

## Art and Christian Conversion in the Jesuit Missions on the Spanish South American Frontier

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# Art and Christian Conversion in the Jesuit Missions on the Spanish South American Frontier

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## 1 Introduction

After Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the West Indies in 1492-1493, the news of the newly discovered land and its numerous inhabitants quickly spread in Europe and excited not only would-be conquerors but also clergymen. The Catholic religious orders found in the New World a fertile ground for their evangelical activities and dispatched the most talented of their missionaries to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Since the language barrier that separated the Europeans from the Native Americans could not be overcome in a short period, at least at an early stage of contact, the missionaries often relied on what they called 'materialities',<sup>1)</sup> namely, the visual arts, architecture, music, theatrical performances, etc. Convinced that they could touch the heart through the eye as effectively as the ear, they built splendid churches, decorated them sumptuously with paintings and sculptures, and staged spectacular ceremonies with music and dancing.

This strategy of the Catholic missionaries was severely criticized, first, by the Protestants, then later, by the Enlightenment thinkers. One of their main targets was the Jesuits. The sons of Ignatius of Loyola gained the dishonorable reputation of appealing to the senses to lure the ignorant and the dull-witted to the allegiance of their order. The Jesuits were frequently blamed for their excessively sensuous style of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The so-called 'Jesuit style' means, in the words of a contemporary art historian, 'a militant, manipulative, overwrought, and insincere artistic hegemony' (Bailey 1999b:39). Its supposed objective is to dazzle

simple folks and manipulate them for political domination and economic exploitation.<sup>2)</sup>

As they themselves admitted in their writings, the Jesuit missionaries indeed made good use of sensuous forms for the purpose of evangelization. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were insincere in their motivation or that they skimmed in their evangelical work by substituting appearance for substance.

This article will discuss the sensuous methods of evangelization that the Jesuits used in their South American frontier missions. By the term ‘frontier’, I mean the edges of the Spanish Empire such as the Amazonian basin, Chaco, the Río de la Plata, etc, where, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the missionaries of Catholic religious orders were particularly active.<sup>3)</sup> The focus of attention is the Jesuit missions of Mojos and Chiquitos (the Departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, respectively, in Bolivia).<sup>4)</sup> The Jesuits of Peru founded the Mojos mission in the 1680s, and those of Paraguay, the Chiquitos mission in the 1690s. These two missions flourished until the expulsion of the religious order from the Spanish dominions in 1767. I shall also refer to the missions of Paraguay for supplementary information. Based on primary sources such as chronicles, official reports, letters, etc, I shall explain the Jesuit missionaries’ concept of the power of ‘materialities’ and illustrate how they actually used works of art to bring about conversion among the Native Americans.

It is also my intention to shed light on the natives’ reaction to the missionaries’ activities. A Jesuit chronicler once referred to the inhabitants of the Upper Amazon as ‘idolaters without idols’ (Castillo 1906:348). In fact, they had a strong inclination toward unmediated contact with supernatural forces and, for this reason, criticized the Christians for worshiping simple pieces of wood and cloth. In this article, I shall argue that this native attitude toward sacred images persisted after their conversion to Christianity and significantly contributed to the formation of the spirituality characteristic of the Jesuit missions.

## **2 Father Garriga’s trip to Mojos**

Let me begin with a brief episode, which I took from an obituary for Father Antonio Garriga, the then Provincial of the Jesuit Province of Peru, written in 1734 by his successor.<sup>5)</sup> Father Garriga was born in Mallorca in 1662, studied theology at the University of Gandia, Valencia, entered the Society of Jesus, and was then sent

to the Mojos mission. First, he worked in a town named Trinidad. After spending four years there, he was sent to Lima to become a minister at the Jesuit College of San Pablo. In 1702, he was sent back to Mojos and founded a town named Exaltación in the land of the Cayubabas (O'Neill & Dominguez 2001:1584) (fig. 1).

According to the obituary, when he made his second trip from Lima to Mojos, Father Garriga took four young missionaries and two lay brothers with him. He also carried a supply of goods for the assistance of his Jesuit colleagues and their parishioners in the mission. Moreover, he took with him two precious objects: one was a large canvas of the Crucifixion; the other was a copy of the image of the Virgin of Mercy which was venerated at the San Pablo College. Father Garriga commissioned the most reputable painter in Lima to produce this copy and had it beautifully framed and glassed so that the image might look brilliant. The obituary says:

These two adornments were the best weapons that he had available to go about his spiritual conquest, and were also the most satisfying comforts for the relief of his heart amid the severe hardships that later besieged him bitterly, as he was preparing for the foundation of the town.<sup>6)</sup>

It is likely that the 'large canvas of the Crucifixion' that Father Garriga took to the mission was destined for the church of Exaltación. It may have formed part of the main altarpiece or one of the lateral altarpieces. On the other hand, the 'copy of the image of the Virgin of Mercy' was Father Garriga's private property and probably ended up in his room.<sup>7)</sup>

According to the obituary, these sacred images were supposed to perform two apparently very different functions: one is active and even aggressive; the other is contemplative and peaceful. As the missionary's weapons for spiritual conquest, the images would help him wage war against the pagans and subjugate them to the yoke of Christ. As satisfying comforts, they would console him for his hardships while, during the night, he were at his devotions. To the missionary's way of thinking, the same sacred images served both, differing, purposes of evangelization and meditation.

These two functions of the images correspond to the two fundamental aspects of the missionary life, namely, the ministries for the help of another person's soul and the devotions for the care of one's own soul. In fact, the Jesuits were acutely conscious of the necessity of maintaining a balance between these two. The Jesuit

doctrine of 'contemplative in action' epitomizes this attitude (O'Malley 1989:18). To take an example, a Jesuit chronicler of the early eighteenth century stressed the necessity of combining the works of Martha and Mary: 'these are the active life and the contemplative one, the external occupations of service and help for the neighbors, and the internal, close union with God'.<sup>8)</sup> Another chronicler reported that the missionaries had to alternate these two activities and 'spent all day in such laborious ministries and kept the night for prayers and for taking a few hours of rest so as to be able to resume ordinary works the next day'.<sup>9)</sup>

The image of the Virgin of Mercy that the Jesuits worshiped at the San Pablo College must have been very familiar to Father Garriga, who used to be a minister there. He must have prayed many times before the image and, even at night, after retiring to his cell, he may have pictured the image in his mind and given himself up to meditation. The copy of the image that he took to Mojos made it possible for him to continue the same devotional practices. During the night, in his room, he probably devoted himself to prayers before the image and held an intimate conversation with the Virgin, which may have brought him a great deal of consolation.

However, unlike the life in an urban college, the life in a rural mission made utterly new demands on Father Garriga. In addition to the ordinary ministerial duties such as saying Mass and teaching catechism, the missionary had to build a church and houses, supervise agricultural and stock-farming activities, distribute a daily supply of food, train artists and craftsmen, settle disputes, administer justice, care for the sick and the aged, etc. He had so much mundane work to do in the mission that it was impossible for him to be absorbed in his favorite devotions. He inevitably had to live 'the mixed life between the contemplative and the active'.<sup>10)</sup> Father Garriga was reputed to 'maintain internally a well-closed oratory where he communicated with God, while his steps and thoughts ran to embarrassing cares, to which the same God took him out of his silence'.<sup>11)</sup>

In this context, the image of the Virgin acquired a new function that had been alien to it while enshrined in the San Pablo College, namely, that of a weapon of spiritual conquest. A fundamental question to be raised is: where did this new function come from? We should recall that, although copied and reduced in size, the image basically remained the same as its original. It continued to guide Father Garriga through his habitual meditation. Therefore, we can presume that the new function of the image originated from the old one and that the two apparently

different functions were in reality of the same quality. In fact, the image of the Virgin seems to have been serving as a hinge that joined together the two aspects of Father Garriga's missionary life which was divided between the daytime mundane activities and the nightly devotional practices.

To conclude this brief episode, let me formulate the following hypothesis: transported to the overseas missions and applied to the evangelical activities, the sacred images evolved into an instrument of evangelization while at the same time retaining its devotional function. The images conquered the souls of the Native Americans with the same power as was used when they assisted the missionaries' meditation, or at least this is what the Jesuit missionaries believed. In what follows, I shall explain what kind of power the images were supposed to possess.

### 3 The Jesuit concept of the power of images

The idea that, with the help of images, one can draw greater spiritual benefit from meditation was familiar to the Jesuits. Ignatius of Loyola formulated its method clearly in his celebrated manual for the *Spiritual Exercises* (Loyola 1914). His recommendations on 'the composition of place' and 'the application of the five senses' are so insistent that a contemporary art historian even calls him 'a sensualist'.<sup>12)</sup> Ignatius recommended that those who were exercising should form a mental image of the subject of meditation and make it existential to them by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching it in their imagination. The main point is to imagine ourselves as if we were actually witnessing the holy event in question. This method helps us conceive a greater feeling of consolation or desolation according to the subject of meditation and a stronger will to live a better life for the perfection of our soul and the greater glory of God (fig. 2).

The Jesuit missionaries who worked on the American soil followed Ignatius' recommendation on the use of images. They modified it, however, in two important respects. First, the missionaries materialized the 'composition of place' and made good use of physical images instead of mental ones. Second, they used the Ignatian method not only for the perfection of their own soul but also for the salvation of other people's soul. By means of material figures, they attempted to appeal to the senses of the Native Americans and act on their souls. For this reason, they took great care over the exterior forms of the divine cult. They built magnificent churches, decorated their interior with colorful paintings and sculptures, and staged

solemn ceremonies and celebrations (figs. 3-4). Let me quote from their writings:

[Father Miguel Sanchez] knew that the kind of things that entered through the eyes and enlivened what God communicated internally to the souls led to an increase and reinforcement of the Faith. Therefore, he took great care to promote the exterior appearance of his church as far as his strength permitted.<sup>13)</sup>

Everywhere people celebrate the birth of our Lord solemnly. [ . . . ] The porches of the churches are decorated with Christmas adornments. The mangers have an ox and an ass. In the upper part of the portal, the star that would guide the Magi is shown. All of them instruct and entertain the spirits of the new Christians so that, by means of the mysteries that are apparent to the eye, the great benefits of the Faith are communicated to the heart (fig. 5).<sup>14)</sup>

In these passages, the missionaries draw a sharp distinction between the external looks of the divine cult and the internal faith, what the eye can appreciate and what God communicates to the heart. At the same time, however, they assure us that there is a channel through which we can progress from the eye to the heart, from the exterior to the interior, from the material to the spiritual.

What we have here is a long lasting European image theory deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. It postulates that the sacred images give us access to the spiritual realm. Because of our human nature as sinful creatures imprisoned in a corruptible body, we cannot grasp the divine truths without the latter being materialized as tangible images and symbols. Only the holiest persons infused with the divine grace could ascend directly to the spiritual realm without any material supports. The ordinary people approach the spiritual forces under the likeness of material figures. As Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa Theologica*, ‘God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all our knowledge originates from sense’ (Aquinas 1990:9).

In the case of the Native Americans, this is all the more true, for, according to the Jesuit missionaries, they are ‘so material as to be very much moved by visible things’ (Altamirano 1979:202). In their chronicles and letters, the missionaries repeatedly asserted that the natives had only a limited intellectual capacity and that their understanding did not reach beyond what they could grasp with their senses. Here are quotations from two Jesuit chroniclers of the late eighteenth century:

Everywhere the external glitter and brilliance let the piety increase and the devotion inflame

greatly. And among the Indians [of Mojos] these things have a greater effect because it seems that they are equipped with a minor intellectual capacity and value everything by its visible aspect. This explains why the missionaries celebrated the festivals with the greatest solemnity possible, representing the mysteries of our salvation and those of the Virgin Mary in the form of statues and images (Eder 1985:371).

Because of their disorderly and barbarous way of living and their savage condition that we have described, these people [of Chiquitos] are not capable of understanding reasoning, at least at the beginning of their religious education. We should therefore find some other means of implanting in them the knowledge, the adoration, and the fear of God, that is, we have to make use of external things that catch the eye, please the ear, and that can be touched with hands, until their mind develops in that direction (Knogler 1979:170).

Using material objects and appealing to the senses is an effective means of attracting non-Christians to Christianity all over the world. However, this sensuous method is even more effective among the Native Americans because ‘they do not value anything other than what they see with their eyes or touch with their hands’.<sup>15)</sup> As for ‘what does not fall below the senses, it leaves very little trace in their spirit’.<sup>16)</sup> In the missionaries’ view, the natives suffer from a serious defect in the basic faculties of their soul. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, no European theologians dared to negate the humanity of the Native Americans as did their predecessors in the sixteenth century. However, many agreed that their intellect was seriously flawed and that they were not capable of abstract thinking. To quote from an eighteenth century Jesuit chronicle:

The Indian is an imperfect animal, with an intelligence that is basic and potential, but not effective; they make up for this defect by the major capacity of their internal and external senses (Eder 1985:87).

The ‘external senses’ mean the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch while the ‘internal senses’ include common sense, imagination, and memory. According to classical cognitive theory, the perceptions of the five senses are gathered together by the common sense and passed to the imagination which processes them into a unified representation. This representation is then passed to the intellect which thinks about it, evaluates it, and finally stores it in the memory.<sup>17)</sup>

The missionaries’ ‘Indians’ are supposed to be equipped with excellent senses, both external and internal. Therefore, they are capable of perceiving accurately every single piece of stone, for instance, forming a clear mental picture of it, and



keeping that picture in their memory for a long time. However, they are not so capable of achieving such an abstract concept as stone in general and even less capable of forming metaphysical concepts such as sacrament, grace, etc.

If we take into consideration the cultural differences that separated the Europeans from the Native Americans, it seems natural that the latter had great difficulty in understanding even the most elemental aspects of the Christian theology. In order to educate them, the missionaries had to 'repeat the same truths to them continually and resort to the comparison with tangible objects that are within their reach so that these truths may remain in their understanding' (Sepp 1969:246). However, we can easily guess that this is not so much due to their lack of intellectual capacity as their unfamiliarity with the Christian messages.

## **4 The missionary aesthetics of wonder**

We know that the power of images is varied. They are capable of causing a great variety of sensuous effects. Therefore, a question might be raised as to what kind of sensuous effect the Jesuit missionaries were aiming for while using images for evangelization. A careful reading of their chronicles and letters brings one into sharp relief. It is wonder. In their writings, the missionaries often report on the Native Americans' wonder at the European works of art. The natives frequently marveled at the churches, the altars, the statues, the divine cult, music, etc. The missionaries knew this well and deliberately evoked wonder among the non-Christians in order to attract them to the mission.

Let me take some examples. The magnificent churches, constructed under the missionaries' direction, were a principal cause of wonder for the natives (fig. 6). In the Mojos mission, it is said that 'the heathens rushed in great numbers to see the marvel that kept them amazed. From the majesty and magnificence of the temple, they inferred the greatness of God who was adored there'.<sup>18)</sup>

Inside the churches, the brilliant altars astonished the natives (figs. 7-8). In the Chiquitos mission, a missionary reported: 'the richly gilded main altar is so brilliant and beautiful and it enjoys so much grace that it would look wonderful in any European city. It is also carved in the European manner, made of cedar wood; it is ten varas [approximately 8 meters] in width and fifteen varas [approximately 12.5 meters] in height. This new gilded altar filled our Indians with amazement and you would also be amazed if you could see it' (Schmid 1981:152).

The celebrations that took place in the churches looked no less marvelous to the natives (fig. 9). In Chiquitos, when two non-Christians were brought to a town, ‘they were so amazed at the devotional exercises that were practiced there that they urged the Indians of their nation to establish their residence among the new Christians and to submit to the laws of the Gospel’.<sup>19)</sup>

At a celebration, the European music particularly impressed the natives (fig. 10). It is said that ‘the Christians sung the litanies in a musical chorus of two parts, and it sounded like a Heavenly thing to the barbarians who, until then, had never heard such harmonies in concert; they stayed as if stupefied while listening to it’.<sup>20)</sup>

On the eve of a festival, the missionaries sometimes displayed fireworks, which caused great astonishment to the natives. Referring to the festival of St. Javier, Mojos, a missionary wrote: ‘Brother Lorenzo was skillful in the fireworks that he prepared on the eve of the festival: wheels of firecrackers, skyrockets, and rockets with streamers. The Indians were astonished and stupefied’.<sup>21)</sup>

In my opinion, wonder is one of the key concepts that characterize the Jesuit missionaries’ aesthetics. In the European classical tradition, wonder is often theorized as an end for art and a motive for philosophy.<sup>22)</sup> As an end for art, wonder causes pleasure and fascination. It catches the eye, pleases the ear and, with its pleasurable effects, attracts people. As Aristotle claims in the *Poetics*, ‘the wonderful is pleasing’ (Aristotle n.d.). On the other hand, as a motive for philosophy, wonder takes our breath away, makes us aware that we are dealing with something unknown, and urges us to inquire into the cause of our perplexity. To quote from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, ‘it is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize [. . .] he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant [. . .] it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy’ (Aristotle 1975:13).

Aristotle claimed that wonder pleases us and urges us to philosophize. Later, Thomas Aquinas combined these two effects of wonder and asserted:

Wonder is a kind of desire for knowledge; a desire which comes to man when he sees an effect of which the cause either is unknown to him, or surpasses his knowledge or power of understanding. Consequently wonder is a cause of pleasure in so far as it includes a hope of getting the knowledge which one desires to have. For this reason whatever is wonderful is pleasing, for instance things that are scarce (Aquinas 1990:764).

Now we can understand why the Jesuit missionaries regarded the natives’

wonder at the European art so crucial for their Christian conversion. It is because, to their way of thinking, wonder serves as a bridge from the senses to the intellect. As a sensuous effect, wonder works on our heart through our senses without recourse to our intellect. Therefore, the missionaries thought that, by means of wonder, they could infuse even mentally inferior Native Americans with the love of God. However wonder's effect does not stop there, for it inevitably urges us to philosophize about its cause which is beyond the reach of our senses. The missionaries hoped that wonder would inspire in the natives the desire of learning at least the essentials of the Christian doctrine.

Let me illustrate this process with an example from a Jesuit chronicle of the early eighteenth century, which gives us a description of how, in the Mojos region, wonder led the natives to religious education. When the Jesuit missionaries came into contact with the natives called Baures, in their main village, they deliberately staged demonstrations of Christian ceremonies. Every morning, with the assistance of Native Christians, they put up a portable altar and celebrated Mass. In the evening, in front of a wooden cross, they recited the Rosary on their knees. The chronicle reports:

The heathens came to see the novelty curiously; at first they scoffed at it, but later they were struck with admiration because, taking notice of the mildness, the humility, and the Christian devotion, they knew, without understanding it, the goodness of what was proposed to them there, of a new life which, in accordance with reason, was quite discordant with and opposite to their customs. The curiosity inclined them to inquire of our Native Christians what each of those things meant and the latter, having been well instructed, propounded them the principles of our Sacred Faith (Altamirano 1979:130).

In this description, the natives' change of attitude from scorn to admiration played a crucial part in their conversion. It began as an interior movement in their souls without their understanding its significance, as it is said in the chronicle: 'Christ, knowing it, called them [the Baures] and they, without knowing it, went to Christ' (Altamirano 1979:132). However, their admiration for the Christian ceremony soon urged them to conduct an intellectual inquiry into its cause. The Baures asked the Native Christians for an explanation of what they were doing and the latter's answer 'was having a lot of effect on the brains and hearts of the heathens, enough for them to submit without contradiction to the task of catechism lessons' (Altamirano 1979:131). The immediate effect of admiration was sensuous,

but its repercussions reached far beyond the senses.

## 5 The natives' reaction to the missionary activities

So far I have focused on the Jesuit missionaries' concept of the power of images and their aesthetics of wonder. Now I turn my attention to the Native Americans and attempt to clarify their reaction to the missionaries' activities. The questions I hope to answer are: how did the natives perceive the Christian images? and what effect did the sensuous method of evangelization produce on them? However, the sources to hand contain little information in this respect and my argument will inevitably remain hypothetical.

As is well known, the first European missionaries who traveled to the New World regarded the native religions as a form of idolatry comparable to that of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks.<sup>23)</sup> According to their theory, idolatry originated from the ambition of those in power who aspired to be revered as gods. In fact, the missionaries who worked in the former territories of the Aztec and Inca Empires found a considerable number of idols and temples. They also imagined that the demons hid themselves behind these idols and spoke to the natives so that they might adore them and sacrifice to them.

In the seventeenth century, however, the missionaries who ventured into the frontiers such as the Amazonian basin or the Río de la Plata encountered a quite different cultural landscape. In the thick forests or vast savannas, they found very few religious images. A Jesuit missionary of the early seventeenth century gave thanks to God for this remarkable Providence: 'The Guaraní nation has been cleaned of idols and adorations, thanks to Heaven, and, free from lies, they are ready to accept the truth' (Ruiz de Montoya 1989:131). However, the lack of idols does not mean the lack of religion. It simply means that the Native Americans' religious practices did not depend on material figures as much as Christianity did. Aware of this fact, one of the first missionaries who visited the Mojos region referred to its inhabitants as 'idolaters without idols':

They are idolaters without idols, though not without temples. Their religion is founded on a dependency that they think they have of their deities for the physical necessities such as eating, drinking, having iron tools, success in warfare, health, and longevity (Castillo 1906:348).

The missionary claims that the natives had no idols, but were not without temples. So what did they worship in their empty temples? According to the early missionary records on the Mojos and Chiquitos regions, each village had a communal house. The Jesuits called it 'drinking house' because drinking bouts took place there. As a matter of fact, it served as a temple where the deities visited the villagers, gave them oracles through the mouth of shamans, and the villagers entertained them with food and drink.<sup>24)</sup> In other words, the natives adored their deities in person, not in the guise of idols. Although the sanctuary was usually curtained off from the eyes of the villagers and only the shamans had access to it, they could hear the gods talk to them and eat and drink what was offered them.

This is the reason why, at least at an early stage of contact with Christianity, the indigenous people of Lowland South America were reluctant to accept the European sacred images. A missionary of the Chiquitos region says:

In this nation, the demons became more impudent; they left clay effigies and began to show up in their own figures or persons to be revered in them like gods. These idolaters were happy to see and hear the same gods that they respected, and reproached the Christians that we paid homage to some mute gods in the sacred images that we adored (Caballero 1933:23).

The same missionary states that the natives were gossiping about the Christians: 'What do you think the Christians respect? Some linen cloth, some stone effigies that do not speak' (Caballero 1933:23). Another missionary of the same region confirms this fact:

[The natives] only adore the demons, not in figures of stone, wood, or metal, but in the extremely monstrous forms in which they show themselves to these Indians; the Indians are very happy and boastful about this and dare to reproach the new Christians for their simplicity of respecting in the paintings and statues mute and blind gods who do not see, speak, or hear.<sup>25)</sup>

It is clear that the natives of the Amazonian lowlands had a strong inclination toward unmediated contact with supernatural forces and, for this reason, ridiculed what they perceived as the Christians' 'idolatry'. According to an obituary for Father Agustín Castañares, a missionary of the Chiquitos region who was martyred in 1744, one of his killers took a canvas of the Virgin of the Pillar that the missionary carried with him and put it on as an overcoat (Montenegro 1746:85-86). In this way, the natives tried to demonstrate that what the Christians worshiped was

in reality nothing more than a piece of cloth.

The Native Americans' negative attitude toward the Christian image worship reminds us of the harsh criticism that, in the sixteenth century Europe, the Protestants launched at the Catholics (Eire 1986). The similarity, however, is only superficial. Contrary to the Calvinist way of thinking, the autochthonous gods of the Amazon are not transcendental. Through the intermediary of shamans, they come into contact with their human worshipers. The gods appear to them, speak to them, and eat and drink with them. Therefore, the Native Americans fully enjoy the presence of their gods, which makes any material representations superfluous. On the other hand, the Christians need divine representations because, as we saw earlier, these are the only channel through which the mortals can approach the transcendental prototypes.

## 6 Visions and dreams

It is true that the Native Americans who chose to settle in the Jesuit missions eventually accepted Christianity and, with it, the Christian image worship. With the passage of time, they learnt to pay homage to the paintings and the statues in the church. They prayed before them and asked of them a variety of favors. Moreover, the missionaries founded workshops and trained children of noble descent to be painters and sculptors, who produced not only imitations of European art but also works of outstanding quality. Today some of their works can be appreciated in the museums and art galleries in Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil (figs. 11-12).<sup>26)</sup>

The sources to hand, however, strongly suggest that, even after the Christian image worship took root among the natives, their initial distrust did not disappear completely. It seems that those living in the missions were not entirely content with 'mute and blind gods who do not see, speak, or hear' and could not help aspiring for direct contact with supernatural forces. In fact, the Native Christians tended to imagine the Christian deities as directly accessible without being mediated through material representations. This tendency manifested itself in numerous cases of supernatural visions or apparitions that the natives had of the Virgin Mary, saints, or angels.

What is remarkable about these cases of visions is a high degree of realism with which the native visionaries recounted their experiences. It seems that, in their

visions, they formed a clear mental picture of a saint or an angel as if they had seen them in person.

Let me take some examples. In the Chiquitos mission, a man who was in his sick bed saw 'the Queen of Heaven, who was emitting so much radiance from her hands and face that the entire village was filled with light'.<sup>27)</sup>

In Paraguay, a man had a near-death experience and saw the Apostle Saint Peter (fig. 12). After coming back to life, he told a missionary about his experience. The missionary stated: 'this good Indian had never seen an image of Saint Peter, but painted him for me in the same way the painters paint him and the writers describe him' (Ruiz de Montoya 1989:98).

Sometimes the vision is accompanied with the senses of smell and touch. For example, in Chiquitos, a man went into an ecstasy when the Holy Ghost entered his heart. Then he saw 'a light as beautiful as the Sun but, in comparison, it was very faint and it emitted a fragrance, so sweet and incomparable with any odor on earth that it was clearly known to be a gift from Heaven. His flesh became very delicate like that of a newborn baby and moved with so much agility as if he were rid of the heavy burden of the body'.<sup>28)</sup>

In their dreams or near-death experiences, the Native Christians sometimes went through a descent to Hell and an ascent to Heaven. These American versions of *The Divine Comedy* were often recounted with extraordinary details. Here is a description of Hell given by a Native Christian named Lucas Xarupá who lived in the Chiquitos mission:

[Xarupá saw] a corps of very ugly demons with terrible appearance and grotesque movements of body; some had a head of tiger, others dragon and crocodile, still others had appearances of such monstrous and terrible forms that anyone would be discouraged from looking at them. All were emitting, terrifying, black flames from their mouths and from other parts of their bodies. They were yelling and moving around from one side to the other, imitating the dances of the Indians until they laid hands on the poor new Christian who was all of a tremble believing that that festival was for him, and made a big fuss, yelling: 'It's him, him, Xarupá, our friend, who used to be our devotee and used the malicious witchcraft we had taught his grandparents'.<sup>29)</sup>

In all these cases, the influence of the European imagery is undeniable. It is particularly clear in the vision of Lucas Xarupá, who must have seen a visual representation of Hell, either painted on a church wall or printed as an engraving (figs. 13-14). We know that, in the Jesuit missions of Paraguay, it was common 'to paint both of the lateral walls of the church with the four last things of man, of

which Hell has a particularly horrible aspect'. The Jesuits did so 'in order that my Indians desist from sin for fear of punishment, if love of Heaven does not make them change' (Sepp 1973:257).

In the case of Lucas Xarupá, it seems as if he were putting in practice 'the composition of place' and 'the application of the five senses', recommended by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, which consist of the creation of a mental landscape and an empathetic participation in it. In fact, in the fifth exercise of the first week, Ignatius invites us 'to see with the sight of the imagination the length, breadth and depth of Hell':

The first point will be to see with the sight of the imagination the great fires, and the souls as in bodies of fire. The second, to hear with the ears wailings, howlings, cries, blasphemies against Christ our Lord and against all His Saints. The third, to smell with the smell smoke, sulphur, dregs and putrid things. The fourth, to taste with the taste bitter things, like tears, sadness and the worm of conscience. The fifth, to touch with the touch; that is to say, how the fires touch and burn the souls (Loyola 1914).

In my opinion, however, what lies behind these visionary experiences is not so much the Ignatian spirituality as the native religious tradition. As we saw earlier, the supernatural visions and dreams were familiar phenomenon in Lowland South America before the arrival of European missionaries. In the Mojos region, for example, the shamans called *Tiharauqui*, or 'the one with a clear vision', made it their profession to enter into ecstasies and get in touch with gods. These shamans were chosen by the gods themselves, who unexpectedly appeared to them and revealed their vocation.

The Jesuit missionaries materialized the Ignatian 'composition of place' and made good use of material figures to appeal to the senses of the Native Americans. The latter, on the other hand, spiritualized European images and transformed them into visions and apparitions in conformity with their cultural tradition. It is true that, despite its initial rejection, the European imagery was eventually successful in making a strong impression on the natives, but on condition that it cast off its stiff materiality and became animated in their imagination. To put it briefly, in the Jesuit missions, the missionaries and the natives set up a kind of intercultural dialogue concerning the power of images, which turned out constructive and creative, but nevertheless ambiguous and conflicting.



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## Notes

- 1) The original Spanish is 'materialidades'. Relación de la misión apostólica de los moxos en esta provincia del Perú de la Compañía de Jesús que remite su provincial Padre Diego de Eguíluz a N. M. R. Padre Thirso González General, año de 1696, ARSI, Perú 21, f.42v.
- 2) See Bailey 1999b; Levy 2004; Wittkower & Jaffe 1972.
- 3) Bolton 1917 is a pioneering study on the relation between the mission and the frontier. For recent studies on this topic, see Daniels & Kennedy 2002; Guy & Sheridan 1998; Langer & Jackson 1995.
- 4) For historical accounts of the Mojos mission, see Block 1994:33-124; Chávez Suárez 1986:187-312; Vargas Ugarte 1964. For Chiquitos, see Hoffmann 1979; Querejazu 1995; Tomichá Charupá 2002.
- 5) Carta del P. Francisco de Rotalde de la Compañía de Jesús, provincial de la provincia del Perú, para los superiores de las casas y colegios de dicha provincia, sobre la muerte y muy ejemplares virtudes, de su antecesor el P. Provincial Antonio Garriga, Lima, 25/II/1734, CJA, VU, Perú - Iglesia 3, n.8.
- 6) 'Estas dos alhajas fueron sus más prevenidas armas para salir a su espiritual conquista, y los más apetecidos regalos para alivio de su corazón entre las duras congojas, que después lo sitiaron amargamente cuando disponía la fundación del pueblo'. Carta del P. Francisco de Rotalde, Lima, 25/II/1734, CJA, VU, Perú - Iglesia 3, n.8, p.26. Throughout the article, the original Spanish is given when a citation is made from manuscript or printed sources of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.
- 7) Unfortunately, the inventory of the town of Exaltación made by Father Sebastián García in 1767 did not mention any images in the church except for a relic of the Cross ('santo lignum crucis'). Inventario de los bienes, así de iglesia como de temporalidades, secuestrados en el pueblo de Exaltación, Exaltación, 12/X/1767, ABNB, AM-V1-1, ff.40r-45r.
- 8) 'Esto es, la vida activa, y la contemplativa, las ocupaciones exteriores en servicio, y ayuda de los prójimos, y la interior, y estrecha unión con Dios'. Fernández 1726:347. This is an allusion to the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42.
- 9) 'Gastaba todo el día en tan trabajosos ministerios, y se reservaba el tiempo de la noche para la oración, y para tomar pocas horas de descanso, con el fin de poder el día siguiente volver a sus ordinarias tareas'. Anónimo 1756:71.
- 10) 'La vida mixta entre lo contemplativo, y activo'. Carta del P. Francisco de Rotalde, Lima, 25/II/1734, CJA, VU, Perú - Iglesia 3, n.8, p.28.

- 11) 'Mantenía en lo interior un bien cerrado oratorio en que trataba con Dios, cuando sus pasos, y pensamientos corrían a cuidados embarazosos a que lo sacaba de su silencio el mismo Dios'. Carta del P. Francisco de Rotalde, Lima, 25/II/1734, CJA, VU, Perú - Iglesia 3, n.8, p.24.
- 12) Smith 2002:35. On the use of images in the *Spiritual Exercises*, see Bailey 1999a:153-158; Bailey 2003:7-9; Fabre 1992; Freedberg 1989:179-180; Smith 2002:29-40.
- 13) 'En conocimiento de lo que conducen al aumento, y firmeza de la fe las especies, que entran por los ojos, y avivan las que interiormente comunica Dios a las almas, [el P. Miguel Sanchez] puso gran cuidado en promover los aseos de su iglesia, cuanto le permitieron sus fuerzas'. Carta del Padre Luis Benavente, superior de las misiones de los mojos en la provincia del Perú al P. Provincial Antonio Garriga, sobre la muerte, y virtudes del P. Miguel Sanchez, que en dichas misiones trabajó, murió muy ejemplarmente, aun después de haber gobernado la provincia, Trinidad, 27/IX/1733, CJA, VU, Perú - Iglesia 3, n.7, p.6.
- 14) 'Natalitium Domini ubique festa peragitur solemnitate. [ . . . ] Ornantur ubique cunae Domini intra templi adita; praesepe cum bove suo et asino consignatur; porticus excitatur desuper cum insidente stella quae Magos ducat: quae omnia ut oculos ita et animos novae gentis pascunt ac recreant: ut per ea quae subiacere oculis mysteria in tantae pietatis beneficia exigantur corda'. Annuae litterae anni 1711, provinciae peruanae a P. Ildephonso Messia Societatis Jesu, et eiusdem peruanae provinciae praeposito provinciali confectae et ad R. P. N. Michaelam Angelum Tamburinum praepositum generalem eiusdem Societatis messae die 1a julij anni 1713, ARSI, Perú 18, f.129v.
- 15) 'No estima otra cosa, sino lo que ve por los ojos, o toca con las manos'. Fernández 1726:220.
- 16) 'Lo que no cae debajo de los sentidos, deja muy ligeras huellas en su espíritu'. Chomé 1756:309.
- 17) On the classical cognitive theory, see Carruthers 1990:46-60; MacCormack 1991:15-49, 225-240; Strauss 1978:71-84.
- 18) 'Acudían los gentiles en tropa para ver esta maravilla [la iglesia], que los tenía pasmados, y de la magestad, y magnificencia del templo inferían la grandeza del Dios, que en él se adoraba'. Orellana 1755:111.
- 19) 'Se pasmaron tanto de los ejercicios devotos, que se practicaban en él [pueblo de los cristianos], que empeñaron a los indios de su nación a fijar su habitación entre los nuevos fieles, y sujetarse a las leyes del evangelio'. Anónimo 1756:75.
- 20) 'Los cristianos entonaron las letanías a dos coros de música, lo que a los bárbaros, que nunca hasta entonces habían oído armonía de buen concierto, les pareció cosa del cielo, y estaban como absortos oyéndola'. Fernández 1726:259-260.
- 21) 'El Hermano Lorenzo, estuvo primoroso, en los fuegos que previno la víspera de la fiesta, de ruedas montantes, voladores y cohetes de sogá, que se quedaron los indios, pasmados de absortos'. Carta del Padre Agustín Zapata al Padre Provincial Fernando Tardío, dando cuenta del estreno de su iglesia y de la fiesta del patron San Javier, San Javier, 23/I/1696, AHLP, LB-285, f.2v.
- 22) On the classical theory of wonder, see Cunningham 1960:60-103; Greenblatt 1991:19-21, 79-82; Iliffe 1999:192-198; Pagden 1993:162-169.
- 23) See Bernand & Gruzinski 1988; MacCormack 1991.

- 24) There are plenty of sources. For the Mojos region, see, for example, Carta de los padres que residen en la misión de los moxos para el P. Hernando Caveró de la Compañía de Jesús provincial de esta provincia en que se le da noticia de lo que han visto oído, y experimentado en el tiempo que ha que están en ella, provincia de los moxos, 20/IV/1676, ARSI, Perú 20, ff.210r-210v; Carta del P. Antonio de Orellana al Provincial Martín de Xáuregui, Loreto, 18/X/1687, ARSI, Perú 17, ff.104v-105r; Relación de la misión apostólica de los moxos, año de 1696, ARSI, Perú 21, f.36r; Altamirano 1979:32-33, 53-55; Castillo 1906:355-357. For Chiquitos, see Anónimo 1756:43-49; Caballero 1933:21-34; Fernández 1726:228-242.
- 25) ‘Sólo adoran a los demonios, no en figura de piedras, leño, o metal, sino monstruosísimos, como se dejan ver de esto indios; y de esto están tan contentos, y jactanciosos, que dan en rostro a los nuevos cristianos con su simpleza, en honrar en las pinturas, y estatuas dios mudos, y ciegos, que no ven, ni hablan, ni oyen’. Fernández 1726:229.
- 26) See Bailey 1999c:144-182; Baldotto & Paolillo 2004; García Sáiz 1995; Plá 1975; Sollers 1995; Sustersic 1995.
- 27) ‘La reina del cielo, despidiendo de sí tantos resplandores en las manos, y rostro, que todo el rancho estaba bañado con luces’. Fernández 1726:266.
- 28) ‘Una luz tan bella, que la del sol en su comparación era muy tenue, y despedía una fragancia tan suave, e incomparable con ninguna cosa odorífera de la tierra, que manifestamente se conocía, que era don del cielo: sus carnes se le pusieron tan delicadas como de un niño recién nacido; y se movía con tanta agilidad, como si estuviera despojado de la pesada carga del cuerpo’. Fernández 1726:118-119.
- 29) ‘Una cuadrilla de demonios feísimos, con terribles semblantes, y descompasados movimientos del cuerpo: unos con cara de tigres, otros de dragones, y cocodrilos, y algunos con apariencias de tan monstruosas, y terribles formas, que no sufría el ánimo mirarlos: echaban todos por la boca, y por las otras partes del cuerpo, llamas de color negro, y espantoso, y gritando, y discurriendo de una parte a otra, remedaban las danzas, y bailes de los indios, hasta que agarrándose del pobre neófito, que estaba todo temblando, creyendo que aquella fiesta era por él, hicieron gran fiesta, gritando: *Él, él es, Xarupá nuestro amigo, que antiguamente era nuestro devoto, y usaba de los hechizos, y maleficios, que enseñamos a sus abuelos*’. Fernández 1726:133-134.

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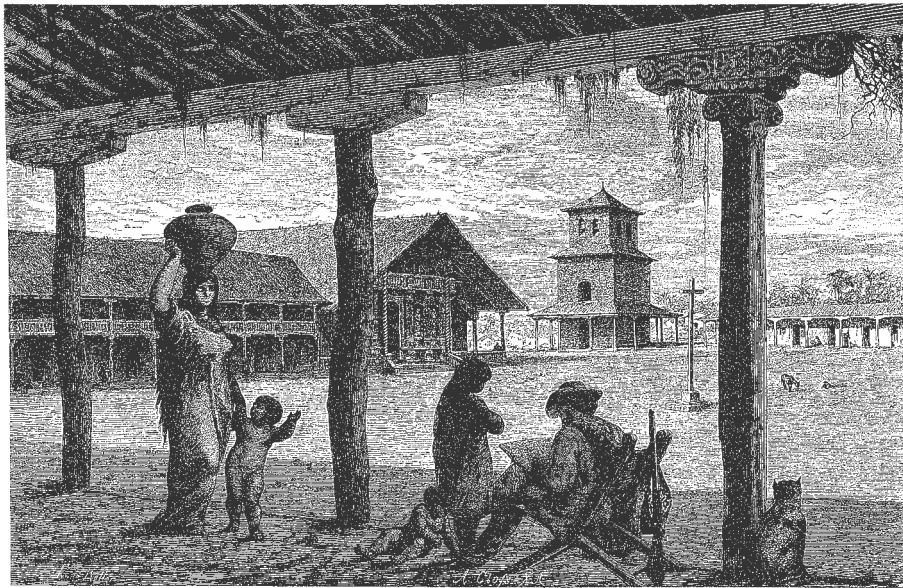


Fig. 1. View of the town of Exaltación, Mojos, Bolivia, in the late nineteenth century. Franz Keller, *The Amazon and Madeira River: Sketches and Descriptions from the Note-book of an Explorer* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874).



Fig. 2. Vision of Ignatius of Loyola at La Storta, main altarpiece, middle of the seventeenth century. Church of San Juan Bautista, Juli, Perú. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



Fig. 3. Church of San Miguel, by Johann Messner, 1750s. Chiquitos, Bolivia. Photo: Akira Saito.



Fig. 4. Church of San Javier, by Martin Schmid, 1749-1752. Chiquitos, Bolivia. Photo: Akira Saito.





Fig. 5. Christmas adornments, 1993. Church of Santiago, Coimbra, Portugal. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



Fig. 6. Church of Concepción, by Martin Schmid, after 1752. Chiquitos, Bolivia. Photo: Akira Saito.



Fig. 7. Church of San Rafael, by Martin Schmid, 1747-1749. Chiquitos, Bolivia. Photo: Tetsuro Ohashi.



Fig. 8. Main altarpiece, by Martin Schmid, after 1761. Church of San Miguel, Chiquitos, Bolivia. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



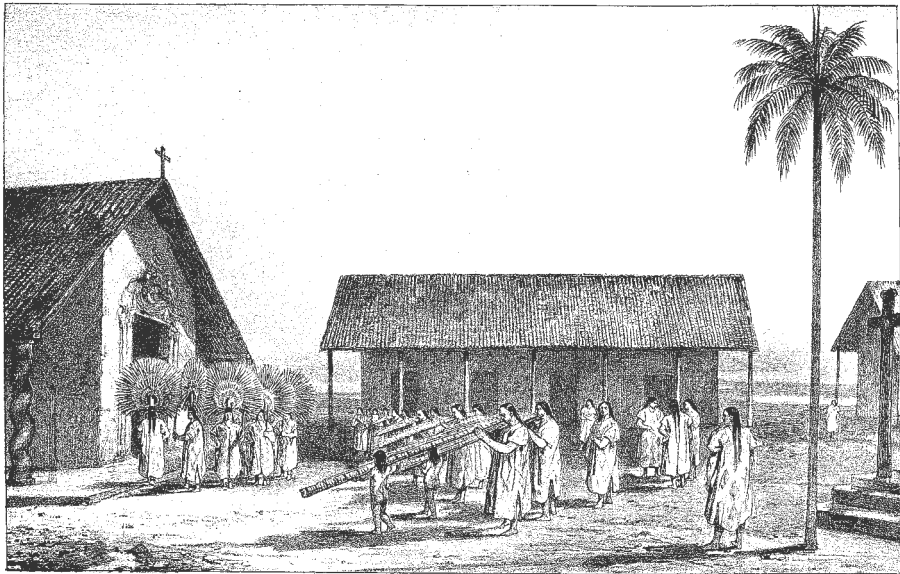


Fig. 9. Festival in a mission town in the early nineteenth century. Mojos, Bolivia. Alcide d'Orbigny, *Voyage dans l'Amérique méridionale* (Paris: P. Bertrand & Strasbourg: V. Levrault, vol. 9, 1847).

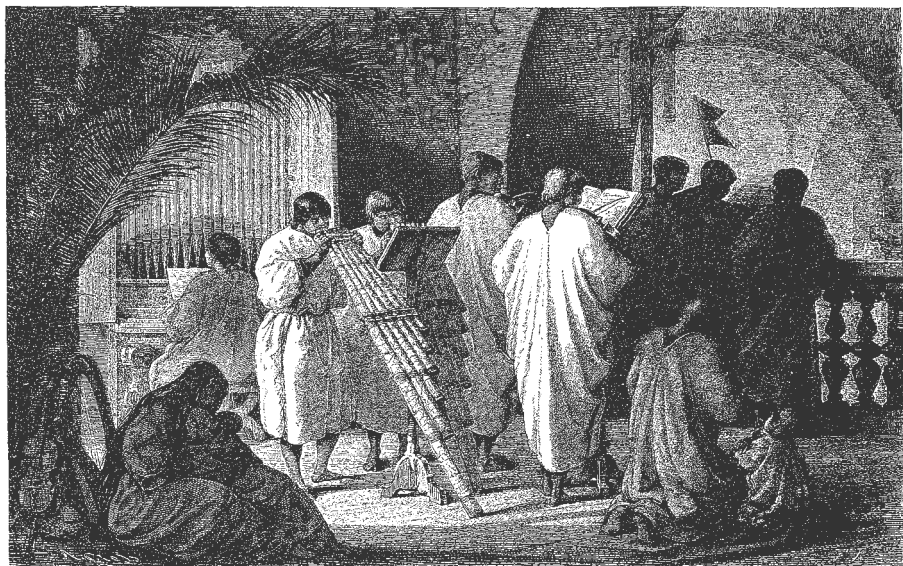


Fig. 10. Choir singing during Mass in the church of Trinidad in the late nineteenth century. Mojos, Bolivia. Franz Keller, *The Amazon and Madeira River*.



Fig. 11. The Virgin Annunciate, eighteenth century. Loreto Chapel, Santa Rosa, Paraguay. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



Fig. 12. Saint Peter, seventeenth century. Museum of San Ignacio Guazú, Paraguay. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



Fig. 13. Hell, fresco from the nave of the church in Huaró, by Tadeo Escalante, 1804. Cuzco, Peru. Photo: Hiroshige Okada.



Fig. 14. Hell, canvas from the nave of the church in Caquiaviri, 1739. La Paz, Bolivia. Photo: Akira Saito.