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CHAPTER 25

RELIGION IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD

KENNETH MILLS

WRITING on the diffusion of artistic forms in a transoceanic context, the art historian George Kubler likened an important work of art to a lighthouse emitting 'signals', which might be transferred officially, but might also be carried by 'unexpected bearers' to be 'relayed' to diverse people, including unintended recipients.¹ Kubler allowed that a 'deformation' of the 'original signal' might occur at various points of relay. This chapter adapts his model of diffusion and transformation to the transatlantic afterlives of a broader set of European forms and ideas, particularly those relating to religion.

Kubler's seems a useful tool to assist understanding of the transmission and fruition of religious forms to the outer reaches of the Atlantic world during the early modern centuries, enabling us to escape from traditional value judgements related to any 'weakening' of the light or any 'decline' in its richness, complexity, or value. His method insists on the original relay and the new form being accepted as equals, thus disallowing the possibility of religious ideas, forms, and practices of peoples across the Atlantic zone being categorized as imitations, copies, satellites, or subsidiaries. This challenges the presumption of European authors of the early modern centuries, and many authors since then, writing on the spread of Christianity.

What is most vital within Kubler's approach is that it recognized the possibility of a novel creation becoming 'its own signal', without being described as either derivative or degenerated. Almost as important is Kubler's openness to what might be called naturalization or localization, with the new form being understood as a 'composite' creation of people and circumstances at its new points and in its new places of transmission. By 'composite' Kubler meant that the object was 'composed . . . in part of the message as it was received, and in part of the impulses contributed by the relay itself'. Process is all-important within his frame of thinking, with the form in question

¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT, 1962), 17-24.

being characterized not as imperfection but as re-creation with the capacity to become more powerful, locally, through its own 'consequent agitations'. Focusing on the re-creation makes it possible to disregard, at least for a time, the circumstances associated with the creation of the original signal. What matters for Kubler is the new signal, which, in turn, grows, sets out on its own paths, attracts its own communities, and generates its own stories and re-creations. Recent publications on the vibrant propagations and unsanctioned adaptations of influential prints depicting important religious themes by artists across the early modern Spanish world suggest the explanatory power and applicability of Kubler's idea.²

In this chapter I contend that episodes suggesting religious transformation across the Atlantic world can be fruitfully studied in similar terms. I highlight moments in which religious participant-tellers and commentators found themselves at various kinds of interpretational impasse, face to face, as it were, with the often-disconcerting outcomes of unsanctioned religious change. Indeed, because sculpted and painted religious images were sometimes at the centre of such encounters, the connection is especially apt. Even Kubler's attention to some people's continuous striving after what they maintained was religion's 'pristine signal' is usefully instructive of historical contexts. Essentially, desires and efforts to authorize and direct, however powerful they might have been, were doomed, because religious ideas and forms—like the people who carried them—proved impossible to control, and frequently encouraged the fusions and fruitions their carriers and promoters most feared.

In 1569, Gregorio González de Cuenca, a judge of the royal district court in Lima, Peru, bewailed that, while 'the new church and the conversion of all these native peoples' had begun well, much backsliding had occurred. Dr Cuenca was a learned Spaniard of fourteen years' experience in Spanish America, who had visited the Peruvian provinces and reported on conditions of the native peoples. What he had witnessed pained him, and he attributed the spiritual regression to the laxity of poorly trained parish clergy and to the generally scandalous behaviour of Spanish Christians. As he wrote to the Father General of the Society of Jesus, he solicited him to send more *padres* who might act as religious supervisors in a redoubled evangelization effort.³

Cuenca's preoccupation was the spiritual condition of the indigenous peoples, of whom he wrote collectively in paternalistic terms describing them as 'the principal treasure and resource of this land'. He particularized their rampant 'errors', contending that these native peoples were even more 'vice-ridden' than their pre-Hispanic ancestors.⁴ What he, like many of his Spanish and Hispanicizing contemporaries, wanted

was a convenient bifurcation between peaceful, Christian, and Hispanicized indigenous peoples—*indios de paz*—in contrast to bellicose indigenous peoples—*indios de guerra*—who had not yet been reached by Spanish civilization and religion. Thus Cuenca, like many like-minded contemporaries, hankered after a clear progression; a conversion with no 'difficult middle'.⁵

Yet lived religious life was rarely like that of a well-choreographed public procession, and Cuenca's vagueness and silences beg attention. As the reports of others who got closer to indigenous people reveal, this indeterminacy occasioned the most discomfort. Cuenca was therefore hardly alone—either in Peru or in an increasingly interconnected world that came to encompass a great many ethnicities and a great many interactive processes of becoming—in his inability to face and articulate the 'problem' of change and heterogeneity on the ground.⁶ In religious terms, the Atlantic world between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries became defined by the ways in which those who were determined to change others frequently found the evidence of religious transformation painful, if not impossible, to behold.

In 1572, possibly because of Cuenca's solicitation, a Jesuit was on his way to Peru who would write regularly of his experiences. He was José de Acosta, who, after fourteen years in Peru and a few more in Mexico, would pen two of the most influential texts ever written about the Americas. The José de Acosta who wrote from the Panamanian isthmus en route to Lima was a man of limited extra-European experience, dedicated to preaching and administering the sacraments, and reporting to Rome.⁷

Acosta was exercised by the condition of the so-called *cimarrones* in Panama; that vital commercial link between the Peruvian ports of the South Sea and Europe through which tons of silver and other commodities passed in either direction. The *cimarrones* were escaped slaves and otherwise rebellious peoples of African, mixed Afro-Indian, and sometimes Afro-European descent, and offspring of the same.⁸ Acosta was as taken aback by the size and number of the communities, which might 'do harm to Indians and Spaniards', as he was by their growing reputation for daring raids. But worst of all was how the *cimarrones* unsettled his mind.

'These Blacks live a bestial life', Acosta explained, yet they were 'baptized', and he found among them one who christened the babies who were born. Moreover he discovered that they maintained some semblance of Christianity, with churches and crosses, and did no evil to priests or friars. The more Acosta thought over what he witnessed and heard, the more horrified he became with a *cimarrón* religious reality he

² Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middle* (Basingstoke, 2006).

³ Matt Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (Minneapolis, MN, 2009).

⁴ Colección Vargas Ugarte, MSS Tomo 20/6/fos. 12^r–13^r, P. Joseph de Acosta to P. Francisco de Borja, Panamá, 20 February 1572, fo. 13^r.

⁵ A. Fortune, *Obras selectas*, ed. G. Maloney (Panamá, 1993); E. Vila Vilar, 'Cimarronaje en Panamá y Cartagena: el costo de una guerilla en el siglo XVII', *Caravelle*, 49 (1987), 77–92.

² See, for example, essays by Javier Portús, William A. Christian, Jr., and Luisa Elena Alcalá in Ronda Kasl (ed.), *Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World* (New Haven, CT, 2009).

³ Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Biblioteca Felipe McGregor SJ, Colección Vargas Ugarte (hereafter Colección Vargas Ugarte), MSS Tomo. 20/2/fos. 4^r–5^r. Dr Cuenca, oidor de la Real Audiencia de Lima al P. Francisco de Borja, Prepósito General de la Compañía de Jesús, Los Reyes, 1 de abril de 1569.

⁴ Colección Vargas Ugarte, MSS Tomo. 20/2/fos. 4^r–5^r.

called 'a monstrous thing'. On the altar in one of their churches, 'in place of the missal', lay 'a book of aphorisms of medicine'. Acosta speculated that because the object was a book, the *cimarrones* assumed it 'belonged in a church'. That he went no further to ascertain what was the meaning of a book for the *cimarrones*, or of the intentions of those who put it on the altar, reveals much more about Acosta and contemporary Spanish Christian attitudes than about these ostensible Christians. Acosta went no further because he considered their self-Christianizing and unsupervised mixing of secular and sacred beyond remedy. He warned against having such people armed and languishing in 'dense and inaccessible hinterlands' on this crucial isthmus.⁹

Acosta's contentions concerning the inaccessibility of these *cimarrón* Christians, and his readiness to ridicule, rather than attempt to comprehend, their beliefs and practices, is suggestive on several levels. First, the Jesuit's reactions—his casting about for a simple explanation, his resort to guesswork, his ready despair and dismissals—were common early modern responses to local evidence of nascent self-Christianization. Acosta could reflect no further about *cimarrón* religious specialists who interpreted, re-created, and administered sacred rites and systems as they saw fit, with books of their choosing, on their own altars, and in their own churches. Second, these reactions came not only from a European mind fresh to America, but from one of the finest minds ever to apply itself to the histories, to the human and natural realities, and to the Christianization of the inhabitants of those lands.

What might have been considered first fruits by the *cimarrones* were judged first deformities by Acosta. The religiosity of many other people of African descent, whether under conditions of enslavement or not, was frequently treated thus by Christianizing agents across the Atlantic world. God's plan was thought to permit enslavement, and even his most talented preachers counselled Africans to be content with their lot, recognizing that if they converted in their hearts to Christianity, eternal salvation would be theirs.¹⁰ Even in the case of Alonso de Sandoval—another Jesuit who followed Acosta and did much, in his way, to draw attention to the doleful condition and the spiritual neglect of African peoples in the Americas—there was a tipping point beyond which he might squint but not proceed. Sandoval worked most intensely in the great Caribbean port city of Cartagena de Indias in the early seventeenth century, a place in which an African majority of 7,000 people outnumbered Spaniards by more than half.¹¹ As the title of his *De instauranda Aethiopia salute* (1627) captures, Sandoval was one of many who believed that an apostle—St Thomas—had evangelized African

⁹ See n. 7.

¹⁰ Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville, FL, 2006); 'Two Slaverys: The Sermons of Padre Antônio Vieira, Salvador, Bahia (ca. 1633), and São Luis do Maranhão (1653)', in Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (eds.), *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History* (Wilmington, DE, 2002), 218–33.

¹¹ Nicole Von Germeten, 'Introduction', in *Treatise on Slavery: Selections from De instauranda Aethiopia salute* (Indianapolis, IN, 2008), p. x.

(as well as indigenous American) peoples, and that he was therefore seeking to rescue a once-righteous people who had fallen prey to Satan. 'Restoring' the 'Ethiopians' to a state in which they would deserve salvation was even more urgent in the Americas than in Africa because so many of them there suffered in slavery. Insistent that peoples of African descent were wayward but not damned, Sandoval blamed their spiritual condition on incompetent clergy and he paternalistically prescribed patience and firm correction.

Whether on the isthmus of Panama, in Cartagena de Indias, in Massachusetts, on the island of Cuba, or in Brazil, the beliefs and practices that obtained among people of African descent throughout the Atlantic world often come to our attention because individuals and groups were investigated for purported errors, or because deviations from supposed norms were reported upon by concerned missionaries and clergy. Their beliefs and practices were judged to be everything from excessively exuberant to diabolical witchcraft. African religious transformations in the Americas were frequently composed of multiple dimensions at once—re-creating what Kubler might have called signals, signals with origins in Africa, Europe, and in the Americas themselves.¹²

In the case of the religiosities Africans conveyed to, developed, and lived in the Americas, those originating among the Yoruba and Igbo are two of many that scholars have investigated both for their resilience and complex fusions with aspects of Christianity, especially the Catholic cult of the saints.¹³ Religious transformations into Vodou in Haiti, and Santería (or Lukumí) especially in Cuba, are prime examples.¹⁴ In the case of the African diaspora, the dynamic presence of Islam—already a transplant and re-creation among a great number of Islamicized African peoples before the slave trade—added yet another heterodox dimension. Brazil became home to the largest number of Muslim African slaves in the Americas, where efforts to convert all African peoples to orthodox Roman Catholicism were uneven at best.¹⁵

Charting the interpenetration of religious systems in Brazil, Roger Bastide has argued that even when Catholicism took root as a living religious reality among Afro-Brazilians, a separation from 'Portuguese Catholicism' was distinguishable. What began in the enforced segregation of religious observances in the patriarchal atmosphere of plantation chapels, he argues, became racially divided observances of the

¹² See, for example, Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (Oxford, 1999); Kathryn Joy McKnight, 'The Diabolical Pacts of Slavery: The Stories of Two Mulatto Slaves before the Inquisition in New Spain', *Revista de estudios hispánicos*, 37 (2003), 509–36; Laura de Mello e Souza, *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross: Witchcraft, Slavery, and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil*, trans. Diane Groszklaus Whitty (Austin, TX, 2003).

¹³ John Ryle, 'Miracles of the People: Attitudes to Catholicism in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Centre in Salvador Da Bahia', in Wendy James and Douglas H. Johnson (eds.), *Vernacular Christianity: Essays in the Social Anthropology of Religion Presented to Godfrey Lienhardt* (Oxford, 1988), 40–50.

¹⁴ Laurent Dubois, 'Voudou and History', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43/1 (2001), 92–100; and Joan Dayan, 'Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods', *Raritan*, 10/3 (1991), 32–45.

¹⁵ Paul E. Lovejoy and Mariza C. Soares (eds.), *Muslim Encounters with Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

Catholic festival cycle.¹⁶ Not unlike the *cimarrones* encountered by Acosta in Panama, African Brazilians created Catholic Christianities of their own. Recent scholarship on remarkable lay saints of African descent—many of them women—from across the Americas suggests the extent of such religious re-creations.¹⁷ Moreover, Jon Sensbach's study of the ideas, actions, and mobility of the evangelical Protestant Rebecca Protten, who was converted by German Moravians, and became an itinerant preacher on the island of St Thomas (a Dutch sugar colony in the Caribbean), reminds us vividly that African religious transformations in the Atlantic world crossed confessional divides.¹⁸

Little more than a decade after Acosta's experiences in Panama, the Englishman Thomas Harriot and gifted illustrator John White encountered the religious beliefs and practices of the Algonquian peoples of the Carolina Outer Banks. Harriot, an established scientist and mathematician with a metaphysical bent, ostensibly created with his *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) an eyewitness account to further profitable colonization. Convinced of English superiority, and thus of the correctness of England's civilizing and Christianizing mission, Harriot's interpretative path seems familiar. Accounts from the Caribbean, and from Spanish and Portuguese America more broadly, had, for their own reasons, found similarly ingenious ways to present indigenous belief systems as simultaneously filled with error and an opportunity for Christian evangelization. Those approaching their responsibilities positively sought evidence that a pre-Hispanic apostle had worked among the Indians, or suggested that while the peoples they encountered had strayed into erroneous ways they still possessed the glimmer of Christianity's 'natural light'. Indeed, as Karen Kupperman has recognized, what Harriot and White identified and catalogued on Roanoke—all the flora and fauna included—was a 'quest for knowledge' akin to 'a religious search'.¹⁹

Nonetheless, Harriot presented native 'religion' as mistaken, if salvageable over time. He saw the Algonquians through a decidedly Protestant Christian lens: he could admire their civility and moral system, their general ceremoniousness around death and burials, and notions of a spiritual afterlife. Also, while Harriot bewailed their veneration of a distressing plurality of 'pettie gods' (called *montoác*) as idols in secluded temple-like structures, he rejoiced over their belief in 'one onely chiefe and greate God, which hath bene from all eternitie'.²⁰ This reassuring northern version of an alluring

¹⁶ Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*, trans. Helen Sebba (Baltimore, MD, 2007), 109–25.

¹⁷ For example, Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque, NM, 2007); Leo J. Garofalo, 'Conjuring the Coca and the Inca: The Andeanization of Lima's Afro-Peruvian Ritual Specialists, 1580–1690', *The Americas*, 63/1 (2006), 53–80.

¹⁸ *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

¹⁹ *Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony* (Lanham, NJ, 2007), 94; Kim Sloan et al., *A New World: England's First View of America* (London, 2007).

²⁰ Harriot, 'A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia', in David Beers Quinn (ed.), *The Roanoke Voyages 1584–1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1584* (London, 1955), i. 372–3, 345.

monotheistic principle, identified just as needfully by Catholic observers in Central and South America, might have satisfied Harriot that conversion was assured were it not for the dances and trance-like activities presided over by figures whom both Harriot and his illustrator White characterized as 'conjurers' and 'flyers', healers and sorcerers who invoked the devil.

These Algonquian religious specialists wore little more than a breechcloth and pouch for tobacco which, when ingested quickly in large quantities, provoked their visionary trances. Smoking the tobacco, they cast it 'into the air . . . with strange gestures, stamping, sometime dauncing, clapping of hands, holding vp of hands, & staring vp into the heavens, vttering therewithal and chattering strange words & noises'.²¹ White's watercolours, which were intended as plates to accompany Harriot's text, informed the copper engravings by Theodore de Bry illustrating the 1590 edition of the work. One plate, inscribed 'the flyer', depicted a specialist in full trance 'verye familiar with deuils, of whome they enquier what their enemys doe, or other suche things. . . . The Inhabitants giue great credit vnto their speech, which oftentimes they finde to bee true.'²² Another engraving depicted people gathered around a fire, shaking rattles and engaged in prayer, presumably to Satan.

Joan Pau Rubiés has warned that Harriot's 'cold, detached' presentation of an indigenous religion with some semblance to Christianity might have been to convince his readers how easy it would be to create a profitable colony.²³ Yet Harriot's purposefulness is significantly disrupted by his own written, and by White's visual, depictions of the conjurers and their ceremonies. The author's insecurities and fearful wonder about what he was observing and hearing were to be repeated in a startling string of later, and steadily more worried and negative, English Protestant descriptions of indigenous religious gatherings and their minister-healers compiled through the seventeenth century.

These other 'uncomprehending observers', as Catherine Albanese has dubbed them, who follow upon Harriot and White, begin with Captain John Smith and, among others, include Roger Williams, William Wood, John Josselyn, William Bradford, and Daniel Gookin. The features of Algonquin ritual that all found arresting were the 'strange' gestures and mutterings by the Indian practitioners, alleged familiarity with Satan, and perverse 'exorcisms' in the guise of curing the sick, and identifying these seemed more important than fresh observation to succeeding commentators. What we ultimately learn about Algonquin religious transformation from all such reportage is slight and tangential to their promotional purpose, but they make explicit the real targets of their disapproval: a dynamic native religiosity, centred upon prophecy, divination, and healing, that endured through change. Later, Algonquin processes of

²¹ Harriot, 'A Briefe and True Report', 345.

²² Thomas Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, introd. Paul Hulton (New York, 1972), 54, 62–5; Sloan, *A New World*, 128–9, and 118–19, 116–17.

²³ 'Texts, Images, and the Perception of Savages in Early Modern Europe: What we can Learn from White and Harriot', in Kim Sloan (ed.), *European Visions, American Voices* (London, 2009), 130 n. 26.

mixing would engage both with elements of Christianity and with African American folk beliefs and practices.²⁴

Many Christian missionaries and commentators across the Americas worked among peoples whose first contact with Christian religion had commenced generations before. These later-generation encounters were frequently unsettling in that evangelizers were confronted with how indigenous peoples had made their own what earlier Christian missionaries had left them. Perspectives on these joint creations of lived religious realities are illuminating.

Prime examples come from the two pairs of Jesuits who, in 1621, climbed from their residence on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, for a two-month stay in the town of Huarochirí and its mountainous environs just south-west of the capital.²⁵ Theirs was a 'flying mission' (*misión volante*), regularly conducted by priests from Jesuit colleges across Catholic Christendom. Pertinently, this mission to Huarochirí was a return visit in that a team of specially appointed Jesuits had ministered there in 1570. These missionaries had devoted two years to intensive evangelizing of native Andean peoples in the province, becoming their regular priests and establishing schools for children in a number of towns, before they proceeded from the *doctrina*, which (in their view) produced mixed results, to work elsewhere. Those who followed them in 1621 were to witness some of what had developed in the aftermath of the earlier missionary drive.²⁶

Fathers Juan Vásquez and Juan de Cuevas arrived to the sight and smell of *coca* leaf and animal blood sacrifices, and to the appearance of blood smeared upon the doors of the priests' and local magistrates' houses. They also discovered, on arrival, that a visiting idolatry inspector had imprisoned 'eleven famous sorcerers' and planned to investigate their errors. Then, after they had retired, one of the Jesuits was aroused by the 'very devout and elegant singing' of the imprisoned Indians. Enquiring how people 'so devoid of Christianity, and so given to the worship of demons' could know such songs and sing in such a manner, the 'sorcerers' explained that they had learned the hymns as children, 'almost forty years before, when *padres* from the Society [of Jesus] had been their priests'. The Indians admitted to having been subsequently 'deceived by the Devil who made them his ministers', while reassuring that they now felt the deception lifting, as the hymns had returned to their hearts and minds.²⁷

This evocation of the earlier implantation of Christianity by Jesuits having been rekindled by this return visit became the subject of the annual letter for 1621 to the

²⁴ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT, 2007), esp. 102–4.

²⁵ 'Letras anuas de la Provincia del Perú de la Compañía de Jesús, Lima, 24 de abril de 1621', in *Revista de archivos y bibliotecas nacionales* (Lima), 3/5, primera entrega, 30 September 1900, 58–61, transcribed and republished by Laura Gutiérrez Arbulú and Javier Flores Espinoza, 'Dos documentos', 202–4.

²⁶ Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Los jesuitas del Perú, 1568–1767* (Lima, 1941), 15; Francisco Mateos (ed.), *Historia general de la Compañía de Jesús en la Provincia del Perú, crónica anónima de 1600 que trata del establecimiento y misiones de la Compañía de Jesús en los países de Habla Española en la América Meridional* (Madrid, 1944), i. 149.

²⁷ Arbulú and Espinoza (eds.), 'Dos documentos', 202.

Jesuit Father General in Rome. Less salutary reports were to follow because, as Jesuits persisted with their mission, they discovered both obstinate attachments to ancestral ways and signs of unsupervised Catholic Christianity.²⁸

After an interlude away from the region, Fr de Cuevas returned, accompanied this time by Fr Rodrigo de Ávila. They worked first in San Juan de Chaucarima, a high settlement which the priests considered worryingly removed from the regular mass and doctrinal instruction available in the resettlement town (*reducción*) in the valley which Spanish officials had ordered into existence a generation earlier. Cuevas and Ávila were particularly perplexed by a 'large rock' which loomed in the Indians' consciousness, as if guarding the banks of their rushing stream, and which one indigenous witness insisted was known as 'the Devil's house'. The witness may have hoped to please his inquisitor. But just as plausibly, the rock's name suggests that the man was familiar with contemporary iconography of Satan, Hell, and the Last Judgement from his previous exposure to Christian evangelization, and that these had become transformed into authentically seventeenth-century Andean ideas.²⁹ The 'Fiend', the Jesuits learned from their witness, appeared at this large rock 'like a viper' but 'with big ears and a beard, killing whoever gazed upon him'.³⁰ The Jesuits responded by erecting a cross at the great boulder, hoping this would banish the devil.

The next reported experience of Frs Cuevas and Ávila related to a nearby town where they met a woman who carefully guarded in her home no fewer than 'fifteen saint's medals'. Their elation at this seeming witness of devotion was eclipsed as she explained how she had come by the medals and what they meant to her. The devil, she pronounced, had been in the habit of coming for her, whisking her off to a high mountain and, from there—much as contemporary preachers would have explained to her and the other townspeople the devil's temptation of Jesus—enticed her with 'such delightful gardens and flourishing meadows' that it took her breath away. When she had returned, still disoriented and afraid, from one of these visionary experiences she had confessed the occurrence to some Jesuits who had been passing through the town, who later 'had given her the medals, counselling that she confess her sins and receive communion frequently'. Subsequently, she had guarded the medals and followed their advice, so that 'even though the Devil still appeared to her, he kept his distance'.³¹

Ávila and Cuevas were even more perplexed when, on a small window within the humble church at Chaucarima, they found two small sculpted 'little animal' figures which had long been 'held in great veneration', because in times past, according to a sacred tradition ('una fábula'), these animals had proven their worth to the people's ancestors, especially by opening an important irrigation channel 'for one of their

²⁸ *Ibid.* 203.

²⁹ Kenneth Mills, 'The Naturalization of Andean Christianities', in R. Po-chia Hsia (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, vi: Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 2007), 508–39; Andrew C. Redden, *Diabolism in Colonial Peru, 1560–1750* (London, 2008).

³⁰ Arbulú and Espinoza (eds.), 'Dos documentos', 203.

³¹ *Ibid.* 203–4. See also Kenneth Mills, *Idolatry and its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

goddesses'. For this reason, these representations of the animals had been placed in a niche in the church they had built, in the hope of keeping their sacred structure secure. Meanwhile, the Jesuit visitors found, nearby, the mummified bodies (*malquis*) of ancestors with evidence of offerings, which they immediately either burnt publicly or threw off cliffs. Even more sinister for the Jesuits was a 'chapel' that the Indians had constructed, and within which were 'four idols at the foot of a cross'. This place seems to have been something of a cultic headquarters with which 'four sorcerers' were associated, one of them analogous to an itinerant preacher who 'wandered throughout the province, consulted by everyone', and 'led people into deception with spells and superstitious dogmas'.

Such information provoked further concern when it was connected to the reported discovery on 13 September 1621, by Dr Alonso Osorio, the idolatry inspector, of two sacred images that had become central to Andean Christian devotions in this locality.³² These were representations of Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier, two Jesuit *beatos* who had not yet been canonized and whose images were therefore not strictly appropriate for general Christian veneration. A statue of the Jesuit founder rested on the altar, while on the wall was an evidently half-erased painting of Francis Xavier, the missionary to the East. This veneration by indigenous parishioners scandalized the *visitador*, so he demanded that the sculpture be removed and the painting fully erased.

Like many of his contemporary Catholic churchmen in the Atlantic world, Dr Osorio reflected concern for devotional propriety around sacred images, especially when it involved the association of indigenous people whom he, and others, regarded as perpetual neophytes. Yet Osorio was a visitor in more ways than one. The evidence of his investigation reveals that he held no monopoly on religious thought and activity in Huarochiri, and much less on what ought to be local people's spiritual concerns. Rumours had fast begun to swirl in the town about the *visitador's* intentions for the sculpted Ignacio. The *kuraka* and governor of the province voiced the thoughts of many: that because Ignacio was not a saint Osorio planned to burn his image, as if he was a *huaca* or one of the Indians' ancestral *malquis* currently being incinerated and tossed into surrounding ravines. Various town notables, *principales*, and sometimes local office-holders testified. One thought 'that the *visitador* meant to burn the image and that everyone asked if it was *huaca*'. Perhaps attempting some damage control while saying mass in the cemetery, Osorio insisted that, while the sculpture of the *beato* Ignacio might be displayed in a Jesuit church, it was not appropriate for a parish church serving a 'town of Indians'.³³

The inspector's explanations for his actions did not impress the local witnesses. When the sacristan carried out the inspector's orders, taking the sculpted image and locking it away, some indigenous parishioners reacted with anger and defiance. People were 'up in arms', affirmed one witness. Most others spoke less of violence and more of emotion. People 'had wept', remembered one, 'thinking that they wished to burn it [the

image of Ignacio de Loyola']. For a *kuraka* principal (a regional governor and town notable) the prospect that Ignacio's image would be thrown into the fire was quite personal, because he as an Andean Christian had been the patron who had commissioned the image. For this reason, 'he and all the Indians cried in pain'.³⁴

More than a century later, in the north-eastern portion of what is now the United States, David Brainerd, Bible in hand, was concealed near a town he called 'Juncauta' on an island in the Susquehanna River. It was 'the Lord's Day', 21 September 1745. Brainerd was 'not more than thirty feet' away from a massive gathering of indigenous peoples whose rituals he observed for hours, struggling to comprehend what he was witnessing and pondering how to defeat it. For nearly two years, this Connecticut-born preacher had been a missionary in the region, often assisted by native interpreters, but his days in Juncauta suggested to him that native curiosity about Christianity which he had enlivened had resulted only in their rejection of the word.³⁵

Brainerd's trials in Juncauta had begun the evening before when an 'idolatrous revel' was enacted, and he was clearly frustrated by his inability to dissuade people from participating in rituals of nearly two days' duration and his inability 'to discourse privately' with people about Christianity. Because of his previous associations, Brainerd was allowed privately to witness 'nearly a hundred' people participate in a 'sacred dance' around a fire of 'prodigious height . . . yelling and shouting in such a manner that they might easily have been heard [for] two miles or more', where they sacrificed 'ten fat deer'.³⁶

Brainerd's method of 'discussing about Christianity' followed a three-stage process: selecting a potent passage of Scripture as a point of departure; summoning the force of God's word to descend 'like a mighty raging wind'; and moving his hearers' souls. At Juncauta, as at most places, Brainerd's intended hearers were indigenous people where he was partially or fully reliant on native interpreters to communicate. Yet at other times he sought the ears and hearts of 'white heathen' Euro-Americans 'of diverse denominations'.

Like other missionaries Brainerd found much to criticize and degrade in native religious culture, but he feared the signs of change even more. And like other religious participant-tellers across the Atlantic world, Brainerd feared what he felt the Indians were becoming, and particularly feared their degeneration as a result of interaction with unregenerate newcomers. The Indians of Juncauta, he contended, 'live so near the white people that they are always in the way of strong liquor, as well as of the ill

³⁴ Ibid. 206–7, 208, 209, 213, 214.

³⁵ Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), esp. 81–9 and chapter 2 *passim*.

³⁶ Brainerd, 20 September 1745, from the online edition of Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit at the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University. <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive/?path=aHRocDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbW9uZXdwaGlsby9uYXZpZ2FoZS5wbD93amVvLjY>.

³² Arbulú and Espinoza (eds.), 'Dos documentos', 204–16.

³³ Ibid. 210, 212, 213.

examples of nominal Christians'; he found this developing situation made 'it so unspeakably difficult to treat with them about Christianity'.³⁷

While particularly exercised concerning degeneration and corruption, Brainerd did not permit these concerns to overwhelm his critique of broader indigenous responses to changing circumstances and of the place of religious specialists within this process of change. He noticed that the people gathered with a special urgency and in response to the terrible spread of illness among them, and he concluded that his discourses on Christianity had been ignored because of the counter-attraction of half a dozen 'conjurers . . . playing their juggling tricks, and acting their frantic distracted postures, in order to find out why they were then so sickly upon the island, numbers of them being at that time disordered with fever and bloody flux'.³⁸

Having decided that what he observed was a religious response to a social crisis, Brainerd turned his attention, as did Harriot, White, and others, to what they all perceived to be the grotesque extravagance of the religious specialists. With only the mention of sickness to serve as context, the narrator focused upon what, for him, was the strangeness of the Indians' faces and bodies, their gestures and movements, and particularly the religious specialists who 'were engaged for several hours':

making all the wild, ridiculous and distracted motions imaginable; sometimes singing, sometimes howling, sometimes extending their hands to the utmost stretch, and spending all their fingers . . . sometimes stroking their faces with their hands, then spurning water as fine as mist; sometimes sitting flat on the earth, then bowing down their faces to the ground; then wringing their sides as if in pain and anguish, twisting their faces, turning up their eyes, grunting, puffing, &c.

Brainerd's interpretation of these 'monstrous actions'—hours and hours of 'hideous charms and incantations' that were 'peculiarly suited to raise the devil, if he could be raised by anything [so] odd, ridiculous, and frightful'³⁹—also bring to mind José de Acosta's response to *cimarrón* religious and cultural complexity in Panama at the end of the sixteenth century. Each concluded that what seems strange is diabolical, or ridiculous. Taken together, they explode any easy account of what Brainerd (or any other) was measuring as a failure or success of evangelization.

Although he does not state it explicitly, Brainerd's understanding of the Indians' 'disordered' health explains his rendering of a meeting he had with one of the religious specialists, a practitioner of the very actions he had characterized as 'monstrous'. As with Acosta on the isthmus, so for Brainerd on his island, 'monstrous' becomes the cross-temporal, pan-Americas code for the difficult religious and cultural middle which particularly worried our recording narrators but which they could not fully comprehend. In his account of their meeting, Brainerd invoked his authority as a first-person eyewitness, the

³⁷ Brainerd, 22 September 1745.

³⁸ Brainerd, 21 September 1745.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

one who had been there and thus possesses the right to inform.⁴⁰ Drawing upon this authority, he concluded that no sight 'ever excited such images of terror' in his mind as this particular specialist. His appearance suggested radical otherness, as readily animal as human in nature. He appeared in 'a coat of bear skins, dressed with the hair on, and hanging down to his toes' with 'a pair of bear skin stockings; and a great wooden face painted, the one half black, the other half tawny, about the colour of an Indian's skin, with an extravagant mouth, cut very much awry; the face fastened to a bear skin cap, which was drawn over his head'. The specialist shook a tortoise-shell rattle, 'and danced with all his might, but did not suffer any part of his body, not so much as his fingers, to be seen'. As the specialist approached Brainerd, 'his appearance and gestures were so prodigiously frightful' that he 'could not but shrink away from him'.

Brainerd's describing the specialist's dress as 'pontifical garb' is the first hint that he respected as well as mocked and feared the individual, and the continuing narration underscores that the specialist impressed and surprised Brainerd in equal measure. He had a 'house consecrated to religious uses, with divers images cut upon the several parts of it . . . [and] the ground beat almost as hard as a rock, with their frequent dancing upon it'. Even more significantly, he engaged Brainerd in lengthy conversation, seemingly without aid from an interpreter.⁴¹ The man emerged from beneath the hairy cloak of a frightening and diabolic other to reveal himself as more than the simple custodian of 'pagan' authenticity. He proved himself capable of discoursing with Brainerd about Christianity, some of which he seemed to approve, but more of which 'he disliked extremely'. At this point in the narration, the specialist—or at least Brainerd's rendering of him—was permitted to make a number of interjections and, arguably, to take over the conversation for a time. A sense of their parallel experience emerged. As Larzer Ziff has put it, it was as if 'David Brainerd [had] met his double'.⁴²

The specialist turned out to be a convert—not of the kind Brainerd was meant to be seeking, but a man very like himself, a convert on his own terms. As recently as 'about four or five years' earlier, he 'had been inattentive and lax, just like most others around him', but was now steadfast in a belief system from which he would never waver. Disgusted with those around him, including wicked-living white people, and with 'his heart . . . very much distressed', the Indian had gone 'away into the woods, and lived alone for some months' during which time God had 'comforted his heart, and show[n] him what he should do'. Since then, according to Brainerd's narration, 'he had known God, and tried to serve him; and loved all men, be they who they would'.

The man was 'a devout and zealous reformer', Brainerd declared, 'or rather [a] restorer of what he supposed was the ancient religion of the Indians'. Brainerd thus revealed by his very conclusion, that he could not conceive of any belief system being in flux, in the process of being created or fashioned anew by people such as the specialist,

⁴⁰ Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, CT, 1994), chapters 1 and 2, 17–87; Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

⁴¹ Brainerd, 21 September 1745.

⁴² Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven, CT, 1991), 10.

regardless of what they themselves perceived themselves to be doing. However Brainerd appeared both to sympathize with the man, and even to perceive in him a mirror of himself who was struggling to restore Protestant Christianity among an unreceptive people as frequently of European as of Native American descent. Brainerd observed that the specialist was 'derided among most of the Indians' because he was 'a precise zealot . . . who made a needless noise about religious matters'.

As Brainerd further detailed the man's religious position he unknowingly illuminated a selective indigenous convergence with Christianity. Perhaps this illumination was purely the function of Brainerd's own needs and self-absorbed manner of understanding and telling.⁴³ But perhaps it was also rather more. The specialist revealed that he had his own mind, and was no agent of the devil, because, as Brainerd pointed out, 'there was no such creature known among the Indians of old times, whose religion he supposed he was attempting to revive'. Moreover, when the specialist discussed with Brainerd the spiritual fate of people after death, he pushed the case for an emerging religious convergence even further, outlining his belief that the souls of the dead Delawares 'went southward', 'and . . . the difference between the good and the bad was this: that the former were admitted into a beautiful town with spiritual walls; and that the latter would for ever hover around these walls, in vain attempts to get in'.

The religion of the specialist, according to Brainerd, was based upon a number of unbending principles about which this man was impressively informed and reflective, not least because they were presented in disciplined terms that a Protestant Christian might admire: 'a set of religious notions which he had examined for himself, and not taken for granted upon bare tradition.' Indeed Brainerd came to respect the Indian specialist as a courageous man who 'relished or disrelished whatever was spoken of a religious nature', according to how it 'either agreed or disagreed with his standard'. The specialist's critical and high 'standard' became the key component of his integrity: 'he seemed to be sincere, honest, and conscientious in his own way, and according to his own religious notions; which is more than I ever saw in any other pagan.' Moreover, he exhibited 'uncommon courtesy', and opposed the Indians' 'drinking strong liquor with all his power'. Whenever he failed to reform people, he went off crying into the woods.

At least three things appear simultaneously to be true about the specialist in mid-eighteenth-century Juncauta: first, he plausibly communicated to David Brainerd both something of his life story and of his perspective on the changes which beset his people and world; second, he became, for Brainerd, a vehicle for exploring *his own* perspective on this same world in motion; and thus third, Brainerd's description of the specialist as a 'reformer' or 'restorer', and in terms evoking the Christian virtues of lay sanctity, not only obscures but also enables our ability to understand the man and his perspective in his highly interactive, transforming environment.

David Brainerd's conclusion about his native interlocutor 'that there was something in his temper and disposition which looked more like true religion than anything I ever observed among other heathens' reveals that once they began to communicate, the

⁴³ Gustafson, *Eloquence*, 81, 84–6.

specialist became for Brainerd another man finding himself, often and increasingly, alone in a mostly disappointing world. At the culminating point in Brainerd's narrative arc about his experiences in Juncauta in late September 1745, the specialist is a shunned figure in the wilderness, sharing his fear with Brainerd—a fellow outsider—about the transformations of his own people, about the Indians all around him 'growing very degenerate and corrupt'. The two are fellow-travellers in an early modern Atlantic world—reflective, doubting, worried men of faith, spiritual specialists with peripheral and penetrating perspectives upon the far broader middle ground of religious change of so many other people around them.

Appreciation for the global entanglements and interdependence which began in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is growing. Students of the outward flows of people, objects, goods, ideas, and behaviours across an Atlantic world are more likely to recognize their limits than were those of their predecessors a generation ago. Yet in the realm of 'religion'—or perhaps more appropriately religious change—notions of 'spiritual conquest', conversion, Christianization, evangelization, and missionization retain much of their power, pretending completion and thus obfuscating more complex and illuminating realities on the ground. Even proponents of 'syncretism' and 'mixture'—while arriving on the scene with considerable theoretical flourish and explanatory potential—can too often assume a passive, mix-and-match fusion accomplished by this or that set of heroes and thus opposed or ignored by another set of villains.⁴⁴

Through a series of episodes featuring unsanctioned religious change that troubled their original commentators I have suggested an alternative manner of exploring the religious history of the Atlantic world of the early modern centuries. The Kublerian thinking tool of a lighthouse emitting complex signals that are not only relayed to other places but also made powerfully anew, gaining new resonances and meanings, assists understanding of this religious history. My alternative pathway has several defining characteristics. The most important is an insistence upon dynamic and individual actions viewed from as many perspectives as possible.⁴⁵ I stress interactive religious frameworks of appropriation and innovation, and I highlight the often unintentional processes of transformation and untethering of original ideas and forms beneath judgements of imperfection, chaos, and failure. I suggest through concrete examples that religiosities can be both tenaciously held and continuously renewed, and that they are, by their very nature, in motion and thus incomplete. I argue that it is illuminating to get beyond 'first contact' in colonial scenarios, to points in time when that which persists is that which adapts, when people are

⁴⁴ Inga Clendinnen, 'Ways to the Sacred: Reconstructing "Religion" in Sixteenth-Century Mexico', *History and Anthropology*, 5 (1990), 109–10; William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Palo Alto, CA, 1996), 47–73; and Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, esp. 339.

⁴⁵ William B. Taylor in 'Two Shrines of the Cristo Renovado: Religion and Peasant Politics in Late Colonial Mexico', *American Historical Review*, 110/4 (2005), 944–74; Stanley Brandes, 'Conclusion: Reflections on the Study of Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in Europe', in Ellen Badone (ed.), *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 185–200.

Christianizing without a sense of conversion.⁴⁶ That many of these transformations shocked and dismayed commentators and investigating officials is a sign that we are exploring in the right ways and in the right places.

The sprouting shoots of religious re-creation in a vast transatlantic space reflect my enthusiasms and limitations, and these choices will not be every reader's. I disrupt the general scholarly tendency towards repeating hemispheric separatisms in matters of religion, and also explore similarities and resemblances across the Americas and their broader Atlantic world.⁴⁷ While my focus has fallen more fully on religious transformations among indigenous Americans in interaction with people of European and mixed descent, I do not discuss African religious agency as something distinct from the principal patterns of transformation and vital polycentricism I have traced across an Atlantic world. Finally, I have not presented the religious and cultural experiences of the largely Iberian Catholic (and thus more southerly American) zones as defined by a centrally controlled, integrated, and monolithic nature, in contrast to a more diverse, splintering and ultimately tolerant set of religious realities of the largely Protestant northerly Americas. My aim has been to account for meaningful and dynamic religious lives in a great number of places which were new found for all.

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⁴⁶ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁴⁷ Compare J. H. Elliott in *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, CT, 2006), esp. chapters 3 and 7 and Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009).

CHAPTER 26

THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW

ANTHONY PAGDEN

I

The European incursion into the Atlantic—the 'occidental break out'—after the mid-fifteenth century created many challenges and generated many kinds of 'newness' for all of those caught up in it.¹ For the peoples of the African littoral, of the Canary Islands, of the Caribbean, and of the American mainland, the contact with Europeans throughout this period was inevitably, if not always initially, violent. The Europeans, furthermore, were unlike anyone who had preceded them. Ocean-going vessels were infrequent in the Atlantic (unlike in the Pacific) before the fifteenth century. So, too, were steel and gunpowder. Both Africa and America had been the site of large political structures which the Europeans called 'empires', Zimbabwe and Benin, Aztec Mexico and Inca Peru, before the fifteenth century. But none of these, so far as we know, harboured universalistic notions of exclusion and inclusion, nor did any of them seek to transform the religious, social, and intellectual life of their conquered peoples. By contrast the European interlopers came with monotheistic religious beliefs, which they sought to impose, along with their own political and legal systems, on the peoples they were able to conquer. We know something of how the peoples of Mesoamerica responded to a monotheistic system, which made hard and disturbing distinctions between 'good' and 'evil'.² We know how some of the peoples of Africa and America adapted not only to European technology (whose novelty soon wore off) but more significantly to European jurisprudence and European conceptions of

¹ The phrase is John Darwin's, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire* (London, 2007), 51.

² See Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven, CT, 1994).

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

THE
ATLANTIC
WORLD
1450-1850

Edited by
NICHOLAS CANNY
and
PHILIP MORGAN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2011, 2013