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BOOK REVIEW

Words & Worlds Turned Around, Indigenous Christianities in Colonial Latin America. Edited by David Tavárez with a forward by William B. Taylor. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-60732-683-0

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Owen H. Jones[1]

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The edited volume, *Words & Worlds Turned Around, Indigenous Christianities in Colonial Latin America*, offers a nuanced approach to agency in the production and negotiation of indigenous versions of Christianity. The essays in this volume help us to escape from the binary of conqueror and vanquished or missionary and convert and allow us to focus on ways that missionary friars and native filigrees assisted each other and collaborated to remake or rework new cosmologies that synthesized beliefs from European Christianities into traditional indigenous worldviews in the Americas. This shift in focus includes translations and interpretations of Christian concepts from European to indigenous languages and symbolic systems that applied to diverse indigenous groups throughout the Americas.

Louise Burkhart's introductory essay contextualizes the chapters to follow in the larger debates in the field with a thorough historiography and theoretical framework that centers them in an epistemological scaffolding. William B. Taylor's forward provides anchor and gravitas to the volume.

This book is divided into four parts, the first is entitled *First Contacts, First Inventions*. In "Performing the Zaachila Word, *the Dominican Invention of Zapotec Christianity*," David Tavárez asks and answers the question—how was Christianity or the Christian message disseminated and strategically translated into Zapotec world-views and how was it received and re-interpreted by Zapotec lay-assistants and

✉ Owen H. Jones
owen.jones4680@sinclair.edu

[1] Annually Contracted Faculty, Sinclair Community College, Dayton, OH, USA

neophytes? Neither Dominican friars nor indigenous lay-assistants controlled Christian discourse but either through necessity or invention and the use of the Zapotec language, negotiated Christianity was the result. The ultimate interpretation of the Christian message was left to the indigenous neophytes whose quotidian practices converted rote prayers, rosaries, and songs into a new catechesis that they understood.

Julia Medejczak in "Toward a Deconstruction of the Notion of Nahua 'Confession'" shows through the etymology of two Nahua verbs from books one and six of *the Florentine Codex* the similarities of pre-contact rituals and Spanish ones like confession. Her methodology is focused and purely philological. James Lockhart's "double mistaken identity" comes to mind.

Gregory Haimovich's "Precontact Indigenous Concepts in Christian Translations, *The Terminology of Sin and Confession in Early Colonial Quechua Texts*" follows the same methodology emphasizing a philological approach to early evangelization in Peru. Haimovich reminds us that evangelization efforts in a language in which concepts like "sin" and "penance" do not exist necessitate a strategy that includes the engagement of approximate terms that often bring with them their own cultural signifiers. Medejczak and Haimovich belong to a school of thought that privileges textual deconstruction, linguistic focus, and philology.

Garry Sparks and Frauke Sachse's chapter, "A Sixteenth-Century Priest's Field Notes among the Highland Maya, *Proto*-Theologia *as* Vade Mecum" provides a complex contextualization of Manuscript 1015 from the Kislak Collection archived in the US Library of Congress. They identify it as a *vade mecum*, a "go with me" book that priests in medieval Europe and missionary friars in colonial highland Guatemala and other parts of Latin America used to proselytize. The manuscript was a source used in Dominican controlled areas based on the highland languages, Ixil, K'iche', and Q'eqchi', found in the documents bound together in their leather casing. Their analysis includes historical contextualization and eloquent descriptions of orthography and script, genre, and voice. They then break down an intertextual analysis of the core text including the "coplas" in K'iche' and Q'eqchi' that follow the teachings found in Domingo de Vico's *Theologia Indorum*. This chapter reflects the multi-ethnic composition of highland Guatemala and the approaches of the many religious orders that attempted evangelization.

Part II *Indigenous Agency and Reception Strategies* begins with M. Kittiya Lee's chapter "International Collaborations in Translation, *The European Promise of Militant Christianity for the Tupinambá of Portuguese America, 1550s–1620*." She argues that a collaborative warrior ethic facilitated a multi-generational and multi-ethnic devotional literature found in both written and oral traditions in Brazil. Lee exposes the layered techniques of evangelization from both Jesuits and Protestants and how they disseminated their message in the French, Portuguese, and Brasílica languages. Through song, dance, theater, recitations, and memory both the Tupinambá and Europeans adjusted to fit the cultural realities of the other, resulting again in a negotiated Christianity.

In "The Nahua Story of Judas, *Indigenous Agency and Loci of Meaning*," Justyna Olko shows theater as a tool of evangelization and source for negotiated Christianity as Nahuas interpreted in Nahuatl the meanings behind the story of Judas's betrayal. In searching for the European origin of the story, Olko proves that Judas is modeled on Oedipus Rex. She further proves that Nahuas transformed meanings and that Christian concepts were "lost" and found in translation. Olko challenges the notion of a "true"

Christianity verses a Nahua interpretation of Christianity thereby challenging the concept of orthodoxy.

Ben Leeming, in "A Nahua Christian Talks Back, *Fabian de Aquino's Antichrist Dramas as Autoethnography*," explores Christian themed plays authored by a Nahua in Nahuatl and the process of "autoethnography" in which the Nahua author attempts to reframe medieval European Christian concepts for a Nahua audience, becoming a mediator and transforming the text into a hybrid. Leeming keeps to the overall theme of negotiated Christianity. It is tempting to imagine that Fabian de Aquino chose his name to equate himself with Saint Thomas Aquinas, the famous European theologian.

Part III *Transformations, Appropriations, and Dialogues* begins with a shift in the discussion from the negotiated evangelization and reception of Christian ideology, theater, and ritual to the use of humor in the negotiation of Christian sexuality in John F. Chuchiak IV's "Sin, Shame, and Sexuality, *Franciscan Obsessions and Maya Humor in the* Calepino de Motul *Dictionary, 1573–1615*." As Franciscans attempted to record terms for sex and sexuality, the Maya of the Yucatán peninsula responded as informants in confessionals with *baxal than*, "playful speech," filled with sexual double entendres. These terms and phrases, a form of "ethnopornography," made their way into Fray Antonio de Ciudad Real's famous *Calepino de Motul* dictionary in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and defined deviance, sexuality, promiscuity, and perversity for Maya parishioners and their European curates in and out of the confessional.

Claudia Brosseder in "To Make Christianity Fit, *The Process of Christianization from an Andean Prospective*" presents an appropriated and transculturally "translated" ritual as symbolic speech. Performance of a negotiated Christianity reveals itself in the seventeenth century inquisition documents, local idiomatic expressions in the Chancay and Caxatambo districts of the Andes, and in material culture. The creation of a new, hybrid Christianity with elements of *huaca* religion was the result.

Mark Z. Christensen's "Predictions and Portents of Doomsday in European, Nahuatl, and Maya Texts" masterfully deconstructs *The Fifteen Signs Before Doomsday* contextualizing them in their European origins to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* among other European theologies. He then shows how missionary friars and their Nahua and Maya lay assistants reconfigured and interpreted the signs to fit into Nahua and Maya Christian apocalyptic visions of cyclical regeneration. A negotiated Christianity with words and worlds transformed allowed for new hybrids to emerge.

The final part of this book, *Contemporary Nahua Christianities* contains a single chapter. Abelardo de la Cruz in "The Value of *El Costumbre* and Christianity in the Discourse of Nahua Catechists from the Huasteca Region in Veracruz, Mexico, 1970s–2010s" emphasizes the practice of *el costumbre*, contemporary folk religion open to adaptation and sympathetic to Christianity. His approach to the anthropology of contemporary Nahua religion is emic, as a member of the communities he studies he brings an insider's perspective. He concludes that Christianity and *el costumbre* are complementary and that contemporary Nahua catechists and *rezanderos* understand the differences as well as the benefits of combining Christian and traditional elements in ritual practice. Cruz reinforces the overall theme of negotiated Christianity and the development of new ritual as a result.

David Tavárez's final conclusions tie the volume together emphasizing the unique contributions of each chapter as well as the theoretical and methodological ties that

bind them together. As the result of collaboration and negotiation, several Christianities emerged from reconfigured world views and translated meanings, significances, and words. The only criticism of the book is its coverage and what it omits. The volume does not include indigenous peoples in missions such as the Guaraní or the various groups that comprised the Chichimecs in northern Mexico who similarly experienced evangelization and catechetical documentation developed in their languages. This volume of essays is recommended for all scholars and students of religion and indigenous peoples of the Americas.