

The Americas' First Theologies

EARLY SOURCES OF POST-CONTACT
INDIGENOUS RELIGION



Edited and Translated by
GARRY SPARKS

With FRAUKE SACHSE *and* SERGIO ROMERO

Foreword by ROBERT M. CARMACK

The Americas' First Theologies



RELIGION IN TRANSLATION

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For April, *naayátok wixoqil*

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Foreword

By Robert M. Carmack

DR. GARRY SPARKS HAS finally provided for all those scholars, students, and other peoples interested in the native peoples of Guatemala access to one of the most important documents on this topic, specifically on the Highland Maya: the *Theologia Indorum*. The various partial documents of this invaluable historical text have not been easily accessible because, in part, they consist of many versions scattered in diverse library collections located in different countries (especially in France and the United States). Furthermore, the *Theologia Indorum* was written in at least three prominent Mayan languages: K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Tz'utujil. Sparks has focused primarily on the K'iche' versions.

Before providing an English translation of the K'iche' version of the *Theologia Indorum*, along with Dr. Frauke Sachse, Sparks presents a highly accurate and comprehensive history of this important document. His account includes a superb summary of theological history in Spain and elsewhere in Europe during the pre-modern era. This early historical focus during the sixteenth century resulted in the arrival of religious scholars in Mexico and Central America, most importantly including the principal author of the *Theologia Indorum*, the Dominican friar Domingo de Vico. Sparks treats his readers with an invaluable summary in English of religious thinking and scholarship in the Old World, followed by the story of Vico's priestly activities during the first half of the sixteenth century in what is today the country of Guatemala.

Before turning to Vico's English translation of the *Theologia Indorum*, Sparks offers one of the most elegant and insightful summaries of "Maya poetics or parallelism," which along with other literary devices were to have a powerful impact on K'iche' and Kaqchikel documents subsequently written by the Guatemalan Maya indigenes.

Of special interest is Sparks's discussion of the Popol Wuj, translated in recent times into English and Spanish by well-known modern scholars such as Munro Edmonson, Dennis Tedlock, Luis Enrique Sam Colop, Allen Christenson (and soon by James Mondloch). He draws on their diverse translations and commentaries to both interpret sections of that renowned ancient document of the K'iche' people and to demonstrate how it was profoundly influenced by numerous chapters of the *Theologia Indorum*, and vice versa.

Sparks provides an English translation of many chapters of the K'iche' version of the *Theologia Indorum*. In general terms, he explains that (1) the *Theologia Indorum* was not based on "a previously written European work exported to Mesoamerica" but was inspired by references "to Maya practices and narratives based on direct conversations and ethnographic studies among the Maya"; (2) it was not written in "Latin or Castilian" but in the K'iche'an (and other Mayan) languages, and in "a high-register of moral, ritual, and ceremonial discourse attentive to traditional Maya rhetoric and poetics"; and (3) although "commissioned as an aid to the Spanish priests, the primary readers directly addressed in Vico's text are not fellow clergy but rather literate Maya" (p. 32).

Spark argues that it is difficult to fully appreciate Vico's theological strategy without reading the corresponding corpus of early K'iche' Maya religious writings, especially to understand the full force of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Maya responses to "Hispano-Catholicism." The *Theologia Indorum* was "a direct Christian reply to the Maya and their cosmogonic narratives as found in later contemporaneous K'iche' texts such as the renowned Popol Wuj" (p. 33). Sparks's English translation of the *Theologia Indorum*, and his numerous notes referring to words and concepts employed in that religious document, soon find their way into the Popol Wuj and other K'iche' and Kaqchikel Maya historical writings.

For example, Sparks's translation of the first of twenty-two chapters of the *Theologia Indorum* (p. 53ff), begins with a note on "the theme of names and attributes, including the existence and essence of God," and it includes a list of "creatures" such as "dog, hen, rabbit, lion, jaguar, falcon, condor, boa constrictor . . . that there is on earth" (p. 55). In note 15 of the *Theologia Indorum*, Sparks explains that such lists "echo the lists of creatures found in the cosmogonic section of the Popol Wuj." "There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest . . . Now they (the creators of the world) planned the animals of the mountains, the guardians of the forests, all the creatures of the

mountains: the deer, birds, pumas, jaguars, serpents, rattlesnakes, fer-de-lances, guardians of the bushes.”

To support this example of the close relationship between the *Theologia Indorum* and the Popol Wuj, Sparks cites other passages from that K'iche' document as recorded in and translated by modern scholars such as Tedlock, Christenson, and Sam Colop. Sparks makes similar references to additional correlations between the *Theologia Indorum*, the Popol Wuj, and other K'iche' documents cited in notes to this section of the *Theologia Indorum*.

Along with references to the writings of diverse scholars—including Frauke Sachse and Sergio Romero (who also contributed to this volume), and that of Carmack and Mondloch—Sparks also translates into English, discusses, and critiques other important K'iche' and Kaqchikel documents. In addition to the Popol Wuj, these documents include the *Title of Totonicapán*, *Tamub III*, *Santa Clara la Laguna*, and *Ilokab*. Besides pointing to possible errors committed by previous translators of these works, Sparks brilliantly refers to elements in these diverse Maya documents that were directly derived from the original *Theologia Indorum* introduced by Vico and his priestly colleagues to the Maya people of Guatemala.

Throughout Sparks's translation and interpretation of the *Theologia Indorum*, his translations of other K'iche' and Kaqchikel writings are accurate and highly relevant. They also contain convincing references to words and concepts derived directly from the sixteenth-century *Theologia Indorum*.

Sparks's notes in English relative to these important Maya documents also refer to errors committed by previous translators, including those by Carmack and Mondloch! Most importantly, his translations and relevant comments on these invaluable Maya documents constitute a major contribution to understanding not only Vico's *Theologia Indorum* but, perhaps even more importantly, also its influence on the many K'iche' and Kaqchikel histories written by the Maya themselves during the sixteenth century.

Acknowledgments

THE ROOT OF this project (or the *uxe'* as the K'iche' Maya author-redactors of the Popol Wuj might have called it) began almost twenty years ago when I first read about Domingo de Vico's *Theologia Indorum* in the endnotes of Robert Carmack and James Mondloch's critical Spanish translation of the *Title of Totonicapán*. However, at the time my work with Highland Maya *ajq'ijab'* (daykeepers) and cultural activists led me to dismiss scholarship on early Christian influence on indigenous Mesoamerican religiosity for instead, overly romantically and naively, something more "purely" Maya. It would be almost a decade later when, as a PhD student at the University of Chicago, trying to settle on a dissertation topic, that Sergio Romero, then an instructor of a K'iche' Maya language course in which I was enrolled, encouraged me to take another, closer look at the *Theologia Indorum*.

At the time only a handful of scholars, and really only beginning in the 1980s, had done so. Within the past decade interest and scholarly attention has gratefully increased as the text is too long and too complex not have the shared critical insights by others from across the human sciences, especially those in religious studies, history, and anthropology. Among those who have emerged to become constant conversation partners and now collaborators on a current multiyear project to produce a critical translation of the entire *Theologia Indorum* are Frauke Sachse and Saqijix Candelaria Dominga López Ixcoy, along with Sergio Romero. However, since the beginning of my work to transcribe, translate, and analyze Vico's work, my deepest indebtedness and amount of gratitude is toward tat Manuel de Jesús Tahay Gómez (*nima k'amol b'e*), tat Diego Adrián Guarchaj Ajtzalam (*ajq'ij*), tat Manuel Jamínez Tambriz (*ajq'ij*), tat Eduardo Elías (*ajtij*), tat Virgilio Vicente (*nima k'amol b'e*), and tat Santos Domingo Par Vázquez as well as former colleagues at Guatemalan Cultural Action (Acción Cultural Guatemalteca, ACG), especially tat Luis López de León (*ajq'ij*), tat Juan Carlos de León Ventura (*ajtij*), nan Matilde de León, and tat Juan Ixchop

Us (*ajq'ij*) for their time and willingness to be my teachers of K'iche' Mayan language, culture, and religion. Many of whom spent many long days specifically reading aloud and discussing Vico's K'iche' with me.

Many others also proofread and provided invaluable feedback on various translations and aspects of my analysis, namely Rusty Barrett, Robin Shoaps, Robert Carmack, Allen Christenson, and Ruud W. van Akkeren, as well as others who introduced me to the world of the Highland Maya through the language and literature of the Kaqchikel, namely Judy Maxwell and Walter Little, including Judy's "blessing" to include alternative versions of two *Xpantzay* texts. However, I am most grateful to the strong support I received beginning over a decade ago from my dissertation committee—William Schweiker, Robin Shoaps, and Kathryn Tanner—and Kris Culp as my analysis then tried to place Vico, his work, and that of the early post-contact Highland Maya into a wider sociocultural and intellectual history of religious debates. The initial seeds they planted of questions, corrections, and suggested directions of inquiry have only continued to grow as I have continued to research and translate Vico's work. Some of the results are in this book, as well as a companion book to this volume that is currently in process. I am also especially appreciative of the extremely attentive insights, corrections, and constructive suggestions provided by the two anonymous reviewers of this book. Former colleagues from the University of Louisville and current colleagues of George Mason University, especially the Department of Religious Studies, remain constant conversation partners who have helped inform the shape and content of this book.

Translation and analysis of texts, though, would not be possible without archival material in various repositories and those who know how to navigate them. I am specifically thankful for the assistance of Héctor Concohá with the Archivo General de Centro América, the Fondo de Libros Antiguos of Guatemala's Biblioteca Nacional, and the closed stacks of Archivo del Arzobispado of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Guatemala, the staff of the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, Aaron Sandoval and Chris Winters at the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago for acquisitions of copies of manuscripts from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, John Aubrey and John Powell of the Newberry Library, AnnaLee Pauls of the Firestone Library of Princeton University, John M. Weeks of the Museum Library at the University of Pennsylvania, John O'Neill of the Hispanic Society of America, Valerie-Ann Lutz and Brian Carpenter of the American Philosophical Society,

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I am very grateful for the support and guidance of John Nemec, the AAR/OUP Religion in Translation series editor, and then Cynthia Read and her staff for shepherding this book from the proposal and through the review and revision stages and for breaking down for me the new world of academic publication. I am also very appreciative of the copyediting done by India Gray to make this volume accessible and readable (and preventing me from embarrassing myself in so many places). This book is a book because of them.

Finally, I am most appreciative of my family who have provided unconditional support for this career and research choice, especially my parents who are only now realizing that I probably will not be applying to law school. My wife, though, knew that was not part of the package when she signed on, and it is near impossible to express the gratitude for a spouse's patience and tolerance for spending weeks if not months away doing fieldwork or detouring to visit archives (even when supposed to be on a family vacation), so for her unconditional love and support this book is dedicated. *Sib'alaj malyox chawe wixoxil, sib'alaj malyox chiwe iwonojel.*

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Introduction

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN conveyers of a worldview—any worldview let alone a religious worldview in particular—attempt to translate their recondite understandings (which, though highly arcane to even many of their own adherents and practitioners, still largely makes sense to those within that worldview) to others wholly unfamiliar with them and their religious, cultural, and linguistic worlds? And what happens to those freshly conveyed religious understandings once in the minds and hands of the “other,” the “natives”? To what extent did the missionaries really say what they aimed, hoped, or thought that they said in a newly learned local language? How much and in what ways or senses was it received, heard, and understood by their local, native audiences? Rarely in the history of religious thought, until the modern era, does surviving evidence afford scholars a glimpse into such exchanges and the various attempts to establish commensurability between religious worlds.

Ironically, the interest in literature in the Highland Mayan languages of Guatemala is generally limited to a few circles of specialists, namely those who either study these languages or historical events from the point of view of the Highland Maya (referred to as the field of ethnohistory), or those who conduct ethnographic fieldwork in the Guatemalan highlands. The major exception within this literature, of course, is the K'iche' Maya version of a set of pre-Hispanic cosmogonic and sociopolitical stories referred to as the *Popol Wuj* (also *Popol Vuh*, *Popol Buh*, *Pop Wuj*, or *Memorial de Chichicastenango*) since the 1850s and now translated into almost every dominant language of the world. Unlike their distant kin in the lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula or even of the ancient peoples of the Guatemalan Pacific coastline, the Highland Maya, with the notable exception of K'aminal Juyu', built few ancient metropolitan city-states and,

so, left hardly any of the major archeological sites with monumental architecture, murals, and inscribed glyphic texts on walls, stelae, elaborately painted ceramics, or carved jade from the so-called Preclassic (prior to ca.250 C.E.) and Classic eras (ca.250 C.E.–ca.900 C.E.). Nor did they write any known hieroglyphic (more accurately logographic) books, so their languages today are not as useful for deciphering the ancient Maya scripts. They did, however, write.

The surprisingly understudied post-contact writings of the Guatemalan Highland Maya are, in fact, among the oldest known indigenous texts written in indigenous languages by exclusively indigenous authors for an exclusive indigenous readership. The more well-known Lowland Maya texts—written in Yukatek Maya by Yukatek Maya authors for an exclusive Yukatek Maya audience—such as the nine *Books of the Chilam Balam*, from which much of the popular hype of 2012 dooms-day predictions were based (obviously prior to December 2012), are later seventeenth-century texts albeit with deep roots in the sixteenth century and pre-Hispanic periods. And so these Lowland Maya writings show, as do many of the contemporaneous texts in Nahuatl from central Mexico as well as texts in Quechua from the Andean region, the influence of the Catholic Reformation in New Spain—the effects of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Spanish Inquisition also known as the Holy Office (beginning in New Spain in the 1570s), and the Second and Third Synods of Mexico (1565 and 1585 respectively)—as well as the distinctive apocalyptic millenarianism and philosophical nominalism held predominantly by Observant Franciscans of the time—all features absent in the earlier Highland Maya texts. Other earlier surviving texts of the sixteenth century, such as those also written in other indigenous Mesoamerican languages like the Nahuatl of Guatemala and Mexico—while in native American languages—were written under the supervision or editorial control (albeit sometimes fairly limited) of Catholic clergy or for primarily, if not exclusively, a non-indigenous audience like the Spanish Crown, his viceroy, or the colonial administration of a legal court like an *audiencia*. In no small part this was due to the fact that most of the central and eastern Maya highlands of Guatemala as well as Chiapas, Mexico, were missionized not predominantly by Franciscans but rather Dominicans, especially Dominicans educated in the early Salamanca school of philosophical humanism and scholastic Thomism between the 1530s and 1580s. The relatively small number of texts by Maya authors—probably no more than forty documents altogether from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though more documents probably still remain

to be found—written in K'iche'an languages express a relatively unique, nearly exclusive indigenous, highly local or hyperlocal, pre-Reformations world, beginning only within a couple of decades of the encounter between Hispano-Catholicism and a native American people.

The approach taken by this strand of mendicants and their subsequent indigenous American students did not occur in a vacuum or without precedent. In the wake of the Renaissance and the emergence of humanism, Western Europeans' increased access to and renewed interest in the Greco-Roman literature of late antiquity brought about seismic shifts in thought, such as how to interpret and apply the insights of Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and even Augustine of Hippo. One of the early shifts, in the thirteenth century, actually slightly predating the Renaissance, was the philosophical theology developed by the Dominican Thomas Aquinas (ca.1225–1274) at the University of Paris, which was especially concerned with the question of the ability to know the essence of the divine creator by means of natural creation and particularly by the faculty of natural human reason. Scholastic Thomism argued that if the divine lawgiver, such as by the Decalogue to Moses and the Beatitudes from Jesus, and the author of the laws of nature was the same, then something about the former could be reasonably known from the latter. The physical realm was like, but not the same as, and also intended to align with, the metaphysical. In fact, argued Aquinas, divine love or grace not only did not conflict with nor destroy nature and its laws but rather perfected it. Therefore, not only the existence that there was a god but also some understanding of the essence of that god could be known not despite but rather in the midst of the radical differences between the divine and nature, namely through analogical reasoning. While the most accurate claims about the Christian god, according to Aquinas, were negative statements about what God was not—for example: not finite (infinite), not temporal (eternal), not dependent (independent or free), etc.—positive or affirming statements could be made but with the caveat that they were not claims of equivalence or sameness. In other words, the biblical god's goodness, strength, or kingdom could be understood but only as analogous to and not the same as anything thought of as “good” and “strong” in the natural world or as any specific or even imaginary idealized “king” on earth. Through analogy, relationships between seemingly unrelated things and ideas could be “discovered” and studies of the once unfamiliar found meaningful from the basis of what was already familiar.

However, Thomism, even within the intellectual circles of scholasticism, had its critics. For some, in particular the nominalists who questioned the existence of universals in a finite world, the theological focus or overemphasis on being in a doctrine of God overshadowed, if not also devalued and theologically threatened, an understanding of the sovereign will of God. They questioned the optimistic idea that there was an organic relationship between the metaphysical and physical realms that both joined in God's being—with God's essence as existence itself as Aquinas had argued—that is, the nominalists rhetorically challenged, unless God's will is not really absolutely free. Thus, nominalism, instead, was concerned with questions of divine sovereignty over those of divine being. Nominalists, mostly Franciscans, understood grace not as perfecting nature but rather grace (understood by them as God's sovereign will) as radically independent and foreign to nature (especially the human ability to reason and know).

This intellectual divide framed how Dominican and Franciscan missionaries—or, better stated, since some Franciscans like Bernardino de Sahagún and other clergy besides Dominicans also attended Salamanca, how those trained in Thomistic humanism and those humanists, nominalists, and others schools suspicious of it—approached the Americas and its peoples. It shaped the extent to which many Franciscans tended to view native religions as products of demonology while many Dominicans in New Spain less so.¹ It compelled the practice, or at least the stereotypical reputation of, Franciscans to baptize first and then educate indigenous converts into the Christian faith later, and Dominicans vice versa. Specifically, the optimist view of nature and analogical reasoning led Dominicans to be more willing to want to see their Christian god already present and active in the lives of the indigenous peoples. Dominicans and their post-1530s Salamanca cohort in the Americas were more open to appropriating native terms, images, and ideas for translating Catholicism, whereas Observant Franciscans, especially those antagonistic to Thomism, insisted on Latin or Castilian Spanish for key concepts or crafted new words, neologisms, in indigenous languages to refer to the new religious ideas for the people. Finally, generally for this strand of Dominicans, the Americas

1. See, for example, Cervantes 1994. Sabine MacCormack, however, seems to indicate that Dominicans who worked among the Quechua may not have had a greater concern for this ideology as related to demonology than their peers in New Spain, see MacCormack 1991, especially 3–63.

was the “new world” to be built up and integrated into as an extension of an increasingly greater Spain and Christendom, whereas, based on their millenarian worldview, the Observant Franciscans saw Europe with the excesses of the Medici papacy and spread of Protestantism as the waning “old world”—which is why God had given the anti-materialist mendicants the “new world” as a *tabla rasa* from which to build the new “spiritual” church and socio-moral utopia.²

In this sense both Dominicans and Franciscans had social projects intricately grounded in their philosophical and theological worlds, in addition to the efforts of many in these competing religious orders who were jockeying for the ear of the Crown and pope, for positions as faculty chairs at leading universities, to be head of the Spanish Inquisition, and to obtain the property of condemned heretics. However, it would be too simplistic to reduce the mendicants’ interests in the legal to personal or partisan gain, just as it would be irresponsibly naive to not recognize that such interests played their roles. However, much of the Dominicans’ social project occurred in the midst of the second seismic shift in theories of law, such as the general shift during the period from a discourse of the privileges (*fueros*) of a few toward a newly increased language of rights (*derechos*) for many if not yet all. Understandings of law saturated much of the early sixteenth-century debates from Church reformers—such as John Calvin’s university studies on Cicero and Martin Luther extending the division between grace and nature by nominalist humanism to a new distinction between gospel and law—and politics, such as Hernán Cortés’s legal claims to Mexico, as well as where theology and governance overlapped, such as Vitoria arguing for a higher “law of nations” between and above that of individual monarchs, or the “defender of the Indians” Las Casas as the first to formulate an idea of universal human rights. Perhaps ironically, what Cortés and Dominicans like Las Casas shared were their studies at the University of Salamanca, the humanism that Vitoria inherited there from his Dominican predecessors, and the Thomism that Vitoria grafted onto it.³ Dominicans stand out as advocates for defending the rights, including

2. In fact, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) was one of the most widely read books by early Franciscan missionaries and extremely influential in the establishment of their early dioceses in New Spain such that of Michoacán.

3. Specifically regarding Cortés see Elliott 2009, 180; for summary and analysis of Las Casas’s arguments see Adorno 2007, 61–124; and for Vitoria’s predecessors of the early Salamanca school of the fifteenth century, such as the spiritual and theological reforms made by Dominican Diego de Deza based on Renaissance learning, see Belda Plans 2000, 41–139.

property rights, of indigenous American peoples—apologetics they engaged in based on their understanding of natural law that was fundamentally rational and, by extension, the natural inclinations in all humans. Their defense of indigenous property rights occurred back in Spain before the royal court and theological debates—such as the famous 1550 one in Valladolid between Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda—but also in New Spain, implicitly if not also directly, as articulated in *títulos* by native elites. For example, as Rolena Adorno has argued, by the early seventeenth century, Quechua nobleman Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala employed the writings of Las Casas, especially his questioning of the Crown's correct use of Augustine's doctrine of just war, and Inkan lore to pen his "chronicles" and plead his case for his property, title, and Andean rights for regional autonomy.⁴

Thus, more intriguing at the broader level of the history of Western religious ideas and practices, the early K'iche' literature presents the first case example of the arrival and translation of a Christianity into a local vernacular for the purposes of converting that population and, in turn, the local elites who authored contemporaneous replies to the Christianity presented—indigenous counter-arguments to a newly arrived Christianity. Any previous possibilities of contemporaneous written replies—for example, in late antiquity by Greeks or Romans to Paul of Tarsus's letters in the 50s C.E., by non-Christian Judeans to the Johannine communities' letters in the 90s C.E., by Iberians to the Arian Christian Visigoths in the 400s C.E., by eastern Asians to the Nestorian Christians in the 500s C.E., by Celts to the Romanized British Christians also in 500s C.E., by lower Saxons to Charlemagne's Catholics around 850 C.E., or any other pre-modern milieu of Christian expansion into previously unexposed non-Christian regions—either never existed or simply have not survived. With the spread of Western European Christianity, or Christianities, into Asia later in the sixteenth century, historians begin to find contemporaneous writings by Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto intellectuals, usually of the respective royal courts, in response to claims presented by, for example, Jesuits (such as in India, China, Burma, and Japan) and Franciscans (such as in Japan). In this sense, the early Highland Maya literature is not a continuation of late medievalism but marks the beginnings of a distinctive feature of the emergence of early modernity, as well as from a distinct

4. Adorno 2007, 21–60.

religious and cultural venue, not in the Asia that Europeans sought but rather in the Americas they previously never knew even existed.

To this extent it is also ironic that the wider corpus of early literature written in the Maya K'iche'an languages by Dominicans and Franciscans has not been of more interest and by extension made more widely available to students and scholars of various fields of research. Logically, to more fully understand, let alone appreciate, a reply or counter-argument one needs to know the initial argument or perspective presented. Again, the letters of Saul or Paul of Tarsus for the early history of Christian thought serve as a helpful example. Historians of late antiquity, the Classics, and early Christian literature (including the Christian Bible and its New Testament) must wrestle with the fact that Paul's letters are responses to quite possibly earlier pieces of written or verbal correspondence that are now lost. So neither the initial issue presented to Paul—for example from the early Christian communities in Galatia, Corinth, Rome, or possibly Thessaloniki—nor their immediate responses, written or not, regarding his letters back to them is known aside from what may be hypothetically reconstructed from Paul's penned perspective. In fact, some current scholars of Pauline literature have hypothesized that Paul may have actually lost his epistolary arguments with some of those early Christian communities in Greece.⁵ Yet in the rich cases when documentary evidence written by various parties—dominant and dissenting—does exist, a dialogue may begin to be intertextually rendered from a jointly written paper-trail rather than hypothetically imagined from only the documents authored by one side.

And yet, while ethnohistorians and other scholars of the Maya mine much of the early writings of the Highland Maya, very little of the ecclesial documents in these Mayan languages has been rigorously studied, and most of it remains untranslated if not also miscataloged in archives in the United States, Europe, and Guatemala. The notable exceptions are some important early colonial era grammar guides (*artes*) and dictionaries (*vocabularios*) on these Mayan languages by clergy that are still used by scholars but with a suspicious attitude toward the priestly authors' theological agendas and biases. Ironically, one of the first and still to this day longest single piece of literature written in any native American language falls into this camp—the *Theologia Indorum* by the Spanish Dominican

5. For example, see Mitchell 2010.

friar Domingo de Vico. No single text has ever been copied for such a length of time—often by indigenous scribes—into so many indigenous languages nor in so many different indigenous communities, thus possibly giving sociolinguists (who would have little to no scholarly interest in the religious construals articulated by Vico), for example, textual data by which to comparatively theorize about the history of language convergence and separation among the Highland Maya since the sixteenth century. And for those scholars and students who are interested in the history of religious ideas documented in symbols, practices, and discourses—particularly of Christianity, especially in the Americas, let alone also among indigenous peoples of the Americas—critical study of the literature by early mendicant clergy and how they attempted to translate their Catholicism, a Catholicism to which the earliest indigenous authors wrote at least implied responses, has only just had its surface scratched.

What follows in this short volume is just that—a scratch at an intellectual itch that, in the end, hopefully for the purposes of further research into this field and related topics by many others, will prove to be unsatisfying and wanting.⁶ Specifically, especially given the wide scope of Vico's religious treatise, only a sample set of exemplary sections from the *Theologia Indorum* are presented here to give insight into his theological method, his resourcing and treatment of both Catholic and Maya source materials, his original interpretative or theological constructive moves (doctrines of God and idolatry, cosmogony, effigies and rituals, morals and theological anthropology, etc.), as well as his use of not just the K'iche'an languages but also more specifically the traditional poetics of a formal, high-register of K'iche' speech reserved for ritual and ceremonial occasions by Highland Maya even to this day. In other words, these selected sections of the *Theologia Indorum* are intended to provide merely a general but specified sense of a much larger and complex text that, in all honesty, has yet to be fully translated outside of a Mayan language let alone more fully understood by any reader since most likely the sixteenth century. Translating the *Theologia Indorum*, namely into English and Spanish at this stage, still remains a multiyear work in progress by a number of scholars in different academic fields. The aim here is to bring other students and scholars into

6. "If somebody scratches where it itches, does that count as progress? If not, does that mean it wasn't an authentic scratch? Not an authentic itch? Couldn't this response to the stimulus go on for quite a long time until a remedy for itching is found?" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Frankfurt, 1977, as quoted as the epigraph in Rorty 1979, vii).

the conversation not years from now, after a finalized full, critical translation has been completed, but rather while it is underway by Maya and non-Maya scholars.

However, the translated sections of the *Theologia Indorum* presented here are also selected because many appear to be among the more influential with regards to also being able to more fully understand the respective arguments in contemporaneous Highland Maya documents. With this sample of Vico's treatise and the samples translated from various K'iche' and Kaqchikel Maya texts, a present-day reader unfamiliar with these Mayan languages may still note the close intertextuality between these contemporaneous mendicant and Maya writings and, just as importantly, the range of responses by Highland Maya elites to not simply Spanish imperial hegemony or Catholicism in general but specifically to a particular, highly influential text by an individual priest. To that extent, not all the relevant Maya literature has been translated and presented here but rather only those Maya texts or parts of texts—and especially those Maya texts that have never been translated into English—that show possible influence of Vico's *Theologia Indorum* within the early post-contact Maya world.

Much of this literature has previously appeared in Spanish translation but never in English. Although a couple of the chapters from the *Theologia Indorum* presented in this volume have only appeared in English and never previously in another non-Mayan language. And a couple of the selections, namely from the *Xpantzay Cartulary* and *Popol Wuj*, have previously appeared in more critical and authoritative English translations, but their alternative presentation here is to provide in a single volume the most complete collection of Maya texts that show evidence of influence of Vico's theology—either through use of or in reaction to. Regardless, all the sections included here are original English translations made directly from the K'iche' and Kaqchikel language texts (with original manuscripts consulted in libraries and archives in the United States, France, and Guatemala when and where available) and also rendered with specific attention to the Maya poetics shared between these texts despite their differences: of particular Mayan languages (or dialectical variations within a Mayan language), of religious claims, of genres, of specific historical locales, of how similar source materials were used by Vico or the various Maya authors, and of other respective agendas.

On this note, some brief explanation of Maya poetics or parallelism is warranted, especially given that it is a pre-Hispanic indigenous rhetorical feature that both Vico and Maya authors strove to continue to master and

use as part of the persuasiveness of each of their respective positions. In some sense, the use of Maya poetics by a speaker—and by extension a writer—implicitly tells an addressee (an audience) that the addresser (a speaker or writer) is an authority; ought to know what she or he is saying; and does so by grounding their position, at least in part, in Maya antiquity—that is, in the authoritative language of the ancestors (if not also the understood symbols and practices of, the sage advice passed down from, and the stories about them). Furthermore, some of the most recent research on Maya literature and speech in general, but especially on the early post-contact literature like the *Popol Wuj* in K'iche' and *Books of Chilam Balam* in Yukatek, has revealed greater insights and complexities in formal Maya rhetoric.⁷ However, until this volume, little has been published on its prevalent, let alone competent, use by non-Maya, like the sixteenth-century mendicants who wrote, preached, and taught in Guatemala. For this reason great effort has been made to render both selections of Vico's *Theologia Indorum* and documents by Highland Maya elites into English but also in strophes or stanza formation that illustrate these poetics for readers unfamiliar with Mayan languages. Even modern-day professional K'iche' Maya rhetoricians who strongly disagree with Vico's Catholicism and his treatment of Maya myths and rituals—since most of them are also traditional Maya calendar priests (*ajq'ijab'* or daykeepers)—when reading the sixteenth-century K'iche' of the *Theologia Indorum* commented on how impressed they are that Vico had not only learned the K'iche' language so well but had also apparently mastered its eloquence. The strophic presentation in English here aims to provide only a glimpse into that dimension of the K'iche' Mayan language within Vico's theology.

In general, Maya poetics consists of repeated words or phrases that aim to both place emphasis on a particular point and to convey a larger, more general concept beyond the specific single terms but without losing the nuances offered in the respective particulars of each term. Typically, formal speech in Mayan languages does not use volume or a speaker raising her or his voice to add stress (though in informal K'iche' speech a speaker

7. See, for example, Hull and Carrasco 2012 for an excellent recent collection of studies on Maya parallelism as found in both Highland and Lowland Maya texts that date from antiquity, the colonial era, and present day—though, use of Maya poetics by non-Maya, such as missionaries, is overlooked. For specific attention on the use of indigenous Mesoamerican parallelism by mendicant missionaries in New Spain, particularly by Dominicans in Oaxaca and northern Chiapas but not as far south or as early as Dominicans in Guatemala, see Farriss 2014.

my raise her or his pitch to provide emphasis). And without the aid of anything like an exclamation mark, capital letters, or bold font in Maya writing (at least not until the twentieth century), repetition tells a readership or listening audience that a point is especially important. However, the repetition is not usually a mere duplication of the exact same word or phrase but rather stating it slightly, or even very, differently and expecting the reader or listening audience to capture a more abstract common notion (technically referred to as diphrastric kenning), a shared similarity amidst all the differences between the set of terms. For example, the terms for “mother” (*chuch*) and “father” (*qajaw*) might be placed side by side in a parallel structure to really be saying “parents” but in a way that does not obliterate gender distinctions and all the cultural connotations they carry in a Maya society.

In the late 1960s, Mexican indigenous language scholar Miguel León-Portilla and later U.S. Mayanist Munro Edmonson in the early 1970s were the first to recognize rhetorical parallelism in Highland Maya texts like the *Popol Wuj*. By the 1980s and 1990s, Dennis Tedlock and Luis Enrique Sam Colop expanded the understanding of Maya poetics and parallelism beyond merely dyads or binary phrases (called couplets or bicolons) to also include the recognition of sets of three words or lines of words (called tercets or tricolons) and sets of four words or phrases (called quatrains or tetracolons).⁸ In general, the significant difference between a couplet and a tercet is not just a third line but also that the third word or phrase usually does a different kind of work from the prior two lines. Whereas the second line in a Maya parallelism presents the same idea but from a different vantage point, and thus establishes a similarity-in-difference like an analogy, a third line breaks the pattern shared by the first two lines to convey a starker difference. Whereas a rhetorical couplet presents a reader or listener with two sometimes seemingly opposite perspectives on an idea—like views of two sides of the same coin, which cannot possibly be seen at the same time but must still eventually be witnessed to have a fuller idea of what the coin is—the adding of a third line to make a tercet tells an audience or reader that a coin never simply has only two sides, that the idea addressed is a bit more complex, since there is always also the rim of the coin—which is not merely another “side” but rather a qualitatively different perspective

8. The field of ethnopoeitics is treated more expansively with and in other influential works by Dell Hymes (2003; 2004), Dennis Tedlock (1983), and Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim (1995).

but on the same coin. In this sense a tercet may leave a reader or listener with an open-ended idea that may not be resolved for aesthetic or conceptual reasons, or it may be resolved later in the text if not in the immediately subsequent line. For a tercet to be resolved immediately, the author will present a fourth word or phrase that somehow parallels in structure, grammar, phonetics, common theme, and so forth not the third line but rather the first two lines to, in turn, form a quatrain. In this sense a quatrain is usually not the repetition of a word or phrase four times—since that might simply be two couplets in a larger parallel couplet pattern—but rather four lines in which the first, second, and fourth phrases share some feature not in the third line. The third line in a tercet opens a couplet for more nuanced thinking, and the fourth line in a quatrain closes a tercet to provide an audience with a sense of a completed idea almost akin to the final notes in a musical phrase to produce a sense of resolution, a poetic resolve not usually afforded with a tercet.

Within the past decade, scholars of Maya literature have continued to note and study the use of parallel structures in pre-Hispanic, early colonial era, and present-day Mesoamerican texts. Mayanists have also both expanded the understanding of Maya poetics to note how basic units like couplets, tercets, and quatrains can build into larger and longer stanza formations of five, six, seven, or more lines and how these strophes, in turn, form larger rhetorical patterns, like chiasmic structures within a text. Furthermore, scholars of Mayan languages and literature also note that there is not simply one kind of couplet. U.S. anthropologist Allen Christenson has identified no less than seventeen types or subtypes of parallelism within the *Popol Wuj*, many of which also often appear in later Maya legal documents.⁹ Applying the rubrics of Sam Colop and Christenson to the *Theologia Indorum*, it becomes more readily apparent the extent to which Vico and most likely his K'iche' "ghostwriters," like Diego Reynoso, employed Maya poetics to enhance the prestige and authority of this early indigenous Catholic theological presentation.

For example, one of the most prominent uses of parallelism in the *Theologia Indorum* occurs with Vico's attempts to talk about his Christian god with the three basic strophes just mentioned. As with simple couplets, Vico borrowed from traditional K'iche' theogonies, or myths about Maya gods, such as calling the creator god of the Bible *Tz'aqol*, *B'itol* (the

9. Christenson 2003, 42–52 and 2012, 311–336; Sam Colop 2012, 283–309.

Framer and the Former) and *Alom, K'ajolom* (the Bearer and the Begetter). But Vico also crafted his own Maya couplet—*Dios, nima ajaw* (God, the great lord). Any one of these is a simple bicolon, but Vico also periodically combined them to form a tricolon or tercet, such as *Tz'aqol, B'itol, nima ajaw* (the Framer and the Former, the great lord). The third phrase does not mirror the first two terms since they are composed of only one word each, specifically proper nouns, and the third line consists of a two-word phrase, specifically a predicate that modifies a common titular noun. In other words, by replacing the first term (*Dios*) of his couplet (*Dios, nima ajaw*) with a K'iche' couplet for the Maya creator god (*Tz'aqol, B'itol*), Vico moves his phrase from a couplet to a tercet.

Likewise, though on different criteria, Vico also occasionally combined both of these couplets to form not a set of two couplets—a couplet of couplets—or a simple four-line phrase but rather a quatrain by also including the Spanish word for “God”—*Tz'aqol, B'itol, Dios, nima ajaw*. The first and second terms are in K'iche'; then the third term breaks that pattern with the use of a Spanish word; and then the K'iche' use is re-established in the fourth and final line, thus bringing the stanza to a resolution. Through this use of Maya poetics Vico told his readership that both the creator god presented in the Catholic Bible and some of the creator gods spoken of in Maya cosmogonic narratives are all ultimately the same god though with some differences in the renderings that Vico aimed to clarify over the course of his theology.

However, this is not to say that tricolon, tetracolon, and longer lists of words or phrases that comprise a stanza are simply mirrored lines with no structural or grammatical disruption; there are different types of couplets, tercets, quatrains, and so on as well. For example, regarding the different types of parallelism, these three couplets that Vico used as names for his god are what Christenson calls functional association parallelism since each of the pairs are implying similar kinds of work with, for example, Framer and Former both referencing to craft something, Bearer and Begetter both referencing to procreate, and *Dios* and lord both referencing to reign over and to own. Furthermore, like English and unlike Spanish, words in Mayan languages are not gendered (i.e., neither designated as male nor female with the possible exception of the use of the prefix /ix-/ or /x-/ in a name to indicate that someone or something is somehow understood as “female”) but do have gender connotations. For example, mothers bear children and fathers beget them, so the couplet *Alom, K'ajolom* may also be implicitly understood as “Mother and Father.” And, while less

obvious to a reader unfamiliar with K'iche' culture, *tz'aqol* (framer) and *b'itol* (former or shaper) also respectively imply distinct female and male realms of Maya social life. So, unlike Vico's couplet of *Dios, nima ajaw*, the two K'iche' Maya lexical couplets may also qualify as a second type of parallelism called gender association parallelism in which opposite but complementary gender roles are paired by an author, customarily listing female first and male second.¹⁰ As a result, Vico argues in the *Theologia Indorum* that his Christian god is both female and male, and he explicitly states as much by using another gender association parallel phrase calling his god "our mother and our father" (*qachuch, qaqajaw*) rather than simply trying to explain the traditional Catholic doctrine of the first person (from the Latin *persona* or "mask") of the Christian triune god as only "God the Father."

Gendered pairs may also qualify as a third type of parallelism if referencing family relations and thus called familial association parallelism.¹¹ For example, throughout his *Theologia Indorum*, Vico, as a Catholic priest or "father," directly addresses his Maya readership regardless of their ages as "my daughters and my sons" (*numi'al, nuk'ajol*) as if to say "my children" but in a poetically K'iche'an way. Likewise, not only Vico's reference to the Christian god metaphorically as "our mother and our father" but also to Eve and Adam biologically as "our mother and our father" would qualify as familial association parallelism, while his calling them also "our first mother and our first father" (*nab'e qachuch, nab'e qaqajaw*) is, again, a gender association parallelism and usually always presented with first the female phrase followed by the male phrase.¹²

One other specific association parallelism occurs often in the *Theologia Indorum*, a material association parallelism where items are listed rhetorically together because they are understood to share some aspect

10. Christenson 2003, 44; Sam Colop 2012, 298–290. In addition to generally listing female terms before male terms, Sam Colop also notes that the other general Maya preference is the short term before the long term.

11. Christenson 2003, 44.

12. See, for example, the entry for "chapter 39" in the reconstructed table of contents of the *Theologia Indorum* in the next section. Note, however, that in that example Vico still lists Adam before Eve, thus reversing the Maya gender preference in that bicolon but perhaps to align it with how it usually appears in the Book of Genesis. Within this section of the *Theologia Indorum* Vico will also refer to Adam and Eve as *nab'e achi, nab'e ixoq* ("first man and first woman") thus still in the inverted gender preference of the Maya style. However, notably, in the Popol Wuj the divine grandfather Xpiyakok is also listed before the divine grandmother Xmukane (Ayer MS 1515, fol. 1r).

substantively in common. For example, when Vico lists the various forms of material wealth or money used by the Highland Maya he arranges them into a list of couplets like *k'o pu q'ana pwaq, k'o pu saqi pwaq* (there is thus gold and there is thus silver), *we q'uq', we raxon* (if either quetzal feathers or if cotinga feathers), or *we peq, we kako* (either if pataxte or if cacao) as if to say all varieties of precious metals, rare colorful plums, or varieties of chocolate.

There are, though, other kinds of parallelism that do not relate how two or more items in a list may be understood to be inherently associated to each other by an author. Some of these other kinds of parallelisms relate, instead, to aesthetic concerns. For example, in what Christenson labels as alliterative parallelism and Sam Colop refers to as morphological parallelism where, in addition to any similarity in some aspect of the meanings between the first and any subsequent terms or phrases, the pattern of key sounds as either consonants or vowels, or both, of the first phrase is repeated especially when read aloud.¹³ Granted, while not readily apparent to non-K'iche' readers, many of these phonetic repetitions have been rendered in translation through the use of alliteration in English. Such as, returning the earlier example of K'iche' names for a creator deity, the repetition of /-ol/ in *Tz'aqol, B'itol* has been conveyed by, instead, the repetition of an initial /f-/ and terminal /-er/ in the translation as "Framer, Former."

The other set of previous examples of symbols of wealth listed by Vico also illustrate what Christenson calls grammatical parallelism and Sam Colop labels syntactic parallelism, where the grammatical aspect or inflection of two or more terms is the same.¹⁴ However, this is more easily identified by both K'iche'an language and non-K'iche'an language readers in the repetition of verb forms. For example, in the opening section of the *Theologia Indorum*, Vico states that his text will present:

a teaching
 about God,
 the great lord,
 a clarification
 of the existence of and
 of everything done by God,

13. Christenson 2003, 45; Sam Colop 2012, 291–293. Tedlock's translation of *Tz'aqol, B'itol* as "Maker, Modeler" works in the same way but with an initial /m-/ (Tedlock 1996).

14. Christenson 2003, 45; Sam Colop 2012, 294.

a demonstration thus
 of everything of the great name that there is
 with the language of God . . .

The three nominalizations of the verbs “teach,” “clarify,” and “demonstrate” (*utzijoxik*, *uq’alajob’isaxik*, *uk’utunisaxik*) may also be translated as “its being taught,” “its being clarified,” and “its being demonstrated” and, as a result, provides a syntactical thread that helps tie this larger poetic tercet together.

Returning to the example of Vico’s discussion of Adam and Eve, he introduces them in a tercet of bicolons: “Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman, our mother and our father” (*Adan, Eva, nab’e achi, nab’e ixoq, qachuch, qaqajaw*).¹⁵ While the first two lines mirror a male-female or more generally an A-B pattern according to gender, the third line reverses the gender order to B-A for a female-male listing. Christenson technically calls this reverse parallelism or chiasmus.¹⁶

Extended further these multiple lines or sets of couplets, tercets, quatrains, etc. can form groups that compose, in turn, a larger strophic pattern. Many of these larger, often initially seemingly unrelated or non-adjacent lines when viewed as a wider structure form an alternative parallelism.¹⁷ For example, when Vico explains both specifically and generally what the biblical creator god made, Vico lists these two categories in a pair of quatrains that may be more clearly presented strophically as:

formed the land by God,
 formed the sun,
 formed the moon,
 and stars by God,
 formed fire,
 formed water,
 formed cold,
 and wind by God . . .

15. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscrit Américain 5, fol. 45v [hereafter BnF MS Amér].

16. Christenson 2003, 46–47.

17. Ibid., 45–46.