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Writing in 1600, the Franciscan friar Juan Bautista Viseo took issue with a typical way the Christian concept of the Trinity was expressed in Nahuatl, the principal indigenous language of Central Mexico: rather than understanding that the three members—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—corresponded to just one true god, people could reasonably conclude that only one of the three was really a god. The friar found that, asked to choose, people generally selected Jesus, the Son (Bautista Viseo 1600, 51v–52r). This was a reasonable assumption since, of the three, he was the figure indigenous people most frequently heard mentioned or saw depicted.

This friar’s complaint elucidates just one of the innumerable pitfalls accompanying the adaptation of Roman Catholicism into the languages and cultures of colonial Latin America but aptly illustrates how indigenous people could turn Christianity around in ways not even noticed by the majority of non-native observers. In this introduction I briefly sketch how the investigation of indigenous Latin American religions under colonial rule has developed to the point where it has fostered the present volume. My own position in this field tilts my attention toward the Nahua area of Mexico, but I include a sampling of work on other regions.

Words like evangelization, conversion, Christianization, and missionization, typically used to describe the introduction of Christianity to the Americas, suggest a one-way transfer of Christianity into the hearts and minds—or at least the public practices—of the colonized peoples. They, in turn, might accept, resist, or fall somewhere in between. Thus, Christianity’s introduction into Mexico has been told as a
story of a “spiritual conquest” following on the heels of the military conquest, most influentially by Robert Ricard (1933, 1966). After academics began to question this received wisdom and to seek the views of the “vanquished,” leading to such works as Miguel León-Portilla’s (1959) *Visión de los vencidos* (*The Broken Spears*, León-Portilla 1962) for Mexico and for Peru Nathan Wachtel’s (1971, 1977) *La vision des vaincus*, a counter-narrative of “spiritual conflict” or “spiritual warfare” was proposed, particularly by J. Jorge Klor de Alva (1980a, 1982). The indigenous position was also characterized as “nepantlism,” or a state of in-betweenness (León-Portilla 1974, 24; Klor de Alva 1982, 353–55). This concept derives from a conversation the sixteenth-century Dominican chronicler Diego Durán claimed to have had with a Nahua man who, scolded by the friar for squandering his hard-earned money on a wedding feast, excused himself by saying, “Father, don’t be shocked, for we are still nepantla” (more likely, tlantepantla): that is, in between things, between the old law and the new (Durán 1967, I, 237). From this statement León-Portilla postulated a theory of cultural nepantlism, defined as “to remain in the middle, the ancient ways confused (ofuscado) and the new ways unassimilated” (León-Portilla 1974, 24). This notion of a befuddled but potentially creative intercultural condition was avidly taken up by, among others, Chicana thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987; see Keating 2005, 2006; Nieto 2009) and inspired the name of the journal *Nepantla: Views from the South*, published from 2000 to 2003.

Scholars of colonial America have come to see, however, that the effects of Christianity on indigenous cultural formations cannot be characterized simply in terms of how much or how little (European) Christianity was adopted or as people being somehow stuck, rudderless, between opposite cultural shores. Rather, we have come to speak of indigenous Christianities, nativized and multitudinous recreations of Christianity by indigenous people, who took the imported ideas, texts, and images and recast them for their own use. Sometimes their versions align closely with European models, sometimes they are radically different, and both extremes can coexist within the same community and even within the same text. But in all cases indigenous Christianities must be understood in the context of indigenous cultures, languages, and histories and never be assumed to operate in the same way as their Old World counterparts. Hence this volume speaks of words and worlds turned around: translations of Christian texts into native languages and transformations of Christian ideas and practices into native ways of being and behaving.

In emphasizing both the agency of indigenous people and the multiplicity of their responses, this reevaluation of the “spiritual conquest” parallels changes in how we view the military conquest (Restall 2012). In place of conquistador armies bestriding the continent as empires collapsed before them, we see bands of Europeans improvising and adapting, dependent on indigenous interpreters (such
as Malintzin; see Townsend 2006) and, even more, on local military allies, who are now seen as they saw themselves: as conquistadors in their own right (Restall 1998; Matthew 2012; Matthew and Oudijk 2007; Asselbergs 2004). Eurocentric narratives of victors and vanquished, missionaries and converts, have been further complicated by increased attention to the various others who populated the colonial landscape, transported from Africa (see, for example, Bristol 2007; Carroll 2001; Restall 2005; Vinson and Restall 2009; O’Toole 2012) or Asia (Seijas 2014).

The key to these increasingly detailed and nuanced understandings of life under colonial rule has been the intensive use of documentary sources, especially those written in indigenous languages. The Nahuatl language was the first and is still the most prominent focus of this research, for several reasons. The Aztecs spread the language as their empire grew, and it retained its functions as a lingua franca into the colonial era. Speakers of Nahuatl were particularly avid at keeping alphabetic records of many kinds. Catholic priests in New Spain were more likely to learn Nahuatl than any other native tongue and often employed it among people for whom it was not their first language. The most systematic attempts to study an indigenous language and compose a written literature in it were devoted to Nahuatl, by Franciscans and Jesuits in collaboration with Nahua scholars. Colonial textual production in Nahuatl thus dwarfs that in any other Native American language, both in volume and in the diversity of genres; yet, as this volume shows, many other languages boast enough written records to support innovative research.

The turn toward working with native-language colonial documents owes much to larger trends in later-twentieth-century anthropology and history, such as increased interest in process and change over the reconstruction of “pure” pre-contact cultures; postmodernist and feminist critiques of Eurocentric academic discourses of all stripes; and the influence of Michel Foucault, James Scott, Pierre Bourdieu, Ranajit Guha, and others, who turned their attention to processes of domination in daily life and how dominated people respond to their situation and exercise power and agency. Eric Wolf’s ironically titled 1982 book, Europe and the People without History, pointed at the lack of serious historical study of the people who endured Europe’s colonial expansion (Wolf 1982).

Meanwhile, two American anthropologists were toiling at a massive translation project, gradually released in twelve volumes from 1950 to 1982 (Sahagún 1950–82). Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble worked through the Nahuatl text of the entire Florentine Codex, the only complete, surviving version of the encyclopedic Historia general compiled under the direction of the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún from the 1540s to the 1570s. Scholars had hitherto had access only to the Spanish gloss composed to accompany the Nahuatl texts. By making the full richness of this unique work available, Anderson and Dibble boosted interest in
Nahuatl and enhanced subsequent studies of the Aztec Empire and Nahua civilization (a translation into Spanish has proceeded more recently, under the direction of Miguel León-Portilla). Although the Anderson and Dibble edition has serious flaws, including those noted by Julia Madajczak in this volume, its impact and usefulness have been enormous. The color facsimile of the original manuscript issued in Mexico in 1979 complemented the English-language project (Sahagún 1979; the manuscript can be viewed on the World Digital Library website, www.wdl.org/es/item/10096/).

While the Florentine Codex project aimed more at the illumination of preconquest than of colonial Nahua life, it helped spawn a movement aptly described by the title of a ground-breaking collection of Nahuatl texts: Beyond the Codices (Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart 1976). This phrase encapsulates three moves: away from illustrated manuscripts toward more ordinary, alphabetic genres; away from urban elites to a wider social landscape; and, especially, away from preconquest civilizations toward survival under colonial rule. Although Charles Gibson had published excellent studies of colonial Nahuas in the 1960s (Gibson 1964, 1967), the new focus was on the recovery and translation of notarial or mundane texts written in indigenous languages, such as wills, petitions, annals, land transfers, legal testimony, and community histories. The historian James Lockhart exerted particular influence within this approach, contributing his 1992 masterwork, The Nahuaas after the Conquest, among other publications (e.g., Lockhart 1991, 1993), and training students who analyzed Nahuatl materials—among them Sarah Cline (1986), Robert Haskett (1991, 2005), Susan Schroeder (1991), Rebecca Horn (1997), Stephanie Wood (2003), and Caterina Pizzigoni (2012)—or extended his approach to other languages; Kevin Terraciano (2001) for Mixtec, Matthew Restall (1997) for Yucatec. As Lockhart’s students in turn trained others, this approach, labeled the New Philology (see Restall 2003), spread further. Apart from the Lockhart school, Nancy Farriss (1984), Susan Kellogg (1995), Robert M. Hill (1992), and, for the Andes, Karen Spalding (1984) published books on life in indigenous colonial communities, including religious expression. Collectively, this research told a story of indigenous corporate communities struggling but surviving, forced to accommodate Spanish institutions but often able to reformulate them at the local level and thus “transcending conquest,” as Wood’s 2003 book phrases the process. In a different genre, John Bierhorst’s controversial reinterpretation of the Cantares mexicanos, a collection of Nahuatl songs long viewed as a repository of pre-Columbian poetry, repositioned this text as a product of colonial encounter (Bierhorst 1985).

Scholars of indigenous languages have also made vital contributions simply by expanding the corpus of texts available in English or Spanish translation (to mention just a few such works, Chimalpahin 1997, 2006; Cline 1993; Cline and
León-Portilla 1984; Karttunen and Lockhart 1987; Pizzigoni 2007; Restall 1995; Reyes García 2001; Rojas Rabiela, Rea López, and Medina Lima 1999–2004; Zapata y Mendoza 1995). Online dictionaries, textual and visual collections, and searchable linguistic databases now move the collection, dissemination, and analysis of native-language material toward increased availability and increasingly thorough coverage. Most notable are the Wired Humanities Projects based at the University of Oregon, led by Stephanie Wood (http://blogs.uoregon.edu/wiredhumanitiesprojects), and the Revitalizing Endangered Languages project, headed by Justyna Olko, at the University of Warsaw (www.revitalization.al.uw.edu.pl).

The vast corpus of Christian doctrinal texts in indigenous languages—catechisms, sermons, meditations, orations, saints’ legends, and other material—also received more attention as an outgrowth of the interest in Sahagún’s Nahua1t manuscripts. Dibble and Anderson examined the Christian texts composed under Sahagún’s supervision (Dibble 1974; Anderson 1983). Anderson prepared editions of some of this material, publishing the Sahaguntine Addiciones, Apendiz, and Exercicio quotidiano in Spanish (Sahagún 1993a) and the Psalmodia christiana in English (Sahagún 1993b). The only piece of Sahagún’s vast corpus published during the friar’s lifetime, the 1583 Psalmodia, an illustrated collection of Nahua1t songs for Christian holidays, is particularly noteworthy (figure 0.1). Anderson and Schroeder included Anderson’s English translation of the Exercicio quotidiano, a meditational text revised under Sahagún’s direction in 1574 and copied by the Nahua historian Chimalpahin, in their compilation of Chimalpahin’s work (Chimalpahin 1997, vol. 2, 130–83). The Sahaguntine Colloquios, a 1564 text that imagines the earliest dialogue between Franciscan friars and the Nahua1 of defeated Tenochtitlan, discovered in 1924 (Póu y Martí 1924) and published in German by Walter Lehmann (1949), became more accessible through translations into English by Klor de Alva (1980b) and into Spanish by León-Portilla (Sahagún 1986).

Non-Sahaguntine doctrinal imprints appeared in the occasional facsimile edition (Wagner 1935; Dominican Order 1944; Gante 1981; Molina 1984) but were not widely available outside of libraries until they began to be accessible online (most notably through the John Carter Brown Library’s Indigenous Languages of the Americas database)—to say nothing of the mountains of handwritten religious texts in Nahua1t and other languages compiled during the colonial era but never published. Roberto Moreno de los Arcos’s (1966) index of the Biblioteca Nacional de México’s indigenous-language manuscripts and, later, John Frederick Schwaller’s catalogs of Nahua1t manuscript holdings in the United States (compiled in a 2001 volume) helped to disseminate information on these materials.

One manuscript genre unconnected to Sahagún that received serious attention was Nahua1t religious drama (figure 0.2). Indeed, the first modern publications of
colonial Nahuatl religious manuscripts were Francisco del Paso y Troncoso’s (1890, 1899, 1900, 1902a, 1902b, 1907) Spanish translations of Nahuatl plays. John H. Cornyn and Byron McAfee published one play (Cornyn and McAfee 1944) and translated others, which Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz included in her 1970 book (Ravicz 1970). Fernando Horcasitas produced a copious study of the genre, including seven plays, in 1974; a second volume, compiled from his unpublished material, appeared posthumously in 2004 (Horcasitas 1974, 2004).

Georges Baudot, whose works on the early Franciscans (especially Baudot 1977; Spanish translation 1983; English translation 1995), like that of John Leddy Phelan (1970), built a more nuanced view of the erstwhile heroes of the “spiritual conquest,” published excerpts from Nahuatl sermons associated with Sahagún and fray Andrés de Olmos (Baudot 1976, 1982, 1990) and contributed a facsimile and French translation of the latter’s “Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios” (Olmos 1979; issued in Spanish in Olmos 1990). Olmos (and, presumably, Nahua collaborators) adapted this work from a Spanish treatise on witchcraft and sorcery but altered and added
material to fit it to the Nahua context. Interest in what Spaniards viewed as sorcery but which might be regarded as surviving indigenous ritual practices also inspired Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker (1982), and, independently, J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig (Ruiz de Alarcón 1984) to translate Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón’s seventeenth-century treatise on Nahua “superstitions,” in which this

Figure 0.2. First page of a Nahuatl play about the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine and the discovery of the True Cross by his mother, Saint Helen. The play was written in 1714 by don Manuel de los Santos y Salazar, a Nahua priest and scholar from Tlaxcala. This page shows the title, dramatis personae, and opening lines. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, RI.
clergyman included the Nahuatl incantations he elicited from healers he harassed for what he saw as service to the devil.

I entered this story in the 1980s as a graduate student lured from archaeology to historical anthropology by Sahagún's siren song. Aiming at first to understand the colonial context of the Florentine Codex and other works to better interpret their representations of preconquest religion, I soon found the development of Nahua Christianity a sufficiently interesting topic in its own right to absorb my research for what now amounts to over three and a half decades. A paper for Michael Coe’s seminar on ancient Mexican thought having led me into Aztec-era views of sexual morality and excess, I focused first on how friars attempted to teach Christian morality while obliged to deploy Nahuatl terminology and rhetorical devices poorly fitted to the task (Burkhart 1986, 1989). Post-dissertation, I pursued Nahua interpretations of Christianity through various genres of devotional literature, with a particular interest in the Sahaguntine *Psalmodia christiana* (Burkhart 1992a, 1992b, 1995, 2003), the development of Marian devotion (Burkhart 1993, 1996, 1999, 2001), and especially Nahuatl theater (Burkhart 1996, 2010, 2011, 2013; Sell and Burkhart 2004; Sell, Burkhart, and Poole 2006; Sell, Burkhart, and Wright 2008; Sell and Burkhart 2009). Most recently, I joined Elizabeth Boone and David Tavárez in a new appraisal of pictographic catechisms, a genre long misconstrued as an early result and tool of the “spiritual conquest.” These texts appear, rather, to be an indigenous adaptation recalling ancestral pictographic traditions and asserting indigenous religious and political credentials (Boone, Burkhart, and Tavárez 2017; Burkhart 2014, 2016). Figure 0.3 depicts an excerpt from one of a few such texts that also include alphabetic glosses in Nahuatl.

Meanwhile, others have entered and advanced this field of study. Barry D. Sell broke from the mold of his adviser, Lockhart, to survey colonial Nahuatl religious imprints in his 1993 dissertation. Sell went on to publish Nahuatl confraternity charters (Sell 2002) and to collaborate with Schwaller on an edition and translation of Bartolomé de Álva’s 1634 confession manual (Álva 1999) before undertaking the four-volume Nahuatl Theater set with me and our collaborators. Susanne Klaus (1999) closely examined some of the early Sahaguntine sermons, and José Luis Suárez Roca produced a Spanish translation of the *Psalmodia christiana* (Sahagún 1999). The iconic Franciscan-Nahua encounter continues to inspire new evaluations of this cultural exchange and the resulting documents, as in Viviana Díaz Balsera’s 2005 book and Berenice Alcántara Rojas’s studies of the *Psalmodia christiana* and other Nahuatl sources associated with the early Franciscans (e.g., Alcántara Rojas 2005, 2011, 2013). Among my own students, Annette Richie (2011) explored indigenous participation in religious confraternities, Nadia Marín-Guadarrama (2012) traced the contestation between friars and Nahua over the rearing of children, and

As if Nahuatl did not pose sufficient challenges, both David Tavárez and Mark Z. Christensen have added a second language to their investigations of colonial religion. Tavárez has published many studies of colonial religious practice among speakers of both Nahuatl and Zapotec (e.g., Tavárez 2000, 2006, 2009, 2013a, 2013b), as well as a major treatise on colonial anti-idolatry campaigns that fully incorporates Nahua and Zapotec reactions to the intended eradication of their clandestine practices (Tavárez 2011, 2012). Also working with Zapotec, Farriss examined the encounter between the ritualized language used to address deities and the Christian sermons introduced by Dominican friars (Farriss 2014).

Christensen added Yucatec Maya to Nahuatl, comparing the two areas and delineating a range of native-language textual responses, from the most canonical formulations to those most inventively reworked by indigenous writers (Christensen 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014). I labored to establish the existence of Nahua Christianity and a Nahua Church, distinct from Spanish Christianity and not simply a partial
reflection of it. Christensen rightly went a step further by pluralizing Maya and Nahua Christianities, granting the various indigenous adaptations the same legitimacy as any other version of this global religion, a move this volume follows. Also working with Yucatec, the linguistic anthropologist William F. Hanks moved from the analysis of contemporary shamanic discourse back in time to the colonial formulations of Christian doctrine in Mayan and their impact on language practice more generally (see especially Hanks 2010). Highland Maya sources are less abundant, but Sergio Romero (2013), Frauke Sachse (2016), and Garry Sparks (2014, 2016) are demonstrating the potential of K’iche’ and other Highland Maya sources.

Other useful research has focused less on indigenous documents than on inquisitorial records and various other genres that also map the colonial religious landscape. This work includes books by Fernando Cervantes (1994), Inga Clendinnen (1989), Martha Few (2002), Serge Gruzinski (1989, 1993), Laura Lewis (2003), Patricia Lopes Don (2010), Matthew D. O’Hara (2010), Stafford Poole (1987, 1995), John Frederick Schwaller (1987), and William B. Taylor (1996, 2010, 2011). Christianities were made tangible not only in words but also in art and architecture, in forms explored by Manuel Aguilar-Moreno (2005), Jaime Lara (2004, 2008), Jeanette Favrot Peterson (1993), Constantino Reyes-Valerio (1978, 1989), and Eleanor Wake (2010), among others.

Compared to Mesoamerica, colonial Andeans made relatively little use of alphabetic writing, so we do not have similar troves of documents in Quechua or Aymara. However, as in Mexico, colonial churchmen in Peru endeavored to preach in local tongues and fostered native-language religious texts, albeit a more centralized and standardized corpus than the vast array of texts surviving from Mesoamerica. Alan Durston’s work on Quechua, especially his 2007 book, constitutes the most comprehensive examination to date of Christianity’s adaptation into an Andean tongue, while Regina Harrison (2014) provides a study of Quechua penitential texts. On the religious encounter in the Andes more generally, see, for example, the work of Sabine MacCormack (1991), Nicholas Griffiths (1996), and Kenneth Mills (1997).

We have come a long way from “spiritual conquest,” “nepantlism,” and other ideas that predated the florescence of native-language documentary studies since the 1980s. I would note a lingering tendency—to which I am as prone as others—to highlight what is different, and hence particularly indigenous, about indigenous Christianities, especially features that recall pre-Columbian cultural forms or that seem to heroically defy colonial domination or both. I suppose this is inevitable: scholars who are drawn to the study of colonized Native Americans have an intellectual and often emotional investment in their survival, their legitimacy, and their right to be themselves. Even if we no longer seek “pure” native cultures, exotic otherness still entices us. I will justify this propensity, however, by stating
that my long sojourn in this field has left me humbled by how limited a view the words of the texts grant us of those turned-around worlds in which our subjects lived. I have surely underestimated, rather than exaggerated, the Nahua-ness of the Nahua-Christian texts I have studied and even more so that of the broader colonial society they only partially inscribe. So many texts remain to be translated and interpreted or even discovered in unplumbed archives; the ones we already know retain tremendous potential for new scholars with new approaches. I invite readers to see the essays that follow not just as the current state of the art but as groundwork for the continuing expansion and refinement of how we understand the Christianities indigenous Latin Americans experienced and invented as they lived with colonial rule.

Volume editor David Tavárez opens the first section, focused on early efforts to construct a linguistic and conceptual common ground between Christian and indigenous worlds, with an overview of Dominican ventures into Zapotec text production and their effects. The preaching friars’ experimental strategies included striking appropriations of Zapotec mythical and historical pasts. Julia Madajczak shows that what both colonial observers and modern scholars categorized as preconquest “confession” rituals were in fact much more remote from the Roman Catholic sacrament of penitence, thus deepening our insight into the “moral dialogue” I explored in the 1980s. With a nuanced focus on moral terminology, Gregory Haimovich tracks the Quechua terms adopted for such Christian notions as “sin” and “guilt” back to their likely preconquest referents and traces their semantic shifts; here again, European observers were too quick to read an indigenous rite as an analog of confession. Garry Sparks and Frauke Sachse take readers into the early evangelization era in the Maya highlands, exploring an eclectic notebook whose content contributed to fray Domingo de Vico’s K’iche’-language *Theologia Indorum*, completed in 1554, the earliest full-fledged theological treatise in an indigenous language.

M. Kittiya Lee begins part II with a rare glimpse of evangelization in Amazonia, showing how churchmen as diverse as French Calvinists and Portuguese Jesuits made common cause with potential Christians by promising that the Christian god would ensure victory over their enemies. Justyna Olko then presents a Nahua adaptation of the medieval legend of Judas, exploring how a European Christian text could gain new, local meanings in translation as critical Nahua thinkers considered its potential to convey their own ideas. Ben Leeming also follows an Old World text into Nahua adaptation, here the theatrical work of a Nahua man who used a performance of the Antichrist story to counter the dominant view of indigenous people as poorly indoctrinated while staging daring descriptions of preconquest religious practices.
At the beginning of part III, John Chuchiak shows how Franciscan friars’ obsession with their Maya charges’ sexuality led to a number of indigenous ripostes, including the embedding of veiled sexual joking into vocabulary glosses and complaints against priests whose examinations of female penitents crossed over into outright abuse. Then, Claudia Brosseder returns us to South America and a fascinating case of indigenous appropriation, in which a Quechua man manipulates Christian ritual elements to simultaneously embody a local *huaca* and a Catholic priest, thus absorbing Christianity into the ancient Andean focus on sacred loci and forces. Mark Z. Christensen finds a common interest of indigenous people and Europeans: prophecies of world ending, in particular a medieval list of fifteen Doomsday portents that found its way into Nahua and especially Maya textual traditions.

In part IV, Abelardo de la Cruz shows that the dialogue between Christianity and indigenous religion continues to the present day in the remote Huasteca region. Here it was Nahua catechists, not intolerant foreigners, who began a program of Catholic evangelization in the 1970s; their acceptance of the older religious rites people call *el costumbre* suggests a path not taken by the early colonial church.

From Mexico to the Andes and Amazonia, indigenous people in Latin America confronted many strategies intended to promote their participation in Christianity. Faced with this evangelizing pressure and the many new ideas, images, and textual genres carried across the Atlantic, they responded inventively and diversely, finding many things in translation and subtly—or not so subtly—reworking the received ideas into their own terms. Each chapter that follows takes readers into one of the innumerable encounters that turned these worlds and words around.

**NOTE**

1. For the uses of Nahuatl in the colony, see volume 59, issue 4, of the journal *Ethnohistory* (2012).

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