

Western University

From the Selected Works of Jason Dyck

2020

Native Evangelists in Northwestern New Spain

Jason Dyck

Jason Dyck

“Native Evangelists in Northwestern New Spain”

OFFPRINT FROM

Reframing Reformation: Understanding Religious Difference in Early Modern Europe, ed. Nicholas Terpstra. Essays and Studies, 44. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2020, pp. 215–234.

NATIVE EVANGELISTS IN NORTHWESTERN NEW SPAIN

JASON DYCK

Accompanying Francisco de Florencia's (1620–95) chronicle of the Jesuit province of New Spain (1694) is a frontispiece by the artist Miguel Guerrero (fig. 8.1).¹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1566), founder of the Society of Jesus, gracefully hovers above the clouds atop a globe charting much of the New World. He is surrounded by cherubim, his head divinely illuminated by a crown of light; two beams protrude from his chest, shining towards both the east and the west. The first connects directly to the breast of Saint Francis Xavier (1506–52), the Jesuit missionary par excellence who redirects Saint Ignatius's light to the people of Asia, below him on bended knee piously looking up to the heavens. The second is joined to the chest of Saint Francis Borgia (1510–72), the third General of the Society of Jesus, who channels this same light to the people of America, also on their knees with their heads reverently raised towards the sky. In this engraving Jesuits shine the light of the Christian gospel into heathen darkness, but they do so directly without the aid of native intermediaries.

Guerrero's engraving captures how Catholic missionaries were generally viewed in the early modern period: white European men clothed in religious habits. There is a clear binary projected in the image, one in which Europeans and natives are given clearly defined roles in mission settings. The frontispiece perpetuates the idea that evangelization was a "spiritual conquest," a phrase Jesuits and other religious orders used to describe the establishment of the Catholic Church around the globe.² Over the past few decades scholars have rightly challenged this simplistic and misleading narrative of religious conversion in colonial contexts. Much like the studies in this volume, their research demonstrates that religious difference was mobilized in unique ways at the margins of the Reformation world, a long distance away from the disputes among Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists in Europe.³ Far from being passive receivers of new spiritual beliefs and practices, non-Europeans

¹ Florencia, *Historia de la Provincia*.

² For one example, see Montoya, *Conquista espiritual*.

³ Hsia, ed., *A Companion to the Reformation World*, xvii–xviii.

either passionately resisted or creatively reworked Christianity according to their own cultural assumptions.⁴ But as much as natives have emerged in many recent studies as actors in the missionary theatre, they are still often given supporting roles as translators, aids, and helpers.⁵

In this article I question the traditional binary between Europeans and natives that still guides how missionary work in the early modern period is often interpreted. Focusing on Jesuit missions in northwestern New Spain (Mexico), I argue that natives — both women and men — were missionaries together with their European counterparts, even if the majority were never ordained and formally commissioned by the Catholic Church. I take inspiration from Edward E. Andrews, who has demonstrated that black and indigenous preachers often outnumbered white missionaries in the British Atlantic world. We need to “rethink missionaries from the inside out,” he suggests, and the same holds true for the Spanish Atlantic and Pacific, even if natives were generally barred from the religious orders.⁶ As I will demonstrate, indigenous people in northwestern New Spain preached the Christian gospel, taught Catholic doctrine, occasionally performed baptism, and in certain cases were even hailed as martyrs by Jesuit writers. I begin with a reflection on the meanings of “mission” and “missionary” in the early modern Spanish world before turning to examples of what I am calling native evangelists. Although traditionally outside of histories of the Reformation, these native women and men — albeit under difficult and at times violent circumstances — spread Catholic reform in similar ways to clerics on popular missions in early modern Europe.⁷

Missions and Missionaries

After its official founding in 1540, the Society of Jesus became a driving force in Catholic renewal, quickly spreading throughout much of western Europe

⁴ As a result of New Mission History in the 1990s, scholars shifted their focus away from missionaries to indigenous peoples to see how their lives changed on Jesuit and mendicant missions. See Langer and Jackson, eds. *The New Latin American*.

⁵ For some important exceptions, see Farriss, *Tongues of Fire*, 36–42 and Christensen, “Missionizing Mexico,” 27–36.

⁶ Andrews, *Native Apostles*, 7.

⁷ The connections between missions to Catholics and non-Christians in both Europe and overseas is treated by Melvin, “The Globalization of Reform” and Galindo, *To Sin No More*.

and parts of India, Japan, and the Americas. Its first members in the New World were in Brazil by 1549 and then in La Florida in 1566 and Peru in 1568.⁸ Although the Jesuits established themselves in Mexico City in 1572, they began missionary work among indigenous people in northwestern New Spain only two decades later in 1591. That year, Gonzalo de Tapia (1561–94) and Martín Pérez (1560–1626) arrived at the Villa de San Felipe along the Sinaloa River, which they used as a base to preach to local inhabitants with the help of interpreters.⁹ Over the next century and a half, the Jesuits established networks of missions among diverse ethnic groups, which they organized into larger administrative units known as rectorates (*rektorados*). In each mission rectorate there were several mission districts (*partidos*) consisting of a head mission (*cabecera*), where one or two Jesuits resided, and a series of smaller mission stations (*visitas*) the *padres* visited on a rotational basis.¹⁰ Using this system, the Jesuits claimed to have baptized more than 400,000 natives in a little over fifty years, starting with two missionaries and reaching only eighteen men by the 1620s.¹¹

The natives who joined Jesuit missions came from complex societies within the Uto-Aztecan linguistic family. They were primarily sedentary agriculturalists dedicated to the cultivation of maize, beans, and squash, although many supplemented their diets with hunting and gathering. Living on permanent or semi-permanent rural settlements (*rancherías*), their communities were politically decentralized and under the leadership of a *cacique* (native leader) or groups of elders.¹² They waged frequent intertribal warfare, an opportunity for warriors to display their valour, and they looked to ritual specialists for intermediation within the spirit world. At the time of contact, the population of northern New Spain was roughly one million, but scholars estimate that anywhere between 70 and 95 percent was killed by epidemic disease.¹³ Daniel T. Reff argues that natives joined missions because they felt Jesuits were better able to explain and prevent diseases than their

⁸ For an overview of Jesuit missions, see Cohen and Colombo, "Jesuit Missions," 254–279.

⁹ For the foundation of the Sinaloa missions, see Reff, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons*, 122–206 and Cushner, *Why Have You Come Here*, 49–70.

¹⁰ Polzer, *Rules and Precepts*, 1–12.

¹¹ Reff, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons*, 122; Hackett, ed., *Historical Documents*, 2:26.

¹² The diversity of indigenous peoples in northwestern New Spain is treated by Deeds, "Legacies of Resistance," 89–135.

¹³ Deeds, "Legacies of Resistance," 53; Reff, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons*, 173.

own shamans.¹⁴ This type of spiritual authority allowed missionaries to congregate dispersed groups of natives into larger centralized towns for purposes of evangelization, a strategy that mendicants used in central Mexico in the wake of the fall of Mexico Tenochtitlan in 1521. But as they performed their missionary work, Jesuits relied heavily upon natives as translators, preachers, cantors, sacristans, churchwardens, and catechists.

Natives played active roles in the establishment of Christianity, but their version of this history can only be arrived at through primarily European and Creole sources. At contact, indigenous peoples in northwestern New Spain had rich oral traditions, but they did not have writing systems to record their past. In contrast, writing was built into the global structure of the Society of Jesus. Provincials sent regular reports to Rome (*anuas*), Jesuits corresponded with each other through letters, and a select few wrote relations, sacred biographies (*vidas*), and longer histories of their order, religious provinces, and mission territories.¹⁵ While natives contributed to the production of some of these works through various forms of collaboration, Jesuits controlled the narratives in which they appear. In their writings, Jesuits crafted an image of the ideal missionary as a man who was chaste, pious, brave, polylingual, and a jack of all trades willing to leave his *patria* behind to die, if necessary, as a martyr at the hands of “savages.” Vicente del Águila (1581–1641), author of an early seventeenth-century relation on the Sinaloa missions, claims that “here the missionary padre is a doctor, alms collector, stonemason, and architect, having to perform these and other tasks at the same time.”¹⁶

The construction of a model missionary was based upon experience and hundreds of years of Christian hagiography. Jesuits wanted to provide their brethren with exemplary figures to imitate, aiming in particular to reach future novices and potential recruits to frontier zones, which were rarely perceived as attractive destinations. They also needed to solicit prayers, alms, and royal funding to support their missionary efforts, together with evidence to persuade the papacy in Rome that their martyrs were worthy of canonization.¹⁷ But as the Jesuits described their ideal missionary through sacred rhetoric, they often made passing references to natives performing many of

¹⁴ Reff, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons*, 179.

¹⁵ For an overview of Jesuit mission historiography for northwestern New Spain, see Warren, “Jesuit Historians,” 329–339 and Mathes, “Jesuit Chroniclers,” 37–80.

¹⁶ Águila, “Relación breve,” 124. Here and elsewhere, all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ McAllen, “Jesuit Martyrdom in Imagery,” 143–165.

the same evangelical tasks. At times these indigenous women and men are entirely anonymous, but in certain occasions their full names appear in the historical record. In most cases their stories are captured in just a sentence, although a select few are treated at greater length in scattered sections or in a paragraph or two. Regardless of the space allotted to them in Jesuit sources, natives were always given secondary roles in the missionary theatre. As Recil Mojares observes, in “Spanish colonial texts [...] the native stands distanced, peripheral, and dimly visible.”¹⁸

The Jesuits had no trouble crafting images of pious converts who faithfully assisted them in their evangelical work, but they reserved the title of ‘missionary’ for Europeans and Creoles. According to the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (1726), a missionary (*misionero*) was a “gospel preacher who establishes missions” and “mission” (*misión*) was “the act of being sent,” the “journey religious men make [...] preaching the gospel,” and “the land [...] where missionaries preach.”¹⁹ In the early modern period Jesuits were sent by either the pope or their superiors, they worked towards the propagation of the Christian gospel, and they laboured among natives in designated territories around the world they called missions. As these three definitions suggest, Jesuits were formally educated and held an official commission from an ecclesiastical authority, which means they received theological training and, in most cases, were ordained into the Catholic priesthood. Spanish jurist Juan de Solórzano Pereira (1575–1655) explains in his *Política indiana* (1648), one of the most important legal documents produced for Spanish America, that thanks to Pope Clement III (1130–91) “any given monk or priest [...] has the right to proclaim the Catholic truth to gentiles only with a licence from his prelate.”²⁰

The Jesuits obtained licences to preach, both in Spain and other regions of the Spanish empire. In the Iberian peninsula, they went on missions to Spanish Catholics and New Christians (whether Conversos or Moriscos), calling them “our Indies” because those living there lacked much knowledge of Christian doctrine.²¹ When the Jesuits sailed to other parts of the world, as Luke Clossey explains, they legally embarked as missionaries, a category that provided them with finances from the Spanish crown to cover the costs

¹⁸ Mojares, “The Life,” 437.

¹⁹ See *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*. Sievernich provides a nice analysis of this three-tiered understanding of mission among the Jesuits in “La misión,” 255–273.

²⁰ Solórzano Pereira, *Política indiana*, 156–157.

²¹ See Ehlers, “Mission (Spain),” 225–227 and Galindo, *To Sin No More*, 297.

of their trip.²² But when they arrived to their new provinces, a strict division in terminology was applied. Those engaged in pedagogy and pastoral care in urban contexts — like teaching in their colleges, visiting inmates in prisons, taking care of the sick in hospitals, and administering the sacraments — were normally not referred to as missionaries. The provincial of New Spain, Andrés de Rada (1601–73), writes in his annual report of 1650 that those in Mexico City perform ministries that “do not enjoy either the work or the apostolic title and fame of missionaries.”²³ Although Jesuits honoured many of their brethren with this “apostolic title,” in many cases they were not the first ones to preach the Christian gospel to indigenous peoples.

The Heirs of Malintzin

Native women were among the first evangelists in northwestern New Spain, a surprising development given perceptions of gender in the early modern period. Most European writers were men and they viewed women as both inferior and, much like Eve in the book of Genesis, the source of evil in the world. Since women were thought of as the weaker sex, they were under the control and authority of men and, notwithstanding notable exceptions, were largely barred from education, political power, and ecclesiastical positions.²⁴ Given this established gender hierarchy and lack of theological training, women were rarely commissioned as missionaries in overseas contexts.²⁵ Missionary tasks in frontier regions were highly gendered and construed as men’s work because they involved priestly duties and were risky and dangerous, not to mention the fact that missionaries were often alone. Beyond this, in 1563 the Council of Trent decreed strict enclosure for all religious female communities to supervise their religiosity and guard their sexual purity.²⁶ Although several European and Creole nuns and *beatas* (lay pious women who took informal vows) challenged these restrictions to engage in missionary activities, they did not accompany Jesuits into northwestern New Spain.²⁷

²² Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization*, 13–15.

²³ ARSI, ms. Mexicana 15, *Carta annua*, fol. 294^{r-v}.

²⁴ Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender*, 18–24.

²⁵ The Franciscan Conceptionist nun María de Jesús Agreda (1602–65), however, was believed to have had the gift of bilocation. The “Lady in Blue,” as she was called, had supposedly been transported by angels to preach to the natives of New Mexico on many occasions between 1620 and 1631. See Benavides, *Tanto que se sacó*.

²⁶ Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 33–34.

²⁷ See Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*.

Across Spanish America ideas of gender were intimately linked to bodies and ideas of socioracial difference. As a rule, colonial bureaucrats and clerics believed that native women were not only intellectually inferior but unable to control their sexuality. Unlike noble indigenous men, they were never considered for education in the Franciscans' initial efforts to establish a native priesthood in the first half of the sixteenth century. In this regard they were socially restricted in much the same way as most European women had been for centuries. Unlike Spanish and Creole nuns, native women were also barred from taking up the veil and joining female convents. Throughout the entire colonial period, even after Corpus Christi was opened in Mexico City in 1724 as the first convent for noble indigenous women, ecclesiastical authorities debated the ability of native women to meet the rigours of the religious life. Although views of native women were extremely unfavourable, a select few still received hagiographic treatment by Jesuits and mendicants.²⁸ There are only a handful of examples because Europeans and Creoles generally saw them as instruments of a supernatural power or of a male figure in their lives. As a result, native women have little agency in colonial texts, often occupying background roles or being entirely ignored.²⁹

Despite their views on native women, Jesuits often turned to them as teachers and translators out of necessity. Several recent studies demonstrate that right from the beginning of the Spanish invasion, when the conquistador Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) acquired Malintzin (d. 1529) (commonly known as doña Marina) from the Chontal Maya as his translator, indigenous women played important intermediary roles as go-betweens and cultural brokers, in most cases as captives or slaves.³⁰ Instead of seeing them as mere channels and tools of European men, scholars have elaborated on the ways in which they navigated their new colonial reality for their own advantage. But the religious responsibilities native women had in these contexts have not been adequately treated, especially when we consider that they were often the ones who initially interpreted the Christian gospel. In early chronicles of conquest, Cortés is frequently represented as a gospel preacher to the Mexica and other indigenous groups, but Malintzin was the one who translated the Christian

²⁸ Lavrin, "Indian Brides," 225–260.

²⁹ Reff and Kelly study images of native women in missionary texts in "Saints, Witches and Go-betweens," 237–260.

³⁰ For Malintzin, see Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*. For other examples of native women who acted as go-betweens, see Metcalf, *Go-betweens* and Cave, "Madalena," 171–200.

message.³¹ The secular priest Juan Díaz (1480–1549) and the Mercedarian friar Bartolomé de Olmedo (1484–1524), both of whom accompanied the Spanish conquistadors and their native allies, also had to work through Malintzin because they were unable to directly communicate with the people they baptized.

Although it is impossible to speak to Malintzin's understanding of Christianity, she was New Spain's first native evangelist. Other native women in the northern parts of the viceroyalty were forced into this role as well. Luisa is a perfect example, a *cacica* (feminine form of cacique), former captive, and key translator for explorers Francisco Vázquez de Coronado (1510–54) and Francisco de Ibarra (1539–75). According to Creole historian Baltasar Obregón (b. 1554), who had accompanied Ibarra on his explorations, Luisa was also an "Indian Christian" who knew Nahuatl and three other native languages. Given her linguistic abilities, and the fact that she had been baptized, the Franciscans used her as an interpreter to "preach the holy Gospel."³² Luisa eventually did the same for Andrés Pérez de Ribas (1576–1655), a Jesuit chronicler and missionary with sixteen years of experience in the province of Sinaloa. In his 1645 mission history, Pérez de Ribas recalls that Luisa was a "very important" assistant and "famous Christian Indian woman" who not only served as a translator but "was a great help [...] in the baptism of the entire nation" of the Zuaques.³³ Although Luisa plays a secondary role to Pérez de Ribas, he still concludes that "with [her] always preceding me [it] seemed that God made her the instrument of that nation's salvation."³⁴

Jesuits occasionally acknowledged that native women like Luisa were central to their evangelizing efforts, but when such women died together with their missionaries, they were not always willing to call them martyrs. A case in point is María (d. 1594), an indigenous woman from Culiacán who accompanied Gonzalo de Tapia as a servant. María appears in passing in the Jesuit annual letters and other mission histories as a "good Christian" and "Gonzalo's teacher."³⁵ Because Jesuits stress Tapia's linguistic abilities, they marginalize María's role as his translator. Not only this, but even though the two died together in Tovoropa in the summer of 1594, Tapia was the only

³¹ See Cortés, *Cartas de relación*, 239 and Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera*, 68.

³² Obregón, *Historia de los descubrimientos*, 78.

³³ Pérez Ribas, *History of the Triumphs*, 205, 162; Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 143, 92.

³⁴ Pérez Ribas, *History of the Triumphs*, 222; Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 164.

³⁵ Santiago, "El padre," 277. See also HHB, Mexican Manuscript 7, Albizuri, *Historia de las misiones*, 98–99.

one who was hailed as a martyr. While most accounts ignore María's death, Francisco Ramírez (1552–1630), rector of the Jesuit college of Pátzcuaro, provides a graphic telling of her passing. In his version Ramírez adds that the cacique Nacabeba (1560–95) and his men, after having killed Tapia, moved into the kitchen of his dwelling only to find María. They blamed her for teaching Tapia their language and took her out and tied her to a tree. After performing a ceremonial dance, they shot her with arrows and chopped off her head. Unlike other Jesuits before him, Ramírez claims that “the holy woman finished her life in a saintly manner, entrusting herself to God.”³⁶ Ramírez never calls María a martyr, but he represents her in this light.

Shadowing the Black Robes

While native women preached Christianity and experienced the dangers of evangelization in frontier zones, native men were given more opportunities to spread the Christian gospel. Jesuits preferred to work with caciques and their sons when they could, a strategy they inherited from mendicant missionaries in central Mexico and their brethren working in other mission contexts around the world. Much like in medieval Europe, across colonial Spanish America missionaries concentrated their proselytizing efforts on the leaders of non-Christian communities. Mendicants and Jesuits believed that if local rulers converted to Christianity, their people would soon follow suit and provide them with protection to perform their sacerdotal duties. They also needed help because their numbers were always small. Edward W. Osowski has shown that by the 1580s, through royal policies and ecclesiastical ordinances, the religious duties of caciques were significantly enhanced in New Spain. Both the crown and the Catholic Church encouraged Indian governors to work with missionaries, which is why Jesuits established several schools for their sons across Spanish America.³⁷

Much like the Franciscans had done starting in the 1520s, the Jesuits trained the male heirs of caciques to assist in the Christianization of their own people. Their Colegio de San Martín in Tepotzotlán, opened in 1581, was a model for other regions of New Spain. It was here, according to the provincial Nicolás de Arnaya (c. 1557–1623), that the sons of caciques learned not only how to read, write, and to play musical instruments but also

³⁶ AHPM, ms. Ramírez, *Breve relación*, fol. 7^r.

³⁷ Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, 34.

Christian doctrine and the principal rituals of the Catholic Church. Even though Arnaya believed they were unsuitable for the priesthood, he strongly promoted the education of natives in colleges because many of the graduates then became local governors. According to his assessment, “one [indigenous] governor produces more fruit in any pueblo — if he is virtuous — than the priest who administers to them.” He also admits that such Christianized governors were often able to “win over more pueblos” where Jesuit missionaries were unable to penetrate.³⁸

While Jesuits were eager to train the sons of caciques, they were not as willing to welcome them into their ranks as brethren. Although the Society of Jesus was originally open to accepting all qualified men, by the end of the sixteenth century it established stricter policies regarding lineage. Jesuits made some efforts to train a native clergy in Africa and Asia (especially in China), but they never attempted to clothe large numbers of them with their religious habit.³⁹ In the Americas, they entered the mission field many decades after the mendicants, so they encountered far more scepticism about the spiritual capacity of native peoples. By the late sixteenth century various ecclesiastical councils in both New Spain and Peru had restricted the ordination of natives, blacks, and mestizos, not to mention the fact that the religious orders prohibited them from taking up their habits.⁴⁰ The Franciscans, for example, had by then abandoned their efforts to create an indigenous clergy. With the exception of a few native nobles in New Spain, and one of them only on his deathbed, the Jesuits also never considered indigenous peoples as desirable candidates for their order, and even less so on their missions.⁴¹

Even though native men were barred from donning the black robe of the Jesuits in northwestern New Spain, they frequently preached Christianity to their own people and other neighbouring groups. Much as they had done with Luisa, Jesuits relied heavily on natives, in this case men, for translation

³⁸ Arnaya, “Memorial de la importancia,” 560–561.

³⁹ Cohen reviews Jesuit views on accepting non-Europeans as members in “Racial and Ethnic Minorities,” 199–214.

⁴⁰ For Church policy on natives in New Spain, see Poole, “Church Law,” 637–650. For a larger discussion of native clergy, see Lundberg, “El clero indígena,” 39–62.

⁴¹ For the life of Antonio del Rincón (1556–1601), see Guzmán Betancourt, “Antonio del Rincón,” 253–265 and McDonough, “Indigenous Intellectuals,” 145–165. Although the ethnic past of Pedro Caltzontzin (d. 1576) has not been debated, there have been attempts by Jesuit historians to prove that he was given their religious habit. See Burrus, “Was Pedro Caltzontzin,” 211–220. For Lorenzo, the indigenous man who was accepted as a Jesuit on his death bed, see Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 741–743.

and gathering indigenous communities together to hear sermons. Historian Juan de Albizuri (1601–51), in a 1640 mission history on Sinaloa, references a Tahue cacique named don Martín who “with ardour and religious zeal tirelessly helped padre Juan Bautista Velasco in the preaching of the gospel.”⁴² Although Albizuri purposely frames don Martín in a secondary role as an assistant, caciques often preached on their own because of their command of native languages. Unlike native women in Jesuit sources, these men appear as autonomous actors, as can be seen in the life of don Bautista. According to Pérez de Ribas, don Bautista was the cacique of the Huites and was instrumental in helping to settle his own people into reductions (*reducciones de indios*). He “displayed great zeal in making Christianity known everywhere” and “he was singular not only by the virtue of the sermons he gave in his manner, but also by his example, which drew others to the Church.”⁴³

Beyond preaching the Christian gospel, native men were also heavily involved in teaching Catholic doctrine. While native women played a role in religious education, most of the catechists (known as *temistianes*) were men who were trained by the Jesuits either at their mission churches or in special schools for native boys. In a 1601 relation on his work among the Acaxees, Hernando de Santarén (1567–1616) recounts how they chose “enthusiastic and intelligent young boys to learn the doctrine [...] so that later they would be [...] teachers to teach the rest.”⁴⁴ Much like with preaching, Jesuits were unable to shoulder the pedagogical load on their missions, especially when there was continued resistance to Christianity. Albizuri recalls the difficulties his brethren faced uprooting “diabolic” practices in the town of Santiago Ocoroni, home to one of their schools for native boys. Under the leadership of Pedro Méndez (1558–1643), the school produced “great teachers and *temistianes* who helped our religious men in the expansion of the gospel in the parts where idolatry still persisted.”⁴⁵ Much like he had done with don Martín, Albizuri describes *temistianes* as invaluable assistants, not as co-workers, in what the Jesuits often described as the “vineyard of the Lord.”

Native men preached and taught catechism, which in certain cases led to violent confrontations. As was the case with María, native men died because of their relationship to individual Jesuits or because of their promotion of the Christian faith. In their case, Jesuits were far more willing to recognize

⁴² Beinecke, ms. WA S-769, Albizuri, *Historia de la vida*, fol. 199^r.

⁴³ Pérez Ribas, *History*, 269; Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 219.

⁴⁴ Santarén, “Misión de los yndios,” 502.

⁴⁵ Beinecke, ms. WA S.769, Albizuri, *Historia de la vida*, fol. 197^r.

them as martyrs than they were with native women. The life and death of Nicolás Caviari (d. 1632) illustrates the gendered hierarchies of native martyrdom in the early modern period. Pérez de Ribas describes Caviari as a “good and faithful Christian Indian” from among the Varohíos.⁴⁶ After having heard word that his own people were planning to kill the Italian Jesuit Giulio Pasquale (1587–1632), Caviari tried to persuade the padre to flee the mission for safety. He was determined to rescue Pasquale from certain death, which involved “speaking to them [the Varohíos], ignited by Christian zeal” and “reprehending them for their evildoings.”⁴⁷ It was not long until one of his own people laid a fierce blow to Caviari’s head with a wooden club (*macana*). Pérez de Ribas claims his address to the rebel Varohíos “had the same effect as the speech given by the most holy proto-martyr Stephen when he preached about Christ.”⁴⁸

Martyrdom was an illustrious crown for missionaries, something Jesuits bestowed upon a select number of native men. A few imitated the Jesuits in other ways unavailable to native women, challenging the idea that Jesuits were the only ones touring the *visitas* of their missionary districts. In a 1664 *vida*, Alonso Bonifacio (1592–1667) briefly describes the work Pedro Juan Castini (1587–1663) performed among the Chínipas in the 1620s. Castini had baptized several in the community during his initial visit, but he felt many adults still needed more instruction, so he left them “an Indian Christian” to teach them the catechism and, if it was absolutely necessary, “to administer the Holy Sacrament of baptism.”⁴⁹ To gain the confidence of the people, this native neophyte married a “morally upright Chínipa maiden,” a strategy of assimilation that the Jesuits employed in other areas of indigenous cultures. After working with the Chínipas for some time, Bonifacio claims the “Indian Christian” left them to perform “entradas [exploratory expeditions] among the Guazápare and the Themoris, maintaining the promised peace and catechizing them in preparation for holy baptism.”⁵⁰ Contrary to traditional views of Jesuit missions, this anonymous indigenous convert preached alone as if he had the habit of the Society of Jesus.

⁴⁶ Caviari is also referenced by Nieremberg, *Vidas ejemplares*, 84 and Florencia, *Memologio de los varones*, fol. 6^v.

⁴⁷ Pérez Ribas, *History*, 308; Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 263. In Spanish sources Pasquale is known as Julio Pascual.

⁴⁸ Pérez Ribas, *History*, 308; Pérez Ribas, *Historia*, 263.

⁴⁹ Bonifacio, *Carta del padre Alonso Bonifacio*, fol. 12^r.

⁵⁰ Bonifacio, *Carta del padre Alonso Bonifacio*, 12^r.

Conclusion

The narratives about native evangelists I have highlighted in this article demonstrate the need to expand traditional definitions of Catholic missionaries as solely European and Creole men of the religious orders. Although Jesuits and mendicants were often the initial face of empire and the church for native peoples across the Spanish Atlantic and Pacific, scholars have demonstrated that secular priests, lay brothers (*donados*), and even nuns participated in missionary work in varying capacities.⁵¹ Native evangelists need to be added to this list given their contributions to the creation of local Catholicisms across the Spanish world. Many of the missionary tasks traditionally associated with the Jesuits — preaching, teaching, baptizing, and, when necessary, dying for the faith — were all performed by native women and men, whether they were interpreters or autonomous actors carrying out their own *entradas*. Even if native evangelists were never recognized as missionaries in the early modern period because they were not ordained and members of the religious orders, the Catholic Church was established in northwestern New Spain through their missionary work. Far from being simply “mission furniture” in the background of the complex drama of religious conversion, native evangelists were agents shaping their own history under difficult circumstances.⁵²

In this article I have focused on the actions of native evangelists and not their theological understanding of Catholicism. Unlike in central Mexico, where Nahuatl-speaking peoples adopted alphabetic writing and penned wills, testaments, annals, and histories in their native tongues, the natives of northwestern New Spain did not leave a large body of records in their own languages. Without these types of documents, it is impossible to apply the methods of New Philology to Jesuit missions so as to understand the nature of religious transformation.⁵³ Nonetheless, if we examine Jesuit writings together with other colonial documents, one general conclusion can be reached about conversion on the borderlands of New Spain: there was a wide spectrum of responses to Christianity that included various levels of religious acceptance. Even if we cannot know the content of what Luisa or don Martín preached, or even what María or Cavioti felt in the final moments of their

⁵¹ See Schwaller, “Evangelization as Performance,” 305; Lavrin, “Lay Brothers,” 411–438; and Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*.

⁵² Saeger, “The Mission,” 64.

⁵³ For New Philology, see Lockhart, *The Nahuas*.

lives, their presence in Jesuit sources challenge us to reconsider the channels of religious transmission in the global history of Catholic renewal. Beyond being mere translators, helpers, and assistants, native evangelists were also “spiritual conquistadors,” yet another term that Jesuits unfairly reserved for themselves even if they were always outnumbered.⁵⁴

TRENT UNIVERSITY DURHAM

CITED WORKS

Manuscript Sources

Berkeley. University of California (Berkeley), Hubert H. Bancroft Library (HHB)

Mexican Manuscript 7, Juan de Albizuri, *Historia de las misiones apostólicas que los clérigos regulares de la Compañía de Jesús han hecho en las Indias Occidentales del Reino de la Nueva Vizcaya*.

New Haven. Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Beinecke)

Western Americana Collection (WA) ms. S-769, Juan de Albizuri, *Historia de la vida y martirio del venerable padre Hernando de Santarén de la Compañía de Jesús y de las cinco misiones apostólicas que fundó de Guazave, Topia, San Andrés, Tecuchuapa y Xiximes*.

Rome. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI)

Ms. Mexicana 15, *Carta annua de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de México del año de 1648 y 1649*, fols. 280^r–297^v.

Mexico City. Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Mexicana (AHPM)

Fondos Documentales, Fondo Decorme, caja 1, carpeta III, doc. 4, ms. Francisco Ramírez, *Breve relación de algunas cosas tocantes a la vida del*

⁵⁴ I follow New Conquest History here, which moves beyond natives as allies to see them as conquistadors. For an overview of an expanding literature, see Schroeder, “Introduction,” 5–27 and Restall, “The New Conquest History,” 151–160.

B. Padre Gonzalo de Tapia martirizado en Sinaloa 12 de julio de 1594. Religioso de la Compañía de Jesús.

Printed Sources

- Águila, Vicente del. "Relación breve de la misión de Sinaloa en la Nueva España." In Francisco Zambrano and José Gutiérrez Casillas, *Diccionario bio-biográfico de la Compañía de Jesús en México*. Mexico City: Buena Prensa, 1963, 3:98–128.
- Andrews, Edward E. *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Arnaya, Nicolás de. "Memorial de la importancia del collegio de indios de Tepotzotlán." In Francisco Javier Alegre, *Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España*, eds. Ernest J. Burrus and Félix Zubillaga. Rome: Institutum Historicum, 1956, 2:560–561.
- Benavides, Alonso de. *Tanto que se sacó de una carta que el R. Padre Fr. Alonso de Benavides, Custodio que fue del Nuevo México, envió a los religiosos de la Santa Custodio de la Conversión de San Pablo de dicho reino, desde Madrid, el año de 1631*. Mexico City: Joseph Bernardo de Hoyal, 1730.
- Bonifacio, Alonso. *Carta del padre Alonso Bonifacio, rector del colegio de la Compañía de Jesús de México. A los superiores y religiosos de esta provincia de Nueva España: acerca de la muerte, virtudes y ministerios del padre Pedro Juan Castini*. Mexico City: Por la viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1664.
- Burrus, Ernest J. "Was Pedro Caltzontzin, Grandson of the Last Tarascan king, a Jesuit?" *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 24 (1955): 211–220.
- Cave, Scott. "Madalena: The Entangled History of One Indigenous Floridian Woman in the Atlantic World." *The Americas* 74.2 (2017): 171–200.
- Christensen, Mark. "Missionizing Mexico: Ecclesiastics, Natives, and the Spread of Christianity." In R. Po-chia Hsia, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 17–40.
- Clossey, Luke. *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Cohen, Thomas M. "Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Society of Jesus." In Thomas Worcester, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 199–214.
- _____ and Emanuele Colombo. "Jesuit Missions." In Hamish Scott, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*,

- Vol. 2, *Cultures and Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 254–279.
- Cortés, Hernán. *Cartas de relación*, ed. Ángel Delgado Gómez. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1993.
- Cushner, Nicholas. *Why Have You Come Here?: The Jesuits and the First Evangelization of Native America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Decorme, Gerardo. *La obra de los jesuitas mexicanos durante la época colonial, 1572–1767*. 2 vols. Mexico City: Antigua Librería Robredo de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1941.
- Deeds, Susan M. “Legacies of Resistance, Adaptation, and Tenacity: History of the Native Peoples of Northwest Mexico.” In Murdo J. McLeod and Richard E. Adams, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Vol. 2, Part 2, *Mesoamerica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 44–88.
- Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 2000.
- Diccionario de la lengua castellana, en que explica el verdadero sentido de las voces, su naturaleza y calidad, con las frases o modos de hablar, los proverbios o refranes, y otras cosas convenientes al uso de la lengua*. Madrid: Imprenta de Francisco del Hierro, 1726–1739.
- Ehlers, Benjamin. “Mission (Spain).” In Evonne Levy and Kenneth Mills, eds., *Lexikon of the Hispanic Baroque: Transatlantic Exchange and Transformation*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013, 225–227.
- Farriss, Nancy. *Tongues of Fire: Language and Evangelization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Florencia, Francisco de. *Menologio de los varones más señalados en perfección religiosa de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús, de la Nueva España; presentado de orden de la Congregación Provincial, que juntó en México, por noviembre del año de 1669*. Barcelona: Por Jacinto Andreu, 1671.
- _____. *Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España, dividida en ocho libros, dedicada a San Francisco de Borja, fundador de la provincia, y tercero general de la Compañía*. Mexico City: Iván Joseph Guillena Carrascoso, 1694.
- Galindo, David Rex. *To Sin No More: Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830*. Stanford: Stanford University Press / Oceanside: The Academy of American Franciscan History, 2017.

- Guzmán Betancourt, Ignacio. "Antonio del Rincón (1556–1601). Primer gramático mexicano." *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 33 (2002): 253–265.
- Hackett, Charles Wilson, ed. *Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Approaches Thereto, to 1773*. 3 vols. Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1923–37.
- Hsia, R. Po-chia. *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- _____, ed. *A Companion to the Reformation World*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Langer, Erick and Robert H. Jackson, eds. *The New Latin American Mission History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Lavrin, Asunción. "Indian Brides of Christ: Creating New Spaces for Indigenous Women in New Spain." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 15.2 (1999): 225–260.
- _____. "Lay Brothers: The Other Men in the Mendicant Orders of New Spain." *The Americas* 72.3 (2015): 411–438.
- Lockhart, James. *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Lundberg, Magnus. "El clero indígena en Hispanoamérica. De la legislación a la implementación y práctica eclesiástica." *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 38.1 (2008): 39–62.
- _____. *Mission and Ecstasy: Contemplative Women and Salvation in Colonial Spanish America and the Philippines*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2015.
- Mathes, W. Michael. "Jesuit Chroniclers and Chronicles of Northwestern New Spain." In Joseph A. Gagliano and Charles E. Ronan, eds., *Jesuit Encounters in the New World: Jesuit Chroniclers, Geographers, Educators and Missionaries in the Americas, 1549–1767*. Rome: Institutum Historicum S. I., 1997, 37–80.
- McDonough, Kelly S. "Indigenous Intellectuals in Early Colonial Mexico: The Case of Antonio del Rincón, Nahua Grammarian and Priest." *Colonial Latin American Review* 20.2 (2011): 145–165.
- Melvin, Karen. "The Globalization of Reform." In Mary Laven, Alexandra Bamji, and Geert Janssen, eds., *Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 435–450.
- McAllen, Katherine. "Jesuit Martyrdom in Imagery between Mexico and Rome." In Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey, eds., *The New*

- World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 143–165.
- Metcalf, Alida C. *Go-betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Mojares, Resil B. “The Life of Miguel Ayatumo: A Sixteenth-Century Boholano.” *Philippine Studies* 41.4 (1993): 437–458.
- Nieremberg, Juan Eusebio. *Vidas ejemplares y venerables memorias de algunos claros varones de la Compañía de Jesús, de los cuales es este tomo cuarto*. Madrid: Alonso Paredes, 1647.
- Obregón, Baltasar de. *Historia de los descubrimientos antiguos y modernos de la Nueva España*. Mexico City: Departamento Editorial de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1924.
- Osowski, Edward W. *Indigenous Miracles: Nahua Authority in Colonial Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012.
- Pérez Ribas, Andrés. *Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe entre gentes las más bárbaras, y fieras del nuevo orbe: conseguidos por los Soldados de la Milicia de la Compañía de Jesús en las Misiones de la Provincia de Nueva-España. Referense assimismo las costumbres, ritos, y supersticiones que usaban estas Gentes: sus puestos, y temples: las victorias que de algunas dellas alcançaron con las armas los Católicos Españoles, quando les obligaron à tomarlas: y las dichas muertes de veinte Religiosos de la Compañía, que en varios puestos, y a manos de varias Naciones, dieron sus vidas por la predicación del santo Evangelio*. Madrid: Por Alonso de Paredes, 1645.
- _____. *History of the Triumphs of Our Holy Faith amongst the Most Barbarous and Fierce Peoples of the New World*, trans. Daniel T. Reff, Maureen Ahern, and Richard K. Danford. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999.
- Polzer, Charles W. *Rules and Precepts of the Jesuit Missions of Northwestern New Spain*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1976.
- Poole, Stafford. “Church Law on the Ordination of Indians and *Castas* in New Spain.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 61.4 (1981): 637–650.
- Reff, Daniel T. *Plagues, Priests, and Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- _____ and Courtney Kelly. “Saints, Witches and Go-betweens: The Depiction of Women in Missionary Accounts from the Northern

- Frontier of New Spain." *Colonial Latin American Review* 18.2 (2009): 237–260.
- Restall, Matthew. "The New Conquest History." *History Compass* 10.2 (2012): 151–160.
- Ruiz de Montoya, Antonio. *Conquista espiritual hecha por los religiosos de la Compañía de Jesús, en las Provincias del Paraguay, Paraná, Uruguay, y Tape*. Madrid: En la Imprenta del Reino, 1639.
- Saeger, James Schofield. "The Mission and Historical Missions: Film and the Writing of History." In Donald F. Stevens, ed., *Based on a True Story: Latin American History at the Movies*. Lanham: SR Books, 1997, 63–84.
- Santarén, Hernando de. "Misión de los yndios acaxeos en la serranía de Topia y Sant Andrés." In Francisco Javier Alegre, *Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España*, eds. Ernest J. Burrus and Félix Zubillaga, Rome: Institutum Historicum, 1956. 2:498–512.
- Santiago, Alonso de. "El padre Alonso de Santiago al padre Esteban Paez, Prov." In Félix Zubillaga, ed., *Monumenta Mexicana*. Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1973, 5:277.
- Schroeder, Susan. "Introduction: The Genre of Conquest Studies." In Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*. Norman: Oklahoma Press, 2007, 5–27.
- Schwaller, John F. "Evangelization as Performance: Making Music, Telling Stories." *The Americas* 66.3 (2010): 305–310.
- Sievernich, Michael. "La misión y las misiones en la primitiva Compañía de Jesús." In Thomas M. McCoog, ed., *The Inflammate Omnia: Selected Historical Papers from Conferences Held at Loyola and Rome in 2006*. Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2010, 255–273.
- Solórzano Pereira, Juan de. *Política indiana*. Madrid: Matheo Sacristán, 1736–1739. 2 vols.
- Townsend, Camilla. *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.
- Warren, Fintan. "Jesuit Historians of Sinaloa-Sonora." *The Americas* 18.4 (1962): 329–339.
- Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 3rd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.



Figure 8.1. Miguel Guerrero, frontispiece in Francisco de Florencia, *Historia de la Provincia* (Mexico City: Iván Joseph Guillena Carrascoso, 1694).

Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University,
Providence, USA.