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27 February 2011

We are again honored to bring you new work from three scholars in this second half of our Winter 2010-2011 Issue.

Charles Randall Paul investigates the challenges societies face when working to bring about non-violence and the greatest good in “Inter-Religious Diplomacy: Trustworthy Opponents Engaging in Respectful Contestation Yield Peaceful Tension.” We are asked questions related to this topic time and again, and find that Paul’s examination of the problem and ideas bring much to the conversation.

Garry Sparks brings us a “brief and rare snapshot” of the “first encounter” between Western K’iche’ and missionaries in Guatemala; his consideration of an intertextual framework for understanding this encounter is new scholarship we are pleased to share with our readers.

We are honored to share N. Frances Hioki’s “Early Christian/Non-Christian Encounters as Comparative Theological Resources: A Case in Sixteenth-Century Japan.” Hioki brings early encounters in the East as a resource identifying how we are changed, and change one another, when we engage in inter-religious dialogue.

Finally, in “Normative Inculturation? A Thirteenth –Century Example of the Middle Ground In Relations Between the Latin Church and the Church of the East,” A.J. Watson uses two thirteenth century accounts of comparative theology as case studies for examining the role of inculturation in interfaith dialogue.

These articles continue the writing we shared in Part 1 of our Winter Issue, rounding out another fine and substantial offering.

As we write this, friends in the Middle East continue to engage in urgent and world-changing conversation—conversation linked by Twitter, Facebook, traditional media, and one-on-one relationships in large-scale protests.

From its very inception, the JIRD has sought to be a free, online resource, and we are inspired by the immediacy and connectedness we see around the world to take part in the spirit of this work. A major part of our mission includes *listening*, listening to the voices, experiences, travails, and expertise of another’s lived experiences. We thank the writers of the Winter Issue for helping us further that mission, and welcome your comments and submissions now and in the future.

In the spirit of dialogue,

Joshua M. Z. Stanton and Stephanie Varnon-Hughes
Founding Editors in Chief

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Inter-Religious Diplomacy: Trustworthy Opponents Engaging in Respectful Contestation Yield Peaceful Tension

By Charles Randall Paul

Inevitable Conflict over the Purpose of Life

Historically, when people have found themselves in conflicts over the best way to live or the very purpose of life, they have often found a way to separate from—if not fight—each other to protect their cultural order. Underneath the nation-state and tribal structures, societies have traditionally shared a deep cultural world-view that is religious. As our societies continue to become intertwined through virtual and actual migration today, there exist significant tensions between our cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Global trade, modern technology and the common use of the scientific method will not yield universal agreement over the purpose of life and religion. Indeed, as educational and economic differences between peoples decrease, their differences over foundational beliefs become more salient. No economic system, no universal liberal education program, and no political system, even one that emphasizes individual freedom, can resolve our deeper cultural differences over ultimate truth and religion. What do we do when we have irresolvable conflicts over the very foundation of order and purpose? This paper will explore this question.

With the recent end of the most violent century in human history—if body counts from violence are the measure—the new century has begun with a mixture of disillusionment and hope for improving our lives without war or coercion. Human evils seem to be a continual source of conflict, but we must recognize that disagreement over the right way to implement our higher values—justice, truth, loyalty and peace—is also a serious perennial source of conflict between cultural or ideological opponents of equal intelligence and integrity. In an attempt to avoid conflicts over values, many of us urge the restriction of political discourse to rule-based legal proceduralism. While the rule of law is extremely useful in many mundane situations, it alone cannot sustain the pressure from religious or cultural conflicts over fundamental social values and mores upon which laws rest (de Tocqueville 1988, 274, 287). The robust desire to publicly promote the highest good and resist wrong is common among religions; religious beliefs cannot be entirely disassociated from social and political life, particularly during times of conflict over values and mores. Justice, truth, loyalty and peace are contested values because we have different religious and ideological beliefs about the right way to

interpret, achieve or apply these ideals. The very old social question returns: how does a society enact the highest good (not just prevent crime) without coercion or violence? Can persuasion replace coercion as the method for sustaining the continual contestation over interpreting and following religious or foundational truth?

Engaging (Not Avoiding) Irresolvable Conflicts

Political, commercial and legal forms of non-violent conflict resolution have historically assumed that opponents' similar desires to avoid painful conflict will bring them to reasonable compromises. However, this assumption of "win-win" diplomatic compromise cannot readily be applied to conflicts over unchanging religious order or truth. With integrity of their convictions people usually elevate *eternal* truth and salvation or enlightenment above social tranquility or healthy prosperity in this short, mortal life. To the believer, peace of mind is more important than peaceful relations with often well-meaning people who promote falsehood that leads to eternal misery.

It is often thought that anyone who advocates a religious position as superior to another must be an arrogant fanatic or naïvely undereducated. But looking deeper we should ask, can a humble and wise person live with integrity *without* advocating the higher truth he or she sincerely believes would benefit the world? Our common humanity is found in our similar capacity to care about each other's welfare and to try to discern what is best to do given diverse contested beliefs and practices. We act on our beliefs and try to persuade others of our views. Neither a liberal education nor an affirmation of common respect for humanity will resolve conflicts over our fundamental beliefs. Education sharpens and clarifies the extraordinary incompatibility between some of our world-views and values. When facing these incompatible truth claims about ultimate purpose and reality over which there has never been universal agreement, people cannot *live* as if in a state of suspended judgment. Humans live in a forced-choice test—though agnostic in mind, in body we either join or not, act in favor, or by doing nothing, against the momentous conflicting propositions about truth that learning presents to us.

Liberal education is vital to our social well-being because it makes our differences and similarities clear, but if our learning stops with the content of our different beliefs and not the right way to engage disagreements over them we have little hope to improve our current intercultural conflicts. It is essential to teach that wise, good-hearted people can come to different conclusions about reality and truth in science, in arts, in politics, business, philosophy and, of course, religion. And above all, a liberal education needs to impart how to respectfully engage in the continual contest over truth. The way this is communicated is more important than content of the message. If any teacher is contemptuous of another belief, this is the deep message to the students, no matter how

civil or polite the delivery. Thus, the self knowledge and integrity of teachers of religions and philosophies other than their own is vital to diminishing the rampant resentment between groups that look down on each other. Transparency of disclosed bias is the only 'objectivity', and the only way for liberal education to be trustworthy.

Those with cultural or religious fundamental disagreements would be prudent (without compromising integrity) to grant each other the benefit of the doubt with respect to motives and intelligence. They should begin by assuming the other to be a trustworthy opponent desiring to help—not a vicious enemy bent on destruction. The way of mutual engagement over religious truth would entail persuasive, transparent diplomacy with the frank purpose of influencing conversion of, not compromise with, the other. This would be inter-religious diplomacy that delved below (without neglecting) interests in economic or political power to the question of divine truth and purpose and authority. The mutual aim to influence a conversion of belief and practice would be explicit, and the participation in the dialogue would be voluntary. This is diplomatic dialogue, not debate. It is the sincere sharing of witness and experience and reasoned belief. It is a diplomacy based on the recognition that religious opponents often *do not desire to end tensions* over differences, but to engage in a respectful persuasion contest over the truth. While seeking to find useful ways to cooperate on humanitarian projects, the goal for inter-religious diplomacy is not traditional conflict resolution; rather the aim is sustaining an irresolvable contest in *peaceful tension*.

Peaceful Tension as the Goal

Throughout history, conflicts over the purposes of life and the right way to live tend to produce social strife. Intelligent believers usually judge their religious or ideological worldview to be superior to the alternatives; otherwise they would not hold it. For most people, this judgment is not an act of arrogance but a sincere expression of conscience. Nevertheless, inherent in judging one way to be superior to another is the unavoidable offense, implied if unspoken, of calling into question the judgment or character of those who give allegiance to alternative ways. In our increasingly diverse societies, conflicts over religion 'disturb the peace' and threaten the well being of families, communities and/or societies. These conflicts wherever they occur have the potential for serious escalation. There are no purely local religious conflicts, as believers around the world act in solidarity with their religious tribe-mates. This will make tensions of allegiance between religion and tribe and one's home nation a more difficult matter to negotiate.

New methods are needed to provide ways to increase trust and good will among sincere believers who, because they feel responsible to advocate their religion's superiority, cannot avoid the offensiveness of criticizing others. Adamant advocates

need safe places where they can contest in good faith their deepest differences. In a new form of inter-religious space, religiously bilingual diplomats might forthrightly speak their belief of superior truth while agreeing in advance to take no offence at another's exclusive claim of religious superiority. Each party is an opposing witness who, in good faith, feels responsible to influence the other to adopt a new religious belief and allegiance. They know that to respect one another, they must fully speak their views of the truth—especially their reasons for believing in the superiority of their religion.

Decent people in families, communities, or societies can seriously disagree about the purpose of life and the best way to live. Conflicts over religious differences can become fundamentally intractable. Although understanding that leads to compromise resolves many social conflicts, religious conflicts are sharpened when parties come to understand clearly that they cannot with integrity compromise their beliefs or practices. Unlike legal or commercial conflicts, inter-religious conflicts resist settlement because the opponents recognize no common authority to adjudicate their differences, and the stakes are much greater than in mundane affairs. Often, parties feel that cosmic order, eternal life or enlightenment is on the line, and that their loved ones are in danger of great misery or losing great joy or peace if they go the wrong way.

It is normal with such momentous matters at stake that we desire and find some certainty among people who agree with our beliefs. However, when we are convinced we have received the highest divine truth often we have a subtle—if not strong—suspicion and disrespect for anyone who disagrees with our beliefs and practices. This is usually not because of our arrogance, but because we assume God is fair to all. Those who have been blessed with knowing the highest divine truth presume that a just God would not purposefully leave others in dark confusion; therefore, any who sincerely desire to know and follow God's truth will be clearly given it—by their conscience. It follows that those who do not agree with them about the highest truth when it is presented, although claiming to be sincere, must either be too stupid, naïve, prideful, lazy or evil to acknowledge and follow the clear call from their conscience. No matter how civilly we behave, this attitude is not conducive to building respect and trust. It more typically engenders unspoken resentment that eventually explodes in social conflict. Yet, how can this offensiveness be avoided if with integrity we truly believe our neighbors are in spiritual danger? While the offensiveness of contradictory convictions cannot be honestly avoided, we need not choose to 'take offense.'

Inter-religious Diplomacy—Respectful Contestation

A new acceptance of the social healthiness of forthright, respectful contestation over ultimate truth is required. However, respect between opponents who disagree about God or reality can only exist by granting each other in advance respectfulness. We can indeed eventually prove to be simple, naïve, prideful, or evil, but unless we begin

our disagreements by presuming our opponents are wise, knowledgeable, open, and good-hearted, it is unlikely that either party will listen deeply to the other. In actuality, disrespect is the emotional result from disinterest or disregard for a relationship of mutual influence. In matters of the heart we are only open to influence from those we think we can influence. Dialogue, no matter how proper, between people who disrespect each other is mouthing empty sounds. So how do we who disagree deeply come to desire a relationship of mutual influence? How do we sincerely respect, let alone trust, an opponent?

For those who believe in a singular divine or rational order, there is a crucial theological or practical move that allows for the possibility that divine wisdom or natural order has created the condition for irresolvable differences over truth to test our love or care for each other to the limit. Using a Hebrew Biblical story here is useful. The confusion of tongues at Babel was God's way of blessing humanity and showing it that cultural and technical cooperation was not an effective way to build a tower to heaven. The human heart had to change—to love for the good of the other as well as the self—and that could only be realized in the crucible of irreconcilable differences. So as we intermix more and more with those who do not believe as we do, we are wise to replace any ideal goal of social tranquility with a the practical aim of peaceful tension. I think Henry David Thoreau had something like this in mind when he penned "*Let Such Pure Hate Still Underprop Our Love:*"

Let such pure hate still underprop
Our love, that we may be
Each other's conscience,
And have our sympathy
Mainly from thence.

We'll one another treat like gods
And all faith we have
In virtue and in truth, bestow
On either, and suspicion leave
To gods below.

We have seen in history that attempts to end conflicts "once and for all" inevitably lead to the continuation of conflict. Likewise, in continually trying to evade conflicts over deep differences we only increase frustration and hidden resentment that eventually explodes in ill will. It is time to try a better way to face our irresolvable differences over ideology and religion. Through forthright dialogue that discloses both appreciation and criticism, we can fulfill our obligations to express as witnesses the

truth we hold dear, and to listen as our opponents do the same. We must choose not to rip our garments in disgust at their claims, because we enter the contestation granting respect for the intelligence, integrity, and goodwill for our opponent. If in this experience we come to trust the motive (not the doctrine) of our opponents, we have a basis upon which to build trustworthy diplomatic relations. Even religious zealots can sustain a peaceful tension of co-resistance with opponents, who like them desire to influence the hearts and minds of others for good. With this shift in attitude and method, the next generation of militant idealists will consecrate their lives to persuasive missionary work instead of coercive violence.

Marriage as Analogy for Social Relations

Healthy social relations, like good marriages, are based on trust that difficult conflicts can be sustained without dissolution of the social bond. Researchers at the Gottman Institute have systematically observed successful marriages for many years. They report that 69% of the conflicts in long lasting marriages are respectfully sustained, and never resolved. The happier couples face their irresolvable differences in forthright, periodic dialogue without anger (Gottman et. al. 2005, 299-300). After years of observing inter-religious discussions and dialogues I believe that the key to improving trust between religions is not in ignoring or attaining doctrinal agreements, nor in doing humanitarian service together, although both of these might be helpful in some situations. Inter-religious trust comes more from people facing their intractable conflicts with honesty, patience, and respect for (*not* sympathy with) the distinctive differences that bring them into conflict. While contentious disputations destroy trust and foster envy and violence, forthright contestation between opponents who care for each other builds trust and good will. Holding adamantly to their own views, honest contestants who listen carefully to their opponents often come to see themselves in the integrity of the other. Dialogue can lead parties to understand not just why they should be opponents, but why they should be trustworthy ones—that would not misrepresent the truth or desire to the other. Inter-religious diplomacy is born when people learn enough about each other to make similarities and differences clear, and to sense the ethical necessity, if not divine mandate to be an honest witness to the goodness, not just the wrongness, of the opposition. This openness to truth from any source is not based on relativism or an over-arching belief in the ultimate harmony of all religions. It is based on the desire to influence others by being open to their influence. It is based on the “trust-but-verify” strategy that requires ongoing evidence that our opponents care enough to listen closely to us, and though persuading our change of heart is their goal, they make no attempt to coerce our will.

A New System for Inter-religious Diplomacy

The perennial challenge of sustaining social cohesion in the face of perennial religious conflicts over the foundational authority for human order is growing more difficult as our society becomes intermixed with larger numbers of people with different world views. To try to end conflicts completely by forcing tranquil unity is always tempting to the majority population. However, history has proven that ending conflict is tantamount to ending differences, and that leads eventually to massive violence in the name of peaceful ideological unity. We may subdue our opponents for a season, but the resentment will rise and harmful retaliation is sure. So, we best learn to live in uncomfortable peace, rather like listening to our good music with a slight ear ache. Patience is the attitude and diplomacy the skill for pluralistic peace. In addition to the right attitude and skill, an institutional system is required if diplomacy between religions is to become the norm.

A new place, an inter-religious space, is needed for the intentional *religious practice* of diplomatic engagement in cooperative and contestational dialogue. This will be a place both virtual and actual that is inviting and safe for diplomats of all religious stripes—especially those who in times past saw little reason to proclaim their truth—to meet with others of strongly opposing beliefs. It will be for the most articulate representatives of each religious tradition (and subdivisions thereof) for private as well as public diplomatic engagements that benefit their communities by proclaiming their distinct sacred stories from a highly credible inter-religious platform, and learning from others better ways to improve the world.

In future years when people gain the confidence that they can enter inter-religious space without risk of ridicule or misrepresentation they will find the pain of facing conflict is less bothersome and to the excitement of the contest is more enticing. Not that contests over religious truth are pleasant sporting events. Given the eternal stakes contestants over truth can feel as if they are risking their spiritual lives--more like gladiators than ball players. Inter-religious contestation, the mutual witnessing to conflicting claims, is a way for shallow civility to marry deep integrity. We can learn to acknowledge explicitly, with respectful transparency, the inevitable tension we feel as our desire to trust the good will of another is constrained by our mistrust in the other's dangerously wrong religious beliefs. We must learn the difficult pleasure of learning from people that we believe to be mistaken so they will be open to learn from us.

We need a new venue for this mutual exchange of ideological or religious language and practice. It should not occur in our courts or legislatures, nor in our sacred precincts, each dedicated to a particular worship and allegiance. It should not occur in our secular academic or commercial venues or the open town square where religious proclamations are given no more dignity than any other statements. Religious groups need to establishment of an inter-religious space where believing diplomats who learn each other's religious languages communicate clearly and respectfully as unofficial

proxies for their entire tradition. The trust and patience that can build from this network for inter-religious diplomacy will pervade the other sectors of society where our business is heavily influenced by values and beliefs that cannot there be well expressed.

A practical system of inter-religious diplomacy should promote ethical methods of for cooperation and contestation without favoring particular religions or ideologies, worldwide religious unions, multi-religious councils, parliaments, or ecumenical movements. The network of inter-religious diplomats would be organized in diplomatic missions with the legitimacy of their respective communities fully behind them. No system will never be able to perfectly balance the power differences that talent and means and spiritual strength make in the world. But when building trust is a major goal, any unmatched diplomats will wisely acknowledge this reality and by so doing increase their mutual credibility and ethical stature. To build trust where it does not now reside, inter-religious diplomacy must especially appeal to the very traditional and very secular communities that do not normally participate in dialogue. Doing this will encourage full expression of belief, including the sincere belief that one has been given the superior religious way that all others would be wise to follow.

A system of inter-religious diplomacy rests on a few cross-cultural principles that are voluntarily advocated by those who participate: First, human relations flourish when they are built on respectful mutual persuasion of conscience, not on forces of coercion or threats of violence. Second, an opponent can be wrong about religion without being stupid, naive, weak, lazy or evil – and can be a trustworthy person who is not an enemy desiring to coerce or harm another. Third, while passive tolerance of others' religious beliefs is a baseline requirement for social order in pluralistic societies, honest sharing of beliefs, including appreciation and criticism of others, demonstrates a higher form of social responsibility, civility, and ethical stature if done with the motive of helping others.

Conclusion

The impetus for social religious conflict all over the globe in the 21st century, not unlike that which drove European and American religious conflict in the 17th century, will derive from the need to contest fundamental disagreements over the basis for ordering new societal organizations. As de Tocqueville said, religious and ideological beliefs and cultural habits form the under-girding mores upon which law and social order rests. The American experiment of allowing a continuous contestation over the foundation of social order between its citizens of various religions is about to become a contender with secular and religious alternatives in establishing a global experiment. De Tocqueville would not be too sanguine about unifying the world legal and political order around contested foundationalism and religious freedom because the various

cultures on the planet do not share the common religious mores of the American nation in the 1830's.

Nevertheless, to catch up with the economic order, a new global experiment, presumably including religiously bi-lingual diplomats, will be promoted when pressure for order from intermixing cultures become intense. Without unifying mores, some overtly planned system for the contestation of religious differences will be needed to channel the impetus for coercive conflict into the discipline of persuasive contestation. If we learn how to do inter-religious diplomacy, then violent conflicts will be less frequent and respectful contests will be the norm. An experiment creating a new inter-religious space for these "conversion contests" where religious languages, learned by the participants, can be used to discuss spiritual values and authorities without apology. Neither secular nor religious judges will be there to adjudicate the contestation of religious experiences and doctrinal evidences provided by the participants. The voluntary agreement to speak and listen will govern interactions in inter-religious space. The most respected and influential diplomats will be religiously bi-lingual and be known for their integrity and credibility. Ethical conventions of inter-religious diplomacy allow no lying, no threats of intimidation, and no disrespectful tone or abuse of symbols or beliefs. Anyone who breaches these conventions would soon find him/herself alone.

Will contests of persuasion actually replace coercive conflicts as the preferred means of influencing the generations to come? It is always tempting to impose military and economic power on those weaker than we are for material gain, but as we intermix our societies of different believers it will become obvious that using force to impose belief on others is a sign of weakness for the imposer. It is—in any culture—a commonly accepted fact that the human heart cannot be forced to yield its highest allegiance. Can fervent believers of all stripes—including the millions of secularists—see that to win in the long will require patient exchanges of criticism and appreciation that will move hearts without contention? Will the contest for truth this time be engaged in peaceful tension? Viktor Frankl taught that peace is not a tension-free state of being; it derives from continually striving toward a goal worthy of the human spirit. Can the practice of forthrightly persuading others to change their ultimate beliefs be rehabilitated as an authentic expression of worthy human striving or will it be considered cultural genocide? The answer depends on how those who desire to change the world decide to organize their influence in relation to those who disagree with them. The pragmatists would be optimistic that those who exacerbate harmful ideological or religious conflicts to increase their political power will be less successful than those religious leaders who inspire their communities to show as brightly as they can their distinctive ways to improve the lives of others. The Qu'ran says that God could have made all nations one people, but made the world with many religions so they would push each other to perform greater righteousness. (Sura 5:48) As it is written, so let it be done.

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Charles Randall Paul, Ph.D. is the founder and president of the Foundation for Inter-religious Diplomacy (NY and UT). Among other projects the foundation is building a network of religiously bi-lingual inter-religious diplomats to build trust (without ecumenical agreement) between diverse religious communities. He has a BS from Brigham Young University in social psychology and an MBA from Harvard University. He worked as a partner at Trammell Crow Company in the southwestern USA where he developed many commercial real estate projects for 16 years. He then obtained a doctorate in 2000 at the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, writing his dissertation on methods for engaging in religious contestation without recourse to coercion or violence. His major academic mentors were David Tracy, Martin Marty and Harold Bloom. He is on the executive board of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, and is an editor of the *International Journal for Decision Ethics*. He and his wife, Jann, have five children and ten grandchildren.

Fill in the Middle Ground: Intertextuality and Inter-Religious Dialogue in 16th- Century Guatemala

By Garry Sparks

Uae nima vuh rij. theo logiaindorum. ubina am nima etamabel. utzihoxic. Dios nimahau. vealahobiçaxic v εoheic. ronohel vbanoh Dios. veutuniçaxicnaypuch. rono hel. nimabiih εo chupam. vahabal D: ueutuniçaxic naypuch chahauaxic. Chetamaxic. rumal vtçilah vinak Chritianos vεoheic. chupam εiche εhabal tzibamui.

This large tome, the *Theologia Indorum*, titles a grand wisdom and teaching of God, the great lord, a clarification of the existence of everything done by God demonstrated thus everything of the great name that there is with the language of God, the demonstration thus of what is ruled, of what is known by good Christian people of God's existence in the K'iche' language written here (Manuscrit Américain 5, 1 recto, my translation).

Introduction

There are, in fact, very few times in human history when two or more sizably significant groups of people encounter each other and neither one has any actual idea who, or even what, the other group is. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Spaniards had no idea where they were or what they were encountering, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas had no idea what had washed up on their shores. While an encounter with the radically cultural and religious “other” is not new within the history of Christianity, the arrival of mendicant missionaries – namely Franciscan and Dominican – to Mesoamerica is unique because it provoked and provided a paper trail authored by both voices of western Christianity from late medieval and early modern Iberia and, to a lesser degree, their indigenous American hosts, resisters, and converts. While Christian thought has always addressed, in some form, the intersection between aspects of cultures and the claims of a Christian faith, the encounter between Hispano-Catholicism and Maya religion is one the earliest – if not *the* earliest – incidents to

include contemporaneous minority reports by survivors of Christendom or colonial Christianity.

From the landing of the first sustained presence of explicitly Christian missionaries to the American mainland until the arrival of the Spanish Inquisition, the period between 1519 and 1572 in Mesoamerica marks a brief but highly unique moment in the radical shifting of religious reflection. Such periods of first contact or encounters mark foundational moments for comparative studies, including comparative theology.¹ The interdisciplinary field of ethnohistory has emerged as a specialty sub-area that focuses on the “texts” generated between such cultural and religious “others.” Recognizing that during historical periods of radical first encounters respective constituencies negotiated *misunderstandings* that then served as provisional precedents for further negotiated relationships, Richard White’s notion of a “middle ground” in particular provides a model that does not deny local agency as it does not relegate historically disenfranchised persons to a status of either simply passive victims or merely reactionary resisters (White 1991, ix-xvi and 50-53). By the same accord, the ethnohistorical method, especially as applied to work with historical and ethnographic Mesoamerican resources (both indigenous and mendicant), can provide Christian theology with an approach and method for comparative study that appreciates the role and value of local agency and autochthonous spiritualities.

Despite the rich paper trail from this area and period the roles and historical, ethnographic, and theological contributions by such Spanish missionaries have remained underappreciated by most scholars. Yet, the claims and approaches of these missionaries remain flat and un-nuanced over and against recent scholarly attempts to fill out and evaluate the agency and intellect of the indigenous peoples with a new appreciation. Furthermore, like White’s research into colonial interactions between the French and Algonquians, few ethnohistorians have access to historical material written by indigenous groups during or immediately after the periods of first encounters with Europeans.

However, unlike other indigenous American peoples, the Maya of Mesoamerica developed a phonetic writing system prior to contact with Europeans as part of their linguistic ideology that enabled them to appropriate the mendicant alphabet and quickly generate their own manuscripts.² Therefore, unlike most other first encounters in the Americas, the “middle ground” in Mesoamerica is filled, in part, with written sources—Mayan texts, namely *títulos*, warranting intertextual comparison. Together the writings of the highland Maya, namely the Western K’iche’, and the Spanish mendicant missionaries working in the highlands of Guatemala, specifically Dominican Friar Domingo de Vico, offer a missing and substantive insight because they constitute a brief but rare snapshot into this historical period of first contact, and a period of reconfiguration of both Hispano-Catholicism and the indigenous religion of the Maya.

Furthermore, while ethnohistorians and linguistic anthropologists have dedicated a significant amount of scholarship to the early post-contact literature by the Maya, theologians have been remiss in recognizing the value and role of these texts in either the history of Christian theological thought and method or for current constructive theological work, especially by Latin American liberationists who have taken the cultural turn seriously. Finally, despite their recognizing mendicant missionaries' work in designing and teaching a Latin-based script for Mesoamerican languages, producing the first grammars and lexicons in those languages, and often as the face of Christendom being among the primary responders to Mayan authors, ethnohistorians and linguistic anthropologists have made few efforts to take seriously and to appreciate the writings of Spanish Franciscans or Dominicans.³

The near-forgotten theologian Domingo de Vico, O.P., and his theological method predicated on his ethnographic and linguistic work among the Maya can serve as a missing key for those in the human sciences, including theologians, who work on this period. As the earliest historical period to include mutually responsive written texts by Christian theologians and religious "others," this period should be of particular importance for Christian theology in general. Followed by a biography of Vico and his context, this paper will illustrate his culturally and linguistically attuned approach through a brief analysis of the structure of Vico's theological treatise—the *Theologia Indorum*. Specifically, an analysis of genre and doctrine of God in Vico's *Theologia Indorum* will further clarify this text as a theological work akin to a *summa theologica americana* rather than other previous mendicant genres of popular theology used in the Americas, such as *doctrinae christianae* or *sermonarios*. Furthermore, attention to his doctrine of God will examine one particular, but main, theological claim in which Vico argues with and through highland Mayan concepts and rhetoric. Finally, an intertextual comparison between these two aspects of Vico's *Theologia Indorum* (its structure and claims regarding the divine) and that of a Mayan text, the *Title of Totonicapán*, this paper will demonstrate how ethnohistorical sources read in light of each other provide insightful antecedents of inter-religious dialogue – despite perceived misunderstandings – for current comparative theology.

Friar Domingo de Vico, O.P.: Brief Life, Long Work

Of these early mendicant missionaries, Friar Domingo de Vico compiled the first important works on numerous Mayan languages and translation materials that served as major touchstones in the following centuries' debates in Mesoamerica. Born possibly around 1519 in Úbeda, Jaén when it was still an Arabic and Ladino (Sephardic Castilian) speaking region of southern Iberia, Domingo de Vico studied at the Dominican convent's Colegio de San Andrés in Úbeda and the Universidad de Salamanca before going to the Americas with Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P., and 45 other

Dominican missionaries on January 12, 1544.⁴ The prestige of Las Casas – a former military chaplain, reformed estate and slave owner, “defender of the Indians,” and now new bishop of a new dioceses – was not a coincidence on this second and largest Dominican expedition to the American mainland in the sixteenth century with nearly half of them leaving Salamanca (Ciudad Suárez 1996, 29-31n66). Vico and his cohort were chosen not as a punishment or to dispose of them from Iberia but rather because the Order sought among the best and the brightest. Upon arriving in Ciudad Real, Chiapas, Mexico on March 12, 1545, Vico headed what would eventually be the Colegio de Santo Domingo in Chiapas and began working in the Dominican convents of those highlands and later in Guatemala (Remesal 1996, vol. 2, 289-292). In 1551 Vico was elected prior of the Dominican convent of Guatemala, a position he held for almost three years before resuming his missionary fieldwork (Akkeren 2010, forthcoming). As the prior he remained in the colonial regional capital city of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala.⁵ There he had close contact with Franciscan Friar Francisco de la Parra who invented the Latin-based alphabet used by all mendicants for writing Mayan languages. Also in Santiago, Vico most likely met and established a close working relationship with Diego Reynoso, a K’iche’ nobleman from Totonicapán whom Bishop Francisco Marroquín, the first bishop of Guatemala, invited and sponsored to study in that capital city. As a member of the pre-Hispanic Western K’iche’ ruling council, or *popol winaq*, a minor author of the eventual *Popol Wuj* or Mayan “Book of the Council,” and the principal author of the *Title of Totonicapán*, Reynoso was probably Vico’s primary consultant on K’iche’ language, culture, and religion.

By February 11, 1553 Vico finished the first part of a theology, his *Theologia Indorum* (Manuscrit Américain 5, 185 recto; Manuscrit Américain 10, 101 recto). The following year, on November 9, 1554, Vico finished the second part of this *Theologia Indorum* at the same time that the new and larger Dominican Province of San Vicente was designed and its regional center for the Dominicans in southern Mesoamerica moved from Santiago, Guatemala to Ciudad Real, Chiapas (Akkeren 2010, forthcoming). As a result of these changes, Vico was elected prior of the new Dominican convent of Cobán, the regional capital of the Verapaces. Early chroniclers note Vico’s prolific ethnographic, linguistic, and religious writing, his facility and competency in at least seven indigenous languages, and his death.⁶ While his exact date of birth is unknown, early Spanish and Mayan sources – such as the 1565 *Título del barrio de Santa Ana* by Poqomchi’ Maya – mention his martyrdom by Chol Maya in the Acalán region north of Cobán on November 22, 1555 (Sapper 1906, 373-381 and Stoll 1906, 383-397).⁷

In addition to his previous writings on Mayan grammar, vocabulary, customs, stories, idiomatic expressions, et cetera, Vico wrote sermons and hymns as well as doctrinal material that incorporated elements of both Jean Gerson’s catechism as well as Thomas Aquinas’s theology. A few years before Vico’s death Guatemalan bishop

Francisco Marroquín – who fostered the Dominican and Franciscan friars’ work on Mayan languages and even supposedly mastered a couple of the Mayan languages himself – commissioned Vico to write a treatise on the nature of idolatry as a foundational primer or *summa consciencia* for future debates in the colony on the diversity of deviance and proscribed penances (Scholes 1952, 400). What Vico wrote instead of a supposed *Tratado de idolos* was more comprehensive. In 1554 Vico completed his theology in Mayan languages, mostly in K’iche’, Kaqchikel, and Tz’utujil (Saint-Lu 1968, 424, 426-427n227). Drawing upon his homiletical, linguistic, and ethnographic work, he wrote a theology that would serve as examples for how preaching might actually use local beliefs rather than merely condemn them.

Consisting of almost 700 manuscript pages divided into two parts, Domingo de Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* addresses a variety of theological and cultural themes. The first part, entailing 105 numbered chapters in addition to a proemium (or preamble) and a colophon, begins with the being of God and the creation of the world until the birth of Christ.⁸ The second part contains 110 numbered chapters and a proemium and begins with the parents of the Virgin Mary, (Saints Ann and Joachim) and ends with the “final judgment.”⁹ As mendicant publications of this period and region consisted of not only doctrinal tracts for instruction in the Christian faith and ceremonial practices but also sermons with prayers, catechisms, and other doctrinal materials, the *Theologia Indorum* exemplifies all of these genres. Furthermore, it exemplifies these missionaries’ efforts to achieve their main aim of presenting recondite subject matters in languages that – from the missionary preacher’s perspective – were problematic (Scholes 1952, 404). The *Theologia Indorum*, thus, was not a translation of a Castilian or Latin document into a Mayan language but rather a Christian product or voice from within the early encounter.

However, unlike other missionary works, Vico’s indigenous theology was never published but only continuously hand-copied. In comparison with contemporaneous mendicant texts, Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* distinguishes itself in four basic ways. First, Vico’s manuscript is not a translation of a previously written work elaborated in Europe and exported to Mesoamerica, but instead explicitly references Mayan practices and narratives based on his direct conversation *with* and ethnographic study *among* the Maya. Secondly, the *Theologia Indorum* is not written in either Latin or Castilian but originally in K’iche’. Thirdly, the *Theologia Indorum* is the first known work written in the Americas to explicitly declare itself a “theology,” thus intentionally differentiating itself from its peer texts. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while commissioned by the Church as a preaching and teaching aid for parish priests, the primary readers directly addressed in Vico’s theology are not fellow mendicants but literate Maya, by which the *Theologia Indorum* emerges as a direct Christian reply to the Maya in the

midst of early cultural encounters. In this respect, *Theologia Indorum* may be translated as both “Theology of the Indians” and “Theology for the Indians.”

Long after his death Vico’s writings were copied and passed along between later clergy with his work influencing that of others who did not necessarily attribute credit to him (Remesal 1966, vol. 1, 298 and Sáenz de Santa María 1974, 369). By the turn of the eighteenth century the “discoverer” of the Mayan “Book of the Council” or *Popol Wuj*, Dominican Friar Francisco Ximénez, commented that the majority of Vico’s works could still be found among the Mayan leaders and parish caretakers, or *fiscales*, as:

[I]t is a lot to note those first fathers that wrote, who at least some writings can still be found, those of the venerable father [Vico] have not all been lost, whereas before only some of his are saved by the Indians, holding on to them with a veneration as if it was a rich treasure; reading publically in the church on the days which they gather, and it is a very dignified thing I recall that there are some very obscure old writings that today that seem to have been updated a great deal from the ancient languages as in every successful language, of this venerable father [Vico] they are clear for all that appear in the same language that is found today (Ximénez 1985 [ca. 1701], 43, my translation).

In fact, a systematic comparison of mendicant doctrinal tracts written over the next two centuries after Vico’s death prove how, despite the early colonial context and issues surrounding Vico and his work, the *Theologia Indorum* made a lasting impression in the region (Sachse 2007, 21). Well into the eighteenth century later clergy in the Mayan highlands acknowledged, even in formal surveys submitted to the ecclesial hierarchy in Guatemala and Spain, that:

[T]o explain in the language of the native population the holy teachings, I use the books left to us by the holy missionary fathers, especially the one that is called the “Indian Theology,” prepared by the venerable father Vico of my holy religion (Cortéz y Larraz, cuaderno 2, 35 verso – 43 recto, my translation).

Regarding his linguistic work specifically, while it is possible that he wrote grammars and lexicons on all of the seven Mayan languages that he knew, only two survive: his K’iche’ grammar and Kaqchikel dictionary. However, to the extent that they did survive, they continued to influence and be used by later clergy in their studies of Mayan languages (Bredt-Kriszat 1997, 188 and n16). Among both Maya and mendicants, the

ethnographic, linguistic, and theological work of Vico was a “best seller” (Bredt-Kriszat 1997, 185).

As a result of Vico’s interdisciplinary theological method and amalgamated genre as a *summa*, the few recent scholars who have worked on the *Theologia Indorum* mistakenly identified the work as either a mere compilation of sermons or the redaction of three or four separate, previously written works: “The Names of God” or “Theology of the Indians” proper from chapter one to around chapter 29, “The Earthy Paradise” from chapter 30 to 45, “The List of Great Names” from chapter 46 through the remainder of the part one, and a catechism as part two (Acuña 1992, 137, and Acuña 2004, 19).¹⁰ While the vast majority of writings by Spanish mendicant missionaries during the sixteenth century in Mesoamerica did consist of *cartillas* or catechisms and *sermonerios* or sermon collections, Vico’s two tomes clearly distinguish themselves even on the superficial quantitative scale in both size and scope and, thus, consist of “probably the most complete theological treatise ever produced in a native American tongue” (Brinton 1883, n32).

A *Summa Theologica Americana*: A Question of Genre

The most apparent evidence that his *Theologia Indorum* is not a mere collection of sermons but rather an internally coherent and cohesively structured theological work pertains to the ordering of the chapters. Because Vico listed his chapter headings with K’iche’ ordinal numbers and wrote them out in the Latin-based script, rather than use Arabic numbers or Roman numeral, the ordering of the units or chapters in the *Theologia Indorum* has misled both scholars of the nineteenth century to see the two volumes as an edited anthology and later ethnohistorians of the twentieth century to under-appreciate Vico’s influence on texts written by the Maya.¹¹ As evidenced throughout the body of the work, the numbering within Vico’s theology entails multiple orders of general or major points, topics, or themes and various divisions, subdivisions, and sub-subdivisions of minor points. Vico distinguishes between these major and minor points with a set of basic K’iche’ words. He further refers to major topics as *b’ij* or *b’i* (literally “name” which in current K’iche’ is *b’i’aj* in its unpossessed form) with usually some sort of modifier, such as *loq’olaj b’ij* (“beloved name”) or *nima b’ij* (“big name”), or even occasionally a combination, *nima loq’olaj b’ij*. In the first part of his theology the use of *b’ij* or *b’i* becomes confusing as the latter portion of part one is structured along the lines of a list of prominent character names from the Catholic Old Testament. The two uses of “name” – the first use to mean “general point” or “major theme” and the second use to refer to proper personal names – both appear in chapter 44 and obviously indicate two different types of listings (Manuscrit Américain 5, 63 verso). Without previous attention to chapter 44 and the beginning of a new count with eight names starting with Adam, that skip chapters 45 and 46 but continue in chapter 47

with Cain, Abel, and Seth as the enumerated ninth, tenth, and eleventh names, the following “chapter” 48 misread as the “twelfth major theme” might seem random (Manuscrit Américain 5, 64 recto, 65 verso, 67 verso, and 69 verso).

A second but integrated numbering system of minor points or topics further highlights the internally coherent structure of the *Theologia Indorum*. While the second use of *b’ij* or *b’i* as “names” does not continue into the second part of the *Theologia Indorum*, the first use as “general theme” does along with an enumeration of minor points or topics. Minor topics, including sub-subdivisions and smaller units, have a repeating number order as new sets of subdivisions begin within each major topic. In addition to numbering them differently, Vico distinguishes major points from minor points by referring to the latter as *paj tzij*. A *paj* in K’iche’ indicates a full measure of an item in question, such as a scoopful of grain, a cupful berries, a glassful of water, a sack full of sugar, et cetera, and most often refers to liquids when used to measure something tangible. However, particularly in the high register of ritual discourse of K’iche’, such as *pixab’* or advice or council, *paj* can mean a “full measure of an idea,” a complete thought, or a point. An elder or ritual guide, a *k’amol b’e*, often begins her or his speech by announcing that she or he only wants to make “one or two points” – *jupaj, kapaj tzij*. Throughout his *Theologia Indorum*, Vico uses this K’iche’ term to designate minor points of the subdivisions within the theology’s major points or themes.

The greatest amount of confusion seems to have occurred among previous non-K’iche’ readers of the *Theologia Indorum* in the respect that Vico did not distinguish between a major point and that major point’s first minor point. When one or more chapters on minor points follows a chapter addressing a major point or theme, the major theme is also considered the first minor theme. In other words, the initial minor point enumerated in a multi-themed major topic is actually listed as the second minor point. The result is the common repetition of “[u]ka *paj tzij*” (“second point”), because no chapter headings with immediately prior listing of “*nab’e paj tzij*” (“first point”) ever appear. For this reason, a reader must pay acute attention to both the ordering of the major points (*b’ij*) along with their subsequent minor points (*paj*). Occasionally, however, the phrase “*jupaj tzij*” – most likely “*jun paj tzij*” or “one thought” rather than “first thought” – does label a couple of seemingly random chapters. Such chapters do not disrupt the number sequence and, therefore, seem to designate “a side point” or excurses.

The use of *paj* and the designation of minor points is further complicated with two other aspects of Vico’s numbering system. First, Vico often interchanges *paj* with another common K’iche’ term for “amount,” *molaj*. The rate of occurrence without disrupting the numbering sequence would indicate that he used both terms synonymously. However, current K’iche’ speakers sense a distinction in quality or level of importance between the two terms (Manuel Tahay, pers. comm.). Whereas *paj*

designates a full mutually agreed upon or a conventional unit of measure – be it traditional Maya, colonial Spanish, or current metric – *molaj* implies a less specified or ordered amount. Etymologically, *molaj* is related to both “time” as the unpossessed form of ordinal time, such as a “first time” (*jumul*) or a “second time” (*ukamul*) and possibly with “pile,” specifically such as the piles of dirt that a mole, or *b’a*, accumulates when it digs down into the ground and makes a hole, or *jul* (Santos Par, pers. comm.). While the enumeration of subdivisions as either *paj* or *molaj* indicates that they are of equal quantitative value – and thus both are minor points or subdivisions of major points rather than demarcating a distinction between subdivisions and sub-subdivisions – qualitatively a “full measure of words” is of higher importance than a “pile of words.” This use of *molaj*, however, is only evident in the first part of the *Theologia Indorum* and only in the K’iche’ versions of the text.

The second complication with Vico’s use of *paj* and *molaj* is its tendency to indicate either “minor points” or literally “chapters.” For example, in chapter 24 of part one “[u]ka *paj tzij*” clearly indexes the second minor point of the general or major point introduced in chapter 23, whereas chapter 55 explicitly uses *paj* to mean “chapter” with “*Rolajuj paj roxk’al tzij*” (“The fifty-fifth chapter” or literally the “fifth of ten (fifteen) full measures toward its three-of-twenties (plus 40) of words”) (Manuscrit Américain 5, 30 recto, 30 verso, and 78 verso). *Paj* in these two instances does not mean the same thing, thus leaving earlier unit headings, such as chapter 22 in part one, “[u]juwinaq kab’ *molaj tzij*,” ambiguous as to whether it is the “twenty-second chapter” or the “twenty-second minor point” (Manuscrit Américain 5, 27 verso). In the second part of the *Theologia Indorum*, at least in Kaqchikel, *molaj* does not appear and *paj* clearly refers to “minor point.” Instead, *pixa* or *rupixa* is used to designate the sub-sub-points in the headings from only chapters 78 through 82 in the second part in Kaqchikel.¹² While *paj* and *molaj* are recognizable in current K’iche’ speech and writings, the contemporary convention for “chapter” is *tanaj*, a “well-ordered stack,” as opposed to a “pile.”

Vico’s multilayered numbering system for the units within his theology, therefore, clarifies three facets of the main issues regarding the *Theologia Indorum*. These three conclusions not only serve to redress some of the more enduring misunderstandings by scholars of Vico and his work but also move beyond them and toward initial substantive insight into the content and strategic style of this theological language and method. First, by the explicit distinction between major and minor, if not also more and less important, points or topics the *Theologia Indorum* has an internally consistent, well-structured, and coherent order like a theological treatise such as a *summa*. Second, the order of presentation of the material in his theology, consisting of both biblical structure and that of catechism manuals, does not correspond to the liturgical seasons as in a missal or of the canonical hours as in a breviary making it less likely still to have been a *sermonerio*. Third and finally, the use of spelling out the

Mayan numbers in the more traditional and complex style further works, along with his appropriation of the use of *paj*, to designate a complete idea or thought – Vico’s strategic use of a formal, high register of K’iche’ normally reserved for ritual speeches by K’iche’ elders and religious and political leaders. This thus implies an argument that, for Vico, Christian clergy could position themselves as Catholic *k’amol b’e* or spiritual guides and authorities on the conditions of highland Mayan culture and religion. More importantly, the skillful use of K’iche’ and Kaqchikel terms and ritual rhetoric demonstrates a high-degree immersion by Vico into the highland Mayan world.

A Mayan Response

As a result of the mendicant alphabet, literate Maya quickly generated a large body of indigenous literature (Scholes 1952, 400). Included in these is the *Popol Wuj*, the oldest surviving and most complete indigenous account of Native American cosmogonic narratives composed as a transcription of narratives from dances and transliteration of logographic codices which had managed to survive the book burnings of Mesoamerican libraries. These surviving colonial documents authored by highland Maya in the missionary script represent their voices in their encounter with Hispano-Catholicism. Along with the mendicant missionaries, indigenous Mesoamericans were not passive recipients of conversion efforts but active participants and initiators of religious changes that, in turn, transformed their culture. With highland Mayan voices “fixed” in oral texts via myths or transcribed from logosymbolic glyphs and oral speeches into the colonial script and engaged with missionary materials (such as catechism manuals, scripture, sermons, passion plays, et cetera), their early colonial period documents illustrate a larger, longer conversation that evinces active Mayan involvement in the reshaping and maintaining of their cosmology and corresponding spirituality (Restall 1997, 246-254 and Megged 1995, 62). Most of the post-contact native documents from the highlands were written for legal and political purposes and functioned as land titles before the Spanish Crown (Carmack 1973, 19).¹³ Among the K’iche’ Maya, the largest of the highland sociopolitical and linguistic groups, approximately forty such *títulos* still exist as annals, testaments, appendices, and fragments, in addition to the *Popol Wuj* and a play, *The Lord of Rab’inal*. They contain many clues to the pre-Hispanic social order, noble genealogies, calendrics, history, and creation of the cosmos from the highland Maya point of view (Carmack 1973, 18).

The *Title of Totonicapán* contains more references to Christianity than any other indigenous document from the early colonial period. The appropriation of the legal genre of *título*, land title or deed, as well as of legal wills by Maya was not an uncommon event amidst the ongoing legal claims over land between Spaniards and Mayan nobility (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 12). The *Title of Totonicapán* is no exception. However, unlike their European counterparts, some of the Mayan deeds or *títulos* based their

argument for proper land ownership within an account of creation. Unlike contemporaneous Mayan mythic and social histories, such as the *Popol Wuj* or the *Annals of the Kaqchikel*, the *Title of Totonicapán* demonstrates references to both traditional Mayan religious narratives and Genesis by way of Vico's *Theologia Indorum*, specifically the first part which Vico completed by 1553 (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 10-11). Written in 1554 – the same year that Vico completed the second part of his *Theologia Indorum* – the first seven folios of the *Title of Totonicapán* consist of a summary of Vico's treatment of Genesis and consistently reiterate the K'iche' phrase Vico uses for "God" – *Tz'aqol-B'itol, nima ajaw*. By the eighth folio, however, the *Title of Totonicapán* begins to incorporate elements from traditional, pre-Hispanic Mayan narratives, such as the cosmogonic histories also found in the *Popol Wuj*. In some parts of the *Title of Totonicapán* the authors literally recite Vico while in other places they either make grammatical changes to his formal K'iche' or substantially adapt his position to traditional culture (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 10-11). While the *Title of Totonicapán* does not negate or resist Vico's appropriated K'iche' name for God or his theology in general, it does use many other divine names as if to correct Vico's synonymous or univocal use and at least to imply an analogical use with different sets of names. On one hand, this Mayan text recognizes Vico's accommodation to Mayan culture and spirituality. On the other hand, the Mayan authors, such as Diego Reynoso, accommodated Vico but in a way that did not allow his theology to overwrite theirs, thereby consisting of a direct Mayan response or correction to the *Theologia Indorum*.

In general, the *Title of Totonicapán* consists of three elements: an account of biblical creation followed by the biblical genealogies and migration stories; a genealogy of K'iche' rulers since their mythical migration from "across the waters" in the east and into the Guatemalan highlands; and the verbal mapping out of the territory of land attributed to the Yax clan. The signature page contains the names of the then still living K'iche' nobility residing in Totonicapán and the area of Q'uma'kaj – the pre-Hispanic K'iche' capital and present day Santa Cruz del Quiché and Chichicastenango (or Chi Uwi' La'). For the most part, the value of the document is its correspondence to genealogies in other *títulos* and the *Popol Wuj* whereby a pre-Hispanic K'iche' national history can be reconstructed from the perspective of the K'iche' Maya through the 1550s.

As the document is written in the K'iche' language, it is more likely to have had a primary readership or audience among K'iche' elite. However, this text is written in the new genre appropriated from imperial Spain by Mayan landed gentry which the Spanish crown recognized, absolved from paying tribute, and allowed to hold estates of indigenous labor forces. While previous scholars who have worked with these highland Mayan documents have underestimated both the influence of Vico and the agency of the K'iche' authors and redactors – arguing instead that they merely copied from the *Theologia Indorum* without understanding Vico's claims and did not understand how to

write their own number system (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 167n25 and n33) – analysis of the first seven folios in light of the internal structure of the *Theologia Indorum* clarifies how the K'iche' authors of the *Title of Totonicapán* redacted and further contextualized Vico's work.

The opening line of the *Title of Totonicapán* begins with what has previously been translated as “This is the second chapter” (*Uae vcab tçih* or *Wa we ukab' tzi*), leading some scholars to speculate that either a first chapter from an earlier version is missing or that the K'iche' authors misquoted from Vico's *Theologia Indorum* (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 39). The latter is more likely, as the word-final /h/ and /b/ in the colonial mendicant script appear similar, and this opening chapter of the *Title of Totonicapán* begins by describing the “Earthly Paradise,” the topic of chapter 30 in the first part of Vico's theology (Manuscrit Américain no. 5, folio 44 recto). However, as discussed above, Vico did not number his chapters but rather his major and minor themes; chapter 30 in the *Theologia Indorum* is numbered as the fourth major theme (*Vcah nimabi* or *Ukaj nima b'i*) on the “Earthly Paradise” (Manuscrit Américain no. 5, folio 44 recto). In other words, where Vico numbered his thirtieth unit in K'iche' as *vcah* (*ukaj* or “fourth”), the authors or scribes of the *Title of Totonicapán* instead wrote *vcab* (*ukab'* or “second”). Based on comparative analysis between the listing of sections, subsections, and sub-subsections as “chapter” units in the *Theologia Indorum* and those “chapters” or *paj tzi* explicitly mentioned in the first seven folios of the *Title of Totonicapán*, it becomes increasingly obvious that the K'iche' authors did not merely copy but also closely read and then edited on their own “chapters” 26 through 101 of the first part of the *Theologia Indorum* as an appropriation of and correction to Vico.

For example, after recounting the first seven days of creation from Genesis from Vico's “chapter” 30, the *Title of Totonicapán* then shifts to “chapter” 29 or the “fourth subsection of the third major theme” in the *Theologia Indorum* to tell about the “nine groups and levels of angels” (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 41). Because this is only introduced as another “[u]kaj paj tzi,” previous Mayanists have misunderstood this as another listing of a “fourth chapter” in the *Title of Totonicapán*. While not all of Vico's sections are explicitly referenced through line 65 of the *Title of Totonicapán*, the K'iche' authors combined and redacted “chapters” 26 and 29 of the *Theologia Indorum* before then moving to “chapter” 31 or the “fifth major theme” (*Ro' paj tzi*) of Vico's theology, which addresses Adam and Eve as the first human beings (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 43). “Chapters” 27 and 28 of the *Theologia Indorum*, which deal with the story of the fall of Lucifer, are skipped until line 70, where they are then edited down together with “chapter” 38 of the *Theologia Indorum* (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 45). Therefore, this apparent move from a “fourth chapter” (*ukaj paj tzi*) to a “fifth chapter” (*ro' paj tzi*) – rather than recognizing that the K'iche' authors are citing from Vico's “fourth minor point [of the third major theme]” and then from his “fifth major theme” –

have mistakenly led scholars to read these section headings as “chapters” proper to the *Title of Totonicapán* rather than as Mayan citations back to the *Theologia Indorum*. In discussing the relationship between Lucifer, Adam, and Eve, by line 103 the *Title of Totonicapán* again cites a “[u]kaj paj tzij” – the fourth subsection of the fifth major point or “chapter” 43 of the *Theologia Indorum*, giving the false impression that the K’iche’ authors have lost count of their own “chapters” as they move from a “fourth” unit to a “fifth” unit and then to a “fourth” unit again (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 47).

As demonstrated in Table 1, over the course of the first 342 lines or 14 pages of the *Title of Totonicapán*, the K’iche’ authors strategically selected sections dealing with creation and migration – such as the flood, the tower of Babel, Exodus, and exile stories from the Catholic Old Testament – to construct a Catholic corpus by which to integrate and graft on their own cosmogonic and migration narratives. On one hand, the citing of specific number headings of sections or “chapters” from the *Theologia Indorum* indicates that the K’iche’ authors had not merely heard the topics or themes addressed in mendicant sermons in their local parishes but had closely read Vico’s text. On the other hand, in addition to having large portions quoted or paraphrased, the K’iche’ authors’ autochthonous editing and rewriting of the biblical accounts demonstrates that they understood not only the themes and how they may have topically matched with their own pre-Hispanic stories but also the persuasive force such stories bore for Spanish ecclesial and colonial authorities.

Table 1 “Chapters” from Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* in the Title of Totonicapán

Line in <i>TT</i>	“Chapter(s)” of Vico’s <i>TI</i>	Content
1	30	seven days of creation and the Earthly Paradise
6	(26, 27, 28) 29	nine levels of angles
66	(27, 28) 31	creation of first humans
103	43	creation of Eve out of Adam and the two trees
164	47 (49)	Cain, Abel, and Seth and their descendents
185	51	flood and the children of Noah
187	52	tower of Babel
198	57, 58	Jacob and his sons
201	59, 60, 61	Joseph and the entrance into Egypt
206	62 (60, 63)	Moses in Egypt

223	64, 65	Moses and Aaron confront the pharaoh
250	(66) 81-84	crossing the river
259	67, 68	journey in the wilderness
264	69	defeat of Amalech
265	72	arrival of children of Jacob
267	77	death of Moses in Moab
269	81, 82	Jericho defeated and Joseph as ruler
270	86	Joseph's death
272	87, 88	Samuel and Saul
273	89	David
274	90	Solomon
273	91-101	listing of prophets
281	100	arrival of Babylon and Assyria
283	101	diaspora by Babylon and Assyria

Furthermore, the K'iche' author-redactors made two additional, if not also corrective, moves beyond Vico's theology, again demonstrating that his theology was neither merely imposed and regurgitated nor superficially used for legal gain, such as land rights. First, the K'iche' author-redactors often changed Vico's translated account of the biblical stories for wording or versions that would have been more properly or correctly understood by a wider K'iche' audience. For example, beginning in line 94 the *Title of Totonicapán* repeatedly specifies that the two trees placed in the "Earthly Paradise" by God – the tree of eternal life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil – were *tulul* or zapote trees (*Pouteria sapota*), a specification that does not appear in the *Theologia Indorum* (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 45). With apples as a later European imported crop, highland Maya would have had little to no understanding of even the popular, non-biblical idea of these two trees mentioned in Genesis as apple trees. The initiative by K'iche' interpreters to designate these two trees as common but prized fruit trees native to the more temperate and lush regions in and around the highlands reduces the proximity and unfamiliarity of the biblical "Earthly Paradise" narrative to a wider Maya audience.

In addition to this example of K'iche' authors further contextualizing biblical narratives for their newly at-least-nominally Catholic commoners, two other notable examples demonstrate this move by K'iche' elite. In line 178 the *Title of Totonicapán* states that Cain was slain in his *ab'ix*, "milpa" or corn-squash-bean field, the common farming plot of traditional foodstuffs of many Mesoamerican and North American indigenous peoples (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 53). Cain, therefore, for these early

K'iche' exegetes was not simply killed in a generic field but rather in a familiar, domesticated, or presumably safe place recognized by average K'iche' and Mesoamerican agriculturalists. However, "chapter" 47 of the *Theologia Indorum*, in which Vico recounts the story of Cain and Abel, does not specify in what type of field Cain's death took place (Manuscrit Américain no. 5, folio 69 recto).

Finally, likewise in line 209 the *Title of Totonicapán* specifies that the burning bush that confronted Moses was a *tukan*, "mora" bush that would include raspberry, boysenberry, blackberry, or other such types of shrubs but with thorns (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 55). In addition to a common food source, the K'iche' often use *tukan* or "mora" bushes as property border markers against human or animal intruders. Such an example might, in the understanding of average highland Maya, highlight not so much a border of a particular parcel but rather a conceptual boundary between the domesticated and the divine, a border sought by mendicant missionaries but better explained and translated by K'iche' scribes. In all three of these examples, the K'iche' author-redactors of Vico's theology further contextualized the biblical narratives on their own to make them more familiar and culturally accessible for a wider K'iche'an readership, a criterion that would not be apparent in a resistant or reactionary document or a text merely interested in property rights.

The second constructive and corrective move that the K'iche' author-redactors of the *Title of Totonicapán* make pertains to the mapping of their pre-Hispanic narratives onto the biblical accounts from Vico and the use of the K'iche' names for the divine. While the first seven folios consist of an edited version of the first part of Vico's theology, folio eight of the *Title of Totonicapán* identifies the migration of the four principle founders of the K'iche' nation with the "lost" tribes of ancient Israel, the diaspora under the invasion of ancient Assyria, and the exile by ancient Babylonia (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 69). On one hand, by leaning into the popular misunderstanding by many of the Spanish missionaries that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were descendents of the "lost ten tribes," the K'iche' elite ground the legitimacy of their culture, worldview, and spirituality in popular mendicant terms. On the other hand, based on the commonly accepted authority of this misunderstanding, the K'iche' proceeded not only to unfold their national history after the "migration from the east" – with the Mayan mythic place of origin of Tulan and biblical Babylon now one and the same – but also to reassert the validity of their own pre-Hispanic cosmogonic narratives, such as the Hero Twins' cosmic ball game with the lords of the otherworld, Xib'alb'a. While the K'iche' author-redactors of the *Title of the Totonicapán* further contextualized the biblical stories via Vico, they simultaneously reconfigured their own religious stories. Throughout the course of this dual process, as the K'iche' author-redactors referred repeatedly to God, they affirmed the common use Vico's K'iche' term for the triune God but also added onto it through their continued use of, and thus in

defense of, their other terms for divine agency as apparent in the remainder of the *Title of Totonicapán* and other contemporaneous texts like the *Popol Wuj*.

Intertextual Inter-religious Theological Negotiations: Talking about Talk about God

Throughout his opening chapters of the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico constructs a Spanish-K'iche' couplet by which to refer to God as he speaks of God – *Dios, nima ajaw* or “God, the great lord.” At this level of referencing, Vico’s phrase for God is neither analogical nor equivocal but rather univocal and therefore establishing a synonymous relationship between a Christian set and a Christian’s understanding of a Mayan set of terms for the divine. In the opening of his chapter one, Vico explains that:

“God” spoken of by us [Catholic] priests,
 “Maker-Modeler” by the [K'iche'] people, is
 the Maker of the people,
 the Modeler of the people,
 the Doer of us all, and
 the Creator of us all;
 only [God] made us,
 only [God] made us people,
 sculpted us,
 carved us;
 we have been sculpted;
 we have been carved.
 Maker of the good, Creator of persons;
 we were good by [God], we were persons by [God] (Manuscrit Américain
 5, 1 recto).¹⁴

The K'iche' root or stem *-tz'aq-* literally refers to building something out of stone as opposed to adobe or wood and denotes female creative qualities whereas the K'iche' root or stem *-b'it-* refers to working with clay for pots, jars, or bowls and denotes male creative qualities in terms of wider highland Mayan culture and worldview (Carmack and Mondloch 2007, 165n12). However, as the second half of the above quote implies, *b'itol* also refers metaphorically to the raising of children (Tedlock 1983, 267), such as the humans as the “children of God.” Based on his knowledge of K'iche' cosmogonic narratives, Vico selects a traditional K'iche' couplet for the divine, one that is similar to “Creator” in Genesis, and establishes it as the same as, or univocal to, the Hispano-Catholic *Dios*.

Rhetorically, Vico’s univocal shift from *Dios, nima ajaw* for *Tz'aqol-B'itol, nima ajaw* augments his Spanish-K'iche' couplet for a tercet. Both forms, along with

quatrains and longer forms of parallel or chiasmic structure, are extremely common in formal or the high register of spoken and written K'iche'an languages. The formation of these juxtaposing parallel constructions was not only common in Mayan thought and speech before the arrival of Europeans but also influenced the construction of Maya-Spanish bilingual semantic couplets with mendicant missionaries working throughout the Maya region.¹⁵ Vico's shift from a couplet for a tercet is actually two-fold as his replacement of *Tz'aqol-B'itol* or "Maker-Modeler" for the first part of his own couplet – the "Dios" in *Dios, nima ajaw* – is already in parallel form and thus a couplet. Therefore, his construction of the tercet *Tz'aqol-B'itol, nima ajaw* moves both his couplet (*Dios, nima ajaw*) and that of the K'iche' (*Tz'aqol-B'itol*) into a tercet form. In general, a third concept or term – in this case *nima ajaw* – is added within formal K'iche' rhetoric to add nuance the first two terms neither through analogous complementarity nor necessarily equivocation but rather through subtle difference (Restall 1997, 267).¹⁶ This use of a third term, or the shift of rhetorical context of *nima ajaw* from the second term of his couplet for the third term of his tercet, allows Vico to establish and use analogies not only on scholastic grounds but also on K'iche'an grounds and their understanding of similarity-in-difference or analogy.

Furthermore, in K'iche' poetics or rhetoric, a fourth term or phrase added before or after a tercet restores evenness to form either a quatrain or a pair of couplets (Tedlock 1983, 267). As also demonstrated in the above quote from the first chapter of his theology, Vico and the high register of K'iche' language in his *Theologia Indorum* is not limited merely to couplets and tercets but cuts across the various poetic and rhetorical forms of highland Maya moral and ritual discourse. For example, after establishing the univocal relationship between his "God" and the K'iche's "Maker-Modeler," Vico moves his list of what God does into a quatrain. He begins by not only reaffirming traditional K'iche' religious language and teaching but then reiterates the *-tz'aq-* and *-b'it-* roots as the first couplet of his quatrain followed by a second couplet of God as one who "does" (*-b'an-*) and as one who "creates" (*-winaqirisa-*). By opening his theological treatise with the construction and combination of couplets not only in but also according to K'iche' speech, Vico incorporates concepts and modes of meaning intelligible to his scholastic humanist cohort and the Mayan culture of his audience.

In this regard, Vico's use of Mayan culture and language as a theological resource is not merely symbolic or a negotiation of the form or level of his discourse. Such as in the construction of the second couplet to his divine quatrain, Vico strategically pulls together a quotidian word with the common stem "to do" (*-b'an-*) together with a highly technical and specialized word of "to create" (*-winaq-*) now used only by K'iche' rhetoricians.¹⁷ The root of this verb, *-winaq-*, refers simultaneously to "people" and to "twenty," however the verb is not "to people or populate" or "to make into twenty." Rather, this verb means "to create for the first time" or "to originate" but at the level of

ideas. It is uniquely used, most commonly in colonial and current K'iche' discourse, affirmatively for an activity by a divine agent. However, when used in reference with a human agent the connotation is not positive as in "to create" or "to make" but rather negative as in "to make up" or "to fabricate or fib." The positive human counterpart is -*k'isanik*, "to invent" or "to raise or rear a child" (Santos Par, pers. comm.).

The result is a classic K'iche' quatrain where the first two terms are of a high register and complement each other like two sides of coin – "to sculpt" or "to make" (-*tz'aq-*) and "to carve" or "to model"(-*b'it-*) with each implying female and male complementarity respectively and child rearing – and the third term (-*b'an-*) for "to make" differentiates as a more ordinary or low register term; the fourth term (-*winaq-*) then raises again the register as a term uniquely applied to the divine in K'iche', like the first two terms, but complementing the non-specified type of "making" as a general term like that of the third. The implications of ending with this particular stem leaves an increased impact on a potential K'iche' reader as *winaq* also referring to "20" connotes completion of a round within the Mayan vigesimal number system. Vico's quatrain and initial presentation of an understanding of the divine negotiated between Hispano-Catholic and K'iche' worldviews is, at least implicitly, "complete." Vico's ability to convey ideas of God not by merely translating a European catechism, sermons, or *summa questio* into a Mesoamerican language but rather negotiating in, through, and with Mayan concepts, style, and rules demonstrates the highly technical contextualization enterprise he engaged in as well as the need for an interdisciplinary theological method that appreciated and understood historical Mayan sources and mendicant ethnographies.

While the use of *Tz'aqol-B'itol* is not dropped, by folio 18 other names for God, if not other gods, such as *Tojil* and *Uk'u'x Kaj*, *Uk'u'x Ulew* (Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth) are put forward specifically in reference to Nakxit's prayer (Carmack and Mondloch, 107). In this respect, K'iche' socio-political and religious leaders, through their appropriation of a genre originally designed as a legal appeal to the Spanish Crown regarding land ownership, refute Vico's equation of the Christian God of the Bible with the highland Mayan understanding of divinity by, on one hand, agreeing with Vico that God is like *Tz'aqol-B'itol* but, on the other hand, not limited to *Tz'aqol-B'itol*. Whereas Vico uses his ethnographic and linguistic research to argue for and construct analogical meanings between Hispano-Catholic and K'iche'an cultural concepts and images but an univocal or synonymous understanding of *Tz'aqol-B'itol* as God, K'iche' Maya intellectuals argue back for an analogical or commensurate contruals of the divine from a basis of a more univocal relationship between their Mayan and biblical narratives. The result is a documented exchange between two radically distinct – linguistically, culturally, and religiously – groups drawing from each other's source materials to reflect upon, translate, and negotiate talk about ideas about the divine—theology (*theo-logos*).

Conclusion

While Vico's obvious aim pertains to the conversion of the Maya to Catholicism, his strategy builds off of a shared theological anthropology as recognized by the Church in 1537, the latent legitimacy of a natural disposition to commune with the divine, and an affirmation of pre-Hispanic Maya spirituality and culture. As Vico argued against the autonomous mixing of Maya spiritual practices with Catholic devotionism, he did not rule out altogether a mixing of Catholic theology and indigenous culture as he provided an argument and precedent for another kind of mixing. First, he works primarily not only in K'iche'an languages, in which he makes his argument and assumes a literate Maya readership, but also adapts a highly formalized K'iche' vocabulary and rhetoric reserved by the Maya for speaking about the sacred. Second, Vico appears acutely aware of the analogical dimension within K'iche' as he selects his K'iche' term for God as the Maker-Modeler. While his K'iche' sources use a variety of phrases in couplet or tercet forms to refer to divine agency, Vico selects the couplet most similar to the "Creator" in Genesis over others, such as Bearer-Begetter or Sovereign Plumed Serpent. However, Vico does not use Maker-Modeler analogously to the God of the Bible but rather univocally—as understood by a Thomistic humanist in the sixteenth century.

In less than a year after the completion of the first part of his *Theologia Indorum* (1553) and probably while he was writing the second part of the *Theologia Indorum* (1554) K'iche' elites wrote the *Title of Totonicapán* (1554) and began to compile, edit, and transcribe their "Book of the Council" or *Popol Wuj* (1554-1558) as, in part, responses to the influence of Vico's theology. His death in 1555, unfortunately, prevented him from authoring a reply to the K'iche' regarding their response to his accommodation of their culture and language and use of their cosmogonic myths. Based on his appropriation of K'iche'an formal rhetoric as well as key Mayan religious and quotidian concepts, Vico might have most likely read the additional terms for divine agency put forth in Mayan texts as still univocal to the Hispano-Catholic *Dios* – an univocal relation increasingly questioned by ecclesial authorities after the arrival of the Catholic or Counter Reformation in the 1570s. Even during his lifetime, he and other mendicants schooled in the humanist scholasticism of early modern Spain who understood that different signs and words could change referents and still mean the same, faced opposition from mostly contemporaneous Franciscans who rejected accommodation of K'iche' terms for *Dios* for, instead, the Mayanized Spanish term of *Tyox* (García-Ruiz 1992, 89-92).

In addition to this mendicant debate regarding their different understandings or misunderstandings of semiotics and competing linguistic ideologies, Vico's missionary fulfillment paradigm not only competed with a more conventional replacement paradigm but also did so on the misunderstanding of indigenous Mesoamericans as

related to Jews. While many mendicants such as Vico's own Dominican superior Friar Bartolomé de las Casas disagreed with this view of Native Americans, this misunderstanding not only allowed Vico to aim to have Catholic theology fulfill Mayan religion in a similar way that he understood the New Testament to fulfill the Old Testament, but also to establish analogical meanings between Mayan culture and Hispano-Catholicism for further dialogue. K'iche' respondents, in turn, critiqued Vico's accommodationism not by rejecting his theological claims or identification of them with biblical Israelites but rather by agreeing on the misunderstood identity to invert his method of generating theological claims. Whereas Vico's theological method aimed to negotiate analogical meaning between Mayan and Iberian culture and univocal meaning between Maya spirituality and Hispano-Catholicism, highland Maya elites deployed a correction through a more univocal relation between their cultural history and that of ancient Israel and analogical understanding, thus, between their religious discourse and ritual and that of Hispano-Catholicism. Therefore, Hispano-Catholicism for the K'iche' was not a fulfillment but rather an augmentation of Maya spirituality as it accommodated biblical narratives, local ecclesial symbols and forms, and Vico's claims (Tedlock 1983, 273-4).¹⁸ Despite the contrast between these two supersessionisms – Vico's fulfillment approach and the K'iche's' accumulation approach – they both agreed on enough misunderstandings to establish a provisional foundation for mutually continued inter-religious dialogue.

What has been briefly proposed here is that a comparative theological study based on intertextual analysis of indigenous and non-native materials that emerge from periods of first encounters can provide historical resources for current ethnohistorical and theological work. Furthermore, the particular moment of first contact between the Americas and Europeans is a rare, if not unique, moment in human history both to the degrees of radical alterity and the residual paper trail left by various dominant and dissenting parties. In addition to providing a thick case example of Christianity's engagement with cultural and religious others for further comparative work, the recovery and scrutiny of the work of Domingo de Vico with the highland Maya provides a reconstructed record of an inter-religious dialogue rarely available as a historical resource to comparative theology. Just as current highland Maya continue to use such texts in their own social and religious movements to redress past grievances and enhance present life, such recovery, for theology at least, gestures to a broader understanding and substantive corrective for future, comparative dialogue.

Notes

¹ By comparative theology I refer to the emerging school located primarily as a strand of Christian liberal theology which maintains a theological method of a mutually informative rapprochement with other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences – such as anthropology, history, language studies, et cetera – as well as between Christianity and other religions through a dialogical praxis with and highly contextual immersive commitment into a particular community of religious “others” through which to critically reflect on, if not also reconfigure, Christian religious claims. Notable representatives of this “new comparative theology” include James Fredericks, Francis X. Clooney, Kristin Base Kiblinger, and Hugh Nicholson among others.

² Similar to many other writing systems like ancient Egyptian and modern Japanese, the ancient Maya script is technically logographic: consisting of both phonetic symbols representing simple CV or “consonant-vowel” morphemes and logograms of words (but not ideas as they may be homonyms); Michael D. Coe, *Breaking of the Maya Code* (New York, New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1992), 233-234.

³ However, this is a trend that is currently beginning to shift in Mesoamerican studies with William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Anthropology of Christianity) (Los Angeles and Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2010) and David Tavárez, “Invisible Wars: Idolatry Extripiation Projects and Native Responses in Nahua and Zapotec Communities, 1536-1728” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000) and in Andean studies with Alan Durston, *Pastoral Quechua: The History of Christian Translation in Colonial Peru, 1550-1650* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), and Andrew Orta, *Catechizing Culture: Missionaries, Aymara and the “New Evangelization”* (New York, New York: Colombia University Press, 2004).

⁴ According to Dutch anthropologist and ethnohistorian Ruud van Akkeren, the earlier date is more widely mentioned in popular literature but without any cites or documentation; Ruud van Akkeren, “Fray Domingo de Vico maestro de autores indígenas,” (forthcoming chapter, 2010), 82. However the later date is arrived at by René Acuña to place Vico in school at a more respective age by 1544; René Acuña, “La *Theologia Indorum* de fray Domingo de Vico,” *Tlalocan: Revista de Fuentes para el conocimiento de las culturas indígenas de México*, Volume X (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985), 281. For examples of some of the more recent and often cited popular references to Vico, see: the *Gran Enciclopedia de Andalucía* (1979), pages 32 and 59 cited in Ginés de la Jara Navarrete, *Historia de Úbeda en sus documentos*, Volume II (Seville, Spain: Asociación Cultural Ubetense “Alfredo Cazabán Laguna,”), page 659; Dominican Friar Andrés Mesansa’s *Los obispos de la orden Dominicana en América* (Vatican: Establecimiento Benziger & C., S.A., n.d.), the only book in the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala City that mentions Vico, and it claims that Vico was not martyred but rather elected bishop of Verapaz between 1560 and 1566 and died a septuagenarian; the Guatemalan Catholic Archdiocese of Los Altos’ website <http://arquidiocesisdelosaltos.org/content/view/15/34/> (June, 2009); the Spanish and French language website dedicated to the biographies of mendicants who worked among the Maya, <http://moines.mayas.free.fr> (June, 2009); and the more recent Swiss-Guatemalan development project

among Q'eqchi' Maya in Cahabón, Alta Verapaz, the Instituto Agroecológico de Educación Bilingüe “Fray Domingo de Vico,” http://www.guatesol.ch/lwschule_es.html (June, 2009).

⁵ Now called La Antigua, this was the third of four attempts – after Iximche' or Tecpán and then Ciudad Vieja or San Miguel Escobar – to establish a capital and the most enduring capital city of Guatemala to date.

⁶ Most notably: Remesal, especially vol. I, 420 and vol. II, 297, and Francisco Ximénez, O.P., *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala de la orden de los Predicadores*, Biblioteca “Goathemala” Volumen II, J. Antonio Villacorta C., ed. (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, January 1929 [1721]), especially 473 and 523. These languages were K'iche', Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Q'eqchi', Poqomam, and Ch'ol (Lakantun or Lacandon) according to Ximénez; Ximénez, *Historia*, I, 58; and Poqomchi' according to Biermann; Benno Biermann, “Missionsgeschichte der Verapaz in Guatemala,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* (Colon, Germany: Böhlau Verlag Köln Graz, 1964), I, 128; also see the letter to the Audiencia de los Confines from Dominicans of May 14, 1556; Archivo General de Indias (Seville, Spain), exp. Guatemala, Leg. 168 as cited in Cristina Bredt-Kriszat and Ursula Holl, “Descripción del Vocabulario de la lengua cakchiquel de Fray Domingo de Vico,” *La descripción de las lenguas amerindias en la época colonial. Biblioteca Ibero-Americana, Vol. 63*. Klaus Zimmermann, ed. (Frankfurt and Main, Germany: Vervuert and Madrid, Spain: Iberoamericana, 1997), 176.

⁷ This source appears to be the same as the Q'eqchi' manuscript “Iulihii titulo quetacque natirta” of August 14, 1565 (Garrett-Gates Mesoamerican Manuscripts 242, Princeton University Library). Together with and the *Annals of the Kaqchikel*, they are Mayan sources that predate almost any of the Spanish language sources about Vico.

⁸ Based on examination of Newberry Library (Chicago, Illinois), Butler Ayer MS 1512 Cakchiquel 33; University of Pennsylvania Library (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Manuscript Collection 700, Item 197; and Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris, France), Manuscrit Américain no. 3.

⁹ Based on examination of Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris, France), Manuscrit Américain nos. 4, 5, 10, and 42. I have confirmed the existence of an additional eight manuscript versions of parts of the *Theologia Indorum*: Princeton University Library (Princeton, New Jersey), Garrett-Gates Manuscripts nos. 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, and 227; and American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), American Indian Manuscript no. 178.

¹⁰ I have also consulted was Acuña's original typed manuscript in La Antigua, Guatemala: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica (CIRMA), 1989, 3. This listing also appears in Remesal, II, 297, with Remesal possibly using Friar Francisco de Vienna's 1577 report to the Holy Office as his source.

¹¹ While Carmack and Mondloch as well as Bredt-Kriszat note the possible role in which the *Title of Totonicapán* serves as a reflection or reaction to Vico's *Theologia Indorum*, Akkeren's forthcoming chapter, “Fray Domingo de Vico maestro de autores indígenas,” provides the most textual detail to help correct this oversight.

¹² Due to lack of access to K'iche' versions of the second part of the *Theologia Indorum* held at Princeton University Library, this analysis was done with the Kaqchikel version, Manuscrit Américain no. 3. This word, *pixa*, does not appear in either colonial or modern K'iche' dictionaries and does not appear to be related to *pix*, "tomato" or "flash" (*centella* in Spanish; Francisco Ximénez, *Arte de last res lenguas kaqchikel, k'iche' y tz'utujil*, Biblioteca Goatemala, Volumen XXXI, Rosa Helena Chinchilla M., ed. (Guatemala City, Guatemala: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, 1993 [1704-1714]), 130. It is possible that it is shorthand for *paj tzij*, *pixab'* (K'iche' for counsel or advice), more likely, or another K'iche' term of measurement that has since been lost.

¹³ For a detailed study of colonial *títulos* by indigenous Mesoamericans in general including the highland Maya, see: Enrique Florescano, "El canon memorioso forjado por los *Títulos primordiales*," *Colonial Latin American Review* 11, no. 2 (December 2002): 183-230; Enrique Florescano, *National Narratives in Mexico: A History*, Nancy Hancock, trans. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); Enrique Florescano, "Titres primordiaux et mémoire canonique en Méso-amérique," *Études rurales*, Carmen Bernand, trans., No. 157/158 (January – June 2001) 15-43; and Matthew Restall, "Heirs to the Hieroglyphs: Indigenous Writing in Colonial Mesoamerica," *The Americas* 54, no. 2 (October 1997): 239-267.

¹⁴ My English translation and punctuation from the colonial K'iche' in addition to formation into couplet and quatrain stanzas based on the Mayan poetics identified by Luis Enrique Sam Colop; Sam Colop, *Popol Wuj: Versión poética K'iche'* (Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City, Guatemala: Proyecto de Educación Maya Bilingüe Intercultural PEMBI, GTZ and Cholsamaj, 1999), 15-19. Also see Luis E. Sam Colop, "Maya Poetics" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1994).

¹⁵ See Timothy Knowlton, "Dynamics of Indigenous Language Ideologies in the Colonial Redaction of a Yucatec Maya Cosmological Text," *Anthropological Linguistics* 50, no. 1 (2009): 90-112 for evidence of this in the "Books of Chilam B'alam" and the work between colonial Yukatek Maya with Franciscan missionaries in particular, and Restall, 239-276, in the region in general.

¹⁶ Also see Nora C. England, *Autonomía de los idiomas mayas: Historia e identidad / Ukuta'miil, ramaq'ihil, utzijob'aal: Ri Maya' amaaq'* (Guatemala: Cholsamaj, 1994), 105-108 regarding parallelism in Mayan poetics in general; and for a case example in non-K'iche'an speech see: M. Jill Brody, "Discourse Genres in Tojolabal," *Geoscience and Man*, 26: *Tojolabal Maya Ethnographic and Linguistic Approaches*, M. Jill Brody and John S. Thomas, eds. (1 July 1988): 55-62. This textual structure not only appears in formal highland Mayan speech but also with weaving patterns or *etz'ab'alil*. In addition to merismus, or antonymic synecdoches, ten different types of parallelism have been identified within the rhetoric of formal K'iche' rhetoric which contribute to not only couplets, tercets, and quatrains but also sextets and longer parallel series often for larger chiasmic structures, Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (New York, New York: O Books, 2003), 44-51. Note: my use of Christenson's language analysis and expansion of Edmonson and Tedlock's work on rhetorical structures in K'iche' speech like the *Popol Wuj* is in no way an endorsement of his more speculative work, along with that of others like the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, who aim to demonstrate a relationship between the Maya (and other Native Americans) and the Israelite Diaspora. While outside the scope of this paper, the Mayan use of parallelism described here can readily be contrasted with modern scholarly analysis of parallelism in Jewish scripture, such as: James L. Kugel, *The*

Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981), 1-95.

¹⁷ The unique use of *-winaq-* as “to create” in Mayan texts is abundantly apparent, such as in lines 9, 15, 21-23, 25-26 of the *Title of Totoncapán*’s account of the seven days of creation.

¹⁸ This Mayan position can serve as a response not only to sixteenth-century theological positions interested in other religions and cultures like Vico but also varied twentieth-century positions like Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, David Tracy, et cetera.

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Early Christian/Non-Christian Encounters as Comparative Theological Resources: A Case in Sixteenth-Century Japan

By N. Frances Hioki, Ph.D.

Recent research on cross-cultural encounters in the early modern period¹ has shown that the records of the first Europeans in eastern Asia provide us with excellent models to reflect on current issues in cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogues.² These stories are helpful for understanding ways through which the Self perceives, understands, and interprets the Other, who is radically different.³ According to sinologist Nicolas Standaert, “One is tempted to call [these records] a ‘laboratory’ for the study of cultural diffusion, transfer of knowledge, and cultural change, leading to deeper insights for broader theories of cultural interaction.”⁴ To be sure, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the European empires’ agendas for colonization dominated exchanges between Europeans and non-Europeans. Nonetheless, their interactions in eastern Asia—especially in China and Japan—were impressively reciprocal in comparison to contemporary cases in Latin America, India, and Africa.⁵ Their stories can serve as resources in conducting a case study of how one is affected by and transformed through interactions with another who is radically different in terms of language, tradition, or worldview.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Catholic missionaries’ interpretations of Japanese religiosity (i.e., religious inclination/disposition, liturgical *habitus*) in the late sixteenth century. I will show that many European missionaries were aesthetically attracted to Japanese Buddhist art and respected Japanese people’s devotion to Buddha, despite the fact that the Church considered such devotion a form of idolatry.⁶ As they understood Japanese religiosity, there emerged an interesting paradox in the missionaries’ overall assessment of Japanese culture: on the one hand, they condemned the local religious tradition as comprising demonic practices, while on the other hand, they praised the local piety and said that the Japanese were disposed to a deeper capacity for devotion than were the Europeans.⁷

This paper also aims to offer a historical case study with regards to the ongoing attempts of comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue. Following Francis X. Clooney, I consider comparative theology a venue through which one seeks a better understanding of one’s faith through comparative, inter-religious and dialogical reflections of other religions.⁸ In undertaking comparative theology, the subject (i.e., the

one who makes the comparison) is open to self-criticism and transformation that emerge during his or her study of other religions. In this context, this study entails an investigation of how the act of comparison helped European missionaries better understand Japanese religions, and how their appreciation of Japanese religiosity influenced and transformed their approaches to non-Christians.

I will first explicate the key terms that are central to this case study. They are: 1) the notion of “liturgical *habitus*,”⁹ and 2) the three interrelated categories of feeling, (re)action, and thought, which are used as tools to analyze the dynamics of Christian understanding of the Other.¹⁰ Second, I will discuss the content of selected primary sources. From the large number of European writings about Japan, I have chosen to discuss the following Jesuit records: 1) the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis’s (1532–1597) account of Buddhist art in *Historia de Japam*,¹¹ 2) Fróis’s other treatise, on a comparison of Japanese and European cultures,¹² and 3) the Jesuit Visitor (mission inspector) Alessandro Valignano’s (1539–1606) *Sumario* of the Japan mission.¹³ Third, I will offer my analysis of the primary sources, focusing on the missionaries’ feelings, actions, and thoughts *vis-à-vis* Buddhism. The overall dynamics of the missionaries’ interpretation of Japanese religious traditions comprise a complex combination of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. This complex, aesthetic appreciation of the non-Christian tradition helped to transform the Jesuit mission principle from a typical conquest-style mission strategy to one that respected the integrity of local customs and *habitus*.

Tools and Methods

1) Liturgical *Habitus*

In early Jesuit discourse concerning Japanese religions, European missionaries’ descriptions of liturgical *habitus* are conspicuous for their quality and quantity.¹⁴ In this paper, I understand *habitus* as a personal system of inclinations and dispositions that influences how we feel and react toward experience. Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi explore this notion of *habitus* in terms of religious aesthetics in *Living Beauty: The Art of Liturgy*. Scirghi offers a definition of liturgical *habitus*, “the development of the higher dispositions for worship,” in which a continued practice of faith cultivates a higher disposition toward religious experience.¹⁵ Following this definition, Garcia-Rivera reflects on the question of cultural/religious distinctions and similarities in liturgical *habitus*. Religion and culture exercise great influence on shaping a person’s *habitus*; therefore, when two persons subscribe to different religions, the explicit forms of their devotion are naturally different. However, at the same time, there is also something similar across different people’s liturgical *habitus* that transcends the boundaries among religions. In this regard, Garcia-Rivera refers to Paul’s

observation of pagan devotion in Areopagus (in Athens) described in Acts 17:22–28, where Paul praises the Athenians, “I see that in every respect you are very religious.”¹⁶ Does this mean that Paul accepted certain aspects of non-Christian religions? According to Garcia-Rivera’s interpretation of this interesting passage,

Paul of Areopagus seems to tell us that culture and society exist as a gift of God to each nation and race by which they could ‘grope for him and perhaps find him.’ What is interesting about this is that this groping and searching is done while God is ‘not far from each one of us.’ In other words, Paul suggests that human culture exists as a means to be sensible to divine Mystery.¹⁷

For Christians, to observe and reflect on the *habitus* of people who believe in other religions is a way to appreciate how God has granted the gift of devotion to all peoples, and how each nation and race reaches for him, each in amazingly creative and beautiful ways. As I will show later, for the Jesuits in Japan, the process of interpreting local liturgical *habitus* involved recognizing the distinctions and similarities between them. In addition to understanding the symbolic meanings and reasoning behind Buddhist practices, their experience challenged them to exploit aesthetic sensitivity in order to cultivate an openness of heart and recognize the beauty of non-Christian traditions.

2) Feeling, (Re)action, Thought

Theoretically, Paul’s preaching in Areopagus, as cited above, can be considered from four different vantages: his primary feeling, (re)action, thought, and further action toward non-Christian rites in Athens. First, Paul talked about his feeling toward the shrines dedicated to local gods. He said, “You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious.”¹⁸ Second, he reacted to the Athenian rites as follows: “The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands....”¹⁹ Third, he offered a theological interpretation of pagan piety, as follows:

He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us.²⁰

Fourth, Paul urged the Athenians to repent their ignorance; since God has established the day on which he will judge the world with justice.²¹

In relation to Paul’s speech in Athens, it is worth noting that American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce related the traditional three normative sciences of

aesthetics, ethics, and logic to feeling, action, and thought, the three elements upon which we base our understanding of experience.²² Aesthetics provides norms for assessing qualities of feeling, ethics supplies norms by which action is judged, and logic sets allow norms for arguments and procedures to be adopted. The three constitute a triadic system and are interdependent. In light of Peirce's triad, it is possible to interpret the passage in the Acts as showing that Paul's thought had developed from his feeling for and impression of the Athenian shrine. In this case, the Apostle's primary feeling was positive. From there, he developed the theological insight that God created boundaries among regions so that people might seek God in their own ways. More precisely, his insight was a synthesis of the positive feeling toward Athenian devotion and the negative reaction toward pagan idols. Paul took further action, explaining the Gospel to the Athenians with the awareness that they were the same and equal human beings created by God and that they were not far from God.

I. Sources

In light of the analytical tools explained above, I will now discuss the content of the selected primary sources, using Peirce's categories of feeling, (re)action, and thought. From the rich corpus of Jesuit reports, letters, and writings about Japanese mission, in this study, I investigate three documents. The author of the first two documents is Luís Fróis, who came to Japan from Portugal in 1563. According to J. F. Schütte's biography of his life, before entering the Society of Jesus, young Fróis had worked as a scribe at the royal court in Lisbon.²³ Probably on account of the practice he had acquired from his secular career, Fróis soon became one of the keenest writers about Japanese matters. The first document is Fróis's impressive account of Japanese Buddhist temples in Miyako (Kyoto) originally written in 1565.²⁴ Years later, in the mid-1580s, Fróis reclaimed a revised version of the same report for the *Historia de Japam*, his multivolume work on Japanese history.²⁵ For the discussion, I will mainly use the text in *Historia* with references to the original 1565 text. Comparing the respective chapters, one may notice that while the main content remained unchanged after 20 years, in *Historia*, the author's excitement and affection toward exotic pagan practices had become subdued.

The second document is the chapter on Japanese religions in Fróis's "Tratado em que se contem muito susintae abreviadamente algumas contradicções e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão" (Treatise, in which, very succinctly and briefly, are described some contradictions and differences of customs between the peoples of Europe and this province of Japan), which had been written in 1585.²⁶ By this time, Fróis knew of Japanese language and culture well enough to present a more objective and detailed comparison of Japanese and European cultures.

Some scholars believe that this treatise was supposed to be published in Europe, although there is no record indicating that it was.²⁷

The third document was written by Alessandro Valignano, who came to Japan in 1579 as the Visitor (inspector) of Jesuit missions in “the Indies,” which included all mission territories east of India.²⁸ Valignano’s summary of the Japan mission, *Sumario*, was a landmark achievement that determined the direction of the early Jesuit mission in eastern Asia.²⁹ In it, the Visitor turns away from the mission method of his predecessors and argues that European missionaries should adapt to Japanese customs. Although *Sumario* predates the extant manuscript of Fróis’s cultural treatise, the Japanese translator of both works, Kiichi Matsuda, believes it very likely that Valignano had received information from Fróis, because the content of the two works overlap in many places.³⁰

1) Feeling: Luís Fróis’s Impression of Japanese Temples

The 58th chapter of Luís Fróis’s *Historia de Japam*, entitled, “Of the things there were to see in the city of Miyako and its vicinity,” is an important source from which one can surmise the Jesuit observations of Japanese culture, especially their uncommon praise of the beauty of Buddhist architecture.³¹ Fróis begins the chapter with an assurance that European churches are so much greater, richer, and stronger than Japanese temples; he writes that the utmost grandeur of European architecture is incomparable to anything in Japan, but that the Japanese are quite satisfied with their architecture, and some of it is certainly worthy of praise. It is possible that to write this chapter Fróis first needed to declare the superiority of European culture and the Catholic world in order to evade the critical eyes of the ecclesiastical censors. Indeed, some of his superiors had considered his former reports to include “unedifying accounts” for the readers in Europe.³² The possibility of censorship notwithstanding, in the balance of the chapter Fróis goes on to describe the beauty of Buddhist temples at length and with candid admiration.

Some of Fróis’s most colorful accounts touch upon his visits to *Tofuku-ji*, *Sanjusangen-do*, and *Chion-in*. All of these are Buddhist temples that stand today in Kyoto, unchanged since that time. On *Tofuku-ji*, Fróis wrote: “[...] the temple is very noble and old, and its precinct is surrounded by a number of curiously shaped, beautiful trees. There are several worship halls within the precinct, including the three main halls on the hill that are especially grand and gorgeous [...].”³³ “In one of the main halls,” he adds,

there are statues representing some of the five hundred disciples of Buddha. These statues are so superbly and skillfully made that if one enters the hall without knowing, one might think they are alive. The statues look like Indian

hermits. But it soon looks like a house dedicated to the devil. Those figures cause more horror than devotion.³⁴

With regards to the description of *Sanjusangen-do*, Fróis made some changes to the original report, and they are featured in the *Historia de Japam*. In the original version, he had written,

[...] the main *Amida* statue in the middle of the temple hall is beautifully gilt with gold, and it is executed even finer than the works of the craftsmen in Flanders. Besides the main statue, there are one thousand life-sized statues of *Kannon* in the mail hall, all gilt head to toe with the finest gold. As one looks around the hall, it is difficult not to be bewitched by their radiance. These statues are extremely elegant, and if this building were not a temple of *Amida*, it would be very appropriate to imagine and contemplate on the ‘angelic hierarchy of heaven [*ordés, & gerarchias angelicas*]’ in this place.³⁵

On reading these accounts, the modern reader may be struck by the peculiarity of Fróis—who preached that Japanese converts must abandon all pagan idols—having been reminded of the angelic hierarchy by a thousand golden idols. Actually, when he later reclaimed this report for the *Historia de Japam*, he edited out the part referring to angels. Even in the revised manuscript, however, his fascination with the thousand Buddhist statues in *Sanjusangen-do* is palpable. He even wrote that “to look over this amazingly many statues is something extremely impressive.”³⁶

At *Chion-in*, Fróis and his colleague Gaspar Viela heard the homily given by a high-ranking Buddhist priest. They were rather curious to see how the Buddhist priests preached to the faithful. At first, Fróis and Viela were embarrassed, because they had to endure a long Buddhist ritual and prayer before receiving the homily. Nonetheless, Fróis’s observation was still detailed. He wrote that during the ritual, the entire congregation knelt on the floor and prayed to *Amida Buddha* for more than half an hour with an utmost attitude of piety and reverence. Then, with the sound of a gong, the congregation chanted “*Namu Amida but (Namuamidabutsu)*” with ecstatic voices, and some of them even had tears in their eyes.³⁷ Finally, the preacher appeared; he was about 45 years old and had a beautiful face and an attractive manner. His voice, his maturity, the gentleness of his words and bodily expression, and the actions he demonstrated during his homily were, for Fróis, quite noteworthy. His homily was so well delivered that those who were listening were amazed by his technique and his way of proceeding.³⁸

2) (Re)action: Comparing Japanese Rites to Catholicism

More than 20 years after the first experience of the temples in Kyoto, Fróis—by now a veteran missionary—penned a treatise comparing Japanese and European cultures. By this time, he had seen many other Japanese temples, sacred sites, and religious rituals. Between the earlier reports discussed above and the treatise, there is a sharp contrast in writing style. In their early reports on Japanese art, Fróis and his colleagues tended to use inflated adjectives such as “very fine,” “grand,” “extraordinary,” and “perfect.” In contrast, in his treatise on cultural comparison, Fróis adopted a systematic, itemized style; its overall tone is detached and objective, and there is no extended display of the superlatives seen in his reports or the *Historia de Japam*.

The treatise consists of 14 short chapters. It compares the Japanese and European cultures on broad topics such as people and their costume, children’s behavior, religions, art, drama, food, the conduct of war, medicine, and buildings. Fróis began the chapter on “temples, pictures, and the things regarding the cult and religion” as follows:

1. Our churches are long and narrow; the Japanese temples are wide and short.
2. Ours [Christian churches] have high choirs, and there are benches or chairs to sit down; the Buddhist priests pray before their altar sitting on *tatamis* [*tatami*, the Japanese straw mat].³⁹

On religious images, he wrote:

5. Our pictures are mostly painted altarpieces; in the temples of Buddhists, they are all graven images.
6. We use multiple colors for painting; they paint their statues gold.
7. Ours all come in human heights; some of theirs are so tall, they look like giants.⁴⁰

In item 8, Fróis reveals his judgment on religious images:

8. Ours are beautiful and lead to devotion; theirs are terrible and fearsome, with figures of demons burning in fire.⁴¹

The chapter goes on to the 30th item in this way; Fróis’s observations are acute at times, but at other times, his understanding is wanting. Throughout the treatise, he maintains an objective tone, but occasionally he inserts his own value judgments, thus painting a picture of Japanese religions as corrupt and conceited:

25. With us, someone who changes religious faith is considered an apostate and renegade; in Japan, one changes one's own without any shame, every time he wishes.⁴²
30. Our prelate travels on a mule; a Japanese prelate on a sedan chair.⁴³

As far as this treatise is concerned, it appears that Fróis's long-term reaction to Japanese religions tended to be negative. At one time he had had very positive impressions of Buddhist art and rituals, but those positive feelings seemed to have subsided. Matsuda has commented that the style of the cultural comparison treatise is too detached to be by the same author of the *Historia de Japam*⁴⁴; on this point, however, J. F. Schütte has shown that there is enough evidence to determine Fróis's authorship of the treatise.⁴⁵ The uncharacteristically detached tone of the text is understandable, if the treatise had been meant to serve apologetic purposes—especially for the use of missionaries, who preached to the Japanese about the superiority of Christianity over Buddhism. The format of comparison was effective for this purpose, since it allowed Fróis to present his readers with an analysis of wide-ranging material.

3) Thought: The Jesuit Inspector's Summary

Alessandro Valignano completed his *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón* in 1583. In that work, the inspector of the Japan mission stated his assessment of matters regarding Japanese customs and religions; he also delineated a concrete mission principle as to how to deal with the Japanese. As noted earlier, scholars believe that in writing *Sumario*, Valignano relied not only on his own experiences with life in Japan, but also on information from Fróis and other missionaries. In that sense, its chapters regarding local religions and people's *habitus* can be considered a summary of accumulated Jesuit experience in Japan.

In *Sumario*, Valignano argues for the advantages of a mission method that was respectful of local customs. He also advocated for the education of native clergy. He acknowledged that the Japanese possessed superior manners and customs; at the same time, however, he claimed that the teachings of Buddhist priests and their idolatry had contaminated the good nature of the people.⁴⁶ Valignano made the point that there were huge differences between the Japanese and the Europeans, including their likes and dislikes with respect to certain foods, colors, and music. He writes:

The seventh reasons is because it is so big and so natural the contradiction or divergence between the Japanese and all other nations in the lifestyle, in the food, in the way of relating with each other, in the language, and in all other things, even in the natural senses, as previously said, that there is the need of much grace of Our Lord, with great care of the Superiors, in order to get them united,

especially due to the fact that the Japanese are so careful and assiduous to their customs, and the peoples of Europe are so difficult to become accustomed to their things.⁴⁷

He argues further, that in order to maintain unity between Japanese and Europeans, the Europeans must accommodate local customs. By doing so, he reasons, the Japan mission would be more fruitful than those anywhere else, because “the Japanese are by nature much inclined towards religion and reverence, and they obey much to the clergy.”⁴⁸

The 17th chapter of *Sumario* deals with religious *habitus*. In the beginning of the chapter, he writes,

Their vocation and inclination towards religion, even though they are gentiles, is so great in them that there are numerous Buddhist priests, as previously said, in all sects and congregations. These sects and congregations have all attained the highest of dignities, as previously said, due to the profound veneration and inclination that the Japanese possess toward religion, and the same [attitude] we see, by experience, toward our own [religion].⁴⁹

He also recognized that the Japanese youth were particularly apt for living religious lives. He assessed their potential as follows: “once the true spirit inhabits their hearts, as previously said, they demonstrate superior disposition than ours, for we require a lot of effort to reach what they have naturally.”⁵⁰ Valignano also related the value of Japanese liturgical *habitus* to the prosperity of Buddhism and wrote:

The Buddhist priests have led all their sects in such a prudent way, and with such an order, that they managed to attain supreme authority and dignity among the Japanese, building so many and so big universities, and so magnificent temples and monasteries, and attaining such high revenues, that they have come to possess the best of all there is in Japan.⁵¹

What is especially interesting in his remarks is that Valignano considered the quality of liturgical *habitus* independent from religious adherence. In other words, whether one were Buddhist or Christian, his or her disposition for faith would be compatible. In this sense, the liturgical *habitus* crossed boundaries for Valignano. The Visitor advocated the ordination of the Japanese, partly because he believed that the native *habitus* would be valuable when people converted to Christianity, and some Christian converts would be even more pious than the Europeans.

II. Analysis

As far as we have seen, the dynamics of the Jesuit understanding of Japanese religions involved aesthetic appreciation, dogmatic reaction, and the interpretation of *habitus*. The missionaries found the Buddhist edifices magnificent and were deeply impressed by the number of learned priests and pious believers. Although other contemporary Jesuit reports are beyond the scope of this study, many of them concur on the aesthetic appeal of Japanese tradition. Fróis's personality and style contrasted sharply with Valignano's; the former was passionate and inclined to exaggerate his experience, while the latter was more logical and speculative.⁵² Nonetheless, in the quotations provided above, even Valignano appears to have been moved by the cultural achievements of the Japanese and by the local population's utmost reverence for Buddhist clergy. Their appreciation of Japanese tradition extended beyond the explicit features of Buddhist art to include the people's inner disposition.

After his experience of living in Japan, Fróis engaged in the project of comparing Japanese and European cultures. Those comparisons provided him with an effective tool to explain Japanese culture to other Europeans. However, his initial acceptance of the aesthetic aspect of the local tradition turned to a rejection of pagan rites. The missionaries' general reaction to Buddhist art was not unlike that of other Christians to local cultures in many other places to which they traveled: they rejected the graven images as idols and condemned the "corrupt" morals of non-Christian societies. Still, the act of comparison as such was a detached and objective process of learning that certainly helped the missionaries deepen their understanding of the Other.

Finally, Valignano fashioned an innovative mission principle that respected and accommodated local traditions. It is possible that the Jesuit inspector refrained from ordering the wholesale destruction of Buddhism simply because he was open to the aesthetic quality of Buddhist art. To be sure, the Catholic Church's approach to other religions was much different in India, where Valignano also served as an inspector.⁵³ Much has been said about his mission principle of cultural adaptation in Japan, but more scholarly attention could be paid to the whole process and dynamics inherent in his interpretations of Japanese people and culture. What was special about his stay in Japan was that he could experience the radiant local tradition as it was, undisturbed by destructive colonialist powers. He recognized that the creative source of Buddhist art was the people's piety, and he came to believe that once these people became Christians, they would build beautiful churches in place of pagan temples.

Thus far, I have discussed interactions between European Christian missionaries and the "gentiles" in Japan. In view of the larger context of global mission history, here, I would like to raise two issues for further discussion. One of the issues relates to the outcome of the early Jesuit mission in Japan and the impact of the iconoclastic

imperative on Japanese converts. The other issue relates to the difference in Jesuit approaches toward local culture, depending on the regions in which they worked.

Despite Valignano's mission policy—which was innovative, in that it promoted cultural accommodation—the early Catholic mission works in Japan ended in disappointment. Having witnessed a rapid Church expansion for decades, in the late sixteenth century, the Japanese authorities—as they finally emerged from a long period of domestic war and unified the country—implemented an anti-Christian policy. Then, in the early seventeenth century, the central government run by the Tokugawa Shoguns expelled all the Christian missionaries and banned Christianity throughout the country. The xenophobic attitude of the Tokugawa culminated in Japan's "closed country" policy in 1639, resulting in a withdrawal from all European trade, with the exception of that with the Dutch East India Company. The possession of Western products, including books and art, was strictly prohibited.⁵⁴ Also, it is important to note that even when the missionaries were allowed to preach and evangelize freely, the education of Japanese clergy was not the easy success Valignano had predicted. Problems stemmed mostly from cultural differences in pedagogy and learning, as well as the difficulties experienced by Japanese seminarians in learning Latin and Western culture. In 1601, more than 20 years after the establishment of a local seminary, the first four Japanese priests were ordained. Of those, three were Japanese Jesuits who had been sent to Europe as members of the Japanese embassy to Rome.⁵⁵

One of the catalysts behind Japan's "closed country" policy and its extreme rejection of Westerners was its fear of colonial conquerors. The authorities suspected that the Spaniards had an interest in colonizing the island of Japan, as had been seen in their conquest of the Philippines. Also, Japanese rulers came to consider Japanese Christians to be a dangerous religious sect that could eventually threaten the ruling authorities. Some Japanese converts to Christianity disturbed the balance of local community life by acting violently against non-Christians. There was a series of adverse incidents, especially in the southern island of Kyushu, where a group of Japanese Christians attacked temples and monks and burned down their buildings and statues.⁵⁶

In the Japan mission documents reviewed above, the destruction of pagan idols was not considered a Christian obligation.⁵⁷ Especially in the first document written by Fróis, it is clear that the Jesuit was fully enjoying his visit to Buddhist temples, feasting his eyes on the beautiful buildings and gardens found there. Nonetheless, the missionaries encouraged Japanese Christians to destroy all religious images that they had previously used in worship. Any appreciation of Buddhist art was in conflict with what they assumed to be the orthodox Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions.

The mission histories of other parts of the world seem to reveal that, besides formal disagreements in terms of doctrine, there were at least two major causes for tension in the relationship between Christians and non-Christians: intrusions by

political/military powers and Christians' aggressive rejection of non-Christian images. Tzvetan Todorov illustrates in *The Conquest of America* how the Spanish conqueror Hernando Cortés attacked and destroyed the Aztec kingdom, despite the fact that he had fully recognized the brilliant accomplishments of Aztec culture.⁵⁸ Todorov remarks that when Cortés made a comparison between Spanish and Aztec cities, "the comparison was always in Mexico's favor."⁵⁹ In Todorov's view, Cortés was able to recognize the external beauty of the local culture, but he did not see the beauty of the people who had created them.⁶⁰ We could also say that colonial greed had ruined Cortés's primary experience with Aztec cities; the sight of the prosperous Aztec cities only fueled the motivation of the colonial conquerors to plunder and annihilate Others' cultures, rather than preserve them.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined the process by which Christian missionaries interpreted Japanese Buddhism in the sixteenth century, in view of three interrelated stages: aesthetic impact (feeling), action, and thought. As for feeling, the Jesuits were deeply impressed by the liturgical *habitus* of the Japanese—especially the people's natural disposition and their achievements in creating magnificent edifices for worship. In terms of action, however, the missionaries reacted negatively to Buddhist art, rejecting it as consisting of pagan graven images. Then, summarizing that positive feeling and negative reaction, Valignano developed the assertion that the Japanese were the people best inclined to religious matters. The missionaries did not allow the Japanese converts to keep their old Buddhist statues, but they did want Japanese Christians to preserve their inclination toward worship.

Particularly with regards to the issue of the graven images, I would like to mention that the issue of idolatry is still poignant in and pertinent to inter-religious dialogues today. In my view, even in today's situations, most Christians' reactions to non-Christian religious images are similar to those of the early modern missionaries. As was the case in the sixteenth century, today, many Christians first encounter other religions in terms of their religious images, architecture, music, and liturgies. To facilitate fruitful inter-religious dialogue in practical, everyday circumstances, we would need a new Christian theology of art that fully accounts for our experience of beautiful things created by non-Christians.

This case study based on Jesuit documents from early modern Japan highlights the significance of aesthetic impact in the process of developing cross-cultural and inter-religious learning. Aesthetic openness is crucial for the Self in appreciating and loving the beauty of the Other. Comparisons contribute to the process by providing a tool by which one can deepen his or her knowledge of the Other, as well as that of the Self. Also, it has been considered that the presented case in Japan could have been an isolated

case, and that the same issues may not apply to cases where other elements—such as economic interests, an iconoclastic imperative, or racial/cultural prejudices—have overshadowed the “middle ground” where cross-cultural and inter-religious interactions otherwise take place.

It is very important to note here that our feelings, actions, and thoughts are bound to contexts. From a historical point of view, the case in Japan was probably one of the happier cross-cultural encounters, in that both parties interacted with each other peacefully and equally, without succumbing to the use of force. It seems to me that the most important lesson to take away from this particularly exemplary history is that, like Paul among the Athenians, the Jesuits in Japan recognized the Japanese as being very devout. Through their direct experience with Buddhist art and practices, the missionaries gained new insights: that the liturgical *habitus* could cross boundaries that the disposition toward the sacred is something God has planted in all human beings, and that each person’s refined *habitus* should be acknowledged on equal terms, regardless of the nature of their religious adherence.

Notes

¹ Here, by “early modern period,” I mean the 16th and 17th centuries.

² One of the most recent reflections on historical inter-religious and comparative learning is Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 24–40.

³ Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

⁴ Nicolas Standaert, “Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission,” in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, eds. Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 83.

⁵ Urs Bitterli recognizes three models regarding historical contacts among cultures: contacts, collisions, and relationships. Relationships are rare occurrences, and there are examples in 16th- and 17th-century China and Japan, as well as on the west coast of Africa. *Cultures in Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), 40.

⁶ Shinto and Buddhism were the two major religions of 16th- and 17th-century Japan. Shinto is the native Japanese religion, and in those days Buddhist and Shinto practices co-existed in people’s daily lives; hence, most Japanese attended both Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.

⁷ Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón (1583), Adiciones del Sumario de Japón (1592)*, vol. 1, ed. J. L. Alvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1954), 204.

⁸ Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7–12.

⁹ Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi, *Living Beauty: The Art of Liturgy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 78–86.

¹⁰ Vincent G. Potter, *Charles S. Peirce: On Norms & Ideals* (Worcester: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 19–21.

¹¹ Its critical edition is as follows: Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, ed. José Wicki, vol. 2 (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1981). Subsequent references to this work are denoted as *HJ*.

¹² Luís Fróis, “Tratado em que se contem muito susintae abreviadamente algumas contradicções e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão.” Critical edition of this treatise is: *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan (1585)*, ed. and trans. Josef Franz Schütte (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1955).

¹³ Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón (1583)*.

¹⁴ On the medieval idea of *habitus*, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 50–55. For a summary of the history of *habitus*, see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded paperback edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15–46. For a sociological understanding of *habitus*, see Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, *Habitus*, Practices,” in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–65.

¹⁵ Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi, *Living Beauty*, 108–9.

¹⁶ Acts 17:22 (NAB).

¹⁷ Garcia-Rivera and Scirghi, 79. Also see Clooney’s reference to Acts 17 in *Comparative Theology*, 25.

¹⁸ Acts 17:22.

¹⁹ Acts 17:24.

²⁰ Acts 17:26–7.

²¹ Acts 17: 31.

²² Vincent G. Potter, Charles S. Peirce, *On Norms and Ideals* (Worcester: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 19. For Peirce, philosophy consisted of phenomenology (perception), normative sciences, and metaphysics. Potter, 8.

²³ On Fróis's biography, see Schütte's introduction to *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan*, esp. 10–9. See also the section on sources in Haruko Nawata Ward, *Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1549–1650* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 17–28.

²⁴ I referred to the printed version of his report, published as a part of *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreverão dos Reynos de Japão & China...*, vol. 1 (Evora: Manoel de Lyra, 1598), 177–81. Facsimile edition of *Cartas* has been published from the Tenri University Library (Tenri, 1972).

²⁵ See note 11.

²⁶ Schütte's *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan* introduces the original text with a German translation. There is also a French translation of the treatise with a brief preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Européens & Japonais: traité sur les contradictions & différences de mœurs* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998).

²⁷ Kiichi Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki* (Tokyo: Chuo-koron-sha, 1983), 12.

²⁸ For a short review of the life of Valignano, see Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542–1742* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 32–46. For in-depth studies of his mission strategy, see Joseph F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan*, vol. 1: parts 1 and 2 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980–1985).

²⁹ See note 7.

³⁰ Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki*, 10

³¹ Fróis, *HJ*, vol. 2, 20. I would like to thank Fr. Luis Ferreira do Amaral, SJ, for kindly helping me with the translation of Portuguese and Spanish texts quoted in this paper.

³² On the Roman editors who “cut out so ruthlessly” Fróis's praise of pagan temples, see Charles Ralf Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 49.

³³ *HJ*, vol. 2, 22–3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁵ *Cartas*, vol. 1, 180–180v.

³⁶ *HJ*, vol. 2, 22.

³⁷ *Namuamidabutsu* is the chant central to Pure Land worship. It means, “I trust myself to the infinite compassion of Amida Buddha.” *Ibid.*, 30–1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ Schütte, *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan*, 162.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁴ Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki*, 11.

⁴⁵ Schütte, “Einleitung” in *Kulturgegensätze*, 3–10.

⁴⁶ Valignano, *Sumario*, 25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136–7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁵¹ Ibid., 205–6.

⁵² Valignano remarked on Fróis’s writing in the annual report of 1587: “And since the said father [Fróis] is much inclined to describe things fully and at length, and be careless about checking whether or not everything he says is true, and in choosing what to put down or not, it did not seem to be that I could simply forward the said letters without alteration.” See Moran, 35–6. Today, we are able to visit the same temples in Kyoto as Fróis did. We can see that his observation was accurate, although he sometimes misunderstood the meaning of Buddhist iconography *vis-à-vis* the statues and other art objects held there.

⁵³ The traditional approach of the Church toward pagan temples was a mixture of preservation and destruction. In the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great wrote about Anglo-Saxon temples in England thus: “The temples of idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed: but let the idols that are in them be destroyed....” Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 123. As to the situation in India in the sixteenth century, the ecclesiastical council in Goa made it clear that “all heathen temples in Portuguese-controlled territory should be demolished.” C. R. Boxer, “A Note on Portuguese Missionary Methods in the Far East,” in *Christianity and Missions: 1450–1800*, ed. J. S. Cummins (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), 79. In comparison to the destruction of Hindu temples in India, in Japan and China, the Jesuits’ approach to non-Christian images was much more tolerant and respectful of the local faith traditions. On the comparison of India and Japan missions with regards to the question of idolatry, see Masakazu Asami, *Kirishitan-jidai no Guzo-suhai* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2009), chapter 2.

⁵⁴ On Japan’s *sakoku* (closed country) policy, see Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 308–97. John Whitney Hall, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5–6 and 368–72.

⁵⁵ Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 161–77.

⁵⁶ Hirokazu Shimizu, *Shokuho-seiken to Kirishitan* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoten, 2002), 171–5.

⁵⁷ In some parts of China, the destruction of non-Christian devotional objects (mostly statues) was an imperative that was made part of the process of receiving baptism. Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 316.

⁵⁸ Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

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Normative Inculturation? A Thirteenth–Century Example of the Middle Ground in Relations between the Latin Church and the Church of the East

By A. J. Watson

Introduction

This paper looks at two thirteenth century accounts, the *Itinerarium* by the Franciscan William of Rubruck and the Syriac Church of the East text *Tashīthā DemārYaballāhā* (the History of Mar Yaballaha), and examines the models of comparative theology both present. While acknowledging that comparative theology is seemingly redundant between different denominations of Christianity, the ecumenical dialogue presented in both of these accounts occurred at a time when these two branches of Christianity had been separated for almost a millennium and had developed within completely different cultural backgrounds. Subsequently, both underwent dramatic changes to their worldviews: one European, the other Middle Eastern and Asian. As a result of the expanding Mongol Empire, both “Christianities” reestablished contact and were forced to examine internal conceptions of the “other” and “dialogue” as they related to their own unique cultural location. This paper examines the ways in which the authors of these accounts relate the ecumenical dialogues they record, and pays particular attention to the language and imagery by which they negotiate cultural difference, thereby establishing what Richard White terms a “Middle Ground.”¹ It also evaluates the comparative theological framework that evolves through its contrast of two different thought systems that, while both Christian, evolve along two very different theological and cultural paths. Finally, it uses these two accounts as historical case studies for examining the role of inculturation in comparative theology and interfaith dialogue.

Are history and comparative theology compatible? What is History?

In its best form, comparative theology is dialogical and continually evolving as a result of that dialogue (Clooney, 2001, 8-10; Watson, 2009, 179-186). In applying historical examples to comparative theology, and vice versa, it is important to first acknowledge that history is also a constantly evolving process as historical analysis

¹ For more on the concept of the “Middle Ground,” see White 1991; For its application in another context, see Garry Sparks, this issue.

responds to the different questions of each successive generation. Distinguished British historian Edward H. Carr also has written that establishing “basic facts rests not on any quality in the facts themselves, but on an *a priori* decision of the historian...It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar’s crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all (Carr, 1961, 11).” He notes that “the facts of history never come to us ‘pure’...they are refracted through the mind of the recorder”(ibid., 22) and that “we can view...and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present.”(Ibid., 24) Thus, both history and comparative theology are inherently dialogical: one applies rationality to the past to understand the present, while the other applies rationality to faith to understand present belief.

In both instances, one should be aware of the ways in which inculturated responses can alter perception and thereby guide a rational response. By inculturation, I am initially taking the definition implied by *Redemptoris Missio* 52, that is “the ongoing dialog between faith and culture,”(Lenfers, 1996; PP John Paul II, 1990) but I will argue later that inculturation is potentially tricky ground for the comparative theologian. In historical method, post-colonial/structural theory is applied to historical argument, where the objective is to recapture voices left out of a Western-oriented discourse. The “inside looking outward” theological definition of inculturation implies ways in which comparative theology might be used in a similar way, but also warns of potential pitfalls. With these views of comparative theology, history, and their intersection in mind, an analysis of a historical case study and its implications for comparative theology is in order.

The Historical Context

In the thirteenth century, Mongol conquests facilitated contact between Latin Christendom and the Assyrian Church of the East for the first time in almost nine hundred years. From common first century roots, these two forms of Christianity had developed along completely different trajectories over the intervening centuries. By the thirteenth century, Christianity in the Latin West had been defined by the split with the Byzantine world, the rise of the Papacy, and the fall of the Western Roman Empire. In religious culture, Augustinianism, the rise of the mendicant orders, and scholastic rationalism defined a worldview that had been shaped by over a century of crusading. In the Latin West, Christianity was the normative religion of the majority, so much so that that the world was seen in Christian terms, and the history of Europe was written in terms of its Christianization.

By contrast, by the seventh century the Church of the East had evangelized along the Silk Routes as far as Tang Dynasty China. Hounded by accusations of heresy by the rest of Christianity, its wide geographic spread had brought it into contact with a

number of religions, some of which were absent in—and even unknown to—Latin Europe, such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, and Manichaeism. The rise of Islam and its spread into Persia and Central Asia had presented a notable competitor, and throughout Asia the Church of the East existed as one minority religion among many. Starting from a common theological ground with Latin Christendom through to the third and fourth centuries, once isolated as heretical, the Church of the East began to develop its own unique ascetic monastic intellectual tradition, in which figures largely unknown to the Latin West—Babai the Great, Isaac of Nineveh, John of Dalyatha—loomed. Interaction with Greek, Islamic, and even Chinese culture informed intellectual and theological development. Beyond the Islamic Caliphs, the only other central unifying figure had come in the form of Genghis Khan at the beginning of the thirteenth century, whose invasions of Eastern Europe finally brought these two vastly different aspects of Christianity back together.

Thus the inculturated positioning and responses of these two Christianities at the point of rediscovery provide historical case studies that are instructive for current efforts at comparative theology (Wills 2008, 13).²

William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium*

In 1255, William of Rubruck, a Franciscan missionary preacher, sat down in a convent in the crusader garrison city of Acre to write a detailed account of his two and a half year journey to the Mongol capital Caracorum for his sovereign, Louis IX of France. At the time of his journey, the Mongol Empire encompassed most of Asia and Central Asia, from the Manchurian coast in the East, to Persia, Kiev, and Konya in the West.

The account that Rubruck left—his *Itinerarium*—remains one of the more impressive medieval travel accounts and has been reviewed in numerous scholarly works over the years. As Peter Jackson notes, to Rubruck also rightly falls the distinction of being the first true Latin missionary to Asia (Jackson. 2005. 262.). His journey spearheaded a trend of what was to be a centuries-long Latin missionary engagement in the region. While he is also critical of many of the faiths he encounters in the *Itinerarium*, in his account Rubruck reserves his greatest criticism for his co-religionists, attacking them on grounds of heresy, sin, and doctrinal and disputational ignorance. William of Rubruck lays out several criticisms of the Nestorians he finds among the Mongols, and describes them in terms that his audience—King Louis IX of France—would understand to be both heretical and sinful. To begin with, his term for them—*Nestorini*—is in itself a pejorative term relating to the Church of the East (Brock 1996, 23-36). The term “Nestorian” is itself a reference to the Christological controversy,

²To the Latin church, the Church of the East was what Lawrence Wills would term a seductive, similar Other, separated by language, culture, distance, time, practice, history, tradition and orthodoxy.

whereby the Church of the East is considered to have come to reject the divine and human aspects of Christ as formulated at the Council of Ephesus (431) (Brock 1996, 23-36; McGuckin 1996, 7-22; Baumer 2006,46-48). Thus for Rubruck, the Nestorians were a heretical remnant from the formative days of the early church.

Rubruck on the *Nestorini*

There are numerous passages in William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium* where Rubruck describes the *Nestorini* in an unflattering light. He castigates their doctrinal knowledge, their simony, their polygamy, drunkenness, and their ignorance. The following passage is very illustrative of this approach:

The Nestorians here know nothing. They perform their service and have their sacred books in Syriac, a language of which they are ignorant, and chant in the manner of our monks who are ignorant of Latin. As a result they are totally corrupt. For the most part they are usurers and drunkards, and some of them, furthermore, who live among the Tartars, have several wives just as the Tartars have...it is difficult for the Bishop (*Episcopus*) to come to these lands, and does so once in about fifty years. At that time they have all young males—indeed even those in the cradle—ordained into the priesthood. As such, nearly all of their men are priests. And after that they marry, which is plainly in contravention of the statutes of the Fathers, and they are bigamists ...by their greed and immorality they alienate the [Mongols] from the Christian rites...³

William of Rubruck also expressed great frustration and concern at the *Nestorini* for their syncretism and failure to stop what he saw as practices that were at best pagan and at worst heretical. He was deeply disturbed by their unwillingness to speak out against practices he regarded as contrary to the Christian faith, and their apparent encouragement of practices he viewed as pagan. The following quote from Rubruck on the *Nestorini* and their failure to stop offensive practices illustrates his views on the subject:

³ William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVI:12-14; Van den Wyngaert, A. ed. *Sinica Franciscana, I. Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Quarrachi-Firenze: 1929), p. 238; see also Jackson, P. tr. and ed. and ed. Morgan, D. *The Mission of William of Rubruck* (London: 1990), p. 163-4. Jackson's translation follows the same chapter and verse schema as that of Van den Wyngaert, and I therefore use these as a common reference point in this paper: the above mention of *Nestorini*, for example, is found in both texts at XXVI:12-14. Henceforth in the following format: William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVI:12-14.

Those wretched priests never instructed [the lady Cota] in the faith, nor did they recommend baptism to her...Nor do the priests condemn any kind of sorcery... The priests never teach them that such practices are evil. (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXIX: 42)

Rubruck would ultimately return to Paris, where he soon disappeared from history. His observations, however, had some influence on contemporaneous thinking, as is seen in the writings of his fellow Franciscan, Roger Bacon, the *Doctor Mirabilis*.

While the *Itinerarium* of William of Rubruck is a private communication between Rubruck and Louis IX, it is clear that he shared his observations with others once he had returned to Paris. In particular, he shared his experiences with his fellow Franciscan, Roger Bacon, who included information from Rubruck—and indeed entire passages from the *Itinerarium*—in his *Opus Maior*, which was written at request of Pope Clement IV and delivered to the Papacy in 1267 (Power 2002; Charpentier, 193, 255-267). In the fourth book of that work, for example, Bacon notes that intermingled among the idolaters, Tatars and Saracens of Asia are “Nestorians who are imperfect Christians, with their Patriarch in the East, who visits the districts and ordains infants in their cradles to holy orders, because he alone ordains, and cannot visit a place more than once in about fifty years...They teach the noble sons of the Tartars the Gospels and the Faith and others also when they have the opportunity, but because of their scanty knowledge and their evil morals they are despised by the Tartars (Burke 1927, 388).”⁴ Thus, the works of William of Rubruck came to influence and reinforce prevailing Latin views of the Church of the East as heretical, doctrinally imperfect, and corrupt. These views would continue to color perception for a few decades afterward. When the Uighur Monk Rabban Sauma would visit Rome in 1287, he would initially be met by the *curia* with skepticism toward his views and declarations of sincerity.

The *Tashitha demar Yaballaha*

The *Tashitha demar Yaballaha* (the *History*) provides the account of two Turkic monks, Rabban Marcos and his mentor, Rabban Sauma, who set out from their cells in Mongol China on a pilgrimage with the ultimate objective of Jerusalem.⁵ They travel along the Central Asian trade routes to Mongol Persia, where Marcos is elected

⁴This passage in Bacon’s *Opus Maius* is a direct lift from William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium* XXVI:12-14

⁵This is the focus of the first half of the *Tashitha*, and is drawn from a now lost Persian account written by Rabban Sauma, with the Syriac author abridging or adding to the text according to his purpose. The second half of the text is concerned primarily with the reign of Mar Yaballaha after the death of Rabban Sauma, his relationship with various Mongol kings, and increasingly poor relations with the majority Muslim community, resulting in the massacre of Christians in Maragha and Arbil. See Bedjan 1895, 85-6; Murre-van den Berg 2006, 38.

Catholicus of the Church of the East and Rabban Sauma is sent to the capitals of Europe in an effort to gain Latin allies for the Il-Khan against the Muslims in the Levant. It is on this mission that he first meets with the College of Cardinals, and learns that the Pope, Honorius IV, has recently died. Upon his reaching Rome, the College of Cardinals immediately questions him on numerous doctrines of faith. They also express surprise at a Christian coming as an ambassador for the “King of the Mongols.” (Bedjan 1895, 57) After a somewhat lengthy discussion of doctrine regarding the Trinity, they “terminated his discourse with many arguments, but they honored him for his discourse (Bedjan 1895, 61-62).” Rabban Sauma ultimately resolves the discussion by acknowledging their authority, his obedience to them, and his desire to make pilgrimage, stating, “I have come from far lands not to dispute nor to expound upon the themes of the Faith; but to receive a benediction from the Reverend Pope and the shrines of the Saints (Bedjan 1895, 62).” He is then given a tour of the holy sites in Rome before being sent away to resume his embassy.

Rabban Sauma in Rome

Upon the coronation of the new Pope, Nicholas IV, Rabban Sauma returns to Rome, where he remains a guest of the *curia*. As the *History* relates:

After some days Rabban Sauma said to the Reverend Pope: “I wish to consecrate [the Eucharist] that you may see our custom.” And he bade him to consecrate, as he requested. And on that day a great congregation assembled to see how the ambassador of the Mongols consecrates. And when they saw, they rejoiced and said: “The language is different, but the rite is one!” And [Pope Nicholas IV] said to Rabban Sauma: “May God receive your offering and bless you, and pardon your faults and sins!”⁶ (Bedjan, 1895,77-78; Montgomery, 1925, 68)

Rabban Sauma then replies that he should like communion from the hands of the Pope, “so that I may have complete forgiveness,” to which the Pope replies, “It shall be so.”

Rabban Sauma stays at the Vatican throughout the Holy Week, and on leaving, the Pope presents him and his Patriarch, Mar Yabalaha, with gifts, including a “ring from his own finger (Bedjan 1895, 83).” He also provides Yabalaha “letters patent which contained authorization of his Patriarchate over all the Orientals. And to Rabban Sauma he gave letters patent as Visitor over all the Christians (Bedjan 1895, 84).” This is important, for as Visitor General, the Papacy effectively empowered Sauma with

⁶ The pages in Bedjan’s edited text are noted in Montgomery’s translation. I have used both in this article, making amendments to Montgomery’s translation where appropriate.

responsibility for correcting doctrine. Thus, the embassy of Rabban Sauma was a success, and while later events would largely negate his achievements, his account provides an interesting model of an individual overcoming an inculturated resistance to his own version of Christianity. Moreover this is an example of Richard White's middle ground, a case whereby actions are used to negotiate cultural differences. In the particular case of Rabban Sauma, through demonstrating obedience to the Pope, establishing his credibility as a pilgrim, and using the Eucharist as a means of negotiating cultural difference, he was successful at mitigating an initially negative cultural response.

“The Rite is One”: Analysis and lessons for comparative theology

Unfortunately, it was not to last. Despite efforts by the Patriarch Mar Yaballaha to establish union with the Roman church, within the decade Franciscan and Dominican missionaries were establishing Roman churches in India and China (Baum and Winkler 2003,100-101). The accounts left by these missionaries—among them John of Montecorvino and Odoric of Pordenone—record continuing conflicts with the Church of the East, with Odoric dismissing the East Syrians of Mylapore as “useless heretics (Baum and Winkler 2003, 101).”

In recent years, relations between Rome and the Assyrian Church of the East have taken a different turn. In 1994, the Catholicos Mardinkha and Pope John Paul II made a joint Christological Declaration attributing conflicts between the two churches as “due in large part to misunderstandings (CCDCCACE 1994).” The declaration continues: “Whatever our Christological differences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith...we wish from now on to witness together (CCDCCACE 1994).” Interestingly, however, the document also notes that, owing to differences in church constitution and sacrament (notably the use of words of institution (This is my body, this is my Blood—as determined by Peter Lombard), “we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist (CCDCCACE 1994).” Given the Eucharist's role in overcoming difference in Rabban Sauma's case, this is instructive, and stems largely from the formalization of sacrament that occurred at the Council of Trent from 1545-1563. Thus again, a purely cultural response, in this case to European Protestantism, is brought to bear on the evaluation of the inculturated Christianity of the Church of the East, with results that impact ecumenical effort.

Catholic-Assyrian Church of the East Dialogue

Since 1994, continuing work has occurred to resolve this difference, and in 2001 the Papacy released its “Guidelines for admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East,” which affirm specific rites used in the Church of the East, as sacramental for the purposes of Eucharist (PCFPCU). The

decision, nonetheless, is not without controversy, particularly among Traditionalist Catholics who frame post-Vatican II moves towards ecumenism in terms of “combat for tradition.” (SSPX)

The lesson to be learned from this history of relations between Rome and the Church of the East is one that is also very instructive for the practice of comparative theology and interfaith dialogue. Again, this speaks to the risks of inculturated response in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, particularly when that response is rooted in religious doctrine. As *Redemptoris Missio* describes the process of inculturation:

The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation “means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for *it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.* (PP John Paul II 1990, 52 [my italics])

As this historical example demonstrates, however, even the Roman church, and Western Christianity, is inculturated, even if the “culture” is normative from our own perspective. The historical case studies of William of Rubruck and Rabban Sauma demonstrate the types of responses that can result between even two branches of Christianity: cases where there is the meeting with an “inculturated” Christianity—such as the Church of the East—and a “normative” Christianity which regards its mission as maintaining “the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith (PP John Paul II 1990, 52).” Further, this concept of “inculturation” is not historically fixed: a primary means by which Rabban Sauma ultimately gained acceptance—the performance of the Eucharist which led those assembled to cry, “the language is different, but the rite is one!”—would have been rendered impossible by the doctrinal language put into play after the Council of Trent, a Council driven by European events that occurred almost two-hundred years after his mission. The middle ground had shifted, and this serves a note of caution for those of us engaged in comparative theology and interfaith dialogue. Since even the post-Vatican II ecumenical work is not without opposition, we must remain vigilant with regard to changing standards of “inculturation” if our activity in comparative theology is to have any permanence.

Normative Inculturation, Acculturation, Enculturation, and Comparative Theology

The Comparative Theology Group and the work being done in this field is one of the more relevant bodies of work that is being undertaken today, essentially because of its dialogical nature. As Francis Clooney has written, comparative theology promotes “a new, more integral theological conversation wherein traditions can remain distinct although their theologies are no longer separable. A religion may be unique, but its theology is not.” (Clooney 2001, 8) Clooney also lays out three basic tenets for comparative theology: that theology is inter-religious and “occurs when believers begin to think through, probe, and explain what they believe,” that “intelligent inter-religious theology is already comparative theology where similarities and differences are taken into account,” and that “if theologians can profitably notice similarities and differences across religious boundaries...theology ideally becomes dialogical (Clooney 2001, 8-10).” Thus the definition for comparative theology lays out a model by which the individual must seek to understand their own cultural-theological location—their own inculturation—and undertake a process, which, by virtue of its active dialogical element, implies that it is constantly evolving. This poses a hope and a threat for the problem discussed above: presumably future theologians will still be in dialogue with those who oppose them as well.

The challenge of Comparative Theology is to be aware of inculturated responses. The case study outlined above demonstrates that such inculturated responses do not occur merely between faiths, but can occur inter-denominationally as well. As such, the role of culture is to be all the more respected in comparative theology. One hopeful aspect of Comparative Theology is that our modern day theoretical toolkit, cultural understanding, and ability to be self critical is presumably better in these post-Vatican II/post-structuralist times than it was at the height of the medieval Papacy or the Reformation. Also encouraging is a formally stated objective of pursuing more interfaith and Ecumenical dialogue.

Conclusion: Implications for Comparative Theology

So what are the ways forward? In prior meetings of this group and in articles, I have argued that the use of theologically loaded terminology can be a stumbling block in interfaith dialogue, as many of these terms—such as words of institution—carry with them presuppositions. (Watson 2009, 179-186.) Taking that argument a step further here, I would argue that such terms and language are, though normative by our own standards, inculturated and evolving, and hence potentially counter to the dialogical aspects of Comparative Theology. I have suggested elsewhere that the use of meta-terminology is one means by which these loaded terms can be avoided. In this model, the use of meta-terminology can become a middle ground. As the example of Rabban

Sauma also demonstrates, sacramental actions can also become a middle ground. Thus, the study of history can aid in the development of the theoretical toolkit available to us, effectively by providing case studies of which the results are known, and providing cautionary examples as we undertake our own theological and interfaith work in the midst of an evolving, historically located culture. I hope this paper has been illuminating in demonstrating precisely how much of a challenge inculturation can pose to efforts at comparative theology.⁷

⁷This paper was initially presented at the Comparative Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion, Montreal, Canada, 15 October, 2009. My thanks to Francis Clooney, Columba Stewart, Arun Jones, and Garry Sparks, who provided comments and advice on an earlier version of this paper. To them the credit: all mistakes that remain are my own.

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