

Preaching & Teaching

16 Introduction	
De la cendre, Erbi- no.	Vne montagne, Oubou.
L'air, Caboupin.	Vne colline, Caf- gila.
L'eau, Touina.	Vne Samane, pri- re, campagne, Ouôl.
Vne riviere, Ei- cours.	Sable, Sacau.
La terre, Nôno.	Pays marécageux, Sabifari.
La bouë, Acouren.	Ille, Oubou.
Bourbeux, Accu- rûbeman.	Inde à vici, Maina.
Par Bourbeux, A- couren.	Vne pierre, To- bou.
rouina, Acon- rûbena touina.	Pierre à chaux, A- mipo.
Eau qu'on se tire, my de noule, Acoumpoman.	
ouana.	

Pierre Pelleprat (1606-1667).
*Introduction à la langue des Galibis de la Terre
 Ferme de l'Amérique meridionale.*

If ownership and possession constituted a single assumption that shaped Western encounters with the New World, the necessary conversion of the native peoples to Christianity was another such assumption. Missionary work was implicit in the very act of possession: to claim territory for a Christian ruler was at the same time to proclaim its indigenous residents incipient Christians. It was untenable that a Christian ruler should preside over subjects of a different faith: one law, one faith, one king, so the tag went. The geographical expansion of the west thus brought in its wake an enormous burst of missionary activity, principally Catholic, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

But missions to exotic peoples, in turn, gave rise to a host of unanticipated problems for which there were few precedents in Christian tradition. What did it mean for the Indians to “hear the Word”? At what point was baptism appropriate? What was the relationship between Christianity and Western culture: did becoming a Christian mean renouncing native customs and culture? How does the missionary translate the vocabulary of Christianity into language intelligible to indigenous peoples? How could such basic concepts as the Trinity, the immaculate conception, transubstantiation, sin and grace, be rendered in exotic forms? And finally: were indigenous peoples even capable of becoming Christians? Were they, indeed, fully human?

What quickly became clear to the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Jesuits, and other religious orders as they began to establish institutional presences in the New World was that a commitment to preaching and converting meant at some level a commitment to understanding native languages and cultures. Missionaries thus became the most acute and scrupulous observers of native peoples: they had very real investments in knowing “the other” as integral to engaging in fruitful missionary activity.

Understanding and being understood required some linguistic common ground. Native languages were studied and codified in western forms that permitted them to be taught and assimilated by neophyte missionaries. In those cases where there was no written speech, missionaries either created scripts or adapted the Roman alphabet to new uses. So what began as a missionary impulse to save souls resulted, among other things, in a repertoire of grammars, dictionaries, and other sources that helped codify and classify indigenous languages.

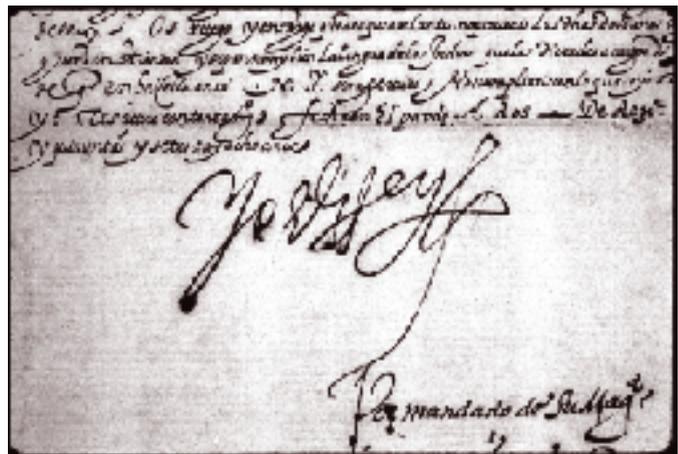
Alonso de Molina (1514-1585).
Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana.
 Mexico: Antonio de Spinola, 1571.



The Franciscan Alonso de Molina produced the first dictionary printed in the New World. It was the first systematic approach to an indigenous language. Molina was one of those remarkably gifted Franciscans who came early to Mexico, following Cortés's invasion. It was these first missionaries who created the richest ethnographic literature on Aztec culture as it survived Cortés. Molina's Spanish/Nahuatl dictionary was born of a double need. On the one hand, missionaries required a field guide to spoken life among the Indians. On the other hand, it was also a tool of a colonial policy that had made Nahuatl the indigenous language of communication, thus marginalizing all other spoken and written languages. Rather than forcing the Indians to learn Spanish, the conquerors required that all learn Nahuatl. Molina's *Vocabulario* is thus an early instance of a sort of linguistic colonialism, though one with a double edge. Not only did it try to consolidate linguistic difference into one language, it also effectively cut off the Indians from Spanish, the language of their new masters.

Philip II (1527-1598).
 Autograph letter signed to Pedro de Contreras, Archbishop of Mexico.
 Countersigned by Antonio de Eraso, Secretary to the king.
 El Prado (Madrid), 2 December 1578.
 1 page.

A bilingual clergy was key to royal policy concerning the conversion of the Indians. The king and his ministers understood full well that the assimilation of the Indians required an educated priesthood that could communicate effectively with them. In this letter, Philip II complains to the Archbishop of Mexico City about his practice of appointing monolingual priests to Indian benefices. Philip had previously ordered the archbishop not to appoint clergy unskilled in Indian tongues. Despite the king's command, the archbishop had still allowed many monolingual priests to hold Indian benefices. At best, these ill-prepared priests had memorized formulae and phrases from standard works, but they were in no way bilingual. The king orders this and similar practices to halt so that the genuine conversion and the reformation of the Indians can occur.



Pierre Pelleprat (1606-1667).
*Introduction à la langue des Galibis de la
Terre Ferme de l'Amérique meridionale.*
Paris: Sebastien and Gabriel Cramoisy, 1655.

(see illustration on previous page)

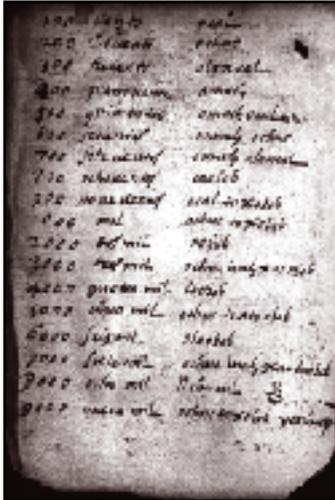
Pelleprat was a French Jesuit posted to the northern coasts of South America, where he worked with the indigenous peoples in this nominally Spanish area. Like Molina, Pelleprat felt the need to make the dominant language of the Caribbean rim better known among missionaries as an aid to their labors. Thus, his introduction to Galibi or Caribe becomes another one of those ethnographically valuable by-products that attempted to bridge two cultural universes. The publisher, the Cramoisy brothers of Paris, was one of the most important firms in seventeenth-century France, associated above all with a huge number of Jesuit missionary accounts. Indeed, Pelleprat's *Introduction* often appears as part of his larger history of the Jesuits in the Caribbean area.

Francisco Pareja (d. 1628).
*Catecismo en lengua Timuquana, y
Castellana, en el qual se instruyen y
catequizan.*
Mexico: Juan Ruyz, 1627.

It was not enough to have dictionaries of indigenous languages: basic instructional texts such as catechisms were necessary for missionaries in the field. In addition to his dictionary, for example, Molina also authored the first catechism in Nahuatl—printed in Mexico. Catechisms presented missionaries with a complicated bundle of problems involved in the work of cultural translation. Although some could continue to believe that the very vocabulary of Christianity was universal and eternal, most found it difficult to avoid translating the mysteries and practices of Christianity into culturally intelligible symbols for the Indians. Pareja's catechism is of particular interest because of both its simplicity and its comprehensiveness. It is also one of the earliest documents relating to the language spoken by the first Indians encountered in Florida by Europeans, the Timucuan. The systematic destruction of Timucuan culture by the Spaniards makes even catechisms such as this one precious legacies of a world otherwise lost to us.



Chirixc Sta. Eulalia tuhixc.
 Manuscript in Kekchi, Quiche, Latin,
 and Spanish.
 Guatemala, ca. 1544-1570.



This remarkable manuscript in at least two Mayan languages was most likely created by a missionary or local religious working with Indian populations in the middle of the sixteenth-century. It includes a variety of materials in Kekchi and Quiche: lives of saints, catechetical instructions, religious hymns and songs, guidance on marital arrangements, Church feast days, and an index. For such a manuscript to have survived at all is extraordinarily rare. The artifact provides a unique window through which to look at issues of cultural translation as they occurred in the field. The manuscript is actually several manuscripts together, a sort of all-in-one book for a peripatetic priest visiting different groups of Indians. With such a composite manuscript in hand, the priest could choose different readings for different peoples, depending on their instructional needs. Several sections in particular offer a glimpse of some of the more problematic cultural practices with which the Church had to contend among the Indians, including incest and polygamy. Books such as this offer a wealth of documentation on missionary methods as they may have been shaped by actual experience.

Pedro de Cieza de León (1518-1560).
Parte primera de la chronica del Peru.
 Seville: Martin de Montesdoca, 1553.



Mexico and Peru presented greater interpretive than military challenges for the Spanish. It was one thing to impose rule on peoples already fragmented internally and decimated by European diseases. It was another to make sense of materially rich, socially complex, and politically ordered groups such as the Aztecs and the Incas. For Diaz and Lopez de Gómara, the density of the Aztec world in comparison with those of the island peoples was sufficient to render them worthy opponents and hence fit ornaments in the Spanish crown. For those who came after the warriors, though, the burdens of interpretation were weightier.

Cieza de León was a remarkable figure in many ways. An accomplished autodidact, he went to Peru just after the conquests to seek his fortune. In the process, he became an acute recorder of a quickly passing Inca culture. He had a keen eye and an ability to describe peoples, their rituals and their beliefs. Coming from a richly ceremonial society himself, he was sensitive to manifestations of ritual and ceremony in other societies, and he saw in Incan society more than a few traces of classical antiquity. He contrasted the sophisticated world of the Incas with that of outlying indigenous groups, and he admired the political achievements of the Incas. At times he seems to be aware of the fragility of Incan civilization and its deterioration at the hands of the Spanish, and he took it upon himself to record those features of the society most in peril. At the top of the list was Incan religion and its rites.

Like many of the early missionaries, Cieza interrogated people and attempted to learn as much as he could about their beliefs and traditions.



And yet, also like the missionaries, he could find no other conceptual template for framing Incan religion than a naïve diabolism common to garden variety paganism everywhere. The solar monotheism of the Incas may have been admirable, but its virtues paled alongside grotesque idolatry and ceremonial excess. For all of the sympathy with which he wrote about the Incas, he too could not avoid the inevitable schizophrenia of other voyagers and travelers: the contradiction between civilization and religious practices in other cultures. Cieza and his world brought with them a simple, unanalyzed assumption that created an homologous relationship between levels of civilization and religious belief. The splendor of the Incan world seemed to betoken something better than the diabolism for which it stood condemned. Cieza did not try to reconcile the polarities; he could not as long as the homology remained intact.