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## Introduction

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From 1492 through the revolutions of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries, Christianity took hold in the Americas. Subjected to persecution or seized with evangelical fervor and the promise of spiritual fulfillment in new settings, friars, lay converts, ministers, secular clergy, and nuns moved across the Atlantic Ocean in pursuit of the life that they believed to be dictated by their faith and of a place free from what they perceived to be the corruptions of European society. Upon arriving in Boston, Salvador da Bahia, Quito, Jamestown, or Mexico City, spiritual seekers formed convents, colleges, congregations, Praying Towns, missions, and *reducciones* in order to implement their religious ideas into practice and facilitate the social organization of settlement. *Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas* takes a spatial perspective on religious history, tracing geographical movements and population dispersals as they were shaped by the providential designs and evangelizing impulses of European empires. Christianity changed as a result of Atlantic transit into new forms of faith, ecclesiology, and theology. The collision of European traditions with American environmental and cultural realities, the reinstatement of religious hierarchy in colonial settings, and the challenge of indigenous cultures and new population configurations engendered religious reinvention.

Many of the religious communities that formed in the Americas exhibited a spiritual quest to replicate the primitive church of Christian antiquity and to further their respective agendas for reform. The native populations that European missionaries encountered served an integral role in the aspiration to fulfill Christian designs. Protestants and Catholics who traveled to the Americas studied indigenous religion intensely with the aim of reaffirming the purity of their own. Europeans described indigenous peoples variably as

*tabula rasa* awaiting the salvific force of Christ, descendants of the ten lost tribes, or worshippers of pagan idols who had merely fallen away from their core Christian identity.<sup>1</sup> Yet time and again, either consciously or by virtue of an opposing worldview, native populations did not fit easily into these Christian categories.<sup>2</sup> Christian Indians also persisted with the practice of indigenous forms of belief, ultimately undermining doctrinal and missionary authority.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous missionary accounts attempted to fit American Indians into a Christian cosmos. In his 1541 *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* [*History of the Indians of New Spain*], one of the first Franciscans to arrive in Mexico, Fray Toribio de Benavente, more commonly known by his Nahuatl name of Motolinía, claims God “punished” the newly conquered lands of New Spain with ten severe plagues. The Jesuit José Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* [*Natural and Moral History of the Indies*],<sup>4</sup> published in 1590, reports that the idolatry practiced by the Indians was a product of diabolical delusion and provides evidence of the New World as an apocalyptic battleground between God and Satan.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch geographer Joannes de Laet’s *Nieuwe wereldt, ofte, Beschrijvinghe van West-Indien* (1625) traces the ancient origins of the “savages” who lived in New France through a commentary on their language.<sup>6</sup> Citing Jean de Léry on Brazil and Acosta, the French Jesuit Marc Lescarbot observed in 1609 of the Mi’kmaq in Acadia: “our savages make a fire and leap over it, as did the ancient Canaanites, Ammonites, and sometimes the Israelites.”<sup>7</sup> In 1650, Thomas Thorowgood’s *Jews in America* argues that the “Americans descended from Sem.”<sup>8</sup> Time and again, through ethnographic observations matched to scriptural passages and through linguistic connections between American Indian and ancient languages, early travelers to the New World attempted to suture biblical history and Christian antiquity to the new sights, sounds, and civilizations that they encountered.

Religious writing in and about the Americas often straddled a desire to adhere to ancient authority alongside the compulsion to account for the new. Acosta’s *Natural and Moral History* is in many ways the urtext for a pattern repeated across two centuries of European attempts to balance the precarious tension between the novelty of discovery in the Americas and the authority of antiquity. Pliny’s *Natural History* and the Bible are Acosta’s two most important but ultimately inadequate source texts. While Pliny could attribute “the varieties of the human race” to the “ingenuity of Nature,” made as “toys for herself and marvels for us,” Acosta did not have this playful luxury.<sup>9</sup> In Acosta’s account, there was nothing marvelous or playful about human vari-

ety, for all had to be understood within a framework of providential design. Acosta's expandable use of scripture accommodates natural wonders, hidden resources, and human practices as phenomena previously inaccessible to biblical authors became newly revealed. In Acosta's *History*, writing is central to both the project of colonization and to the task of transforming experiential discovery into Christian truths. Occasionally, American Indians supplied Acosta and the Jesuit priests, natural philosophers, and theologians with what they were looking for—affirmation of their own deeply held religious convictions and faith-based certainty of God's design. But even while affirming Europeans' own preconditioned beliefs, native populations taught missionaries and settlers something else. Missionary encounters redefined faith, theology, and pious practices, reshaping Christianity into new forms that then reentered a pattern of Atlantic circulation. When news from the New World traveled back to Europe, ancient Christian truths came repackaged in a new light.

Imperial activities in the Americas gave European nations new energy and dynamism. When Charles II chartered the Royal Society in 1662, he outlined his effort to "extend not only the boundaries of Empire, but also the very arts and sciences," envisioning a national agenda for the increase of knowledge that was also connected to the colonial enterprise in the New World.<sup>10</sup> Yet religious ventures in the Americas also exhibited a fractured hierarchy of authority. The activity of the Society of Jesus in New France upheld a utopic vision of spiritual renewal that was cut off from the politics of the Old World.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, in New Spain the relationship between the Spanish Crown and the Jesuits underwent sweeping changes over time. During the sixteenth century the Jesuits' actions were deeply bound up with the promotion of the crown's interests, but by the late seventeenth century the Society of Jesus and its interests had become creolized, and conflict with the Spanish authorities and the imperial project became more and more frequent.<sup>12</sup> Puritans fled Old England for New to escape religious persecution but also because they believed that their king and brethren were headed in the wrong spiritual direction and that their religious mission was to redeem God for England.<sup>13</sup> While codifying the national borders and giving shape to Atlantic empires, the motivation for religious journeys to the New World often challenged long-standing structures of authority and religious as well as secular traditions.

The Americas offered a paradoxical enticement for religious immigrants. On the one hand, the land was imagined as a clear and uncontaminated

space, ripe with the promise of spiritual renewal. On the other hand, Europeans envisioned vast native populations patiently awaiting conversion, whose recent pagan past provided the impetus for both evangelical fervor and spiritual renewal.<sup>14</sup> The supposed enclosed and pristine space of the convent, for example, offered the setting for the display of exemplary female values in a newly found American paradise. Spanish and French nuns made the arduous Atlantic crossing<sup>15</sup> in order to found convents that would house decorous New World virgins whose purity spoke to the Church's ability to promote female exemplarity in even the most challenging of environments.<sup>16</sup> The Mendicant orders and later the Jesuits founded missions and *reducciones* in many rural and remote regions of Latin America. During the early stages of the evangelization project, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians founded large missionary complexes in Mexico and Peru incorporating churches, open-air chapels, schools, and monastery buildings. In the later colonial period, the Jesuits built missions in a variety of geographically removed regions, including the jungle area on the border of present-day Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, which they named El Paraguay. By the date of Jesuit expulsion in 1767, the Society ran thirty *reducciones*, or mission towns, where the Guaraní Indians lived, worked, and prayed and received protection from slave raiders. Puritan congregations in New England allowed laymen as well as women new forms of spiritual self-discovery as they orally translated the evidence of grace recorded upon their souls into communal knowledge and a corporate identity that fashioned itself as a spiritual beacon to the world.<sup>17</sup> By the 1650s, Praying Towns began to appear alongside congregational communities, exhibiting a homologous structure of worship, testimony, and church membership.<sup>18</sup> In each case, the Americas provided a setting for spiritual clearing, a way to imagine and refashion forms of piety believed to more closely approximate the primitive Christian church, while also bringing the communion of saints, whether of Roman Catholic or radical Protestant orientation, closer to an imminent moment of millennial fulfillment. In Catholic and Protestant doctrine, the communion of saints bound the faithful on earth to a commitment of spiritual solidarity, which believers understood to be a visible representation of the mystical body of Christ in heaven.

The need to differentiate doctrinal terms through overinflated rhetorical divisions often masked underlying theological parallels between Reformation and Counter-Reformation advocates.<sup>19</sup> The opening sentence of William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* reflects this rhetorical mask through a language of apocalyptic battle prophesized to take place in the New World

under the auspices of reclaiming ancient, primitive Christian purity: "It is well known unto the godly and judicious, how ever since the first breaking out of the light of the gospel in our honorable nation of England, (which was the first of nations whom the Lord adorned therewith after the gross darkness of popery which had covered and overspread the Christian world), what wars and oppositions ever since, Satan hath raised, maintained and continued against the Saints, from time to time, in one sort or other."<sup>20</sup>

While fixated on stopping the spread of the competing Christian faith, both Roman Catholics and Reforming Protestants also came to the Americas with the commensurate aim of establishing new godly kingdoms. To such Europeans, the Americas could be a staging ground for the continuation of an apocalyptic battle between God and Satan. While anticipating the litany of "bloody death and cruel torments" that would mark the path of the righteous through the necessity of martyrdom and Indian wars, ultimately Europeans believed that the "churches of God" and Christian truth would prevail.<sup>21</sup> For all European Christians, the spiritual journey to the Americas marked a homecoming of sorts through an attempt to reclaim the "ancient purity" of an original sacred essence and to reimagine religious community before the onslaught of apocalyptic battles that characterized the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

However, just as the authority of the ancients could not be maintained in the face of new experiences, lands and populations, missionaries, ministers, secular priests, and theologians in the early Americas failed to realize this "ancient purity" and "primitive order."<sup>22</sup> In place of millennial reclamation of the ancient church, Christianity experienced a religious reinvention, which often stemmed from the clerical need to institute New World orthodoxy and manage the threat of dissent or heresy—particularly when that threat presented itself in the form of women's religious practice and writing or through the need to suppress or correct American Indian and African interpretations of Christian doctrine. Whether in a rural Mexican mission or a New England congregation, migration patterns to the Americas often led to spiritual disappointment and even despair that had to be managed alongside the need to uphold hopes for spiritual renewal and millennial fulfillment.<sup>23</sup> The European journey across the Atlantic and into the psychological and literal wilderness of the New World became an allegory for the journey of the soul. The particular resonances of time, place, and communities of Africans and American Indians profoundly impacted the Eurocentric ideals that had motivated these journeys. Upon arriving in the Americas, religious individuals necessarily traded

a portion of their Old World identity for colonial American selves. Religious identity in the early modern Americas reconstituted itself through a particular confluence of interaction with foreign landscapes, native tribes and complex indigenous civilizations, and new models of community and social interaction.

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From the moment of Columbus's arrival in the Americas in 1492 to the loss of Spain's last colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898, Spanish imperial politics became inextricably intertwined with the politics of religion. In the first entry of the *Diario* Columbus directed to the Catholic monarchs, Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of León, the Genovese navigator framed his expedition in terms of previous Christian triumphs the king and queen had enjoyed: "Whereas, Most Christian, High, Excellent, and Powerful Princes, King and Queen of Spain and of the Islands of the Sea, our Sovereigns, this present year 1492, after your Highnesses had terminated the war with the Moors reigning in Europe, the same having been brought to an end in the great city of Granada, where on the second day of January, this present year, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses planted by force of arms upon the towers of the Alhambra."<sup>24</sup> Columbus himself would take similar royal banners to the Americas, where he would unfurl them to the undoubted puzzlement of the indigenous Tainos who witnessed his actions: "At two o'clock in the morning the land was discovered, at two leagues' distance; . . . they found themselves near a small island, one of the Lucayos, called in the Indian language Guanahani. Presently they descried people, naked, and the Admiral landed in the boat, which was armed, along with Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vincent Yanez his brother, captain of the Nina. The Admiral bore the royal standard, and the two captains each a banner of the Green Cross, which all the ships had carried; this contained the initials of the names of the King and Queen each side of the cross, and a crown over each letter."<sup>25</sup>

The Spanish Crown undertook the financing of the evangelical mission in the New World, and in return the monarchy enjoyed the *Real Patronato* of the Roman Catholic Church in its American territories. The papacy granted the *Patronato* to the Spanish Crown through the promulgation of a series of key bulls in which it awarded Spain sovereignty over the lands it had conquered, as well as control over the religious benefices there. Spain's sovereigns

thus enjoyed an unprecedented degree of control over the Church in their dominions.<sup>26</sup>

Under the auspices of the Spanish Crown, large numbers of religious men immigrated to the New World, determined to bring the word of God to those they deemed "pagan." Isolated priests and monks had accompanied many of the conquistadors on their expeditions, the first being the Hieronymite monk, Fray Ramón Pané, who travelled with Columbus on his second voyage and undertook alone the fraught process of indigenous conversion as detailed in his *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* [*Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*]. Following the completion of the conquest of Tenochtitlan in 1521, Hernán Cortés petitioned Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, for help with the evangelization of the latter's new subjects. At the end of the fourth of his five *Cartas de relación* [letters of relation], Cortés pleads with the emperor for the assistance of ordained men: "Each time I have written to Your Sacred Majesty I have told Your Highness of the readiness displayed by some of the natives of these parts to be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith and to become Christians."<sup>27</sup> He discards an earlier plan he and others had made for the sending of bishops, now favoring the Mendicants who would live from tithes with which they might support themselves and build monasteries and churches. Cortés expresses concern that bishops and other Church dignitaries would bring with them the corruption he saw as endemic in the Old World Church: "they [bishops] will only follow the customs which, for our sins, they pursue these days, of squandering the goods of the Church on pomp and ceremony, and other vices, and leaving entailed estates to their sons and kinsmen."<sup>28</sup> Such practices, common in the Spanish Church, worried Cortés, would serve only to make a mockery of the evangelization process. To this end he requested that two "principal persons" in the Order of St. Francis and that of St. Dominic should come to Mexico, invested with the power to consecrate churches and confer holy orders, for example. These purer and less contaminated messengers of the Holy Word, as Cortés apparently conceived of the Dominicans and Franciscans, would not only be able to evangelize the Indians, but also minister to the Spanish who, resident in the Americas for both present and future, found themselves so far from both the "Church of Rome" and "the proper remedies of our consciences."<sup>29</sup>

The Franciscans who arrived in Mexico City in 1523 were the first religious order the pope officially dispatched to the New World as agents of the evangelization process. Almost immediately, the friars began the process of

institutionalizing Christianity as envisioned by Cortés in his letter to Charles V. In 1527 they built the first European-style school, San José de los Naturales, where the friars catechized and educated the sons of Indian nobles in the Catholic tradition.<sup>30</sup> Other orders arrived subsequently to build on the work begun by the Franciscans.<sup>31</sup> The Mendicant orders and the Jesuits saw themselves as replicating the work of the primitive church of late antiquity, as well as early medieval saints who brought Christianity to the remote rural regions of Europe. The most ardent manifestation of this belief came from the Franciscans who, influenced by the apocalyptic writings of the twelfth-century Cistercian Abbott Joachim Fiore, believed his designated Third Age would be found in the newly conquered and soon-to-be converted Americas. The Franciscans' "optimistic millenarianism" fought off constant challenges from both other orders as well as from within its own ranks.<sup>32</sup> This representation, even in its initial stages, caused both concrete and discursive difficulties as a land of idolatry and its subjects were to be transformed into an exemplary Christian space. On the surface, their success was great; Motolinía himself claimed that the Franciscans had baptized approximately five million Indians between the years of 1524 and 1536. While these figures have been disputed both by scholars of the time such as Bartolomé de Las Casas as well as current sources, the Franciscans did indeed conduct mass baptisms that allowed them to claim huge numbers of indigenous subjects for the faith.<sup>33</sup> The depth of these conversions is hard to measure as Indians incorporated Christian systems into already established religious practices to produce syncretic versions of the religion the friars imparted to them. Franciscan missionary practices became acculturated with the ancient ways in which indigenous peoples related to their gods.<sup>34</sup> In fact, in the viceroyalty of Peru powerful ancestral rituals associated with mummification of the dead persisted despite the best efforts of extirpators of idolatries.<sup>35</sup> Extirpation processes followed hard on the heels of the "crumbling optimism" of Franciscans during the second half of their evangelization efforts. After decades of mass baptisms and other conversion practices, they could no longer adhere to the belief that the indigenous peoples worshipped false idols through ignorance but instead realized that they clung willfully to demonic cults. The Indians "were no longer innocent pagans but rather Christians sinning against the faith."<sup>36</sup>

Differences in theology and evangelical methodology existed among the different Mendicant orders, the Jesuits, and the secular clergy who ministered to and evangelized the indigenous populations. All believed without question that God had chosen the Spanish Crown to bring the Indians into

the Christian fold, and the tensions that existed among them, especially in the early period of the evangelization, speak to the high stakes attending the conversion of the conquered. The confrontation of the Spanish invention of America as a sacred proto-Christian territory with what they saw as the confounding and labile nature of indigenous faith created an anxious and competitive environment for the members of the religious orders who labored there. It is important to remember, moreover, that as we speak of the institutionalization of Christianity in the New World and of the “Church” in general, we are not speaking of a monolithic entity.<sup>37</sup> Disputes between the Mendicants in the early part of the process—particularly between the Dominicans and the Franciscans—as to how best to evangelize the natives manifested themselves acutely in a 1555 letter Motolinía wrote to Charles V, criticizing Las Casas. Motolinía, the Franciscan, accuses Las Casas, the Dominican, of jealousy and of a catalogue of sins against the faith and the crown, including mistreating the Indians in making them his porters as he traveled throughout New Spain, of relentless self-promotion, and of failing to baptize new converts. The Franciscan concept of rebuilding the primitive church in the Indies that imbued their conversion efforts was further hampered by other male religious groups consolidating their own power in the New World: “the sacred soil of America lent itself all too well to turf wars.”<sup>38</sup> The secular clergy began to consolidate their own power in the sixteenth century, although they did not rise to dominance until the eighteenth century with the advent of the Bourbon Dynasty in Spain and the reforms they implemented in Spanish America. The greatest upset to the Franciscan vision, however, came in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, with the arrival of the Jesuits in Mexico City in 1572.

After many different attempts and false starts to obtain the presence of the Society in New Spain, the Jesuits arrived in Mexico in 1572.<sup>39</sup> It was not the activities of the mission field but rather the Christian humanist education of the white settler class that underwrote the arrival of the Jesuits in New Spain.<sup>40</sup> The Jesuits had resisted requests for their presence in New Spain for almost twenty years as they focused their energies on their mission to the East and on areas of the New World where other religious orders had yet to make an imprint. Their efforts to evangelize the natives in Florida, however, had resulted only in the killing of eight Jesuit missionaries in 1571, and led them to look toward New Spain as a possible site for their ministry.<sup>41</sup> In the same year as the Floridian tragedy, the *Cabildo* of Mexico City had written to Philip II requesting help with the education of young Spanish and Creole men whom they feared at risk of idleness and degeneracy for lack of grounding in

Latin and other important educational skills. Phillip responded by turning to the Jesuits, who were rapidly gaining fame for their expertise in education through their network of colleges in Europe and beyond. The Society replicated and expanded this educational project in colonial Mexico and in other colonies throughout Brazil and Hispanic America.

Jesuit colleges formed an important part of the Spanish urban landscape in the Americas. The Spanish used the foundation of their cities in the New World as the staging ground for the creation of Christian life in the colony.<sup>42</sup> Even before Philip II's Royal Ordinances of 1573 crystallized the details of urbanization, the Spaniards had shown their predilection for replicating European city life in the Americas. In what is known today as Cortés's first *Carta de relación*, his supporters tell of their leader's founding of the first city in Mexico, the Muy Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz. The letter's authors style themselves as the "Justiciary and Municipal Council" of the aforementioned city and describe Cortés's establishing of the city in Charles V's name, detailing the particular benefits this foundational act would bring to the emperor: "With great diligence he [Cortés] set about founding and settling a town . . . and appointed those whose names are signed at the bottom of this paper as *alcaldes* and *regidores* of the town, and received from us in Your Royal Highnesses' name the solemn vow customary in such cases."<sup>43</sup>

The institutionalization of the conquest via the founding of urban centers stands as the hallmark of Spain's intervention in the New World. In cities such as Cuzco and Mexico City they dismantled and refashioned indigenous polities into bastions of European values. Religious architecture in the form of parish churches, schools, colleges, monasteries, and convents stood as the most potent architectural reminder of the Spanish presence in the new cities with which colonizers hoped to replicate Spanish urban civilization in the New World. The first cathedral built in newly conquered Tenochtitlan was intended as only a provisional indication of Spanish dominance in religion and culture and was hurriedly constructed with stones from the Aztec *Templo Mayor*. Construction began with the arrival of the metropolis's first bishop, the Franciscan Friar Juan de Zumárraga, in 1524, and was completed ten years later.<sup>44</sup> Planning for a new cathedral began as the first building reached completion, clearly demonstrating the crown's desire to employ elaborately monumental sacred architecture in the service of the imposition of a new societal order and to provide a testament to the successes of the processes of evangelization. Construction on the Catedral Metropolitana de la Asunción



Figure 1. "Catedral de México," 1858, Désiré Charnay, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

de María that stands today in the *zócalo* in Mexico City began in the 1570s, and it would take over two hundred years to complete.<sup>45</sup>

Missions were an important part of Spanish and Portuguese religious identity and produced similarly monumental architecture designed to impact the neophyte Christians who gazed upon it. The Jesuits built extensive missions in the Brazilian Amazon region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although their progress and success in conversion was fitful and characterized by multiple hardships. The Maranhão region held the greatest concentration of Jesuit missions, and, in 1653 António Vieira, towering figure of the Latin American baroque, was named the area's Superior. His work in the Maranhão brought him into constant conflict with Portuguese slave raiders and settlers as the Jesuits sought to protect the Indians who lived within the mission complexes in *aldeias*, or Indian villages. Despite the enormous challenges missionary work presented, Vieira's vision of the Jesuits as a Society of Apostles

ministering to the Indians held fast, and he rejected the emphasis on scholarly and educational work the Society carried out in their urban *colegios*, where they ministered primarily to the Creole population. At age eighty, living in retirement in Bahia, he became Jesuit Visitor in Brazil and used his position to convince Jesuit novices of his beliefs regarding their role. He preached two *Exhortações* at the Bahian college that, according to Thomas Cohen, can best be understood as “an intimate statement of Vieira’s theory and methodology of mission.”<sup>46</sup> In *Exhortacam I em vespora do Espiritu Santo* [*First Exhortation on the Eve of the Holy Spirit*] he urges them to turn their back on the scholarly life and to instead engage in the authentic apostolic work of the mission field: “And what greater honor (seeing that we are so attached to these *honorinhas*) and what greater honor than for me to enter with God into my part in the greatest work of His omnipotence? Who converted these gentiles? God and I. God with His grace, and I with my teaching. God entered into this work with His part and I with mine.”<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation ideals of *sola scriptura* and *sola fides* fueled a variety of sectarian visions, united only through their collective indictment of Catholicism. While these transformations took place throughout Europe, the English initiated a new plan for state intervention in religious affairs through Queen Elizabeth’s settlement of 1559, which mandated conformity with the Church of England. While this settlement facilitated a temporary resolution, the church’s authority soon splintered further, as nonconforming Protestants clashed with the episcopal polity. Religious conflict intensified from the 1580s through the end of James I’s reign through repeated appeals to antiquity and patristic evidence as a plea for further reform. Refusing to conform to the laws of church and state under the repressive regime of Archbishop Laud, Puritans and other radical Protestant sects left England in search of new lands and communities where they could practice their faith free from fear of persecution. The geographic expanse of the Reformation became an enticement for communal movements to Germany or the Netherlands and then eventually to America.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to the Spanish, there was little regularity to the English communities established in seventeenth-century North America. Early Anglo communities were much less structured, each forging a corporate identity out of the wilderness through a general sense of a close-knit community.<sup>49</sup> Maintaining a looser structure of central authority than the Spanish, the English Crown issued patents, or land grants, according property rights to companies investing in colonial enterprises. Elizabeth I granted the first patent to

Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh in 1578 to discover and settle “remote and heathen and barbarous lands.”<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the vast financial engine that the Americas came to be for the Spanish Empire, the English viewed the colonies as serving multiple functions. The momentous publication of Thomas Harriot’s *Brief and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia* (1588) succinctly encapsulates the colonial agenda of the British Isles in the late-sixteenth century. As one of the first eyewitness accounts of the New World, Harriot’s *Brief and True Report* became an immediate success. It was reprinted in 1589 in Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* and then in a four-language edition, accompanied with Theodor de Bry’s engravings, in 1590.<sup>51</sup> Divided into three sections, the text is part promotional tract of merchantable commodities, part catalogue of natural resources to be found in America, and part ethnography of the Carolinian Algonquian population. Written as an account of Sir Walter Raleigh’s first colonial venture, the *Brief and True Report* faced the task of overriding the “envious, malicious, and slanderous reports” that were already circulating in England by the time Harriot returned in 1586. His aim was to restore the “the honor and benefit of [the English] nation” and in doing so, to make a good case for the benefits of colonization.<sup>52</sup> The *Brief and True Report* offers the potential investor a vision of a land ripe for cultivation.

As part of his promotional strategy, Harriot familiarized the unfamiliar. In his catalogue of resources “knowne to yeelde for victual and sustenance,” he identifies several agricultural goods by their Algonquian name. “Wickonzowr,” Harriot reports, is “called by us *Peaze*.” He explains that the English reader will find that these peas look much like English peas in form, but they are “far better” in “goodness and taste.”<sup>53</sup> Harriot gives a detailed account of how the crop of peas might be cultivated: “their setting or sowing is after this manner.” In the 1590 edition, de Bry’s engraving accompanied the text to make this textual description visually familiar by presenting the reader with a bucolic scene of cultivation that the reader is then invited to emulate (Figure 2).

Harriot’s ethnographic observations, “Of the nature and manners of the people,” replicates the pattern of his two preceding sections on merchantable commodities and natural resources. He describes cultural difference in such a way as to render the Algonquians more recognizable to the reader, thus lessening the cultural divide.<sup>54</sup> In doing so, *The Brief and True Report* collapses the observed phenomenon into an intelligible frame of reference. In describing Algonquian homes, Harriot reports that “their houses are made of small poles made fast at the tops in rounde forme after the manner as is sued in

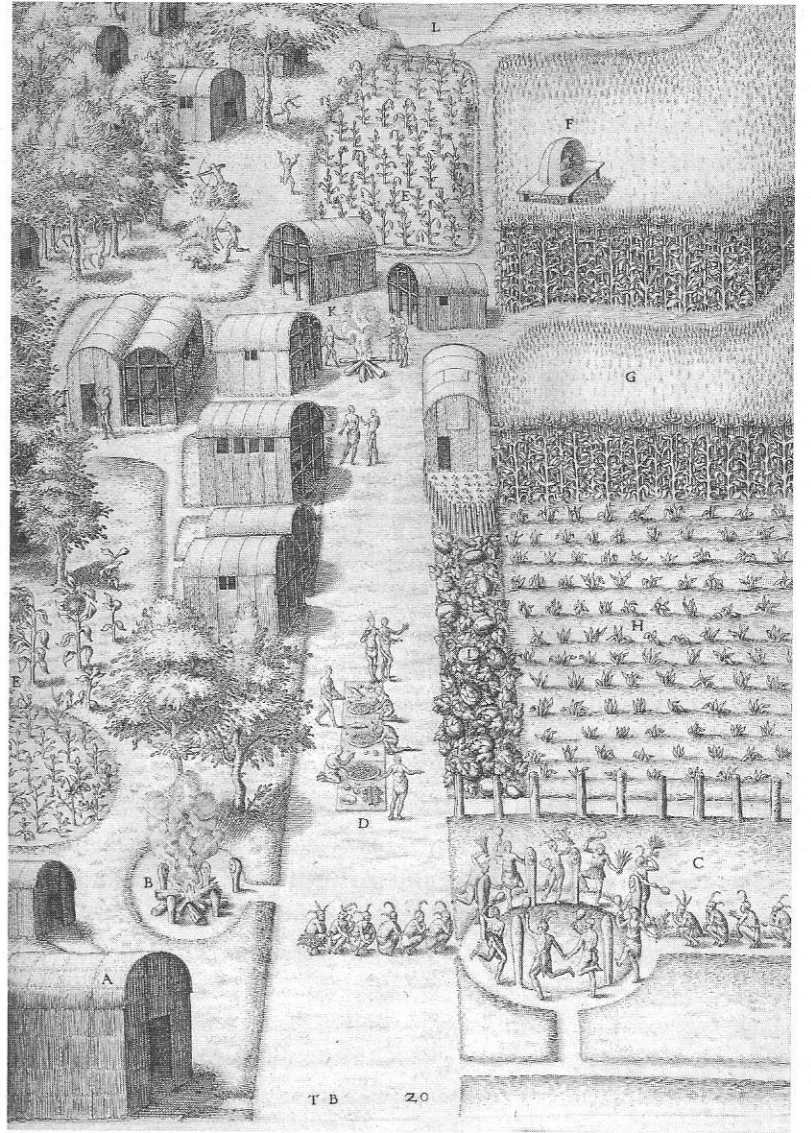


Figure 2. Theodor de Bry, *Admiranda narratio, fida tamen, de commodis et incolarum ritibus Virginiae* (1590), Rare Books Library, Princeton University.

many arbories in our gardens in England.”<sup>55</sup> After describing a manner of home building that the English reader would have perceived as entirely unfamiliar, Harriot compares the construction to an English arbor so that the reader has a point of reference. After numerous such comments on dress, habitation, war, and government, Harriot turns to religion as the solvent of universal humanism. Of the Algonquian’s existing belief system, Harriot reports: “some religion they have already, which although it be farre from the truth, yet beyng at it is, there is hope it may bee the easier and sooner reformed.”<sup>56</sup> Harriot warns the reader that that the native religion he is about to relate will seem entirely unfamiliar, while offering the reassurance that the fact of the Algonquian’s faith makes them more susceptible to Christian conversion. Christianity thus becomes the umbrella term through which Harriot’s observations on the nature and manner of the Algonquians can be massaged into purportedly universal recognition.

Harriot described a land replete with potential for plantation, commonwealth, and Christianity to prosper. Despite the financial setbacks of early English colonial efforts, the Virginia Company formed in 1606 under James I, instigating an intimate connection between clergy and colonization. Sermons became one of the principle means through which the company sought promotion. Several of England’s well-known clergymen, such as William Crashaw, Samuel Purchas, and Alexander Whitaker preached about the moral riches to be found through the establishment of British commonwealths on the eastern seaboard of North America.<sup>57</sup> In 1613, Whitaker, for example, presented a vision of Virginia where “Magistracie and Ministry are the strength and sinewes; nay the very life and being of a Christian body politique.”<sup>58</sup> Integral to reinvigorating the English colonial project in the early seventeenth century, promotional tracts represented the land as ripe, plentiful, and either vacant or scantily inhabited by welcoming Indians.

An example of the English fantasy of an uninhabited land, John Cotton’s *God’s Promise to His Plantations* (1634) paints an eerily vacant picture of the land to be found in the New World. Cotton wrote this sermon before his own voyage to America. It presents a Puritan fantasy of an open and inhabitable wilderness that contrasts sharply with the detailed ethnographic accounts to be found in Acosta, Lescarbot, and De Laet, as well as in English writing by Hakluyt and Harriot.<sup>59</sup> In an imagined sermonic portrait of the New World, Cotton used the scriptural authority of 2 Samuel 7:10 to explain that God will clear the land by “making a Countrey, though not altogether void of Inhabitants, yet void in that place where they reside. Where there is a vacant

place, there is liberty for the Son of Adam and Noah." Cotton establishes a direct typological link between the migration of seventeenth-century Puritans to the New World and the scriptural precedent of a vacant land where they may be "fruitful." Like Harriot and Whitaker, Cotton surmises that any "native People" who reside there will view the "foreign people" favorably. In doing so, Cotton willingly elided recent histories of war and violence such as the Indian massacre of 1622 that was reported in John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624).<sup>60</sup> This system of colonization based on royal patents and sponsoring companies meant that laws, social structures, and customs were imported from England, but without the proximity of the state and its various supporting institutions. When the Pilgrims and Puritans migrated in 1620 and 1630 respectively, they did so with the intention of contesting the power of the crown to mandate religious uniformity. They believed in a Calvinist-based religion that espoused a separation of church and state but that also privileged the spiritual authority of the individual to such a degree as to leave no clear signposts about how the disparate individuals practicing these faiths should form communities.

New religious communities appeared in Plymouth (1620), the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630), and Rhode Island and Connecticut (1636). Collectively, they plotted to continue the work of the Reformation within the Anglo-American world as a way of reclaiming God for England. Close-knit communities were built around the individualized notion of faith, which then proliferated out from the individual to a sense of collective responsibility, corporate identity, and millennial fulfillment. Because the Puritans did not bring the authority of English law or ecclesiastical polity with them, they were soon faced with the question of how to protect fragile communities of native newcomers from factionalism and conflict.<sup>61</sup> Protection from factionalism came in the form of an entirely new system of church governance and law.<sup>62</sup> In the 1640s, the congregational system developed out of a communal attempt to implement familiar religious convictions in an entirely unfamiliar setting. New England churches departed significantly from their Reformed counterparts in the Netherlands and the Low Countries by introducing the concept of a church covenant, or a contract between the elect and God, and spiritual testimony as a prerequisite for church membership. The consequences of these innovations in church practice were felt back home, as a sharp line divided Presbyterians and Congregationalists by 1643. While Presbyterians argued for a national church and a hierarchy that could mirror the structure of church bishops, Congregationalists insisted upon an autonomous

visible church existing exclusively in local congregations.<sup>63</sup> These disagreements over church polity fueled different ways of imagining the Reformation of England's churches during the Civil War. Many Puritans returned home during this time.<sup>64</sup> Others turned their attention toward missionary endeavors.<sup>65</sup>

Anglo-Protestant missionaries, such as John Eliot, Roger Williams, and Thomas Mayhew viewed the successful conversion of American Indian populations as a culminating phase within the cycle of the New World errand.<sup>66</sup> The belief that all men were the sons of Adam and that history would eventuate in the second coming of Christ supplied Anglo-Protestant missionaries with a rationale for civilization and evangelization.<sup>67</sup> This vision was never realized in missionary practice. The ways that *Wôpanâak* audiences interpreted meaning often departed from the doctrinal intentions of Eliot, Thomas Shepard, and other missionaries.<sup>68</sup> One of Eliot's late missionary tracts, *Indian Dialogues*, constructs a conversation between three Indians, Penoowot, Waban, and Nishoukou. Modeling this text after the philosophical genre codified by Plato in the fourth century B.C.E., Eliot intended the *Dialogues* to be "instructive" rather than didactic, so that the Anglo reader would learn upon reading the text "what might or should have been said." Immediately, this tract introduces the ambiguity of meaning intrinsic to the process of translating Christianity to indigenous communities. Through a series of dialogues staged between Praying Indians and their unconverted kinsman, readers learned that the resistance to Christianity often came in the form of confusion over the relationship between matter and spirit: "If your praying to God do indeed teach you the true way of being rich, as you say, how cometh it to pass that you are so poor still?" Piumbuhhou, the "Learned Indian" within the "Indian Church," explains to his congregation that there is a difference between earthly and heavenly riches and that knowledge of God, grace, and Jesus is the greatest attainable wealth. Piumbuhhou conveys this meaning by separating the Anglo-Protestant interpretation of scripture from the knowledge that may be gleaned through the autonomous interpretation of the Christian reader: "The Book of God is no invention of English-men, it is the holy Law of God himself, which was given unto man by God, before English-men had any knowledge of God." Piumbuhhou describes the Bible as a repository of ancient Christian wisdom, bespeaking a truth that transcends national as well as linguistic affiliation. Rather than supplanting indigenous belief with unwavering Christian truths, missionaries depended on a palimpsest of layered meaning.<sup>69</sup> Through a process that David Silverman calls "religious translation," missionaries filtered

Christian teachings through Wôpanâak religious ideas.<sup>70</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, these elements of religious syncretism gradually revealed that the Wôpanâak could not be as easily enfolded into a Christian cosmos as Eliot had initially hoped. The combined force of King Philip's War, of a missionary enterprise that became in the 1680s too costly to sustain in relation to its achieved results, and of a Massachusetts-English Christian world of fluctuating rather than fixed meaning caused Eliot to enter into a state of near despair and effectively ended the first phase of the Protestant mission to the American Indians.<sup>71</sup>

The presence of Africans brought forcibly to the Americas for economic gain further challenged theological commonplaces. In England, the Royal African Company was formed in 1660. Unlike missionary societies of the time, such as the New England Company for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Royal African Company members directed their financial efforts toward the transportation of bodies rather than the salvation of souls. A financial engine of the British Isles, the company supplied slaves to British colonies in Jamaica, Maryland, and Virginia.<sup>72</sup> Fearing that baptism would lead to manumission, the ministers and political elites stationed in these imperial outposts tended to oppose converting Africans and their descendants to Christianity.<sup>73</sup> This position had a religious justification in the Curse of Ham. According to Benjamin Braude, the link between this portion of scripture and the slave trade became increasingly prominent in England between 1590 and 1625, along with the rise of the slave trade and plantation system.<sup>74</sup> It was not until the 1700s and 1710s that clergy began to deny that baptism conferred manumission. Yet as ministers such as Cotton Mather made a case for the conversion of Africans in his *Negro Christianized* (1708), he did so by arguing that Christianity would in fact make slaves more productive. Similar arguments appeared before the British Parliament as proposed legislation. Until the first Great Awakening (1740), if conversion to Christianity was encouraged at all it was to make Africans more effective slaves. Following the mid-eighteenth-century revivals, however, the Christian conversion of peoples of African descent happened *en masse* through the efforts of George Whitfield and others. The writers that Vincent Carretta has grouped together as the "black authors" of the eighteenth-century Anglo world shared this Christian identity in common.<sup>75</sup> Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw began to deploy their Christian identities strategically in an effort to reconfigure the strict bifurcation between spiritual equality and social hierarchy that elite white members of the Anglo-Protestant world fought so ardently to uphold.

The traffic in African slaves in the Atlantic world imposed radical demographic, cultural, and religious transformations upon the early modern Americas as enslaved peoples from different tribal areas of the continent arrived in the major slave port cities of the New World. Between 1542, when Charles V's decree officially prohibited the enslavement of indigenous peoples, and 1550, records indicate the arrival of fifteen thousand African slaves into Spain's American territories.<sup>76</sup> In 1518 Charles V had decreed that all enslaved Africans must arrive in his American territories as Christians, although he issued no instructions regarding the details of how they would attain this status, and Africans came to Christianity in a variety of different ways.<sup>77</sup> Portuguese missionaries had been active in areas of central Africa, and the King of Kongo and some members of the region's population had converted to Christianity in 1491 and, in return for Portuguese assistance in local wars, provided them with captives for the slave trade.<sup>78</sup> Most African slaves, however, had conversion forced upon them after being captured or sold into bondage. Agents of the Portuguese Crown carried out perfunctory baptisms in ports and trading posts in Africa in order that those who survived the horrors of the Middle Passage would arrive in Spain and Portugal's American dominions as Christians. The Spanish Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval, who worked in the Colombian port city of Cartagena de Indias, criticized these types of baptisms in his 1627 treatise on African slavery, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*. *De instauranda* offers a detailed look at different African ethnicities and languages and belief systems of the enslaved peoples who arrived in Cartagena to become enslaved subjects of the Spanish Crown. Sandoval denounces the mistreatment of slaves and includes the lack of Christian education offered to them before baptism in the slave ports among his critiques. He includes a letter from a fellow Jesuit, who reports: "I have testimony from the slave merchants themselves that in the Angolan port called Luanda, black slaves are simply lined up in the plaza one day before they set sail. . . . Up until this point they have been in prison. They do not learn the catechism and do not even know anything about God. . . . When the slaves are asked what they think baptism means, some say that it puts a spell on them so that the Spanish can eat them."<sup>79</sup>

Some Africans received religious education upon arrival in the Americas since royal ordinances mandated slave owners permit their slaves to attend church on Sundays and feast days and receive religious instruction. Despite the staggering demographic transformations the importation of African slaves wrought upon Hispanic America, there is little information regarding

the evangelization and indoctrination of African slaves. This lack of information speaks to the general negligence with which church and crown approached the religious education of enslaved African peoples.<sup>80</sup> Africans and their descendants nonetheless actively transformed Christianity, leaving behind indelible manifestations that mark American Christianity to this day. Despite their exclusion from religious orders and other church institutions, Afro-Hispanic Christians formed their own Christian identities through the formation of groups such as confraternities. These types of local organizations permitted Afro-Christians to form their own communities of worship and social welfare in which Afro-Christian practices were woven into a structure originally imported from the metropolis.<sup>81</sup> Afro-Christian identity also operated in ways the church authorities could not have anticipated: Inquisition documents show how slaves strategically renounced Christianity and denounced themselves for blasphemy in order to call forth the protection of the Holy Office in the face of harrowing mistreatment by owners.<sup>82</sup>

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This cross-disciplinary volume aspires to grasp the complexity and variety of the colonial world as it augmented, transformed, and challenged a range of Christian beliefs, while also maintaining nuanced attention to the particularities of a diverse range of communities and experiences. It is our hope that the interdisciplinary model and comparative methodological framework we outline here will suggest new ways of thinking about religious practice along a wider geographical axis and a greater chronological expanse, while also inviting further reflection on the participation of women, Native American populations, and the African diaspora in the transformation of religion in the New World.

The transformation of Christianity in the early modern Americas functions as the central organizing principle of this volume and provides a basis for our North-South hemispheric comparative analysis. Religion provides a provocative lens through which to view patterns of restriction, exclusion, and tension as well as those of acculturation, accommodation, and resistance in a comparative colonial context. The juxtaposition of New World religions across the hemispheric divide throws into relief the fervor with which church authorities attempted to establish New World communities of the faithful while at the same time controlling indigenous populations, subaltern Africans and their descendants, and disparate modes of female spiritual expres-

sion. Both doctrine and practice became vehicles for managing tensions between spiritual equality and social hierarchy. Meanwhile, through adherence to official and popular religious manifestations, these same communities of the faithful often exceeded the boundaries that church officials created for them as they shaped colonial societies.

As a topic of comparative analysis, religion produces challenges as well as opportunities. It provides a common basis of discussion across boundaries of discipline, field, language, and region, while also exposing the historical variances produced as Protestant and Catholic Reformation theologies defined themselves in opposition to one another. The formation of New World communities on both American continents, and the impact that these communities had on European, indigenous, and African religious traditions, presents new connections across what has been traditionally conceived of in scholarship as an Anglo-Protestant versus an Iberian-Catholic paradigm. While Catholics and Protestants formed their respective doctrines and theologies in a dialectic fashion throughout the early modern period, imperial religious enterprises in the New World were in many respects parallel endeavors. Each linked religious ideas and legal government to the organization and maintenance of a colonial community that also sought to extend its boundaries through missionary projects. Each also juggled commercial initiative with the embrace of moral tradition to engage in an ongoing project of adapting and refining religiously grounded visions of community with the experience of collective life in an unfamiliar place and among indigenous strangers, and, later on, a significant population of African slaves.

The aforementioned elements demonstrate trans-hemispheric continuities and fruitful inter-American points of contact concerning the formation of communities, the tension between liturgical practices and popular religious manifestations, and the control of resistant and marginalized groups of neophyte Christians that readers will find threaded throughout the essays contained in this volume. At the same time, the individual essays attend to specific dimensions of conversion, communal structure, and religious authority unique to the experiences of the Ibero-Catholic and Anglo-Protestant regions and thus avoid paving over real differences in the service of a seamless comparative model. While this volume reflects our attempt to map some general points of contrast and patterns of similarity in New World religious communities composed of different European nationalities and systems of religious belief, we also write from the perspective that we should proceed with this comparative methodological approach with caution, aware of its

limitations as well as its possibilities. Important differences that accord with the political, economic, and religious climate of Old World countries should not be elided in the service of making general claims about New World discoveries, settlements, and patterns of colonization. While we aim to present a series of topics and themes that can speak to both the Iberian and Anglo experiences, we realize that the analysis presented in this framework offers only one slice of a more comprehensive picture.

In offering our comparative approach to religion we aim to elucidate a range of experiences within the rubric identified above. At the same time, through the juxtaposition of scholarship dealing with religious transformations from northern and southern hemispheres, we set forth a larger aim. We believe that there is historical significance to this conversation that extends beyond the need to produce new comparisons or to try to anticipate the future directions of our respective fields. This significance lies in the integral part that the study of early modern American religion plays in understanding the development of modernity. It is for this reason that we have chosen to focus primarily on the Anglo-Protestant presence in North America and the Ibero-Catholic presence in Latin America. The Ibero-Catholic and Anglo-Protestant division has perpetuated cultural stereotypes and scholarly paradigms of Anglo-Protestantism as bringing modernity to the New World, while Ibero-Catholicism promoted monolithic Christian conversion and repressive Catholic regimes. Part of our methodological aim in this volume is thus to revise this historical and cross-cultural inaccuracy, which has arisen partially out of the exceptionalist paradigm that has long shaped the myths associated with early American studies and out of the persistence of the tenets of the Black Legend in positioning colonial Latin American studies within the American academy.<sup>83</sup> One way in which to achieve this goal is to invite scholars together to talk about the topic of religion in their respective fields and disciplines. Such cross-disciplinary conversation contributes more knowledge of the religious experiences of the peoples contained within the geographic borders of each empire while also decoding some of the disciplinary concerns and terminologies that often render our work impenetrable or, in the worst case, irrelevant to those from other, seemingly related disciplines.