To Walk with Slaves: Jesuit Contexts and the Atlantic World in the Cartagena Mission to Enslaved Africans, 1605–1654

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Abstract: The Jesuit mission to enslaved Africans founded in 1605 in Cartagena de las Indias is amongst the most extraordinary religious developments of early colonial Latin America. By the time Alonso de Sandoval, S.J. and Pedro Claver, S.J. began their work to baptize and catechize the thousands of slaves who passed through Cartagena’s port each year, the Society of Jesus had already established a global missionary enterprise, including an extensive network of communication amongst its missionaries and colleges. Amidst this intramissionary context, Sandoval wrote De instauranda Aethiopum salute—a treatise informed largely by these annual letters, personal correspondences, and interactions with the diverse multitudes of people who could be encountered in this early colonial cosmopolitan city—aimed at promoting the necessity of African salvation. From East Asia to Latin America, Jesuits followed the example of their apostolic missionary, Francis Xavier, to bring the Catholic faith to non-Christian peoples. Through De instauranda and the Catholic Church’s collected testimony for the sainthood of Claver, we see how Sandoval and Claver, like other Jesuits of the time, arose as innovative and unique missionaries, adapting to their context while attempting to model the Jesuit missionary spirit. In doing so, this article posits, the historical-religious context of the early modern Atlantic world and global Jesuit missions influenced Sandoval and Claver to accompany enslaved Africans as a missionary theology.

Keywords: Catholicism; Christianity; Latin America; Caribbean; Cartagena; Jesuit; missions; slavery; World Christianity; Atlantic history

1. Introduction

As one of the earliest gentile populations to receive the Christian faith, the 1622 re-conversion of the Ethiopic kingdom to Catholicism was declared by Alonso de Sandoval to be one of the most important Jesuit undertakings. Echoing the sentiments of fellow Jesuit and patriarch of Ethiopia Andrés de Oviedo, Sandoval believed this mission to be of the greatest and highest services to God of all those in existence at the time (de Sandoval 1956, p. 142). In Sandoval’s vision, this conversion restored the spiritual health of the Ethiopians in re-entering the proto-orthodox Catholic faith and would be symbolic of the restoration of the spiritual health of all Aethiopians (black peoples) into Catholicism.1 Informed by the communications of other Jesuits across the globe, Sandoval wrote this appraisal of Jesuit missions in Ethiopia and elsewhere as part of a monumental treatise in which he fervently promoted the evangelization of Aethiopians across the Atlantic in the cosmopolitan port city of Cartagena de las Indias.2 Published in 1627, De instauranda Aethiopum salute, or On Restoring Salvation to the Ethiopians, is an immensely important text of the period.3 However, despite dedicating four books to the subject of enslaved Africans in a Spanish-American setting, it has yet to garner widespread academic attention.4 While its interest continues to grow amongst scholars of Latin American literature and history, scholarly production amongst theologians and missions scholars has not kept pace.5 Additionally, historian Ronald J. Morgan has observed a tendency in scholarship on De instauranda to frame the text primarily in relation to the topic of slavery, with secondary attention to its religious
elements (Morgan 2008, pp. 75–76). As such, this article aims to bring more attentiveness to the religious context of De instauranda and the religious thought therein employed.

Studied alone, the work of Sandoval is captivating. However, studied within the context of Jesuit missions around the globe, its historical and religious importance is further amplified. While histories of Christian missions tend to focus on an individual mission or missionary, the perspective of historians employing a broader Atlantic framework can give greater life to Jesuit missions that during the early modern period were already thinking and acting globally (Banchoff and Casanova 2016). In other words, a historical contextual analysis juxtaposing the Cartagena mission with other prominent Jesuit missions of the period offers deeper insight into Sandoval’s theological strategies, where we see how the missionary activity and the theological constructs employed are shaped in concert with each other and the historical development of Cartagena and the Jesuit order. The Jesuit system of cross-continent letter writing that informed Sandoval’s interpretations of the Ethiopian mission (and other Jesuit missions) likewise informed the way he structured his own mission, continuing to kindle his zeal for the conversion of African peoples. Given the diversity of life in Cartagena, and the wide convergence of transient populations in this missionary setting, a historical perspective of the Atlantic and Jesuit worlds can be useful for understanding Sandoval’s theological proposal. Because of the transatlantic slave trade, it was a setting unlike any other in which the objects of the mission were just as foreign to the lands as the missionaries themselves. Thus, this analysis of the Cartagena mission emerges at the intersection of history, theology and mission, examining Sandoval’s missionary strategy within the historical and religious contexts of Cartagena and global Jesuit missionary activities.

Within Jesuit studies, the Asian missions of the early modern period are well-known. The Method of Accommodation, first implemented in China by Mateo Ricci, may be understood as the singular most important missionary strategy of the period. However, as much as it was shaped by the Jesuit spirit, it does not singularly define all Jesuit missions of the time. Latin America presents a particularly different setting in which the kind of cultural accommodation utilized in the East was not always necessary. The Cartagena mission, led by Sandoval but also driven by the labor of the more well-known Pedro Claver, asks us to consider a missionary approach, that I here refer to as accompaniment, as a kind of accommodation emerging out of the Jesuit missionary ethic, yet unique in its vision from other Jesuit missions.

De instauranda provides a wealth of information about Sandoval’s missionary strategy, Spanish-American society, the slave trade, African peoples and cultures, the Jesuit order and the people that informed its teaching and intellect. The collected evidence for the cause for canonization to sainthood for Claver, compiled by the Catholic Church and published in Spanish as Proceso de beatificación y canonización de san Pedro Claver (Process of Beatification and Canonization of Saint Peter Claver), is additionally invaluable for its testimony of the daily activities of Claver, including the witness of those to whom he ministered. The study of World Christianity during the early modern period can be particularly challenging due to the dearth of written material like these to work with. Yet, the early modern period and Afro-Latin America remain ripe for the study of Christianity in a global world particularly because the globalization of Christianity and large-scale inclusion of non-Western peoples traces back to this time and, in large part, thanks to the work of the Jesuits. These two sources make this work easier, but more importantly they give life in imperfect yet particularly useful ways to the voices of enslaved Africans, an undeniable rarity.

2. The Influence of Jesuit Missions and Sandoval’s Interpretations

By the time Alonso de Sandoval arrived at the Cartagena college in 1605, the Jesuits had already established one of the largest missionary enterprises in all of Christendom. As is well known, the profession of the fourth vow to obey the pope and go wherever it is deemed necessary to bring the gospel of Christ, meant that the Jesuits had quickly
established missions in India, China, Japan, Indonesia, Angola, Ethiopia, Mexico, Brazil and elsewhere. While ultimately faithful to the rigorous theology of the Council of Trent, the Jesuit missions outside of Europe often assumed a posture of flexibility and innovation (Cohen 2009, p. 29). Education and catechesis were important elements of Jesuit missions, and thus they aimed to establish colleges at the centers of their missionary endeavors. A cursory overview of their most well-known missions highlights conversion of the mind as one of the central aims of their missions, yet this was often done while adapting “to the reality imposed by the distant lands to which Jesuit missionaries had traveled,” (Cohen 2009, p. 29). Sandoval operated within an emerging global missionary setting in which adaptation to context was vital for missionary success. This kind of adaptation was most recognized in the East Asian missions of China and India.

For Sandoval, the spirit of Jesuit missions begins with Francis Xavier, the Society of Jesus’ first missionary and close companion of Ignatius of Loyola, its founder. Sandoval so revered Xavier and his example that in 1619 he wrote a Spanish translation of Portuguese Juan de Lucena’s biography of Xavier (del Rey Fajardo 2004, p. 287). As Morgan argues, Xavier’s reputation as a gifted minister made him a central model and rhetorical tool for Sandoval’s arguments on the necessity of converting and baptizing black nations (Morgan 2008, p. 76; de Sandoval 1956, p. 479). According to Margaret M. Olsen, in order to justify and convince the reader, especially his fellow Jesuits, that his mission to enslaved Africans was part of the very core of the Jesuit missionary enterprise, Sandoval more broadly defined Aethiopian to include all dark-skinned nations, signifying that from its beginning, the Jesuits sought to Christianize the darkest (and most suffering) peoples (Olsen 2004, pp. 77–83). Thus, the exemplar first missionaries, headed by Francis Xavier, in bringing the Catholic faith to India, Malacca (Malaysia), the Moluccas (Indonesia) and elsewhere, understood the salvation of Blacks to be of the highest importance.

Xavier left for Goa, India, in 1540 to serve the Portuguese population that had settled there, while also converting the native population. From there he would go to minister amongst the Paravas on the Fishery Coast, continuing on to Malacca, the Moluccas and Japan, before returning to Goa and later dying on another missionary trip on Shangchuan Island off the coast of Macau while waiting for permission to enter China. Xavier became an official supervisor to Jesuits who voyaged east and would come to be seen as the “prototypical missioner, zealous and unreflective—an image that was belied by his growing awareness of the problems facing Europeans who wanted to introduce Christianity into non-Western culture,” (O’Malley 1993, p. 30). His letters back to Europe grew his lore. As John W. O’Malley puts it, they “electrified his brethren and everyone else who read them with the extent of his travels and news of the strange places in which he labored,” (O’Malley 1993, p. 30). According to Sandoval, Xavier was destined by God to bring the gospel to these remote regions, signifying that God intended for the Society to bring salvation not only to Italy, Spain or any other European nation, but to these black regions (de Sandoval 1956, pp. 479–80).

2.1. The Method of Accommodation

Throughout the world, Jesuit missionaries followed the lead of Xavier, or at least claimed to. Sandoval himself emphasized Xavier’s teaching to the poor, stating that “he taught doctrine to children, slaves and crude people, on land and at sea, in churches, plazas, streets, fields, and beaches, on ships and other boats, by night and by day, with an incomparable fervor and perseverance,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 481). Notably, Sandoval highlights what Dauril Alden points to as “his remarkable courage, his incredible endurance, his almost limitless capacity to withstand personal austerities,” (Alden 1996, p. 43). Xavier’s tireless teaching to the lowest classes of people and in all locations, including boarding ships to catechize, mirrors Sandoval and Claver’s own enthusiasm to evangelize on the slave ships at the Cartagena port.

Indeed, Xavier attempted to reach out to both the ruling classes and the common people, something that would become a dilemma and point of strategy for future mission-
aries. It was his ability to work as a diplomat, or a papal nuncio, that demonstrated for other Asian missionaries “his incisive understanding of the sources of political power,” (Alden 1996, p. 43). Following this lead, Jesuits often sought diplomacy with rulers while working to convert the people.

In perhaps the most important missionary development of the period, Jesuits in China gained access to the imperial court through what would come to be known as the method of accommodation. Originally conceived by Alessandro Valignano while working in Japan, the method of accommodation was a way of acquiring an understanding of local knowledge, culture and religion, and accommodating oneself to these conditions. While in China, Valignano determined that the struggling Jesuits would need to accommodate themselves in order to gain more recognition. Although Michele Ruggieri established the Chinese mission, it was Mateo Ricci who took Valignano’s example to heart, and “devised the strategies that enabled Jesuits to survive and ultimately attain considerable success in China,” (Alden 1996, p. 68). Ricci arrived in Macau in 1582 and was able to pick up the Chinese language easily. He initially dressed as a Buddhist monk, but after becoming more familiar with society, realized that becoming like a Confucian scholar would gain him the respect not only of potential converts but of the ruling class as well. He acquired an understanding of early Confucian classics and mathematics, which earned him entrance to Confucian scholar circles. Ricci was more focused on changing the minds of the people through intellectual teaching, which meant smaller numbers of converts but a more effective and lasting Christianization through the changing times. In these ways, his methods varied from Xavier. “As gifted as his great contemporary, the resourceful administrator Valignano, or as his remarkable preaching predecessor, Xavier, Ricci proved far more cerebral and serene than St. Francis, less acerbic than his Italian superior, and far less severe and infinitely more patient in his relations with others than either,” (Alden 1996, p. 68). This accommodation was “as radical as one could possibly imagine by Europeans of the time,” and few Jesuits took it to the same extent as Ricci (O’Malley 1993, p. 342). Yet, accommodation would still become an effective strategy employed in other missionary settings.

The same year Sandoval arrived in Cartagena, another prominent missionary of the period, Roberto de Nobili, arrived in Goa. Ricci and de Nobili were unmatched in their willingness to adapt to local culture. With most of the missionary settlements residing in Portuguese-controlled land on the coasts of India, few missionaries felt the need to adapt. Instead, they expected their religious converts to convert to Portuguese dress and customs, a requirement too pricey for most Indians who would have been ostracized from their caste. Recognizing the unattractiveness of this proposal, de Nobili followed the example of Ricci and became like the Hindu. Sent inland to establish a mission in the city of Madurai in 1606, he leveraged his background as Italian nobility to associate with the Brahmin, the priestly caste of Hindu society (Alden 1996, p. 151). In order to change the image of Christianity amongst the people, de Nobili deemed it necessary to transform himself, shaving his head, eating vegetarian, and embracing the dress and wooden sandals of the sannyasi, people who have adopted a life of spiritual asceticism. De Nobili also mastered Sanskrit and the Vedas (Hindu scriptures), unheard of for a European. Like Ricci, he utilized the knowledge of local language and script to gain the respect of the people, particularly the learned class, and engage them using reason and intellect. While his Jesuit brethren accepted the designation of Parangi, a term used by Hindus to designate their status as uncouth outsiders, de Nobili understood that, in this context, caste could not simply be supplanted by outsiders. He realized the necessity of working within the caste system, and manipulated it in transforming himself, something additionally unheard of but made possible by his learning and noble background.

De Nobili’s treatise, The Report on Certain Customs in the Indian Nation, was a defense of his use of the method of accommodation, which was opposed by his fellow Jesuits in the region. In this text, he observes the distinction between religion and culture, and tried to distinguish the heart of Christianity from the European cultural veneer over it in order
to make it more attractive to Indians. Deeming that the best way to convert people was through the learned class, his catechesis was much more philosophical, challenging his audience to think seriously about religious truths and values. Christianity, he argued, is the one true religion, yet compatible with Indian culture and society. Thus, for de Nobili, accommodation was a good method for evangelization so long as it did not conform theologically or spiritually. To say nothing of the inequalities borne out of caste distinctions in India, the failures of previous Jesuits to recognize these distinctions was detrimental to their mission. De Nobili’s attention to class dynamics in this context saw his mission prosper in converts into the eighteenth century, well after his death in 1657 (Alden 1996, p. 152).

2.2. The Ethiopian Mission in the Eyes of Sandoval

While this kind of radical adaptation to local culture would come to define the period, it was not necessary in all missionary settings. Jesuits were attempting to “create a Catholic culture” in Ethiopia, the Black nation which to Sandoval was the highest example of the possibilities for what the Christianization of all Blacks could be (Cohen 2009, p. 188). Having arrived in 1557, the Jesuits toiled for decades before they began to gain a foothold in this Orthodox Christian kingdom. For Sandoval, this struggle, particularly on the part of Andrés de Oviedo, was symbolic of the dedication the Jesuits must possess in bringing salvation to Black peoples. Such glorification of the patience and suffering of the missionary would be affirmed in the fact that the Jesuits’ hard work eventually influenced Emperor Susenyos in 1622 to mandate Catholicism the official religion of the Kingdom. Citing the Relació anual de Etiopí (Annual Report from Ethiopia) from a priest named Hernando Guerrero, Sandoval elates in the report that the people now revere the Catholic Church (and its priests). He proclaimed that all show “great love, respect and reverence to the priests and preachers of the Catholic Church, now that they are part of our sacred religion,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 144). Although Sandoval aggrandizes this conversion in spiritual terms, it is important to point out that there were strong political and cultural elements at play.

When Jesuit Pedro Paez arrived in Ethiopia in 1603, the Jesuits were finally able to gain “crucial access to the nobility and the emperor’s court,” (Cohen 2009, p. 23). To that point, the Jesuits had been employing a strategy that attempted to change particular beliefs and customs without truly being accepted. Realizing how the church and state in Ethiopia worked hand-in-hand to reinforce each other’s control, they undertook a top-down perspective of evangelization, approaching the nobility for support in attempting to gain access to the emperor. They translated religious texts to Ge’ez, endorsed education, promoted the gospel through persuasive preaching (something Ethiopians were not accustomed to), and engaged in lectures and debates at the emperor’s court. The importance of the political foothold the Jesuits gained during this period is even acknowledged by Sandoval, stating, “Of one of the two houses that the Society has in that empire, (the emperor) gave us a place next to his court. With more support, we could found as many as we want to the great pleasure of the king and applause of the natives,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 144). The Jesuits also attempted to influence Ethiopian culture.

“The use of art became even more pronounced among the second and third generation of Jesuit missionaries . . . (T)he Jesuits used elements and motifs from the local culture, creating, according to the testimonies, original artistic creations that fused Catholic and European elements with Ethiopian motifs and traditions. This was true in the areas of music, theater, architecture, and plastic arts.” (Cohen 2009, pp. 189–90)

Scholars of the Ethiopian missions have postulated the precise reasons for the Jesuit inculcation with the imperial court and the subsequent demise of the mission, with varying degrees of politics and culture at play. Yet, Sandoval saw in the Ethiopian population a pious people primed to be brought back under the cover of the Mother Church after centuries in peril.
By all accounts, the Ethiopians were a pious people. According to Andreu Martínez d’Alós-Moner, the letters the Ethiopian Jesuits sent back to Europe were positive about Ethiopian Christianity: “Their narratives convey an image of a primitive Christianity ‘deviated’ in some practices due to ‘external’ (Alexandrian) influences but also blessed by innocence and a sense of piety,” (Martínez d’Alós-Moner 2015, p. 149). Sandoval emphasizes this point repeatedly. He describes their inclination to virtue and piety saying, “In spite of these errors, they have an extraordinary devotion to the sacred and holy things of our churches,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 143). He observes that they have a devotion to icons, prayers, blessed beads, relics and fasting, the kinds of objects he used to encourage the faith in his own missionary setting. He further adds, “According to what the Fathers of the Society who reside there write to us, we do not see as many sins among them as we do in many other places throughout Europe where our holy faith resides,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 143). Little did Sandoval know that just several years after publishing De instauranda, the Catholic Ethiopian kingdom would revert to Orthodoxy. While this occasion exposes Sandoval’s ignorance of the incredibly complex dynamic between the church, state and society in the Ethiopian context, the Ethiopian conversion was integral to his arguments of the suitability of and necessity for all Aethiopians to receive the faith.

2.3. Jesuit Amerindian Missions

An overview of the influence of global Jesuit missions on Sandoval’s own missionary strategy would not be complete without touching upon the South American missions to Amerindians. While the Jesuits in Ethiopia could be said to have taken a rigid posture in relation to cultural accommodation, Jeffrey Klaiber notes that the early missionaries of the Americas felt that in order to evangelize, they must first hispanicize (Klaiber 1995, p. 37). In Brazil, before any other religious order was able to establish a presence, the Jesuits settled in urban centers and sent missionaries out onto the perilous frontiers. While able to convert large numbers of natives, with pacification aided by the military force of conquistadors, few remained faithful to the practice of Christianity. As Portuguese and Spanish settlers moved into native territory in the Rio de la Plata region, the Jesuits devised aldeias, or missionary villages, in which the Amerindians lived and worked, modeling European ways of life. Known as reductions in the Spanish-Americas, this unique model provided a context outside of the encomienda system for natives to more freely participate in daily life, as control of the reductions was shared between Jesuit and Amerindian leaders. They also offered protection for natives from greedy Iberian settlers encroaching on their lands and looking for free labor. Within these reductions, Jesuit missionaries learned native languages, translated the gospel, and used a regimented lifestyle for work, education, and catechization.

In Spanish-controlled Peru, one particular Jesuit missionary, José de Acosta, argued that the missionary amongst the Amerindians must be flexible and adapt himself to his convert (Olsen 2004, p. 49). Acosta pointed to the diversity of Amerindian groups and languages as a reason for the difficulty missionaries had up to that point in employing a singular strategy of evangelization. The slow progress of Amerindian missions, he believed, were not because of a lack of capacity of the natives, but due to the “inability of the missionaries to evangelize correctly,” (Klaiber 1995, p. 39). His 1588 treatise, De procuranda Indorum salute, would espouse these views and have an unquestionable influence on Sandoval. In this manual, Acosta laid out the argument that Amerindian conversion was necessary due to their full humanity, and he pushed for humane treatment—patience and empathy—from the encomenderos and missionaries. Olsen notes that “De procuranda presented not only a radically new way of thinking about the place of non-European peoples as participants in the church and its sacraments, but it was also an innovative and practical manual for missionary work,” (Olsen 2004, p. 48). Although Sandoval does not speak about the Peruvian mission of Acosta in De instauranda, he does cite Acosta throughout the treatise. Arguing for the necessity of Amerindian conversion, baptism and catechism, and for the Jesuits to take up this work as “a providential mission,” De...
procuranda was a prototype for Sandoval’s own missionary method in *De instauranda* (Olsen 2004, p. 53). Nevertheless, as Márcio Paulo Cenci notes, the legal precedents that were exercised polemically by Acosta in his treatment of the Amerindians, were not available to Sandoval as he treated the topic of African slavery and christianization (Cenci 2015, p. 78).

2.4. Sandoval’s Narrative of Jesuit Missions

While it can be argued that no single missionary had as much of an influence on Sandoval as Acosta, Sandoval’s references to Xavier and Oviedo betray a sentiment of these two as the highest examples of missionaries in the early “apostolic” days of the Jesuits (de Sandoval 1956, p. 145). He saw patience and suffering in the early missionaries and connected it directly to the fruit that would come to bear as the Jesuits converted thousands of Christians in the East and an entire kingdom in Africa. In the first book of *De instauranda*, Sandoval also notes particular areas in which the Jesuits have not been successful, but the toil of these “apostles” gives him much faith that the Jesuit missionary enterprise would not be deterred. In reality, he offers an overly optimistic presentation of the success, relative term as it is, of Jesuit missions. This presentation fits his narrative of Black peoples as ideal missionary objects. He delights in telling how he witnessed “black” Indians—presumably Christian—from the Parava and Ceylon castes living in Lima and Cartagena (de Sandoval 1956, p. 534). He delights in the rising christianization of Black Filipinos under the care of the Jesuits who, according to another priest named Pedro Quirinos, are easy to convert because they have little religion (de Sandoval 1956, pp. 47–48). He delights in the report from Juan Gonzalez Mendoza, a priest in China, of people from Canton (Guangzhou) as dark-skinned as Berbers, and how the “rays of light of the Gospel” have begun shining upon the powerful kingdom of China, in addition to Japan, Ethiopia, Congo, Angola, Guinea (West Africa), Manomotapa (southern Africa) and other remote regions of the world (de Sandoval 1956, pp. 507–8). Sandoval sees the immensity of these global missions, a great and willing harvest, as motivation to not be deterred by the difficulties of exploration, uncultivated land, language-learning, the cruelty of local peoples and death.

“In conclusion, much patience and tolerance with these poor people is extremely necessary if they do not take advantage of our work as we would like. This was taught to us by the Apostles and all the apostolic men, and among them most particularly Saint Francis Xavier, our father, and the distinguished Holy Patriarch of Ethiopia, Andrés de Oviedo, with his distinguished companions, all workers amongst Blacks; ... This patience has opened China and ended the persecutions in Japan, and has allowed them to penetrate almost all of Guinea, converting many kingdoms,” (de Sandoval 1956, pp. 281–82).

Aided by the reports of his brethren from around the globe, Sandoval composed a narrative of Jesuit missions that lifts up the missionary who labors in difficult conditions, especially amongst the poorest and most miserable of Blacks, as he is oft to say. Missionaries of the time, including Jesuits, saw the societies on the Asian continent, especially China, as more sophisticated than Africans and Amerindians. Desiring to engage intellectually with the philosophical systems of these cultures, even Acosta asked initially to be sent to China. In a completely different context of the Americas, Acosta and Sandoval used their missionary treatises to argue for the importance of their own missions, demonstrating their own intellectual engagement and methods of cultural adaptation particular to their surroundings. They, like the Asian missionaries, teetered the lines of what is orthodox and what is radical. As Dauril Alden observes, while the Jesuits in Europe remained tied to a Tridentine teaching and practice of Catholicism, “abroad they became revolutionaries, not among the Europeans whom they hoped to reform, but among the indigenous multitudes whose basic systems of belief and customs they sought to alter through what today would be recognized as behavior modification,” (Alden 1996, p. 77).
3. Sandoval, Claver, and the Cartagena Mission to Enslaved Africans

The imposition of the Catholic faith on enslaved Africans is generally assumed to have been cut-and-dried without the use of strategic thought, care for the objects or continuing catechesis. As historian John K. Thornton has pointed out, “the emergence of Afro-Christian practices represented either the failure of the Europeans to Christianize the slaves fully, or alternatively as a defiant resistance on the part of the slaves to forced conversion to the religion of their masters and oppressors,” (Thornton 1988, p. 261). Conversely, there are profound and complex stories to tell about the development of African religiosity in the Americas beyond syncretism and resistance, including the transmission, reception and appropriation of Catholicism. Undoubtedly, many slaves used the Catholic faith as a tool for their own societal advancement. However, the stories of runaway communities continuing to practice Catholicism in their palenques (runaway villages), visiting priests for confession, and receiving the sacraments, indicate that Catholicism was also genuinely accepted by a multitude. Furthermore, the testimony repeatedly given by slaves in the Proceso de beatificación of the reverence they held for Claver begs for further exploration of what conditions allowed the Jesuit mission in Cartagena de las Indias to prosper.

3.1. Sandoval’s Information Network

As a young boy, Diego Folupo was enslaved to the Americas and sold to Fr. Francisco de Morales, priest at the Catholic cathedral of Cartagena. After three years with Morales, Folupo was sold to the Jesuit college in Cartagena upon the request of Claver to be used as an interpreter. Claver was familiar with Folupo, given he had baptized and catechized him, something Folupo testified before the Sacred Congregation of Rites that Claver did with recently-arrived Africans every day of his life (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 228). Many other slaves, namely those owned by Claver’s Cartagena college, also testified to the kind, charitable and holy person that was Claver. While we must carefully examine and question the credibility of their testimony, given their position as slaves in Cartagenian society and the nature of the beatification process to advance stories of extraordinary Christian charity, these interpreters worked on a daily basis with Claver and had an unmediated view of his mission. In this sense, as both objects of and assistants to his mission, it is quite possible their testimony was more important than just about any other in the determination of Claver’s sainthood. Should they have spoken negatively of Claver, it is unknown the degree to which the Roman Curia would have considered such testimony, but what is recorded leaves an image of a saint dedicated to the spiritual and material care of enslaved Africans.

Through the windows of the Cartagena college, looking out to the sea, the many ships carrying travelers, merchants, Catholic clergy, new colonists, and enslaved Africans could be seen arriving at the ports. A growing and important possession of the Spanish empire, people came to Cartagena from all over; it was “an emporium of virtually all nationalities,” a Jesuit visitor once described it (Santagata 1757, as cited in Morgan 2008, p. 76). As the armazones de negros (slave ships) arrived, Sandoval and Claver would immediately make their way to the port to meet the ships as they disembarked. Stopping only to grab alms to provide the slaves, Folupo records: “Upon entering, [Claver] distributed all this to them; he then went to see the sick. If they were in danger of dying and were already baptized, he confessed them through an interpreter of their ethnic group and applied the holy oils,” (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 228). Cartagena was an economically resourced city at the time, erecting hospitals, churches, forts, schools, and an important canal that would connect to the Magdalena River (Lemaitre 1998, p. 43). This building activity was supported by the importation of slaves brought by the hundreds. Moreover, because of its size and location, Cartagena’s port was the major passage point in the Indies for slaves as they disembarked to travel south to Lima and Quito, east to Venezuela, north to the Antilles, continued west to Panama, or further west to Veracruz, the other main port of the slave trade at this time. According to Sandoval, Cartagena was the “principal destination [of slaves] in all of the world,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 90). Thousands of slaves who passed
through this port annually were met by Sandoval and Claver and required the service of many interpreters who could give words to their suffering and needs accrued on the pitiless Atlantic passage. Indeed, what made Cartagena different from other Jesuit missions of the time was the immensity of its slave trade and diversity of missionary objects.

We have already seen how Sandoval used transatlantic communications to position his mission ideologically within the global context of Jesuit missions and history. However, he also utilized his communication network to understand the people to whom he was ministering. Sometimes read as an ethnography, Book 1 of De instauranda offers descriptions of African ethnic groups—their histories, geographies, languages, and rituals. While this can only be described as ethnography in a very loose sense of the term, Sandoval did receive many of these descriptions from first-hand witnesses. He was eager to speak with slave traders, travelers, and sea captains who came to Cartagena from various parts of the Atlantic. He also maintained direct communication with Jesuits in African colonies, one of whom he mentions on multiple occasions: "Of the Blacks who come from Angola, etc., I have found better information . . . through a letter I received from Fr. Luis Brandon, rector of the college our Society founded there," (de Sandoval 1956, p. 98).26 The communications Sandoval maintained with Brandon in Angola, or others such as Fr. Sebastián Gómez in Cape Verde, helped him to learn about black peoples around the world and the environments from which they came to Cartagena. Sandoval and Claver had the unique and difficult task of ministering to a diversity of blacks, as multitudes of different ethnic groups arrived at a time. Book One’s presentation of black societies attempts to establish the boundaries of this Jesuit undertaking, and the necessity of learning about the societies of enslaved Africans—especially their languages—to be an effective minister.

3.2. Poor Conditions and Pastoral Care

The additional presentation of non-Christian blacks as poor, miserable, and uncivilized in Book 2, unify around a central theme of the need to alleviate their suffering. Yet, few of his interlocutors would have given him information that undermined their own position.27 The slave trade was unjust, but his conversation partners—particularly the slave traders’—position their involvement in the trade in justifiable terms relative to the early 17th century world. It was advantageous for them to present enslaved Africans as uncivilized and their enslavement as just. Some even confided in Sandoval their conflicted feelings over their involvement in the slave trade, yet they claimed to be distressed largely over their uncertainty of an effective christianization of Africans in the Americas (de Sandoval 1956, pp. 101–4). To the extent that this is true, it gave Sandoval additional support for the urgency of his mission, in spite of such a “difficult business and irredeemable situation,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 104).28 His solution, thus, was to respond to the poor conditions and lack of pastoral care that plagued the christianization of enslaved Africans.

Diego Fuloop often accompanied Claver on his visits to the imprisoned. Disease swept through these prisons, carrying the stench of starving and dying chattel. Claver went to "help them in whatever ways he could, interceding on their behalf before the judges and other ministers," (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 309).29 The conditions in which the enslaved endured led many to blaspheme God, a punishable crime in these times. Witnessing this treatment and hearing what he claims to be the daily testimonies of slaves before the courts, Sandoval claims to be moved to shock and dismay at their treatment. Their blasphemy of God was directly connected to their enslavement, and thus Sandoval implored the master’s to treat them better, as the masters’ carelessness led the slaves to sin (de Sandoval 1956, p. 199). In the courts, the slave owner’s, due to their responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of the enslaved, were given the mandate to treat their slaves better.

The lack of concern for the well-being, physically and spiritually, of enslaved African lives meant that even the structures that were in place to facilitate their inculturation to Spanish society were rendered ineffective. Such lack of concern was exhibited not only by the colonists, but even by many clergy themselves, who preferred the “more luxu-
rious ministry” amongst the free white nobility over the subaltern (de Sandoval 1956, p. 257). Moreover, absent priests and bishops was fairly common, as they remained in urban centers or traveled long distances between Spain and the Americas on new appointments. Therefore, Sandoval implored slaveholders to increase their care for their slaves. “The slave owner should have understanding to look after their souls; understanding to look after their bodies; it should be carried in the eyes to see their needs, carried in the tongue to speak kind words, and carried in their hands to provide what is necessary,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 193). Slave owners were compelled by the Church and the enforcement of the courts to ensure the continued education of slaves (Lampe 2001, p. 46). The Cartagena inquisition, one of the three tribunals established in the Spanish-Americas, was able to act as an enforcer in some way of this inculturation, but outside of weekly rest and mass attendance, little was done to ensure the sustained christianization of the enslaved.

The poor catechesis of enslaved Africans—both on African shores and in the Americas—is the impetus of Sandoval’s fervor for this mission. He and Claver worked tirelessly to ensure that the enslaved were not only baptized, but learned the prayers of the church, revered the saints, were devoted to the rosary, sought confession for their sins, and lived a virtuous life. Language barriers, religious barriers and cultural barriers, all combined to make Christianization a slow and tedious project. The same barriers were further exacerbated by the conditions of a slave society that questioned the ability of Black slaves to understand the Christian faith and even debated their equal humanity. Slave owners had a greed for prosperity that relied upon the enforced free labor of the enslaved. Except the most pious minority, they had little use for evangelization. However, Sandoval and Claver had their own greed for saved souls and found a way to adapt their ministry to best curry favor with their missionary objects.

4. The Method of Accompaniment

Nearly every day at midday, Claver would go down to the entry gates of the Cartagena college and relieve the porter. As the college was close to the sea where the galleys docked, many Blacks who worked the area were accustomed to coming to the entrance gates to be fed lunch. After eating, Claver would wash their dishes by hand with well water and exhort the people to give thanks to God. On feast days (of the Catholic calendar), he would prepare impressive lunches served at the table. To create a festive mood, he would also ask his helpers to play music for the people as they ate. Andrés Sacabuche, an interpreter from Angola, having witnessed Claver sit amongst the poor and eat with them as if he was one of them, described Claver in perhaps the most endearing terms he could have hoped for: “I think he considered himself to be the most poor and least esteemed of them all,” (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 209). Accompanying the enslaved, and becoming like the enslaved in this sense, was the essence of Sandoval and Claver’s missionary strategy.

4.1. Accompaniment as a Theological Strategy

While at first glance accommodation was not necessary for Sandoval and Claver to perform their evangelistic work, they did find ways to adapt themselves to their missionary objects. Morgan has already demonstrated a particular accommodation in their adaptation of confessional practices to their particular context (Morgan 2000). However, beyond this, their theological structure appears to have been built around the idea of themselves becoming like slaves in order to minister to the slaves. In the strict sense of accommodation, they were unlike their Asian counterparts. They did not adopt African languages, dress, epistemologies or metaphysical thinking. Instead, inspired by their interpretations of Christian charity, the virtues, and the Jesuit missionary spirit, Sandoval and Claver accommodated to their missionary population by accompanying them in their suffering, and thenceforth leading them through the sacramental process of Christian conversion. However inadequate this strategy may have been at engendering the actual lived reality
of enslavement and the brutalities of the transatlantic passage, it is clear from the source material that they, at least figuratively, believed themselves to be walking with slaves.\(^{34}\)

Theologically, Sandoval and Claver saw baptism as the ultimate remedy to the miserable and depraved state of the enslaved, but treating them with charity and walking amongst them would deliver a degree of comfort they desperately needed to alleviate the physical suffering of their enslavement and open them up to accepting a new God. This method of accompaniment was aimed at changing the hearts, not only of the missionary objects, as was the aim of most missionary endeavors, but also of the missionaries themselves. “Let there be charity here, and may it burn brightly,” were the words of Sandoval in the final sentence of the introduction to *De instauranda* (de Sandoval 1956, p. 7).\(^{35}\) His hope in writing this manual was for his Jesuit brethren to see the value of his missionary work for the entire order, and to increase their pastoral care amongst Blacks, to increase their own charity.

### 4.2. Accompaniment in Practice

Stories of slave suffering fill the pages of *De instauranda*, particularly Book 2. From dying of disease to being murdered by their slaveholders, Sandoval attempts to show how the enslaved were more miserable than any other group in the world. There are poignant passages where he exhibits an understanding of the physical and emotional toil the slaves go through being separated from their home, wondering if they will see their children again, worriedly guessing the reasons they are being dumped in water, attempting to soothe the cries of babies as they are loaded onto ships, and enduring the pains of the *hacendero’s* (ranch owner) whip. “Speaking to them in their language they are intelligent as if they were ladinos. They complain of their work, noting that their owners are uncaring and treat them inhumanely when they’re sick. They beg me to intercede for them,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 342).\(^{36}\)

It was part of Sandoval and Claver’s intention to not be afraid to be seen with Blacks. They walked the streets of Cartagena with their interpreters and encouraged Blacks to join them in their processions. They aimed to accompany the enslaved from the moment of their arrival, proudly visiting them in places where no dignified Cartagenian of the time would find him or herself. Bringing food and drink, they boarded the ships as soon as possible to attend to the sick and needy, including women who had given birth while on the passage and their newborn babies. As the slaves were transported to one of dozens of holding cells in the city of Cartagena to await their sale, Claver, who took up most of the practical duties while Sandoval dedicated himself to his writing and administration of the college, would continue to visit them, bringing food, medical aid and gifts such as alcohol, tobacco, and perfumes.\(^{37}\) Again, he would visit the sick first, “with such charity that if someone was in need, he himself would massage their bodies, applying some palliatives made of wine and giving it to the sick person to sip,” (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 259).\(^{38}\) Claver ministered in this way without fear of disease. When interpreters “advised him to keep distance from the sick, who were very contagious and malodorous, to avoid catching their disease and being harmed by it, he would respond that it would do no harm and that God would keep him safe,” (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 260).\(^{39}\) Maria de Mendoza, a free Black from Biafara, and former slave of the Cartagena college, more profoundly testifies to Claver’s humility, stating how he would treat slaves with diarrhea, “dirtying his hands, and encouraging me to not be nauseous, as these are our fellow human beings,” (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 293).\(^{40}\) Their missionary strategy was to go directly to the enslaved themselves; to humble themselves to the point of becoming like the enslaved, afraid to do no job that only the enslaved themselves would have been expected to do—namely the physical nourishment and care of Cartagena’s lowest class. Although they maintained numerous privileges the enslaved were never afforded, the appearance of their own poverty was intended to move the enslaved emotionally and spiritually towards salvation.
If the Ethiopian Jesuits are known today for their top-down strategy of evangelization, Sandoval and Claver clearly preferred a bottom-up strategy. In this colonial setting, already under the rule of a Catholic kingdom, it is not hard to imagine that they drew the ire of colonial administrators and slaveholders for their radical servitude of the enslaved in the name of Christian charity. For example, in the *Proceso de beatificación* doña Leonor de Orgaz testified that Claver gave preference to Blacks, choosing to hear their confessions over a Spaniard’s (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 173). While such servitude was largely practical in nature, they were not opposed to leveraging the law to defend the rights of the enslaved to live as Christians and freely practice Christianity. For one, *De instauranda*, while primarily addressed to his fellow Jesuits, was also intended to influence the noble, Spanish ruling class. Furthermore, Sandoval and Claver successfully petitioned Governor Zapata to enact a prohibition of slave work on Sundays and feast days, doctrinally required days of rest (Lemaitre 1998, pp. 48–49). Beyond this, they helped the enslaved to take advantage of the law in encouraging Blacks to marry and form families, preventing their owner’s from selling and separating individual slaves from their families in favor of profit (Block 2012, p. 29). Yet, the testimony provided in the *Proceso de beatificación* is overwhelmingly positive from all classes and strata of people, more than just fellow Jesuits at the college, or interpreters, but including colonial administrators, sea captains, barbers, doctors, and members of other religious congregations. Free Blacks, who held various positions and contributed greatly to early colonial Spanish society, also gave positive testimony of Claver’s work (Wheat 2016; de la Fuente 2011). Nevertheless, Sandoval and Claver’s primary concern was that the enslaved feel comforted by their charitable acts and preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Despite the heroic presentation of their missionary work in the *Proceso de beatificación* and *De instauranda*, Sandoval and Claver’s accompaniment could not have relieved the pains of all. They provided comfort to the enslaved, took upon themselves their lowliness, and claimed to have had much success in their conversion. Yet, while these sources speak little to nothing of the rejection of Catholicism, the existence of large numbers of runaways to *palenques* confirms that their christianization was not enough. Runaways were willing to risk death, and wage war, before returning to enslavement in Spanish-American society (McKnight 2004). Most interestingly, an extensive portion of the testimony provided for Claver’s beatification and canonization comes from the voices of the enslaved. It is a marvel to have such a quantity of recorded thoughts and words of enslaved people from the early 17th century. Yet, such testimony should not be received without simultaneously questioning the degree of freedom they may have felt to speak with candor, or from their own cultural understanding, to express negative thoughts about Claver before the Roman Curia. Much deeper analysis of such testimony is necessary in order to litigate the actuality of charity of Sandoval and Claver. Nevertheless, the uniformity of the testimony shows that these missionaries and their helpers were indeed dedicated to serving Blacks, at least in a manner that they thought to be not only effective but sympathetic of their situation. Moreover, that many *palenques* continued to promote the practice of Catholicism does indicate that Sandoval, Claver, and their helpers had some level of influence throughout the region, offering something religiously redeemable in their charitable actions.

### 4.3. Accompaniment in Context

The historical context of the slave trade and the religious context of global missions illuminate how radically different Sandoval and Claver were for their time, while still influenced in many ways by those very contexts and the peoples and thoughts emerging out of them throughout the Atlantic. Sandoval’s emphasis on the Jesuit commitment to catechize the lowliest peoples of society, and take up the most difficult missionary tasks, displays his fidelity to a particular vision of Jesuit ministry modeled after the likes of Ignatius, Xavier and Oviedo (Morgan 2008, pp. 81, 85). Like these apostles, he maintained a sense of God’s presence in all peoples and places, aimed to change his heart through the practice of self-understanding, and went into the world saving souls through pastoral
This is balanced by his audience, the multitudes of Jesuits engaged in the education of the European elite. While different in strategy from other missions, he carried this spirit and innovated from within his own context to bear his own missionary theology. Noting the observation of Javier Osuna, Cohen states that this innovation was borne from the first Jesuits: “Ignatius of Loyola and the succeeding generals of the Order encouraged individual initiative, carefully framed by fidelity to the mission. Particularly when the mission was far away, there was an opportunity to . . . find individual ways of using the Society’s methods,” (Cohen 2009, p. 28). The method of accompaniment employed by Sandoval and Claver was characteristically Jesuit, yet uniquely their own.

5. Conclusions: The Black Legend and the Intellect of Accompaniment

From radical accommodation to strict cultural imposition, Jesuit missionaries to the early modern global South were not uniform in their approach to evangelization. The vastness of the Chinese and Indian empires, and the firmness of their intellectual traditions, meant that Jesuit missionaries struggled to succeed without engaging the intellectual class on their own terms. In Ethiopia, deference to local Christian leaders required political maneuvering to gain religious control before evangelization could be effective. In Latin America, where political dominance was already maintained by Iberian Catholic empires, pastoral care and intellectual persuasion had become an afterthought for most clergy. In each of these locations, distinguishable missionaries arose to forge a more effective path of christianization, employing strategies informed by their specific context.

Given the Cartagena mission’s incessant focus on baptism and conversion, the general assumptions of a vapid and forced evangelization of enslaved Africans—intolerant missionaries and passive slaves—might appear to have been the case. These assumptions suggest that enslaved Africans renounced the Christian faith—receiving it in name only—and more wholeheartedly maintained a clandestine practice of their traditional religions. While based in the reality that many African descendants never completely eradicated their traditional religious beliefs and practices, many sought innovative ways to transform their religious beliefs and practices as new Catholics. To be clear, the Catholic faith was pressed upon enslaved Africans even in the Cartagena mission, but that does not mean that the enslaved were passive recipients of the faith, nor that all missionaries were narrow-minded. They were each intellectual participants in the negotiation of christianization.

The Spanish Black Legend of cruelty and intolerance, used historiographically to denigrate the intellectual development of the Spanish-Americas and its role within the early modern Atlantic, silences not only the voices of innovative figures like Sandoval and Claver, but also of the enslaved Africans to whom they ministered. To the contrary, enslaved Africans (and indigenous Amerindians) had many reactions to Christianization, and appropriated the faith in creative ways that demonstrate their wisdom. Missionaries like Acosta, Sandoval, and Claver sought ways to respond to such creativity. At the outset of his argument in Book 3, Sandoval claims to be free of rhetoric and erudition. Arguing for the practicality and simplicity of his message, he proclaims: “It is necessary to strip (reason) of the finery with which rhetoric and eloquence usually dress her prayers, so that naked, like ancient athletes, she goes down to the arena, comes to blows with her opponents and defeats them, because this is the costume with which the dialectician puts his syllogisms into play,” (de Sandoval 1956, p. 328). Yet despite such claims to the simple force of reason, Sandoval exercised the use of creative rhetoric and engaged persuasively with scripture, the classics, scholastics, and legal scholars of his time in order to promote his mission. Colombian scholar Eduardo Lemaitre echoes this, saying, “Father Sandoval was also an intellectual, an erudite, and a great observer,” (Lemaitre 1998, p. 47). He creatively used the spirit of the Jesuit charism, early modern geography and the context of the Atlantic world to promote his ideological commitments, reinterpreting Jesuit history and the Cartagena mission’s place within it (Morgan 2008, p. 88). Like Jesuits around the world, Sandoval had to amplify the Cartagena mission in order to enter into the conversation of global Jesuit missions and promote its importance.
De instauranda and the Cartagena mission are evidence that Spanish-American missionaries employed more intellectual thought than the Black Legend might lead one to assume, and in fact were involved in, and contributed to, global debates of the time. Sandoval studied philosophy and theology at the Saint Martin Seminary in Lima, and likely wrote at least part of De instauranda there, utilizing the college’s robust library. It is further likely that this is the same library Acosta used a few decades earlier when he penned De procuranda, and the influences of humanism and Spanish scholasticism are evident in both treatises with common citations such as Pliny, Homer, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas. After its completion, De instauranda was sent to Spain for approval from Jesuit superiors, and subsequently published to what appears to be little attention from the European world. As such, it may seem that De instauranda offered little to educated audiences. More likely, it was the collective involvement of northern European (Protestant) kingdoms in the slave trade that detracted from De instauranda’s acceptance. Unlike the widely read and distributed works of Bartolomé de las Casas, the prominent legal and theological defender of Amerindians the century prior, northern European empires could not appropriate Sandoval to point to the cruelty of Iberian enslavement as they were equally involved in the slave trade, and generally harsher in their treatment of the enslaved.

Considering the number of Jesuit communications cited in the text, it is evident that Sandoval maintained an awareness of Jesuit missions throughout the globe, and the missionary strategies employed therein. It would be more surprising if news of the radical accommodation of Ricci and De Nobili had not reached Sandoval, considering they were subjects of debate amongst Jesuit superiors in Europe. Yet, the colonial slave state environment of the Cartagena mission does not make obvious Sandoval’s intellect in implementing his own strategy, and in his and Claver’s adapting to their missionary objects by accompanying them in their suffering. Sandoval and Claver were fighting precisely against such indiscriminate imposition of Catholicism, in accord with other radical and influential Jesuits of the period.

Sandoval and Claver’s theological proposal exemplifies the intersection between history, mission, and theology. Informed by its location within the linked environments of Atlantic and Jesuit worlds, the Cartagena mission is another example (a critical one that features the christianization of enslaved Africans) that challenges the historiographical assumption that Latin American mission and theology were uncritical. Contrarily, analysis of the mission along this intersection leads to deeper historical insight into Christianity’s development in Latin America, Jesuit missions on a global scale, and the theological constructs emphasized therein. Moreover, De instauranda itself emerges not simply as an ethnography or text on slavery, but as a missionary treatise with a larger theological proposal and deeper historical motivation beyond a narrow-sighted desire for the salvation of souls.

Certainly, more can be said about the theologies, philosophies, and legal theories that informed Sandoval’s missionary strategy and writings in order to further demonstrate the thought that he and Claver employed. Moreover, significant questions remain in relation to race, religious and ethnic inequality, and their failures to directly challenge the slave trade, which have not been treated herein. While these might be more pressing questions, with a need for their continued examination in greater detail persisting, a sense of the purpose of the Cartagena mission amidst the Spanish-American and global Jesuit missionary world can assist scholars in treating these topics with prudence and contextualization.

The Cartagena mission emerged out of the missionary spirit of the Jesuits of the time, yet was innovatively unique in its vision of how it could influence the development of religion in the New World. The missionaries’ “success” in baptizing thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Blacks was read as proof for their mission’s global importance. However, to promote its purpose, Sandoval tied his mission into a prophetic vision of the Society’s apostolic missionaries and global expansion. Relying upon the cross-Atlantic movement of people and information, melded with his training in scholastic and humanistic thought, he expanded the diversity of Aethiopian nations to historically authenticate
the necessity of the salvation of enslaved Blacks while giving voice to slave suffering to accentuate its urgency. Sandoval was already exhibiting and employing a global perspective, utilizing the material his network provided to develop a historical and theological justification for the missionary necessity of accompanying enslaved Blacks—adapting oneself in humility to become like a slave.

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Notes

1 As Sandoval explains, Ethiopian was a term used during this period to refer to Black, or African, people. Sandoval, rather intentionally, uses this term widely, including dark-skinned and Black people from other regions of the globe such as India, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea. In the case of Ethiopians (i.e., Abyssinians), he argues that they are rightfully Catholic by lineage, given their prior acceptance of the Catholic faith in the early period of Christianity. His usage of Ethiopian in the broad sense is a rhetorical move to be more inclusive of the possibilities of “Black” salvation, explained in further detail below. When necessary for literary specificity, I am using the Latinized spelling Aethiopian in this article to refer to Blacks as Sandoval did, differentiating these references from Ethiopians as in the people from the kingdom of Ethiopia.

2 Cartagena de las Indias was located in the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada, and is known today simply as Cartagena, in modern day Colombia.

3 The restoration of the spiritual health of Aethiopians is meant to indicate that enslaved Africans are poorly and incorrectly baptized and catechized on African shores prior to the Atlantic passage—a case which Sandoval strongly makes as justification for the Cartagena mission. Less clear, but also possible, is the idea that Sandoval understands all enslaved Africans to also share in the Christian heritage by proximity, given the fact that some of the first peoples to become Christian in the centuries after Christ’s death were Africans, most notably the Ethiopians, thus necessitating the “restoration” of their salvation (de Sandoval 2008, p. xxii).

4 De instauranda has yet to receive the same recognition in U.S. American scholarship that important texts of the period dealing with the evangelization, treatment, and rights of Amerindians have received, namely the works of Bartolomé de las Casas. While Sandoval did not write as voluminously as Las Casas, nor play as central a role in diplomatic relations (mediating between missionary objects, the Church, and Crown), the polemical nature of his treatise and its historical, ethnographic, and theological subject-matter similar to Las Casas’ works makes it vital for the study of the early Spanish Americas.

5 Amongst contemporary U.S. scholarship, De instauranda has been the object of two important book-length works: a critical examination by literary scholar Olsen (2004), and an abridged English translation by historian Nicole von Germeten (2008), which includes a critical introduction and footnotes that give additional context to the treatise. Along with these book-length works, historian Ronald J. Morgan has produced two important articles (Morgan 2000, 2008) for the study of De instauranda. More recently, others have continued to study particular aspects of the text such as its portrayals of Blackness (Harpster 2016) and Black sanctity (Brewer-García 2019). While critical engagement with De instauranda or the Cartagena mission by theologians and scholars of religion remains limited, Christian ethicist Grimes (2015, 2017) has recently examined the ethics of Sandoval’s coworker Pedro Claver’s evangelistic work and the racialized nature of his canonization. R.L. Green also notes the absence of theological engagement in his study on Sandoval and other Spanish Jesuits’ theological perceptions of Africans (Green 2013, p. 98).

6 Morgan echoes Olsen and Colombian anthropologist Restrepo (2005) in calling attention to this tendency of some contemporary scholars to frame De instauranda narrowly without addressing it within its historical and religious context.

7 The Proceso de beatificación is the Spanish translation of the beatification and canonization documents published in Italian and Latin by the Sacred Congregation of Rites of the Roman Curia in 1696. The 1696 text is itself an edited copy of the original testimony compiled beginning in 1657 and first produced in 1676 with the oral testimony of 154 witnesses to the life of Claver.
Morgan recently published an article that sheds light on the everyday lives of Africans in Cartagena using this beatification and canonization testimony. As he notes, the usefulness of the canonization inquest lies in the “diversity of perspective that is almost concealed in this rich source material,” (Morgan 2019, p. 294).

Morgan (2008) article further explores this topic in the writing of Sandoval, demonstrating that Sandoval sees himself within a tradition of Jesuit writers addressing the inner core of Jesuit ministry (Morgan 2008, p. 76).

Suffering should not immediately be read to indicate that Sandoval thought Blacks were poor and suffering as a condition of their Blackness, though this would be an intriguing line of further inquiry. Rhetorically, the suffering and poverty of other dark nations helped Sandoval to identify them with the suffering of enslaved Blacks. Beyond this, there could be both racial and religious (spiritual) reasons for his repeated references to the suffering and poverty of Blacks in De instauranda. Yet historically, amongst Xavier’s most prominent encounters were those with the lowest castes of Indian society.

“The enseñándola por sí mismo a los niños, a los esclavos y gente ruda, en la tierra, en la mar, en las iglesias, en las plazas, por las calles, en los campos, en las playas, en los navíos y demás embarcaciones, de noche y de día, con un fervor y perseverancia incomparable.” Note: There are two modern translation of De instauranda, both published in Spanish. The 1956 translation by Angel Valtierra, S.J., maintains the original title Sandoval gave the treatise with the addition of a subtitle, De instauranda Aethiopum salute: el mundo de la esclavitud negra. The 1987 translation by Enriqueta Vila Vilar is titled Un tratado sobre la esclavitud. While both claim to be faithful translations, I have chosen to use 1956 translation as it maintained Sandoval’s notes in the margins. All translations in this article are my own.

For a digestible overview of de Nobili’s missionary work and writings, as well as a translation of The Report on Certain Customs in the Indian Nation see (de Nobili 2000, pp. 1–47).

“Y ahora refiere el Padre Hernando Guerrero que generalmente muestran todos gran amor, respeto y reverencia a los sacerdotes y predicadores de la Iglesia Católica, que al presente son de nuestra sagrada religión.”

“Y para una de dos casas que en aquel imperio tiene la Compañía, nos dio el sitio junto a su corte, y si tuviéramos sustento, pudiéramos fundar cuantas quisiéramos con muy grande gusto del rey y aplauso de los naturales.”

See: (Martínez d’Alos-Moner 2015; Cohen 2009; Aregay 1998).

“Con todo, en medio de estos errores, tienen extraordinaria devoción a las cosas santas y sagradas de nuestras iglesias.”

“… (según nos escriben los Padres de la Compañía que allí residen) no se ven entre ellos tantos pecados como en otras muchas partes en donde nuestra santa fe por Europa está entera.”

The encomienda was an enforced labor tribute system of the early Spanish Americas. Amerindian inhabitants of these lands were subjugated to this system under the premise that the Spanish Crown held the authority to grant the right to these lands to colonists.

“En conclusión, es sumamente necesaria mucha paciencia y tolerancia con estos pobres, si no acudieren y aprovecharen como querriamos. Esta nos enseñaron los Apóstoles y todos los varones apostólicos, y entre ellos particularmente San Francisco Javier, nuestro padre, y el insigne Patriarca Santo de Etiopía, Andrés de Oviedo, con sus compañeros insigne, todos obreros de negros; … Esta paciencia ha abierto la China y ha acabado las persecuciones de Japón, y ha penetrado casi toda Guinea, convirtiendo muchos reinos.”

See (Thornton 1988). For more on this topic, see also (Lindenfeld and Richardson 2011). More recently, the publication of a volume on Afro-Catholic festivals in the Atlantic continues to show how encounters between Iberian Catholics and Africans led to innovative appropriations of Catholicism beyond defiant resistance and syncretism on both African and New World shores (Fromont 2019).

Recent studies have shown how enslaved Africans were able to utilize their baptism into Catholicism for benefits such as protection from slaveholders (Bennett 2003; Block 2012).

Diego’s last name indicates that he was a native of the Folupo people, today known as the Jola, occupying the region of southern Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau.

Folupo names some of these other interpreters still alive at the time of his interview: “And Father’s other interpreters can also tell you, Black slaves of this college such as Andrés Sacabuche, Ignacio Angola, a mason by profession, Ignacio Soso and Francisco Yolofo and Manuela Biafara, José Monzolo and Lorenzo Cocoli who all still live; he had many other interpreters who have already died.” (Y Tambié lo pueden decir los intérpretes del padre, negros esclavos de este colegio como son Andrés Sacabuche, Ignacio Angola, albañil de profesión, Ignacio Soso y Francisco Yolofo y Manuela Biafara, Jose Monzolo y Lorenzo Cocoli que hoy viven; porque si bien tuvo muchos otros intérpretes, ya fallecieron),” (Splendiani and Arístizábal 2002, p. 230).

“At entrar, les distribuía todo esto; y después iba a ver a los enfermos. Si estaban en peligro y era bautizados, los confesaba por medio de un intérprete de su nación y les aplicaba los santos sustento, pudiendo a todo esto; y después escribían los Padres de la Compañía que allí residen) no se ven entre ellos tantos pecados como en otras muchas partes en donde nuestra santa fe por Europa está entera.”
This can be seen in the conflicting information Sandoval at times received. In an interesting passage in which Sandoval evaluates the legality of the slave trade, he presents a discrepancy between his sources. While Fr. Brandon reports that he had been preaching against the high frequency of the unjust capture of Angolan slaves, the captain of a Portuguese slave ship coming from Angola argued that the high number of Angolan slaves at the time was justly due to a war between local kings (Sandoval 1956, p. 100).

“Negocio dificultoso y en que tan poco se repará.” Sandoval is rather ambivalent about his thoughts on the slave trade. Living in a context in which slavery was common throughout the world, he never seems to question its legality, rather the unjust implementation of slavery. This is an important topic that requires more examination within religious scholarship.

This act could have been particularly important for certain enslaved Blacks. On feast days, enslaved persons were granted by law a day of rest. As a result of them not working, particularly cruel slave owners used these feast days as an excuse to not feed their slaves. On these occasions, some slaves had to prepare their own food with what little they had or choose to work in order to eat.

What is more, when a Spaniard insisted on being heard immediately, Claver would dare them to strip themselves of their extravagances first. Orgaz not only witnessed this, but stated that she was one of them.

The spirit of early Jesuit ministry is a complex subject. As John W. O’Malley points out, it can be evidenced primarily in the Spiritual Exercises written by Ignatius, and the Constitutions, “the living tradition of the life and ministries of Ignatius and other members of the Society,” (O’Malley 1993, p. 67). Ignatius’ Autobiography, written between 1553–1555, was also meant to give a “sense of location” to the order (O’Malley 1993, p. 65). For more on this topic, see: (Bangert 1986; Chapple 1993; Molina 2013; Morgan 2008).

Due to a lack of early colonial studies of the encounter of enslaved Africans with Catholicism in the fields of theology and religious studies, these assumptions are based largely on more prevalent studies of the 19th century slave system, which was driven by the plantation economy. They are also informed in large part by the North American context, which in U.S. academia has received more examination.

Historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra is a leading figure in the historiographical rewriting of Spanish-American intellect, and particularly its impact on the development of the British Atlantic (Cañizares-Esguerra 2004).

“Es menester desnudarla de las galas con que la retórica y eloquencia suele vestir sus oraciones, para que asi desnuda, a fuer de los atletas antiguos, baje al palenque, venga a las manos con sus contrarios y los venza, porque este es el traje con que el dialectico mete en campos sus silogismos.”
“El padre Sandoval era también un intelectual, un erudito, y un gran observador.”

For more on the interesting topic of Acosta’s use of sources in his scientific observations, see (Hornerberger 1939).

In the Proceso de beatificación, Nicolas González recounts that he once asked Claver a few years before his death how many Africans he had baptized. Claver replied that by his count he had baptized 300,000. Given the unlikelihood of 300,000 slaves legally passing through the port of Cartagena throughout Claver’s 38 years in Cartagena, González considers that this figure included enslaved Africans who had arrived to Cartagena and throughout the province of Nueva Granada in the decades prior who by the negligence of others had not been baptized (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 85). Ignacio Angola testified that the number of Africans Claver baptized is incalculable, but that there were years in which 12 to 14 ships carrying 200 to 400 Africans entered the port. At this rate, it is certainly possible that Claver baptized more than 100,000 Africans (Splendiani and Aristizábal 2002, p. 222).

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