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## Introduction

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### (Re)Reading a First Coauthored Paper Trail

There are, in fact, very few times in human history when two or more sizably significant groups of people encounter each other and neither has any actual idea who, or even what, the other group is. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Europeans sailing from the east had no idea where they really were or what, let alone who, they were encountering. And the indigenous peoples of the Americas had no idea what had just washed up on their shores. While an encounter with the radically cultural and religious others is not new within the history of Christian writings, the arrival of mendicant missionaries—Franciscans and Dominicans—to Mesoamerica is unique because it provoked and now provides a paper trail authored by both of the voices of the culture contact: western Christianity, from late medieval and early modern Iberia, and to a lesser degree their indigenous American hosts, resisters, and converts. As is apparent in the earliest Christian literature, such as the letters of Paul of Tarsus (written ca. 40s–ca. 60s CE), Christian thought has always addressed, in some way, the intersection between aspects of cultures and claims of a Christian identity. Yet the encounter between Hispano-Catholicism and Mesoamerican worldviews—including Maya religion—is one of the earliest incidents, if not *the* earliest incident, to include contemporaneous *minority* reports by survivors of Christendom or colonial Christianity.

The landing of the first sustained presence of explicitly Christian missionaries on the *terra firma* of the Americas' mainland until the arrival, implementation, and enforcement of the Catholic Reformation occupies the period roughly between

1519 and 1572. In Mesoamerica, it circumscribes a relatively brief but highly distinct moment in the radical shifting of religious reflection. Such periods of first contact or encounter mark foundational moments for religious ecologies and for the critical and comparative study of religious thought and practice. During such contentious moments, the communities that engaged often felt compelled to translate or even reconfigure their religious systems and traditions. Whether real or imagined, the perception of crisis by a community often motivates its members, especially its highly reflective thinkers—local intellectuals—to make otherwise assumed or deeply implicit understandings more explicit and accessible, to restate what had often been assumed and left “unsaid.” During such seminal periods of interreligious or even intrareligious encounters—be they militant or conversational, or accompanied with coercive or persuasive force—communities reflect upon, assess, reassess, clarify, and re-present their claims about their discernment of explicit but also implicit religious meanings and values.

The early decades of first encounters between indigenous Americans and Europeans are often, and rightly, described in terms of the use of coercive force, with the stereotypical image of Spaniards landing with a sword in one hand and a crucifix in the other. The use of persuasive force by both Iberian arrivals and indigenous peoples, often mutually albeit rarely equally, is less appreciated. During these early decades, Dominicans argued for the removal of Spanish armed forces (though often also relied on them) and even questioned the Crown’s rightful use of force within emerging theories of rights and natural law developed largely by Dominican theologians—theories informed, in part, by the maltreatment of Native American peoples and concern for their defense. And during these early decades the first explicit Christian theology to be composed in either North or South America was written, the *Theologia Indorum* by Friar Domingo de Vico, O.P. Originally most likely written in the Highland Mayan language of K’iche’, it was soon translated into various other Highland Mayan languages but never into Latin or fully into Spanish or any other European language. It was completed just a year prior to Vico’s murder, and still remains the longest single work on any topic to have been written in a Native American language. And yet, within only a couple of decades, it seems to have been broken up into smaller works that were continuously copied and used by both local mendicant priests and literate Highland Maya over the course of the next centuries and eventually misidentified and wrongly cataloged in European and US colonial manuscript collections. Likewise, its principal author, Domingo de Vico, all but vanished from the later histories and studies of the colonial Americas, Mesoamerica, Catholicism, religion in general, or Highland Maya language and literature. Except for a handful of scholars, even among Mesoamericanists, the mention of the name “Vico” usually refers to the Italian humanist Giambattista Vico

(1668–1744). Domingo de Vico and his writings among the Highland Maya of Guatemala have largely fallen into the fault lines between the late medieval period and early modernity, and between the “Old” and “New Worlds.”

However, explicit and implicit traces of Vico’s linguistic, ethnographic, and theological work can be found in many of the later writings by colonial-period mendicants among the Highland Maya of Guatemala. By the early nineteenth century, amid the political and ideological battles between Liberals and Conservatives in the region, clerical and Maya paper trails thin out and any evidence of the continued influence of Vico’s work wanes. Furthermore, all surviving copies of his writings managed to migrate out of Guatemala, mainly to France and the United States. But by the late twentieth century, trends within Latin American social and theological movements were building on a foundation that Vico laid centuries prior, though unknowingly by many of those invested in these theological movements or even by the outside scholars who are studying them. Such movements include liberation theology and inculturation theology, including the strand of Christian theology, now produced by indigenous Americans who constructively engage non-Christian native rituals, narratives, and symbols, called Indian theology (*teología india*) in general or Maya theology (*teología mayense*) by specifically Maya Catholics. The significance of recovering and tracing the legacy of Vico and his *Theologia Indorum* directly affects the study of early modernity and Mesoamerica but also extends latently into studies of religious movements among present-day Maya and other indigenous Americans.

Perhaps ironically in the light of the stereotypical portrayals of sixteenth-century mendicant missionaries entering the Americas, Asia, and Pacific Islands, the earliest surviving documents that mention Vico or his *Theologia Indorum* are not Spanish but rather Maya texts, by Highland Maya authors, in Highland Mayan languages, mostly addressing a Highland Maya readership. Coincidentally, the period, place, and even language in which Vico wrote the Americas’ first Christian theology are the same as some of the first postcontact writings by any indigenous Americans, including one of the most important—the Popol Wuj.<sup>1</sup> Vico and many of the Maya authors learned from each other and drew from similar prehispanic Maya sources for their respective works. Furthermore, many of the first entirely native Maya writings—that is to say, writings almost entirely in an indigenous language, by indigenous authors, and primarily if not exclusively for an indigenous audience—constructively engaged with and reacted against not simply a generic hegemon of Christendom but rather specifically the *Theologia Indorum*.<sup>2</sup> While most of these early Highland Maya texts take the form of legal genres and provide insights into their local social structures and concerns, they are also intermeshed with their religious worldview and may also be read as highly localized and even

kinship-based theologies. Therefore, the early Highland Maya literature (along with that by non-Maya) must be engaged before even beginning to fully recover, reconstruct, and understand Vico and his theological project. Conversely, any reading of the early postcontact texts by Guatemala Maya (as well as those by many fellow and later clergy in the region) will not unpack the fuller force of their respective arguments or appreciate their use of Maya and mendicant sources without first understanding Vico and the *Theologia Indorum*.

### HOW TO LEARN TO STOP WORRYING AND ENGAGE THEOLOGY

Too often narrowly misunderstood as apologetic, dogmatic, doctrinal, or confessional by scholars outside of religious studies, “theology” in a broader sense of the term may be understood as simply a community’s metadiscourse on its own religious worldview. “Religion” is here defined as a community’s articulation of its meanings and values, manifested through speech, symbols, and practices (including ceremonial rites or rituals and quotidian ethics). Religion also entails discernment of what community members understand by the “proper” selection and ordering of those meanings and values from all other possibilities, as well as reflexive and critical discernment of criteria by which they understand how such reflection, selection, and ordering ought to occur. In this respect, the interdisciplinary field of religious studies involves the rigorous, critical, analytical, and reflective examination of understandings of what may be qualified as “the religious” and its relations with other, often intermeshed realms of life, particularly when represented by written evidence.

However, within this broader, perhaps more Aristotelian (i.e., pre-Christian, observational, survey-based approach) understanding of *theos-logia*, or “talk about god,” the historically Catholic (and Eastern Orthodox) understanding of theology also implies engagement with not only canonized scriptural information—the Bible—but also with authoritative understandings that have been “handed down”—*traditio*, or tradition.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, this Christian intellectual tradition—in the strict sense of the term—includes the officialized voices in texts that postdate those of the New Testament. Those voices have come from local, regional, and empire-wide synods and councils since late antiquity, and include influential letters, treatises, lectures, sermons, and dialogues. The Festal letter of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria of 367 CE, for example, played a decisive role in standardizing or “canonizing” the twenty-seven books that would be the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> By the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Catholic Church explicitly spelled out that scripture and “tradition” were mutually informative and equally authoritative, in contrast with the Protestant position of *sola scriptura*. The apparent problem of

internal consistency—that these various sources did not necessarily seem to agree among themselves—was not lost on medieval theologians. Like in his *Sic et Non*, Peter Abelard developed a philosophical theology that prioritized the use of reason, especially from pre-Christian Greco-Roman philosophies. His approach became foundational within the later “school men” movement, or scholasticism, along with Peter Lombard’s *Sententiae* or *Four Books of Sentences*, which was eventually established as the standard text of the medieval curriculum. On the other hand, “handed down” truths were also practices, such as the liturgical traditions of rites and rituals, as well as increasingly standardized hymns, prayers, and verbal formulas. *Lex orandi lex credendi* (“the law of praying is the law of believing” or “what is prayed is what is to be believed”) summarizes the understanding by late antiquity that previous ritual performances and practices served both as precedents and authoritative reservoirs for thought. The production of Catholic theology and its assent within the Catholic Church as “proper” or “straight” opinion, *ortho-doxa*, requires the engagement of an accumulated corpus of intellectual as well as devotional histories.

Recent ethnohistorical studies of indigenous Mesoamerican-authored pastoral material has involved an assessment of the extent to which early colonial texts present orthodox, heterodox, or even heretical positions—that is, an assessment of the extent to which they are indigenous Mesoamerican Catholicisms. Such an evaluation is beyond the scope of this book.<sup>5</sup> For one, understandings of what constitutes and qualifies as “orthodox” or “heterodox” in Catholicism, especially by the turn of the sixteenth century, was precisely what was up for debate within most of western and central Europe.<sup>6</sup> The canons of the Tridentine Catholic Church took decades to permeate and be interpreted, applied, and enforced throughout Europe, let alone the Americas. Furthermore, the identification of theology in the indigenous Mesoamerican record ought not to necessarily consist of *whether* the construals and content align with widely notable Christian understandings but *how* they came about and the extent to which they engaged sources of the Catholic “tradition.” Therefore, the occasional referring to these native texts as articulations of a Highland Maya or K’iche’an Catholicism is not a doctrinal evaluation in this book but rather is merely indicative of a religious identity in the throes of emerging dialogically with a particular strand of Catholic thought and practices conveyed and translated during a particular period. The fact that Maya authors may have produced their theology without the fuller engagement of the Catholic tradition, as Vico and his Dominican colleagues did, may be a distinguishing hallmark of the Maya theology, namely its hyperlocality, its highly if not also limited local and particularized discursive ecology.

Within the history of Christianity little to no paper trail exists to tell about, for example, the firsthand experiences of Nestorian Christians in China, Arian

Christians among the Germanic peoples of central Europe, or Scotti Christians from Ireland among the Jutes and Saxons in the British Isles. While “dialogues” with, or responses to, religious and cultural others help compose some of the earliest Christian literature in late antiquity—such as the Pauline epistles in the Christian scriptures or Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*—contemporaneous replies or counterarguments are absent. For example, there is no written record by the Athenian elites regarding their reactions to Paul of Tarsus (such as portrayed in Acts 17:16–34) nor a text by the Jewish Trypho that presents his version of his debate with Justin Martyr (assuming that Trypho was not merely a literary foil created by Justin Martyr for demonstrating his Christian philosophy’s superiority). And even where early direct arguments against Christian ideas have survived—such as one of the earliest and most detailed, Celsus’s *On the True Doctrine* (ca. 178 CE)—they have mostly been preserved within, and thus filtered through, Christian apologetic literature. Just as historically significant, we have no contemporaneous corresponding Christian reply. For example, Origen of Alexandria wrote his response to Celsus’s critique, *Contra Celsum* (ca. 248 CE), long after Celsus had died.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, Jewish and Greco-Roman religious texts of late antiquity occasionally commented on Christians or Christianity, as in the mention by the Roman governor Pliny the Younger, the Jewish Roman historian Flavius Josephus, and the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius. However no contemporaneous reply or intertextual dialogue between Christian and non-Christian writings exists.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, notable examples from the early and middle medieval periods—such as the Synod of Whitby in 663 CE regarding Celtic Christianity or the ninth-century *Héliand* epic narrative that depicts Christ as a Saxon tribal chief—point out perennial efforts and concerns in contextualizing a Christianity during its spread from the wider Mediterranean region into northern Europe.<sup>9</sup> But it was not until the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi cache of noncanonical or “Gnostic” Christian texts in Egypt that primary sources of dissenting positions against a gradually emerging Christian orthodoxy, or “straight teaching,” became critically appreciated.<sup>10</sup>

And the same holds true in Asia. Through trade with and threat from the Mongolian Empire in the thirteenth century, western Latin Christianity became abruptly aware of an Asian Christianity beyond the Eastern Orthodox churches of Russia, Asia Minor, and North Africa. However, aside from a sparse archaeological record and some liturgical elements, little scholarly work focuses on surviving written accounts (such as the 781 CE Xi’an or Sian-fu Stele), apart from the Franciscan mission to the Mongolian territory in present-day Russia.<sup>11</sup> To paraphrase the historians’ adage: Christian theology—in general but especially during these periods—is written and preserved by the victors. The thoughts of a “losing side” are rarely documented, copied, or archived and thus are lost to the ravages of time and corrosive

environments, not to mention failing memories, let alone intentionally suppressive politics like bonfires. In part, this is what makes notable and valuable the documents written in Highland Mayan languages by both Catholic clergy and indigenous elites, beginning in the mid-sixteenth century.

Yet, the legacies of such moments from contact zones exist not only in the paper trail of religious treatises and tracts but also in the mythic narratives, symbols, and practices (both ceremonial and quotidian) inherited into the present. Modern resources of archaeology (and the tendency of interpreting unearthed Classic-era Maya carvings or murals with myths later written down in the *Popol Wuj*, or vice versa) and ethnography (and the tendency of interpreting the myths of the sixteenth-century *Popol Wuj* with studies of present-day prayers and ceremonies of Maya daykeepers, *ajq'ijab'*, or vice versa) harbor perspectives from cultural and religious others by juxtaposing the vantages of multiple constituencies, especially where documents by indigenous authors do survive. This written record can then be further read in a dialogical mode with the assistance of present-day native speakers of the indigenous languages in which the documents were written. Native speakers sometimes can explicate subtle nuances and multiple layers of meaning from a text. For example, literal translation of an early idiomatic phrase commonly found in many of the mendicants' Maya writings—*qanal raxal*—as “yellowness and greenness” will not get a reader far toward understanding it as referring to “abundance.” Noting its meaning, let alone multiple meanings, in the various colonial dictionaries on Mayan languages written by mendicants helps to elucidate at least what maybe they thought they were trying to say, at least at a particular time, such as “gloria.” But in finding this exact phrase in ancient, precontact, Maya hieroglyphic (technically logosyllabic with some syllabogramatic features) texts, in autonomously written colonial-era Maya documents, and in contemporary Highland Maya ceremonial or ritual discourse (such as during a *kotz'ij* fire-offering ceremony or in the prayers germane to the 260-day sacred calendar), conceptual waypoints can be established by which further meanings may be diachronically trafficked “upstream” or “downstream.”

Many of the mendicant texts in Mesoamerican languages were written by more than one person—usually a European priest working in a local language as a *lengua* aided if not led by literate native amanuenses or *ladinos*, such as identified by William Hanks.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, many notarial and quasi-notarial texts were written by committees of indigenous elites for their own purposes. Reading these documents collaboratively today pairs a compositional with an exegetical strategy. Dennis Tedlock, along with *ajq'ij*, or daykeeper, Andrés Xiloj Peruch translated the most significant Maya text, the *Popol Wuj*, through this kind of dialogical mode. So have, in varying degrees, Allen Christenson's translations of the *Popol Wuj*, Dennis

Tedlock's translation of the *Rab'inal Achi*, and Judith Maxwell and Robert Hill's translation of the *Kaqchikel Chronicles*—namely the *Kiwujil Xajila'* (or *Xajil Chronicle*) and *Xpantzay Cartulary*. In this respect, Domingo de Vico's *Theologia Indorum*—a mendicant text written in various Mayan languages—has been treated here in the same dialogical mode as Mayanists have treated the early postcontact Maya texts written in Mayan languages. In other words, the translation and interpretation of Vico's theology that undergirds the analysis of this book was carried out, first, with extensive consultation of colonial-period grammar guides (*artes*) and dictionaries or lexicons (*vocabularios*) on the various K'iche'an languages written by clergy who worked in the Guatemalan highlands, including two possibly written by Vico. Second, Vico's work was analyzed by working extensively with present-day Highland Maya elders who are not only native K'iche' writers and speakers but also masters of the high register of K'iche'an ritual and ceremonial discourse.

Furthermore, recent translations and critical studies of early postcontact central and southern Mesoamerican indigenous texts—such as by Louise Burkhart, David Tavárez, William Hanks, Timothy Knowlton, and Mark Christensen—have entailed a tight comparative methodology of native language competency (and thus philological analysis as part of the New Philology movement in ethnohistory) and correspondence between those indigenous language texts (Yukatek, Nahuatl, etc.) paired with Franciscan literature either imported from Europe and translated into native languages or written originally in those languages during the outset of Spanish colonialism. The multiple and even seemingly conflicting set of entextualized meanings of an author or group of authors is understood to reside not within the words of the text but rather in a discursive relationship between the various composing texts—in this case both mendicant and Maya—in a domain of what Hanks calls “intertextuality.”<sup>13</sup> Examination of the *Theologia Indorum* as well as notable early Highland Maya texts is treated here in this vein of intertextual analysis as it has been developed initially with the Lowland Maya literature of Mexico but that until recently has not been applied to the earlier Highland Maya literature of Guatemala.

The present volume may be read as a companion to a separate book—*The Americas' First Theologies: Early Sources of Post-Contact Indigenous Religion*—which consists of original English translations from K'iche', Q'eqchi', and Kaqchikel of many of the exemplary sections of the *Theologia Indorum* and Highland Maya texts examined here.<sup>14</sup> Whereas that edition of fuller translations invites readers to conduct their own intertextual and comparative study, this book consists of ethnohistorical and intertextual analysis of the *Theologia Indorum* and its author, sources, production, reception and impact among fellow mendicants and K'iche'an Maya. It then revisits some of the earliest postcontact indigenous literature, particularly the

theological dimensions within their legal writings, to indicate where the legacy of the *Theologia Indorum* may still be implicitly noted.

### APPROACH TO AN ETHNOHISTORY OF CHRISTIANITIES

The present study is significantly distinct in two ways. First, it attends to some of the rare texts written in indigenous American languages prior to the paradigmatic changes that occurred in both the Americas and Europe by the end of the sixteenth century. As is explained in greater detail in chapters 1 and 2, the first few decades (ca. 1520s–ca. 1580s) of initial contact between indigenous peoples of the Americas and Catholic clergy consists of a distinct, even unique, intellectual period—designated herein as the “late postclassic” period of the Maya—which is perhaps more transformative than any epoch that followed, with the possible exception of the late twentieth century. Second, almost all the examinations of the indigenous-language writings from this early period approach them primarily from the interdisciplinary—namely historical and anthropological—understandings of Latin American studies, Mesoamerican studies, Maya studies, and the like. Only secondarily, and as intellectually warranted, do they derive their understanding from a fuller comparative history of Christian thought and practices, such as from the interdisciplinary fields of religious studies or history of religions. Where these previous studies are thick in excavating the dialogicality, heteroglossia, and intertextuality of the indigenous Mesoamerican texts, they are often thin in noting and appreciating the heteroglossia and intertextuality within the history of the Catholic literature. There is therefore room to grow the recognition of conflicting Christian influences in postcontact Maya literature, the distinctiveness of late medieval Catholicism in “the Spains” prior to King Felipe II, or the various, specific, and often competing strands of Hispano-Catholicism (or “Catholicisms”) that arrived in respective waves to the Americas.

Significant gains have often been made in reexamining the role and diversity of agency among indigenous peoples following the turn of the sixteenth century. However, portrayals of the European others—namely Hispano-Catholicism—are too often flattened, superficial, and homogeneous, if not monolithic. Too much scholarship on postcontact indigenous America in the aftermath of the arrival of Christian missionaries uncritically perpetuates the missionary authors’ party line that there was only one singular Catholicism, or one understanding of “orthodoxy.” Ironically, for the period of the sixteenth-century Reformations, which began well before, in the fifteenth century, that was precisely the set of questions at issue: what is a correct, proper, “straight” understanding of Christianity?; what is universal or “catholic”?<sup>15</sup> Mendicant missionaries arriving to the Americas did not have definitive

answers so much as an ethos of rigorous critique and experimentation. Those who thought they did have incontrovertible answers might have seen their once “orthodox” positions deemed “heterodox,” or vice versa, decades later.

Although recent efforts in cultural and postcolonial studies, ethnohistory, and the like have striven to reexamine this early period of encounters with an augmented critical appreciation for indigenous peoples’ agency and reasoning, and a less Eurocentric portrayal, the scales of analysis often do not become balanced but tilted too far to the opposite side. Too often, more detailed descriptions of the historically disenfranchised come at the expense of nuanced descriptions of the historical victors. To compensate for centuries of quasi-hagiographies about Christian missionaries in the Americas, recent scholarship too often has caricatured missionaries. Figures like the famous “defender of the Indians,” Bartolomé de las Casas, are relegated to the status of anomalies rather than being interrogated as voices of a possibly larger, critical, contentious cohort in and from Iberia. The critique, though, of modern empires did not come about sequentially well-after their establishment but consecutively amidst their forging. Furthermore, critiques of specifically the emerging Spanish Empire were not simply anti-Catholic in origin (such by the competing British Empire) but, on the contrary, were often initiated from within Hispano-Catholicism; just as, conversely, many of the clerical and theological apologists for the *Conquista* built their cases on justifications for the previous *Reconquista*. The voices of Iberian Catholicism were several and varied, provoking a range of responses in return from the many groups and strata of the indigenous peoples.

On the one hand, it is necessary to attend to the distinctiveness of the first fifty to sixty years of the encounter between Europe and the Americas, namely the years through the 1580s. This period encompasses the years before the arrival of the Spanish Inquisition in 1571 and the Jesuits in 1572, and the subsequent disempowerment and replacement of mendicant clergy with Jesuits and secular clergy (especially locally born clergy from wealthy *criollo* families). Important too are the implementations of the Catholic Reformation by the Third Synod of Mexico in 1585, the shift from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1584, and, most important, the loss of nearly 90 percent of the indigenous population by the 1580s.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, it is also necessary to attend to the distinctions between the various indigenous Americans and their receptions of the varieties of Catholic clergy, specifically the clergies’ different theological methodologies and language ideologies prior to the Catholic Reformation.<sup>17</sup>

In general, Scotist and voluntaristic nominalism led Franciscans educated in convents to believe that a sign could not be readily separated from its referent, and thus a word in one language could never truly substitute for a word in another language. Franciscans in New Spain, for example—most of whom were strict

Observants heavily influenced by Joachim of Fiore's millenarianism rather than Conventuals—believed that local terms and images intimately bound with their non-Christian particulars could not be simply incorporated into Christian use without risking confusion or, even worse, heresy. With religious terms, for example, Franciscans in Guatemala promoted the incorporation of loanwords from Latin or Spanish into Mayan languages. In contrast, Thomistic scholasticism and the emphasis on analogical thinking allowed Dominicans to believe that a concept was autonomous from the word that expressed it.<sup>18</sup> Especially in southern New Spain, Dominicans, educated in the humanistic Thomism of the early Salamanca school, thought that local terms, images, or neologisms from non-Christianized cultures could be used to speak and write about Christian concepts.<sup>19</sup> While the mendicant orders were exceptional linguists and authors of the first grammars and dictionaries of Mesoamerican languages, their differing semiotic ideologies—that is, their theories of how signs related to meanings, referents, or other signs including words, material objects, and gestures—inflected their discernment of analogical relationships between the various cultures or language groups and their ability to configure local construals of the Christian god.

In this sense, different applications of humanism affected the Christian educational and devotional writings in Native American languages.<sup>20</sup> For example, among missions to the Highland Maya, Franciscans promoted the use of a K'iche'itized form of "Dios," *Tyox*, for "God," rather than use a Maya term. Furthermore, they translated many local religious terms and images, like *k'ab'awil* in K'iche' Maya, to mean false divinities or "idolatries."<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Dominicans working among the Highland Maya used ethnographic and linguistic research to find terms they could appropriate. One of their initial proposals was *k'ab'awil* for "pure divinity." In other words, for Dominicans, as distinct from Franciscans, the term *k'ab'awil* was understood not only to refer to the stone or wooden effigies used in Maya rituals but also to be an indigenous term for "God."<sup>22</sup>

However, with his work among the Highland Maya, the Dominican friar Domingo de Vico went further than any other clergy, even up to today, in writing the first explicit, original Christian theology in the Americas. For a theologian like Vico, educated at Salamanca soon after Francisco de Vitoria, O.P., introduced the theology of Thomas Aquinas as the curricular standard, theological claims regarding predicates for the Catholic god fell into three basic modes: univocal or positive statements (such as synonymous claims, like "God's essence is Being"), equivocal or negative statements (such as claims addressing opposition, like "God is *not* finite or, thus, is *infinite*"), and analogical statements (positive claims made in terms of similarity-in-difference). For Vico and others facing the challenge of how to translate recondite teachings of Christianity into radically other languages, cultures, and

religions, these three kinds of statements, along with the conventional modes of biblical exegesis—especially historical (or conventionally “literal”), allegorical, and tropological (or moral) interpretations<sup>23</sup>—served as their immediate models for cultural translation between Hispano-Catholicism and the worlds of the Americas. Similar to how Aquinas in the thirteenth century sought common ground between the then known different religions by drawing on Jewish and Muslim sources, Vico explicitly turned toward Maya myth and religious discourse in his theological compendium or *summa* for his K’iche’an audience.

Ironically, due to the development of a Latin-based script for Mayan languages and literature for literate Maya, like Vico’s *Theologia Indorum*, K’iche’an elites quickly wrote their own texts. To the extent to which Highland Maya texts in the colonial script engaged missionary materials—such as catechisms, sermons, lessons, biblical dramas, and so on—their late postclassic (ca. 1520s–ca. 1580s) documents illustrate a larger, longer conversation that evinces active Maya involvement in the reshaping and maintaining of their religiosity and wider conceptual world.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in general, they offer insight from the Maya perspective on their pre-hispanic social order, elite genealogies, calendrics, history, and cosmogony.<sup>25</sup>

Written between 1554 and 1558, the Popol Wuj in particular has become an increasingly influential text since the 1850s rediscovery of Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez’s early eighteenth-century manuscripts. Archaeologists use it as a lens to interpret scenes depicted on ancient murals and pottery; ethnohistorians comb it for indigenous understandings of society, time, and the cosmos; Latin American authors have been inspired by its nonlinear and fantastical narratives; postcolonial theorists cite it as evidence of native resistance to European hegemony since the sixteenth century; and present-day Native American activists—many within the Catholic and Protestant churches—use it as a core text in current Maya religious and social movements. As Mexican author Carlos Fuentes stated, many Maya and non-Maya consider the Popol Wuj the Maya Bible.<sup>26</sup> However, except for recent trends in liberal Latin American theology—such as inculturation theology or “Indian” theology (*teología india*)—the influence of Maya religious narratives on Christian theologians has either been ignored in academic studies of religion or assumed not to have occurred.

While recent scholarship acutely notes the impact of Hispano-Catholicism on Highland Maya, and often their resistance to it in early postcontact Maya texts like the Popol Wuj, too few have begun to consider the diverse ways that indigenous religious narratives influenced early articulations of Christian ideas in the region, as evidenced in the texts by missionaries in local languages addressed primarily to native audiences. While written slightly before the Popol Wuj, Vico’s *Theologia Indorum* strategically used Highland Maya names from local stories, legends, and myths to

translate a doctrine of his god and the afterlife in authoritative and eloquent Maya discourse. In this regard, critical study of Vico's theological tome for Highland Maya—who, in turn, wrote the first postcontact native literature—helps to fill in some gaps and provide a hyperlocal perspective during this unique period between the 1520s and 1580s. If analyzed intertextually, the written sources authored by various mendicant missionaries and Mesoamerican elites provide a unique glimpse into a colonial encounter. Though this meeting is traditionally construed as a tale of power imbalance or an overt clash, reevaluating these texts reminds us that this was an encounter that defied prefabricated cultural categories or ready-made interpretations from any specific side at the time.

The approach taken here is twofold. First is to situate Vico and his text within the wider context of the intellectual and sociocultural currents within western European Christian thought as well as read and examine as a Mayanist the *Theologia Indorum*. This includes the transition between the late medieval and early modern periods as well as the ethnohistorical framing, dialogical mode, sociolinguistic and philological (specifically from the New Philology movement) attentiveness, and intertextual analysis Mayanists have developed and employed to study Maya texts like the Popol Wuj, such as the *Xajil Chronicle* (or *Kiwujil Xajila'* or *Annals of the Kaqchikel*), *Lord of Rab'inál* (or *Rab'inál Achi*), *Books of Chilam Balam*, and *Title of Totonicapán* and various other notarial documents. The second approach is to read and examine a wider body of early postcontact Highland Maya literature, including notarial or legal documents, as theology; that is to say, as implicit or explicit Maya articulations of their religious worldview during a contentious period of reconfiguration for and by them.

As is examined in greater detail in the subsequent chapters, what holds these two seemingly distinct bodies of literature—mendicant and Maya—together from the vantage point of some mendicant authors, especially those like Domingo de Vico who were products of the first Salamanca school, is an understanding of analogical relations aimed to establish commensurability between, on one hand, the familiar and unfamiliar, not only from human understanding towards an understanding of the divine—what is wholly Other—but also, on the other hand, between cultures and religions, between cultural and religious others.

The textual evidence is less clear from the Highland Maya perspective as to how these two sets of writings hold together. The lack of clarity stems from a shifting accommodation to Hispano-Catholicism that Maya authors demonstrated—an integration in which the Maya did not simply meld mendicant messages with their prehispanic understandings but, rather, strategically treated them as a new historical font on which to justify key features of their traditional world and ways.

Ironically, the Highland Maya arrived at and stabilized their process of accommodation at the period when the Catholic Church was beginning to put an end to

its own process of creative and constructive engagement with indigenous religiosity. But, thirdly, what holds these two families of religious documents together from the vantage of religious studies is their intertextuality—that they were all written at roughly the same time, drew from many of the same sets of narratives and discourses (though not always in the same ways), and can be aligned and read as at least implicit responses to each other, dialogically.

### THE HYPERLOCAL (VS. THE TRANSLOCAL)

For various political and social factors that exceed the scope here, the decades of early contact with Hispano-Catholicism in the sixteenth and the later decades of the twentieth centuries (consisting of a new Maya awareness or renaissance) are highly analogous, especially in terms of texts produced by Maya. In this respect, the elaboration of written reflections with religious content by Maya in these two moments resembles some recent trends of news production referred to as *hyperlocal media*, signifying news produced by citizen-reporters with little formal training in journalism. Appearing historically in low-cost print or increasingly on online form, hyperlocal newspapers are produced in single-room operations, often someone's home, by one person or small team with tight profit margins. Costs—if not covered out-of-pocket as a labor of love—come from low subscription rates that are *de facto* donations or ads from local businesses or community activists. In addition to low production quality, traditional lines between descriptive reporting and normative editorializing are blurred, as stories draw from crowd-sourced materials that focus on issues of major concern exclusively for a targeted constituency but that might seem insignificant to outsiders. Communicating to and from a highly limited demographic, the full significance and meaning of hyperlocal issues in these endogamous texts are virtually inaccessible to outsiders not familiar with the deeper, historical backstories, which are left as unspoken and obvious to insiders. While used to appreciate the uniqueness of, say, tribal newspapers on US reservations, hyperlocality can be extended to describe the autochthonous theology produced by Maya since the sixteenth century.

While difficult to trace, the term *hyperlocal* emerged in the 1980s among journalists and by 1991 referred specifically to television news coverage and content focused on particular locales, such as at the level of neighborhood communities.<sup>27</sup> By the middle of the first decade of the new century (2005–2008), the use of the term shifted to refer to websites and blogs that dealt almost exclusively with community news either by amateur “citizen reporters” or with the funding of and on platforms by major media brands, such as the *Washington Post's* LoudounExtra.com for that northern Virginia suburb. Other notable ventures by established

print newspapers into this niche area also included the *Local* by the *New York Times*, *Triblocal* by the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Patch* by AOL. Most of these were deemed failures by 2009–2010, due to limited markets and lack of financial sustainability.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the attention, interest, and promotion of these first two types or waves of hyperlocal news continues to gain traction with, for example, the Hyperlocal Newsroom and Summer Academy of New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.

A third type or wave of hyperlocal discourse arose but declined almost as rapidly by 2012: the internationally outsourced and foreign written but US locally focused production of aggregated news. Namely, the company Journatic, also invested in by the Tribune Company, used overseas journalists in places like the Philippines to pseudonymously write copy about US neighborhoods based on aggregated internet searches or RSS feeds that newspapers in the United States then purchased and printed under false bylines.<sup>29</sup> A July exposé by National Public Radio's program *This American Life* resulted in an investigation into and subsequent waning of Journatic, but ventures like it indicated the merger of two basic earlier trends: (1) the concentrated aggregation of highly localized information begun by websites like Craigslist.com and H2OTown.com, and (2) the drive of global news corporations to survive by seeking profits online in perceivably untapped specialty markets.

As a metadiscourse term like "globalization," "hyperlocal" can have germane applicability within the human sciences, including religious studies, beyond its originating context, comparable to the recent decade's wider appropriation of "glocalization" beyond its coining by Japanese marketing agencies and businesses.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, as listed by Sarah Hartley of Wordpress.com but echoed by other media reporters in stories in the *New York Times* and National Public Radio's program *On the Media*, all three of these kinds of hyperlocalism share common characteristics:<sup>31</sup> (1) a narrow geography or demographic domain ranging from 10,000 to 50,000 people and their shared immediate concerns, issues, values, and internal conflicts; (2) articulation by and gravitation around texts, almost irrespective of the formal levels of education or training of the authors; and (3) acute focus on a scope of concern and extent of arguments and claims that are not construed to speak to a wider audience.

Although still highly undertheorized, "hyper-" in this sense is not merely a diminutive to mean "smaller" but rather is an intensifier that augments the role and value of the immediate, concrete particulars of a community or constituency. In contrast to understandings of "localism" or "popular" culture as theorized initially by the Frankfurt school and now by cultural studies, hyperlocalism is not necessarily a balancing of power to the pressures of global dynamics nor is it merely another or extended locus of resistance, but, rather, it is agnostic to them. This means that,

while hyperlocality specifies an additional, smaller, and closer type of intense local connectivity—and thus is not isolated or inoculated from global dynamics—its internal dynamics are not primarily reactions against or responses to outside, wider forces, issues, or concerns. The hyperlocal perspective almost exclusively experiences and interprets the pinch and impinging of wider influences, for good and for ill, as microlocally appropriated in and through radically endogamous texts.

Most important, hyperlocal discourse is not limited to either indigenous American populations in the United States or to social or political texts, like newspapers. Rather, it extends throughout the Americas and includes other types of discourse, such as the moral and the religious. Among the Highland Maya, in particular, recent ethnographic and linguistic scholarship on the moral and religious discursive practices at the hamlet or village level has focused on how wider, common, translocal genres, terms, and images mean differently in various communicative ecologies.<sup>32</sup> One example, as studied by linguistic anthropologist Robin Shoaps, is the production and ritualized use of the annual “Testament of Judas” during the Holy Week festivities among the Sakapultek Maya.<sup>33</sup> This is pseudonymously typed and photocopied communication—most likely, by an unknown committee rather than an individual—as an annual open letter to the whole town by “Judas Iscariot” prior to the public hanging of his effigy in front of the Catholic church. It circulates as a moral chastisement of the previous year’s scandals—a public shaming of individuals littered with profanity, puns in stereotypical Mayan-inflected Spanish, and clever if not also poetically bawdy turns of local phrases virtually unintelligible to an outsider unfamiliar with the innumerable backstories and local Sakapultek dialect. While seemingly a mere parody of a Catholic epistle or encyclical, and thus not a simple appropriation of and resistance to Hispano-Catholic hegemony and religious global dynamics since the 1520s, this unique tradition within a Highland Maya community actually plays a vital role in the town’s unique, deeper, and possibly prehispanic tradition of moral discourse through public advice-giving (*pixab’*) and scolding-gossip (*yajaneek*).<sup>34</sup> Seen this way, “hyperlocal” helps specify the scope or range of a communicative ecology, one that is simultaneously very narrow (in terms of audience and authorial appeal) and intense (in terms of multivariiegated voices, or heteroglossia, and domains of references, or signification) but not removed from wider, translocal dynamics.

Seemingly an isolated, contemporary example, the unique practice of Sakapultek Maya’s annual “Testament of Judas” nonetheless represents a hyperlocal scope of a communicative ecology and, more specifically, the advantage of understanding this text as hyperlocal theology. The particular use or construal of Judas Iscariot and the epistolary genre means differently than it does in any other Catholic liturgical context in Europe or Latin America, historically or presently. Previous

underappreciation by social scientists and clergy alike as local superstition, *costumbre*, folk Catholicism, internalized oppression due to colonialism, or popular resistance to historical dominant Ladino culture left Sakapultek Maya religious and moral reasoning largely ignored unless seen as suitable for the scholars' (post)modern or the Church's dogmatic agenda.

To this extent, various types or parts of Maya texts not readily recognized as explicitly religious or moral—or dismissed as mere regurgitations of Catholic religious or moral teachings—may instead be read as a type of theology or as having theological import for and by the Highland Maya in their various communicative ecologies. The Maya authors of these texts may not have much if any formal theological education, especially compared to clergy or academic theologians. However, they still critically, analytically, and constructively reflected upon and evaluated how their world “is” and what they understood it “ought” to be, and how to close the gap between the “is” and the “ought.” The extent of such theological claims may not have much traction beyond the immediate world and worldview of the audience of a speaker's family or village, and there may be little to no expectation that a text may last more than a single occasion or couple of generations. The force or appeal of a hyperlocal moral or religious argument, for many Highland Maya, draws more from within their worldview, from a sense of “tradition” or understanding of what has always been done rather than from resources perceived as alien and thus inappropriate for wider comprehension.

Ethnohistorians have noted the extent to which the bulk of early indigenous Mesoamerican postcontact literature consists of notarial documents, and have culled through these texts for political, social, and historical insights from the native perspectives. Yet, little research has gone into why indigenous authors leaned so heavily into Iberian legal genres for their own writings. Presumably, native Mesoamericans were exposed initially and more heavily by their mendicant teachers to pastoral and doctrinal genres, such as sermons, catechisms, dramas and other forms of narrative. However, few indigenous texts take these forms. Again, presumably, as many Mesoamericanists have pointed out, native peoples already had well-established genres, many of which aligned with the legal genres that were introduced by Spanish colonial authorities and that were required of native elites if they were to maintain their status, land, and privileges.

The legal genres served as antecedents to those used later by postcontact native elites. A shift in legal discourse from privileges (*fueros*) to rights (*derechos*) is one of the hallmarks between the late medieval and early modern periods. The boundary between legal and theological concerns was most porous when this shift was occurring in the sixteenth century at places like the University of Salamanca, driven by Thomists like Francisco de Vitoria, his correspondents like Las Casas, and their

students like Domingo de Vico and other mendicant missionaries to Mesoamerica. As is touched upon further in chapter 2, indigenous Americans drew upon Iberian sources and mixed them with their own in order to defend their rights, in part because mendicants shared their concerns and taught them many of those genres, legal theories, and lines of argument.<sup>35</sup> And they taught them, not in addition to or aside from, but rather as integral to their theology.

When read as hyperlocal theologies, early sixteenth-century Highland Maya literature—such as the *Popol Wuj*; notarial texts such as wills (*testamentos* or *memorias*) and land deeds (*titulos*); the earliest known indigenous drama (such as *Lord of Rab'inah*); and indigenous chronicles (such as the *Annals of the Kaqchikel*)—illuminates the levels of autochthonous moral thinking and the reconfiguring of Maya religiosity and worldview during the period of first contact. It does so without reducing their religious or theological construals to simply political, economic, or sociocultural foci and motives, and by transcending dyadic or binary options that limit indigenous thought and agency to merely passive victimhood or reactionary resistance. As texts that engaged, drew from, and implicitly or directly responded to mendicant writings, Highland Maya literature constitutes the earliest indigenous theological writings in the Americas. Many of the texts demonstrate autochthonous contextualizations of Hispano-Catholic claims, narratives, and symbols, not for the wider Church, but for their immediate Maya audience. In contrast to the efforts of mendicant missionaries working among indigenous Americans to articulate universalized religious truths, Highland Maya elites were more concerned with what was theologically true within and for their hyperlocal milieu.

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

Through intertextual analysis between contemporaneous early Dominican and Highland Maya writings in K'iche'an languages, the present volume recovers and reconstructs the first original Christian theology written in the Americas, the *Theologia Indorum* by Domingo de Vico. Analysis situates the book's features but also throws light on Vico's sources and influences, construals and claims, and methodology within a transatlantic milieu at the fault line of the late medieval and early modern periods. It traces his book's impact not so much in translocal venues beyond central Guatemala but rather in the highly localized texts—hyperlocal theologies—produced by Maya elites. More broadly, the contention argued throughout is that both of these sets of texts not only can but should be read as theologies—as metadiscourse on their respective religious worlds—although explicitly and translocally for the Dominicans like Vico and more implicitly and hyperlocally for the K'iche'an Maya authors. Furthermore, it is argued that neither

set of texts, mendicant or Maya, can be fully understood and appreciated simply on its own terms and its own respective “indigenous” sources (i.e., late medieval and early modern European for the Catholic missionary and ancient Mesoamerican for the Maya) but rather also via their various relations to each other.

However, this volume is therefore less about the dispossession of indigenous Mesoamerican peoples through the collaboration of Christian clergy with imperial Spain than it is about how scholars—Mayanists, those in religious studies, social scientists, historians and ethnohistorians—have often managed their own dispossession of the Maya as well.<sup>36</sup>

In this sense, indigenous Mesoamericans and Catholic missionaries have more than a single story each and, thus, the first two chapters present ethnohistorical and historical contexts. Such narrative contexts often begin the story of first encounters in Europe, explaining the prior conditions of Iberian, including Christian, thought and culture. However, since the story of the *Theologia Indorum* takes places almost exclusively in the Guatemalan highlands, it seems only fitting that the reader is presented with the background beginning with ancient K’iche’an Maya prior to contact with Europeans. Notably, in addition to being based on findings by non-Maya—such as colonial-era documents by clergy and administrators, the archaeological record of the region, linguistic analysis, ethnographies, and so on—the core of the admittedly thin presentation of the postclassic Highland Maya world is based on their own records, which begin within only a couple of decades of the arrival of Iberians, and many of which also show the influence of the *Theologia Indorum*. Along the way, this context argues for a revised set of historical rubrics regarding the Highland Maya, including postponing the application of the term “colonial” until the middle of the seventeenth century (rather than the early sixteenth century) and, correspondingly, extending the preceding “late postclassic” period of the Maya. As many of the documents indicate, from neither the Maya nor the European perspective was it certain until the end of the sixteenth century that the new arrivals and their religion were successfully planted in the Americas to stay. Many of the colonial institutions, considered as expansions, applications, and adaptations of European structures—like the parish—were to not arrive for another few decades after contact. Many historians of the Highland Maya have argued that the local authority of elites did not so much end as transition gradually over time.<sup>37</sup>

This book is divided into three parts, with the specific aims of (1) providing contextual background for scholars of indigenous Mesoamerica or religious studies and history of religions (namely history of Christian thought), or nonspecialists in either, but also suggesting a new historical periodization as conventionally understood, (2) recovering the lost record of Domingo de Vico and his work and gesturing to the reasons for this loss, and (3) tracing the explicit and implicit influence of Vico’s theology

in the early K'iche'an literature and possibly that of the present-day Maya. Specifically, chapter 1 presents ethnohistorical context about the Highland Maya that contends that the transition from a precontact native "old world" into a colonial "new world" was not as sudden as often imagined. The early impact of epidemic diseases, efforts at relocating and reorganizing local communities, repartitioning lands to new and alien lords, and the destruction of indigenous material culture (including religion) certainly should not be underestimated, but neither should the continuation of indigenous agency, reasoning, and creativity. Given the deep historical consciousness evinced in the early native literature, the extent that they continued to vastly outnumber Europeans in the early decades, and the difficulties Iberians had in holding and administering terrain like the highlands of Guatemala, the permanence of the new arrivals and the changes they brought were not necessarily seen then as a done deal. Many Mesoamerican epics of previous arrivals of foreigners, such as various waves of Nahuas into the Maya highlands, indicate that those earlier invaders themselves eventually became assimilated or K'iche'anized as much as they impacted K'iche' institutions of governance, ritual, and aesthetics, for example. Furthermore, between 1553 and 1921 the Highland Maya of Guatemala instigated at least twenty-five documented, major armed uprisings against colonial and state structures that they considered forms of social, economic, and political, if not also foreign, oppression.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 2 presents historical background regarding Iberia, its historical multi-religious milieu, and what made the Christianity that flourished and migrated initially to the Americas stand out as what may be called Hispano-Catholicism—a Christianity that historically shared features with the wider Latin Catholicism of western and central Europe but that was also distinct from Catholicism outside of Iberia, especially in contrast to those strands that became identified with Protestantism beginning in the 1520s. Of particular focus is the development of a Dominican school of thought that drew from a *longue durée* of intellectual tradition for approaching the religious others. Dominican thought consequently had roots in the medieval era of the Mediterranean region on both sides of the Pyrenees but became distinctively influenced by the final decades of the *Reconquista*, during the development of arguably the first European nation-state with the marriage between the holdings of Aragon and Castile. In the intellectual realm, the resources of humanism combined with Thomistic scholasticism in northern Iberia, notably at the University of Salamanca, where seminal Dominican thinkers were informed and influenced by written accounts and returned clergy from the Americas that reported on indigenous languages, cultures, religions, and histories as well as the treatment, or mistreatment, of natives.

These two first chapters, then, hope to point out how the understanding of terms like "Old World" and "New World" ought to be less geocultural phrases. Instead of

referring to contemporaneous Europe and the Americas, respectively as has been usual in the colonial European and Eurocentric literature, descriptively the understanding should rather be of authentically historical phrases in *both* the Americas *and* Europe prior to and then after contact. The conceptualization should be about how postcontact indigenous thought in the Americas and postcontact Hispano-Catholic thought in both the Americas and Iberia emerged as transatlantic, if not also transpacific, phenomena.<sup>39</sup>

Building initially from chapter 2, the second part of this volume, beginning with the third chapter, provides a biography of Friar Domingo de Vico. It is a brief sketch, since little is mentioned of him in the surviving written records. Notably, however, a significant amount of the surviving early literature that mentions Vico, including some of the oldest documentation, is not in Hispanic but rather Maya writings. For this reason, chapter 3 presents more of an “ethnobiography”—that is, to reconstruct an image of the life and work of Vico, with a heavy reliance on indigenous sources. The chapter also, therefore, introduces many of the important Maya and mendicant texts contextualizing not only Vico’s life but also his work, namely his *magnum opus*, the *Theologia Indorum*, with a critical assessment of his wider possible written corpus. It thus not only pairs his life and his work but also considers texts by him, about him, and eventually influenced by the construals and interpretive methodology of his work.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus almost exclusively on the *Theologia Indorum*, although not topically, as culled from various parts of his treatise. Rather, the chapters are attentive to the order and manner that he presented his arguments, the mendicant and the Highland Maya sources that he drew upon, and the methods by which he did so. Chapter 4 is the result of reconstructing the text from reidentification and critical assessment of the various surviving partial manuscripts now in scattered archives of the United States and Europe. In part, based on analysis of Vico’s structure of his work, his European sources, and comparison with contemporaneous texts used and produced by mendicants in the region, chapter 4 argues for a reassessment of Vico’s theology as a *summa*—a theological compendium that incorporates other, non-Christian worldviews and aligns them, or at least accounts for them, analogically, with a Hispano-Catholic worldview. Chapter 5 then examines Vico’s theological method and how he engaged Highland Maya theogony and cosmogony, together with his strategic use of writing the *Theologia Indorum* in the high register poetry, or parallelism, of Maya moral and ritual discourse to convey a Christianity. In addition to his method and rhetoric, chapter 5 focuses on Vico’s construals or doctrines of god, cosmology, effigies, ritual practices, theological anthropology, and moral reasoning; on how he constructs and conveys these basic religious construals based on what he specifically draws upon, reconfigures, and rejects from Maya religion;

and on how, in turn, that reconfigures the Christianity communicated to the first indoctrinated K'iche'an Maya.

Finally, the third part, beginning with chapters 6 and 7, examines the impact and legacy of the *Theologia Indorum* almost immediately as apparent in some of the earliest and most significant postcontact literature by indigenous Americans. It also further elaborates on the reciprocal relationship between Vico's theology and the hyperlocal theologies of the Highland Maya. Whereas chapters 4 and 5 examine how early mendicant ethnographies on Maya culture and religion became source material for Vico in the production of his theology, chapters 6 and 7 examine how K'iche' and Kaqchikel Maya elites used the *Theologia Indorum* as a touchstone for judiciously incorporating or countering not just Hispano-Catholicism in general but specifically Vico's text. Chapter 6 examines the implied use, chiefly as an argumentative foil, of the *Theologia Indorum* by the K'iche' composer-redactors of the Popol Wuj, one of the most important indigenous American texts. In addition to clarifying perennial questions regarding the Popol Wuj—the influence of a Christianity on and within this set of stories—this intertextual analysis also helps to circumscribe and trace the gradual, initially partial, highly local reception of the *Theologia Indorum* among both fellow mendicant clergy and Highland Maya. Chapter 7 continues this intertextual analysis with a critical assessment of all of the surviving Highland Maya documents that explicitly or even implicitly used the *Theologia Indorum* to present a reception ethnohistory of Vico's theology. It also reexamines the initial heavy Maya authorial influence on Vico, mainly that of Diego Reynoso (a *popol winaq*, or member of the prehispanic K'iche' ruling council) and aides and students of Vico.

Placed within the histories and panorama of Christian thought, the *Theologia Indorum* can be identified, on one hand, as a protoliberal theology in terms of its theological method—that is, the extent to which it strategically and constructively placed traditional Christian sources, such as canonical scripture and historically established teachings, in a mutually informative relationship with non-Christian sources, in this case Highland Maya theology and ceremonial authority, discourse, and practices. On the other hand, Vico's book is in general doctrinally conservative, with the explicit femininity of the Christian god being a notable exception. Furthermore, from the sensibilities of postmodernity and its suspicion of meta-narratives and universals along with an emphasis on the significance of context of many present-day scholars—perhaps ironically akin to the nominalism harbored generally by early Franciscans in Mesoamerica—the semiotics of Vico and the rest of the Dominican school that functioned based on a distinction between form and content may now seem also conservative if not also naive in its understandings of signification and how meaning means. It is not the aim of this book to

construct a hagiography of Domingo de Vico or to present an *apologia* for the *Theologia Indorum* or even for the first Catholic clergy, especially Dominicans and their approach, in New Spain or the rest of the Americas. Nor is it to draw too simplistic a contrast between early Franciscans and Dominicans or to rebalance the amount of literature on each.<sup>40</sup> In many respects their differences in Catholic worldview had much more to do with when and where they received their formal education, theological and otherwise, than it did with which religious order they belonged to (or not, in the case of secular clergy) or whether they went to New Spain rather than to the Andean region (although that also made for differences among the Dominicans).<sup>41</sup>

Instead, the aim of this book is to illustrate how critical understandings of some of the earliest indigenous American literature must be enhanced by an equally thorough historical understanding of the different—often contested if not also conflictive—contemporaneously emerging strands of Catholicism, especially in the intellectually and popularly contentious period around the turn of the sixteenth century. In turn, too, historical understanding must extend to how the encounter with the indigenous peoples of the Americas affected the development of those Catholic strands within hyperlocal and also translocal spheres and, most likely, not only at particular moments but also through tracings thereafter, despite various attempts to limit such effects. The Highland Maya writings are among the oldest postcontact autochthonous literature in all of the Americas and, while assuming the genre of notarial documents, they interweave religious thoughts throughout their arguments. The early indigenous arguments were thus not merely sociopolitical claims about the status, power, and privileges of local elites but were also religious and theological arguments about how they understood their world, the origins of that world, and their privileged if not also tragic place in it. Arguments are better understood when juxtaposed with their contextual counterarguments and the intellectual sources, often shared, that each drew upon to be crafted. Finally, although later Christian and Maya discourse can only precariously inform earlier texts, establishing the specifics of how some early postcontact Maya diversely engaged a Christianity can lay a thicker ethnohistorical foundation for later studies on subsequent and current indigenous theologies and their arguments for indigenous rights within Mesoamerica, as among the Maya today.