Ancient Authorities Intertwined

Natural Philosophy, History, and Theology in the Writings of José de Acosta, S.J. (1540–1600)

In Memoriam Sabine G. MacCormack

Ed. Clifford Ando
University of Chicago
cando@uchicago.edu

Ed. Anne McGinness
John Carroll University
amcginness@jcu.edu

From the moment you stepped on her red-brick footpath, wound past the vegetable garden, under the Roman columns and into the foyer towards the hearth in the living room, the world stopped and Sabine G. MacCormack (1941–2012) gave you her attention for the next eight hours. Educating hearts and minds was the motto of the University of Notre Dame, where she held her last academic appointment, and no one took that mission more seriously than Sabine, the woman at the heart of one of the present author’s (AM) graduate experience there. To give of one’s time is one of the greatest gifts an advisor can give. For it is being together—in conversation, laughing, exchanging ideas on history and health care—that molds the mind, heart, and character. Sabine would get her students involved in everything from campaigning for US presidents, to instating major changes at the university library, and adopting stray cats. Her house was open to local workers in South Bend, undergraduates, graduates, the Quechua professors she housed and cooked for, and academics from around the world. Clearly, for her the boundaries of the academy, and of the life of the mind, were porous.

Only four months after Sabine MacCormack passed away, we, the present authors, were in Rome for a conference that Sabine was planning with Clifford Ando. Members of many of the communities in which Sabine participated were present, and she was truly missed, not only because she would have connected the somewhat disparate papers, but because we felt that Rome was just as much Sabine’s home as Lima or South Bend. In Rome, the classical and
Andean worlds met in the Jesuit archives (Arsi), and in the many conversations she had with friends and colleagues.

Born in Frankfurt, Sabine MacCormack studied Greek and Latin philology and history at the Goethe Universität, Frankfurt and ancient history (particularly late antiquity) at Oxford. Conceiving a passion for the Andes and the Spanish world while still a student, she established research agendas in late antiquity, medieval and early modern Europe, and Andean history that substantially altered the scope and trajectories of all those fields. Having taught Classics and worked as a librarian and archivist, she went on to teach her fuller range of interests at Stanford; then at Michigan as Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History; and at Notre Dame as Theodore M. Hesburgh Professor of Arts and Letters. Sabine held fellowships at Dumbarton Oaks in both Byzantine Studies and Pre-Columbian Art, the only person ever so honored. She was elected a fellow of the Medieval Academy of America and likewise to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among her achievements was leading the Christian Gauss Seminar in Criticism at Princeton University and holding a two-year Mellon Professorship in Latin American History at the Institute for Advanced Studies. Her last book, On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru (2007a) received both the Rawley Prize in Atlantic History and the Fagg Prize in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American History from the American Historical Association. She was also the first woman to win the Mellon Foundation’s Distinguished Achievement Award for scholarship in the humanities, in 2001, the prize’s inaugural year. She founded and edited the series “History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds,” for the Michigan and then for Notre Dame presses. She lectured extensively worldwide. The other awards and honors she received are too numerous to list here. Instead we will focus on Sabine’s character, her contributions to learning, and her unfinished work on José de Acosta.

Born into a shattered Europe whose anguish she felt deeply all her life, she was intensely committed to a belief in the self-redemptive power of human communities and to the role of scholarship in abetting acts of love and understanding. A lifelong commitment to the indigenous populations of Spanish Latin America was, for her, not simply an aspect of historical scholarship. In focusing on the Andean past, she urged that responsible historical scholarship should embrace the totality of populations which were at once Latin and Spanish; Quechua, creole, and Aymara; European and American. To this end, she was instrumental in creating the program in Latin American Indigenous Language Learning at Notre Dame, endowing it with funds from her Mellon award.

Possibly because of all she overcame in her early childhood, Sabine was courageous and not afraid to confront the largest of obstacles. She single-handedly
took it upon herself to stage a major reform of the university library. On another occasion, she wheeled herself into the dean's office when she had a broken ankle to voice her opinion about a graduate student who was being unjustly treated. She was not afraid of what other people thought of her. She explained that she slept on the floor of a hotel lobby to interview for one of her first jobs. Sabine loved universities, and wanted them to behave according to the high principles for which they stand. Her judgments in such matters could be severe, nor were they always correct. But in life, as in scholarship, she was always ready to admit error and strive to grow beyond it. She learned always, and devoted herself to doing so.

With her steadfastness and persistence came an intense work ethic that sustained scholarship across a vast terrain of ecology, peoples, and languages. This learnedness made her work exceptionally dense, and also difficult to summarize. Sabine simply saw more than others; texts and images spoke more deeply to her, because the worlds that generated them, and the pasts that gave birth to those worlds, were so fully known by her. Her work was nearly instantly recognized as admirable, but her arguments took a long time to take root in scholarship; and they have in many respects proved inimitable.

Sabine reminded her students to slow down, be patient, and choose the best, not necessarily the quickest, path. She urged her students to learn languages and always had a word or two to say under her breath to those whose scholarly lives were merely Anglophone. Sabine was known to get upset if students did not read a book to the end. In our fast-paced world there is a tendency to look for shortcuts and shy away from dense sources that hide under dusty covers, but Sabine would have nothing of that. “It takes as long as it takes” was her response to the deadlines of scholarship.

In the middle of the cornfields a treasure was found at Notre Dame that was not immediately visible—a professor who worked on the formation of character. Sabine’s idea of a professor was broad. Politics, healthcare, the New York Times Review of Books, the inefficiencies of the library and university administration were also part of education. She formed students by example as she brought them into the many projects she was a part of. The most important lesson she taught her students was how to live from the heart, the place from where we are most true and most effective. She followed her interests and passions and encouraged others to do the same.

Sabine studied what fascinated her. She told her incoming Ph.D. students not to pursue the degree if they thought they would be guaranteed a job afterwards. Rather, she would say that these years of doctoral studies were to study what you love and enrich your lives. She was insistent that we would graduate with skills we could market in other ways, just as she did after receiving her
D.Phil. from Oxford in 1974. Sabine worked for Phaidon Press and translated academic books on the side until she landed her first full-time academic appointment at the University of Texas at Austin in 1979.

The social and communal aspects of scholarship were a delight to her. She thrived on good company and conversation. Perhaps in compensation for the untold hours she spent reading and writing alone into the early hours of the morning, she took great pleasure in entertaining friends, students, and neighbors. She particularly enjoyed hosting dinners. One often began with wine (red, never white) and olives, whose pits went into the garden; then dinner, simply but expertly prepared, and served not infrequently with a side dish of scorn for the general run of restaurants. Wine and chocolate followed in front of the fire, and talk flowed. Often amusing and quasi-outrageous things were said by the hostess concerning an incident, the quality of a book, or the world’s ills. Such statements always being punctuated, with rising inflection, by an arch, “You know?”

She was an artist of passion and skill. She carried watercolors with her around the globe and high into the Andes, painting wherever she went. On the Wings of Time reproduces a number of her paintings, including on its cover. Sabine also knitted with great sophistication and was deeply learned in the history and production methods of Andean textiles, and so perhaps one might say fittingly of her scholarship that many can recognize intuitively the quality of stitching or a weave without being able to (re)produce it.

Work in Classics
Sabine’s work in classical studies and late antiquity in the late 70s and early 80s concentrated on imperial ceremonial (1972, 1975b, 1976, 1981, 1982). This body of work advanced a number of important ideas: first, it drew attention to the importance of ceremonial behavior in political and religious life in the Roman world, a topic once the object of careful study but long neglected, particularly in English and American scholarship. Second, by insisting that ceremonies were not dramas performed according to some script, it highlighted the function of ceremonial as a mechanism for activating and expressing political ideas. Third, she provided a series of important methodological statements on the study of late-antique art. She argued above all that artistic representations of imperial ceremonies were meaningful because they enabled viewers to place themselves within their world, and in this way produced authoritative, timeless representations of diachronic experiences familiar in form and tempo. She thus insisted that the seemingly reductive tendencies of iconographic representation were instead its greatest strength. Finally, ceremonial provides, according to Sabine, an heretofore neglected index of the decline of classical
civilization: the increasingly rigid stratification of society envisioned and ordained in the imperial law codes was concretized, in her analysis, most widely and visibly in the increasingly inflexible forms of ceremonial that ordered public life in the later Roman Empire.

On a different level, these early projects examined the transformation of classical culture, in particular of what we might loosely call classical social theory, in a period of religious and social change. Her more recent work exhibited similar preoccupations but she exercised her imagination on a very different body of material. In a sense, she spent the last two decades of her life in Classics studying the most canonized of topics: Christianity’s encounter with classical culture. One could describe her essays as explorations of pagan and Christian theories about the sacralization of landscape (1990), of the theology of demons in pagan and Christian thought (1998 ch. 4, cf. 1975a), of one Christian’s readings in classical literature (1998, 1999), and of the influence of Christian ethics on late Roman law (1997). But these essays stand apart from similar contemporary studies in a number of ways, most crucially in their concern to view Roman late antiquity as heir to a complex and vigorous cultural legacy from pagan antiquity and to situate complex intellectual-historical problems in the everyday.

Among her final publications in classical and late antique studies were two that might be taken as emblematic of her later work in these fields. One was a remarkably sympathetic and wide-ranging study of Augustine’s commentaries on *Genesis*, endlessly attentive to Augustine’s classical readings but also deeply sensitive to the historical particularity of his concerns (2007b). The other is a massive survey of late ancient readings of Cicero, which, in its detail, argumentation and ambition stretched far beyond the aspirations of the very fine volume for which it was commissioned (2013). Here, Sabine drew upon her simply remarkable erudition in late Latin literature to transform the history of the reception of Cicero into a lens upon the transformation of Latinate intellectual culture writ large. Despite its length, she was frustrated at the compression involved and aspired to produce a monograph from this project. This aspiration will, alas, remain unfulfilled.

**Works on Latin America**

To the general reader, Sabine announced her arrival in Latin American Studies with the publication of a magnificent, learned, and extraordinarily complicated volume, *Religion in the Andes* (1991). This work commenced from an intuition that early modern theories of cognition, to wit, the nexus of ideas surrounding theories of the soul and imagination, might help one to comprehend Europe’s encounter with the New World. The inquiry therefore begins
with Aristotle’s *De anima*, and Sabine takes her reader elegantly and seemingly inexorably to Spinoza, whose radicalism is measurably enhanced for being the better situated along multiple cultural-historical axes. The concern thereby displayed, for the history of ideas conceived across a *longue durée*, studied in its social and material context, also animates her work in the late Roman world. That said, an enduring concern for the particularity of Andean experience also helps her to see the limitations imposed upon early colonial witnesses by their own powerful desire to explain what they saw in light of the models delivered to them by classical erudition.

In a more abstract perspective, Sabine’s contributions to Latin American history might be usefully divided into two groups (This classification is not exhaustive so much as heuristic). On the one hand, she has proved to be one of the field’s most searching readers of early colonial texts. Against the common grain, her ambition was not to excavate the data that Andean peoples transmitted to Spanish inquirers and inquisitors or to rehearse a conventional history of brutality, exploitation, and domination, but rather to reveal the ages of conquest and consolidation as moments of revolutionary cross-cultural contact and fervent and passionate discovery. Her last book, *On the Wings of Time* (2007a), was a work in this vein, and it might well be regarded as her finest, and certainly her most elegant achievement.

The second category of work by Sabine in Latin American history studies the writers and intellectuals whose works—letters, sermons, epistles, natural histories, biblical commentaries, grammars, and dictionaries—provided their superiors and rulers in Rome and Spain, as well as the wider European public, with the great bulk of its knowledge of the Andean world, until at least the end of the colonial period. Her ambition in this body of work has been to uncover and understand the intellectual formation of those men; to explore the nature of the percipience with which it endowed them; to identify the discursive tools with which it prepared them; and to examine, with sympathy and passion, their achievements as actors and authors in worlds for which they were at best only partially prepared.

Needless to say, to perform this kind of inquiry well required knowing at some very considerable depth all those works in Latin, Greek, and the vernaculars that the most educated men of the early modern world would have read. There are, frankly, few who could do it at all. In Sabine’s case, the results were historical essays of surpassing beauty about human beings at the limits of their preparation, often enough discovering the means to recognize humanity in others. It might be useful to emphasize that Sabine’s work in this last vein has often enough recuperated missionary work as a site of great intellectual achievement as well as charity: the remarkable essay “Grammar and Virtue: The
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Formulation of a Cultural and Missionary Program by the Jesuits in Early Colonial Peru” is a case in point (2006). In this respect, too, her work has stood somewhat outside the mainstream.

The project that she was working on at the time of her death, “Natural Philosophy, History, and Theology in the Writings of José de Acosta S.J.,” fits into the second type. Acosta was a most remarkable man and a thoroughly unconventional thinker. That is to say, as MacCormack emphasizes in the essay published here, his metaphysical priorities differ in rather stark ways from those of the majority of his modern readers, and she quite rightly reproaches those moderns for assuming that one can mine his work for nuggets of information without engaging his metaphysical commitments.

But Acosta also dissented, sometimes explicitly, often implicitly, from the commonplace mechanisms for understanding the historical, biblical, and eschatological situation of the Andes then being advanced by his contemporaries. For example, he largely forsook the resources of ecological determinism that classical ethnographic writing had bequeathed to early modern natural history, nor did he find much utility in the varied efforts to place Andean peoples within biblical genealogies. But this is not to say that he dissented from classical epistemic frameworks altogether. He voiced the conviction that observation of the natural world provided confirmation of metaphysical truths in language that hearkened back to Stoic doctrines of natural law, but Acosta deployed the conclusions he drew from these efforts within a moral program that possessed immediate contemporary relevance.

Coming to grips with the totality of Acosta’s achievement, rather than merely cherry-picking from the Natural History, involves the searching out and transcribing of a very large body of works never published, as well as the reading of many texts that have never received modern editions. Sabine had very largely completed this enormous effort before her death. In a final conversation with one of the authors (AM) in May 2012, Sabine expressed that she was just about ready to begin writing the new book and believed she had found her angle into Acosta’s corpus. She expounded the view that one must not glide over early modern dilemmas, but rather we should allow them to stand. She believed that her angle into Acosta’s work might be to ponder a crucial dilemma among the early Jesuits: some Jesuits call the natives barbarians, while other Jesuits praise them for their virtue. “How can we hold these two things together in the same world?” she asked.

The article that follows comes from Sabine’s preparations for her new book. MacCormack wrote the article for a symposium organized by Emanuele Colombo and Paul Shore at Boston College in 2010, “Jesuits and the Peoples of
the Book: The Society of Jesus, Jews, and Muslims (1540–1773).” Sabine was not able to attend because she broke her ankle. She had sent the text in an advanced version to be published in conjunction with the symposium, if such a volume was ultimately contemplated. Since the text was nearly ready to be published, the present authors chose to preserve Sabine’s language and make only minor alterations in punctuation and spelling. Clifford Ando, who is serving as Sabine’s literary executor, undertook to complete the classical references where Sabine had left gaps and Anne McGinness worked on the early modern references in the footnotes.

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José de Acosta was born of converso parents in Medina del Campo in Old Castile in 1540, attended the Jesuit college there and entered the Society at the age of fourteen. He spent the years 1572–1585 in Peru, then returned to Spain via Mexico. He died in Salamanca where he was rector of the Jesuit college in 1600.

José Acosta is best known as the author of a classic of early modern ethnography, the *Natural and Moral History of the New World.* Whether he would be

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Ancient Authorities Intertwined: Natural Philosophy, History, and Theology in the Writings of José de Acosta, S.J. (1540–1600)

*Sabine G. MacCormack*

Abstract

The article surveys and interprets the works produced by José de Acosta during his years in the New World and his revisions of, and additions to, those works after his return to Europe. Elucidating Acosta’s engagements with both Scripture and classical literature, the essay urges respect for the various religious, intellectual, and metaphysical commitments that structured Acosta’s arguments. Particular attention is given to Acosta’s wrestling with the limits of ancient geographic knowledge, on the one hand, and to his efforts to understand religion in the New World in light of ancient evidence of knowledge of God before Christianity and patristic essays on the conversion of the ancient Mediterranean.

Keywords

José de Acosta – Jesuits – Peru – natural history – evangelization – ancient Mediterranean – Patristics – Classical literature – conversion – Scripture

José de Acosta was born of converso parents in Medina del Campo in Old Castile in 1540, attended the Jesuit college there and entered the Society at the age of fourteen. He spent the years 1572–1585 in Peru, then returned to Spain via Mexico. He died in Salamanca where he was rector of the Jesuit college in 1600.
pleased or dismayed by this recognition of his work I do not know. At any rate, the story he intended to tell and did tell, in this and all his other writings, is the story of salvation. It was this universal story, as he perceived it, whether played out in ancient Greece and Rome, or in ancient Israel, or in the Holy Land in the time of Christ, or finally, in Europe and the Americas, that stood at the center of his interest and provided the organizing principle of what he chose to say. Of course, we can and do read Acosta—along with other writers of his time—while simply ignoring this organizing principle and thus deriving from what he wrote such information as we choose on our own terms. Such reading is common, and in its own way useful, but it arises out of a worldview that Acosta did not share; indeed it would have been inconceivable in his day. Acosta's ethnography, his interest in the histories, religions, and customs of Amerindian peoples was subsidiary to his understanding of the history not just of humankind, but of creation as a whole—or, as he expressed it, history and natural philosophy complemented each other. Put differently, Acosta's conception of the shape of history and the world was in no way an early modern antecedent of global history as understood currently. In effect, our own contemporary understanding of the content of history when applied to Acosta's work amounts to emptying it of the cosmic and human drama that he saw unfolding in the world he observed and in the ancient authors he studied, in particular in Scripture. The endeavor of this paper, therefore, is to understand some aspects at least of Acosta's thinking, alien though it is to our own engagement with the past.

The ancient authorities Acosta thought about were—broadly speaking—of three kinds: Scripture, the Greek and Latin classics, and the church fathers along with later Christian writers. We like to suppose that reconciling these authorities with the realities of the times became particularly difficult during the age of discoveries. And indeed, in the sixteenth century, during Acosta's own lifetime, European knowledge of astronomy, geography, and the world's inhabitants expanded beyond recognition. Human history was at the point of taking a more expansive universal turn, and terrestrial space changed in nature—for example, as Acosta explained carefully, the “torrid zone” turned out to be habitable. But in the Spanish and Portuguese worlds, where church reform was not caused by any reformation, two things remained continuous.

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2 [Edd. The confrontation of the classical tradition as received in the sixteenth century with the startling realities of religion, ecology, and human societies in the New World was an enduring theme of MacCormack’s work, and readers are encouraged to seek out her monographs, Religion in the Andes. Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and On the Wings of Time. Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).]
with the past: first, the shape of salvation, the ongoing presence of God in his creation. And second, the nature and coherence across time of human knowledge—not that knowledge did not change and grow, but it did so in ways that were in themselves believed to be intelligible, explicable, and continuous with the knowledge of the past. Like his contemporaries, Acosta was heir to a very long tradition of grappling with ancient texts in the face of events of the times. In so far as Scripture appeared to be at variance with the worlds that came to light in European consciousness thanks to Portuguese and Spanish ocean voyages, this was nothing new: the endeavor to explain Scripture in light of current events and vice versa went back to the church fathers, and indeed to New Testament times. The same applied to the Greek and Roman classics, the church fathers, and other Christian writers—even Thomas Aquinas himself did not generate universal assent. Furthermore, this multiple, many-layered textual tradition itself contained internal tensions and contradictions that generated controversy. Hence, taking stock of the Americas within this tradition, as Acosta was doing, perpetuated well-honed skills of reading and exegesis with which to explicate a coherent divinely guided universe even if, at the levels of natural philosophy and history, much remained obscure and even controversial.

The first book Acosta wrote for publication was the Latin *De procuranda Indorum salute* [Achieving the Salvation of the Indians], which he finished in 1576, after having spent four years in Peru. He sent it to Rome for approval in 1577. Quoting psalms, prophets, and church fathers—“Have we not all one father?”—he pleaded for the evangelization of all the “innumerable peoples” of the Americas while reproaching his countrymen for placing grave obstacles in the way of achieving this end. Authorities in Madrid and Rome took

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3 Claude Pavur, ed., *The Ratio Studiorum. The Official Plan for Jesuit Education* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), H 19, *Regulae professoris philosophiae*, n. 212: “[... de Sancto Thoma nunquam non loquatur honorifice, libentibus illum animis, quoties oporteat, sequendo; aut reverenter et gravate, si quando minus placeat, deserendo.”

4 José de Acosta, S.J., *De procuranda Indorum salute*, I.1.2, line 48: “Numquid non unus est pater omnium?” Quoting Mal. 2:10: “Numquid non est pater unus omnium nostrum?” (Revised Standard Version, from here on rsv.) See Acosta’s letter to Mercurian in *De procuranda Indorum salute*, ed. Luciano Pereña (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984–1987), 48, line 14: “frustra vero gentes innumerabiles ad Evangelium vocari divinitus, frustra tum alias Dei servos tum nostros ad hoc opus mitti, ut mihi persuaderem adduci numquam potui.” (Edd. MacCormack did not specify which editions of *De procuranda Indorum salute*, *De temporibus*, and *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* she used at any given citation. It is clear that she drew primarily on *De procuranda Indorum salute*, ed. Luciano Pereña and at other times on the first edition, published in Salamanca in 1589:
exception and insisted on revisions, but the book finally appeared in print in 1589, now prefaced by a short treatise, *De natura novi orbis* [On the Nature of the New World]. Two years later, Acosta published this same treatise in the vernacular as the introduction of the *Natural and Moral History*, paraphrasing the subject of the entire work as “the works of God and the works of (human) free will,” where the latter refers to the history of the Americas before the arrival of the Spanish. *De procuranda* by contrast describes the missionary enterprise in Spanish America, especially in Peru. The languages, trajectories, and contents of these two books, Latin and the vernacular, pre-Columbian and Spanish America, and gentile and Christian history, endow the treatise *De natura novi orbis* with quite different messages depending on the sequel to which it was the preface.⁵ Let us begin with *De procuranda*.

The first Jesuits to be sent to Peru were repeatedly instructed to devote themselves to their work and not to meddle in politics.⁶ Like several of his fellows, Acosta found it to be incompatible both with his conscience and with his understanding of Scripture to heed this prohibition. Of the many voices of Scripture that pervade the *De procuranda*, the voice of ethical exhortation, of protecting the helpless and innocent, is the most pervasive, especially where Acosta wrote about the Spanish themselves as the primary obstacle to the implementation of the divine command to “preach to all nations.” So far from living Christian lives so as to inspire prospective and recent indigenous converts, viceroys, *corregidores*, judges, and lesser officials came to the Indies driven by the lust for material gain and for a speedy return to the peninsula.⁷ These very persons, their characters marred by avarice and dissolute living,⁸ dared to claim that the Gospel could only be inculcated by force because the

José de Acosta, *De orbis libri duo; et de promulgatione Evangelii apud barbaros, sive de procuranda Indorum salute libri sex* (Salamanca: Apud Guillelmum Foquel, 1589). It also appears that she either had access to or was planning to check Acosta’s original manuscript of *De procuranda*. Where compelled to do so, we have therefore completed references by citing book and chapter rather than page numbers.

5 Sabine MacCormack, “Grammar and Virtue: The Formulation of a Cultural and Missionary Program by the Jesuits in Early Colonial Peru,” in *The Jesuits II. Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, ed. John O’Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 576–601.

6 Acosta’s translation of his own Latin is very free but matches the original in broad terms.

7 In a passage toned down by the censor, Acosta quoted a contemporary according to whom men were the “refuse of Spain.” Acosta, *De procuranda*, III.5.1: *Hispaniae faeces* claimed as their own many of the secular and ecclesiastical offices in Peru.

8 Acosta, *De procuranda*, I.12.1: dissolute living makes the preacher despicable, and avarice makes him hated.
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Indians would not receive it any other way—a charge Acosta contradicted with arrays of scriptural and patristic authorities. Further obstacles to preaching the Gospel consisted of excessive tribute and the inhuman conditions in which so many Indians worked. Take the mines of Potosí:

It appalls me to describe the appearance of the mines that descend into the innermost entrails of the earth, the chasm of them resembling the very underworld being thrown open to the eyes, whence the ancient poets rightly spoke of riches being hidden in the realm of Pluto. Chrysostom wondered at the labor of men of his time extracting metal, and describes it eloquently, but all this is like smoke and shadows compared to the mining of our own time. Perennial, fearful dark prevails in the heavy underground air, the descent is long and onerous, the struggle most cruel against the unyielding rock, and halting is dangerous. A faltering step while burdened with the weight of ore brings death and the ascent is by winding perilous steps—and there is more that is burdensome even to think about.

Such being indigenous people’s life in the world, often their life in the church was hardly an improvement because some missionaries lacked the patience and dedication to proclaim the Gospel, while others administered the sacraments for gain. Acosta quoted the words of Paul that had so impressed

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9 Acosta, *De procuranda*, II.1.1. [Edd. MacCormack intended to cite more examples of Acosta’s rejection of the use of force to evangelize.]
10 E.g., Acosta, *De procuranda*, V.10.2, citing *inter alia*, Augustine, *Serm.* 62.11.17 and *Tract. in Joh.* 26.6.
11 Acosta, *De procuranda*, III.18.1: “horror est dicere quae mineralium intra ipsa abditissimae telluris viscer a delitescentium facies s it, quae vorago, ut vere tartarus ipse patere videatur, neque inepte poetae olim gazas apud Plutonem reconditas fabulati sunt. Chrysostomus sui temporis laborem hominum in extrahendo metallo miratur narratque eloquenter; verum omnia prae nostris fumus et umbra sunt. Perpetua atque horrenda nox, aer crassus et subterraneus, descensus prolixus et perdifficilis; cum durissima rupe saeva contentio, statio periculosa; si vestigium nutet, actum est, humeris vectatio permolesta, per gradus obliquos et male haerentes ascensio caeteraque etiam cogitatu gravia.”
12 Acosta, *De procuranda*, I.11.2–I.12 where Acosta especially highlights clerical greed and unchastity. See, e.g., I.12.2: “quemadmodum vero impudicitiae foeditas despicabilem redit praedicatore m, ita avaritiae sordes faciunt odiosum” (in short, “unchastity renders the preacher despicable and greed makes him hated.”) See I.12.1: “qui priscos canones legerit merito mare ob semel admissum stuprum, irrecuperabiliter de omni sacerdotali gradu et ministerio ecclesiastico depelli convictum.”
Augustine: “Faith comes from hearing.” Converting Indians was a matter of learning indigenous languages, of allowing time for persuasion to sink in and, above all, of teaching by example. No matter how unpromising the situation in which the preacher found himself, Acosta insisted, all were called to enter the patria coelestis, the heavenly homeland.

True: the task of speaking on behalf of God was hard. Moses and several of the prophets had resisted the call, claiming they were not qualified, and those to whom the prophets had been sent were more often than not unwilling to hear. This accounted for the seemingly contradictory characterizations of Israel that were to be found in Scripture: at times the prophet seeking a hearing described them as God’s chosen people, and at others he reproached them as an unfaithful, idolatrous nation. Similarly, in early Christian times, Paul wrote to the same people as failing in their vocation and elsewhere addressed them as saved by Christ. The missionary experience in Peru, where Indians were at times ready to hear but often not, was thus the continuation of a very old story, going back not just to the time of Christ and the apostles, but to the histories of the Hebrew Bible. Even the terrible example provided for Indian converts by Spanish encomenderos, judges, and visitors, had been anticipated in Scripture, so that the words of the prophet Amos could have been written about Spaniards in Peru:

They hate him who speaks reproof in the gate, and they abhor him who proclaims the truth. Therefore, because you trample upon the poor and take exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.

Conversing with Andean lords, Acosta was told more than once how readily the subjects of the Incas would have turned to Christianity had not the Spanish so treacherously executed the Inca Atahualpa. “We may thus fear,” Acosta wrote, “that we will at some point be listening to the words of the prophet Ezekiel” that fitted equally in the years of Israel’s Babylonian exile and in his own time in Peru:

13 Acosta, De procuranda, I.2.4: fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi, citing Rom. 10:17.
14 Acosta, De procuranda, Dedicatory letter to Mercurian; see also I.6.1: “patria coelestis.”
15 Acosta, De procuranda, I.3.1.
16 Note also Acosta, De procuranda, I.3.3, on the small number of followers of Christ himself.
17 Amos 5:10–11 RSV, quoted in Acosta, De procuranda, I.11.1.
Their leaders are among them like wolves tearing their prey to shed blood and to destroy souls, craving the profit they might gain. Their prophets appeased them without reason, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying “thus says the Lord God” when the Lord has not spoken. The people of the land have raised false charges, have stolen from the needy and afflicted the poor, and the stranger they have oppressed without redress.\(^{18}\)

And yet, despite these and other obstacles in the path of evangelization, Christ’s promise was: “all are called.” In the words of the Psalmist followed by Paul, “their sound has gone out to all the world,”\(^{19}\) and in the words of Isaiah, the Lord would call the nations from Africa and Lydia, from Italy and Greece and from distant islands, and they would come on horseback and on chariots, in litters and on mules and in carts “to my sacred mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord.”\(^{20}\) Expressed in less elevated terms, Acosta’s meaning was that—contrary to the opinion of some contemporaries—the diversity of cultures, languages, and polities of the Americas and also of Asia was no reason for not sharing the word of Christ. For in the last resort, “the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea.”\(^{21}\)

While not alone in finding that scriptural prophecies were being fulfilled in the evangelization of the Americas, Acosta’s understanding of the prophetic process was his own, the product of his years in Peru. During the early years of evangelization, it was possible to think—and many did think—that conversion would be achieved relatively rapidly, in years, not in decades and generations. During the later sixteenth century, when the desired end had obviously not been achieved, a more somber mood came to prevail—hence Acosta’s painful awareness of the detrimental impact of his own countrymen on the missionary cause, his insistence that the cost of government on Indian lives

\(^{18}\) Acosta, *De procuranda*, I.11.2, quoting Ezek. 22:27–29: “Principes eius in medio eius quasi lupi rapientes praedam ad effundendum sanguinem et ad perdendas animas et avare sectanda lucra. Prophetae autem eius liniebant eos absque temperamento, videntes vana, divinantes eius mendacium, [dicentes haec dicit Dominus Deus cum Dominus non sit locutus] populi terrae calumniabantur calumnia[m] et rapiebant violenter egenum et pauperem affligebant et advenam opprimebant calumnia absque iudicio.” [Edd. MacCormack records that the text in brackets is not in Pereña’s edition but is in the Vulgate and proposed to check the text against the manuscript, in case a line has fallen out.]

\(^{19}\) Acosta, *De procuranda*, I.2.2; Ps.18:5; Rom. 10:18.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., I.6.1, quoting Isa. 66:19–21.

\(^{21}\) Acosta, *De procuranda*, IV.4.2, quoting Isa. 11:9: “repleta est terra scientia Domini sicut aquae maris operientes.”
was too high. But it was also a question of the nature of time in the lives of individuals and collectivities, in light of which Acosta reflected on the parable of the sower: growth of the crop is slow, requiring labor by day and night and the passing of much time while seedlings became stalks and stalks mature plants. Moreover, at issue was not merely the spiritual growth of individuals but of “the entire multitude of human beings among whom the gospel seed is scattered.”

Gradually the call of God brings to bear its energy, and after briars and weeds of error have been uprooted, the earth is ready for seeding the gospel. Then the rain of divine favor descends from the sky, and a new seedling in Christ arises and matures until it bears fruit.22

The goal of this process, the growth of the universal church throughout the world was a favorite theme of Jesuits who during these same years were beginning to publish florilegia of letters that members of the Society were writing from India, China, Japan, the Philippines, and the Americas. In their day, these letters were written not so much to create the network whereby Jesuits shared scientific knowledge among each other and communicated it in schools and universities in Europe and overseas, which interests us in our day.23 Rather, the letters provided tangible proof that indeed “all are called.”24 This same point was made in the Jesuit grammars and dictionaries of non-European languages that were being printed in many parts of the world. As Acosta saw it, in the

22 Ibid., IV.22.3, citing the parable of the sower from Mark 4:26–32. We don’t know how the seed grows, must not be impatient, must not demand mature fruits: “etsi dormiendum est aliquando et vacandum Deo, se tamen nullo modo ab opere cessandum, sed surgendum nocte et die. Et licet semen sepultum iaceat, neque nos laboris nostri successum videamus, sustinendum tamen est, quia nobis etiam nescientibus semen germinat et increscit. At neque properandum est nimium neque statim plenae maturaeque fruges expectandae, sed primum herbam quandam cuiusdam externae speciei et significatae christianitatis gratia accipiamus, mox calamum visuri robustioris fidei, postremo plenos gratiae et charitatis fructus demetemus. Hoc non in uno quovis homine tantum Salvator noster voluit intelligi, sed multo magis in ipsa hominum multitudine, quam evangelici seminis iactus attingit. Sensim enim vocatio Dei vires suas exercit, et evulsis tribulis et carduis errorum praeparatur terra futurae sementi fidei sensimque coelitus afluentes divini favoris imbre, novum germen in Christo oritur, maturescit in frugem.”

23 See O’Malley et al., The Jesuits II, Part III. [Edd. Sabine only cited The Jesuits and thus she could have been referring to volume I, but the editors feel that volume II is more appropriate here.]

24 Acosta, De procuranda, V.7, stressing the church as a vital component in the Creed.
time of the apostles, at Pentecost, knowledge of languages was infused miraculously by the Holy Spirit so as to spread the word of the Lord, whereas in his own day, this most necessary knowledge was the fruit of human work, of the habits of study that Jesuits taught in their colleges. In the words of the Ratio studiorum, the plan for Jesuit education, in pursuing their courses the students should focus their attention on “the divine glory and the benefit of souls,” divinam gloriam et animarum fructum. In pursuit of both, study, especially of the scriptural languages, was necessary because, as Acosta wrote elsewhere, Scripture more than miracles drove the missionary endeavor.

Thus far was the message of De procuranda in the uncensored manuscript version of 1576. When the censored text was finally printed, it was prefaced by two additional books De natura novi orbis. What De procuranda had lost in political outspokenness, it gained in cosmic reach. As explained in Acosta’s preface dedicating the overall work to Philip II, it consisted of a review and revision of what “ancient philosophy” had said about the shape of the world, and a discussion of Christ’s call to the peoples of the New World. Put differently, he described this twofold theme as the pursuit of wisdom, studium sapientiae, which he subdivided into the “contemplation of the wonders of creation whose creator is Wisdom herself,” and the pursuit of piety, the realization that the Redeemer “wants all to be saved.” Wisdom in the guise of the pursuit of

25 Ibid., I.9.1: The Apostles were given the gift of languages as they were few, but it is uncertain how long. Preaching continued after the gift had ceased, but caritas continued. At the beginning of creation, the Summus Opifes so established nature that seeds grew nullo terrae labore, nullo coli circuitu. Later, he ordered seeds to grow unde terra laborata genus unumquodque repararet. Even so, in the regeneratio mundi, the first stirpes rose perfectly, then they grew from seeds, accedente humani studii labore. [Edd. MacCormack intended to elaborate on the progression from the work of God to nature to human work.]

26 Pavur, Ratio Studiorum, H 31, Regulae scholasticorum nostrae Societatis, n. 434.

27 José de Acosta, De temporibus novissimis libri quatuor (Rome: Iacobus Tornerius, 1590), III.3: “Et signa quidem infidelibus data sunt, scripturae fidelibus. Idcirco primaeva Ecclesia miraculis abundavit, cum essent infideles vocandi: at ultima Ecclesia cum fideles vocati iam sint, plus scriptura quam miraculis nitetur. Quin etiam audacter dixerim, miracula omnia vana esse et inania, nisi scriptura approbentur, hoc est doctrinam habeant scripturae conformem: scriptura vero ipsa per se invictissimum veritatis argumentum est.”

28 Acosta, De procuranda Indorum salute (Salamanca: Apud Guillemum Foquel, 1589), from the dedicatory epistle addressed to “Philip the Second, Catholic King of the Spains and the Indies”: “genus ad studium sapientiae spectat. Sapientiae porro vel exigua pars, quemadmodum beatus lob censet, non conferetur tinctis Indiae coloribus nec lapidi Sardonyco pretiosissimo vel saphyro, non adaequabitur ei aurum. Neque enim ad divinam illam atque altissimam sapientiam cognoscendam parum conferre putanda est rerum admirabilium
piety was the subject of the revised text of *De procuranda*, while Wisdom as the study of ancient philosophy and of the creating energy of God were considered in the introductory *De natura novi orbis*.

Several authors before Acosta had grappled with the errors of “ancient philosophy,” of Aristotle, the elder Pliny, and others, and also of the fathers of the church regarding the configuration of the globe and the distribution of mankind on it. Acosta did not choose to contribute to this literature. What interested him instead was the reasons why at times the ancients had—as it turned out—been in error. Why did Aristotle and those who followed him think, contrary to what recent experience had demonstrated, that the torrid zone, the zone near the equator, was hot and uninhabitable? The ancients, Acosta concluded, lacked the navigational experience to observe that at the latitude of the equator, as in Peru, for example, evaporation from surfaces of water and the resulting rainfall, along with winds and the equality of day and night, moderated the sun’s heat, producing the gentle, paradisal climate of the Peruvian coast. But the ancients did observe that from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, climates along the same longitude resembled each other, which helped to explain, for example, why the climate of most of Chile resembled that of Europe: for the longitudes of Chile from the south pole were the same as those of Europe from the north. In short, attentive and circumspect reading of the ancient authors revealed that although their knowledge was incomplete, their analysis of causes and consequences often remained apposite.

Acosta wrote about cosmology, geography, and climate by way of continuing the long conversation between theologians and natural philosophers, Christianity and science as it were, that began in the Roman Empire. What had mattered to the early Christian apologists and the fathers of the church, and continued to matter, was the exegesis and defense of Scripture. Magellan’s voyage proved once and for all that the earth was round:

The ship Victoria, renowned throughout the world, triumphed over the immense void of the ancients, measuring the expanse of the Ocean on her course, and—however vast is the size of the earth—she proved it to

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José de Acosta, *De natura novi orbis libri duo* (1588) in José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Seville: Casa de Juan de Leon, 1590), I.9.
be less than a person’s footsteps by her unprecedented voyage. Therefore the shape of the heavens is round and perfect.30

What then to make of scriptural statements about the tabernacle or tent of the sky, the columns of the sky, and the sky as the Lord’s throne, with the earth as his footstool? Lactantius among others had read these passages literally and so dismissed the work of the ancient cosmographers; he concluded rather that the earth was flat, with the sky spreading out above it like a tent.31 The very notion of a round earth aroused his ridicule: was one to believe that on its other side, in the antipodes, people were moving about with their feet in the air? Acosta dismissed this reasoning as foolish and turned instead to Augustine, who also had difficulties about the antipodes, but for better reasons.

In light of the descent of all human beings from one single ancestral pair—as posited in Genesis—Augustine concluded that the southern hemisphere could not have been populated. Acosta could not accept this conclusion, although he appreciated the reasoning. For, he noted, ancient seafarers did not know the compass, and all ancient languages lacked a term for it—which validated Augustine’s theory about the antipodes as consonant with the cosmography and technology of his time. It was the invention of the compass that made regular navigation across the Atlantic possible, which in turn gave rise to an appreciation of the vastness of the American continent and of its many peoples. This disposed not only of Augustine’s theory of an unpopulated southern hemisphere, but also—in Acosta’s view—of speculations that made the Indians descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel, or the people of Plato’s Atlantis,32 which latter he regarded as a literary fiction. Instead, Acosta postulated that humans came to the Americas in the course of a gradual migration across an as yet unknown land bridge or string of islands linking America and Asia.33

What then to make of Scriptural imagery about the earth as God’s footstool and the like? Such metaphors, as Acosta argued throughout his life, had to be understood in light of their context and of scriptural modes of speech. They

30 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.2: “Una navis Victoria prorsus inclyta de toto terrarum orbe, simul de veterum immensi inani triumphavit, Oceani magnitudinem cursu suo emensa, minoremque terrae quantamcunque molem vel ipsis vestigiis hominis exemplo novo declarans. Est igitur caeli figura perfecta atque rotunda.”
31 Heb. 8:2, cited in Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.1; Isaiah 66:1 cited in Acosta, Historia natural y moral, I.4; Job 26:11 cited in Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.3.
32 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.22. [Edd. Lactantius on the shape of the world: Divine Institutes 3.24.]
33 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, I.20.
were in no sense invitations either to claim that the earth was flat or to think of God in anthropomorphic terms. In effect, scriptural exegesis in itself was a historical process that changed with changing times. In addition, the language of Scripture was historically conditioned, or as Spinoza was later to formulate this old established exegetical principle, in the texts of Scripture, God spoke in human language that changed over time. Language in turn was accessible not just to historically contextualized interpretation but also to philological analysis. Acosta accordingly rejected as wrongheaded the theory—proposed by his contemporary the biblical scholar Benito Arias Montano—that the land of Ophir, whence, according to the fourth Book of Kings, the fleet of King Solomon had brought precious materials for the construction of the temple of Jerusalem, was Peru. Sound philology did not support an etymological connection between the names of Ophir and Peru, and in any case, a voyage from a port in the Red Sea to Peru was impossible given the navigational resources of Solomon’s times. In effect, according to Acosta, Ophir and similarly Tarsis were scriptural terms for long-distant exotic places, not unlike the Spanish term Indias as used in the peninsula in his own time. Did this mean that prophetic passages in which the term Tarsis occurred had no living relevance? Acosta did not think so. “My opinion is that commonly Tarsis as used in Scripture is either the wide sea, or very distant, strange regions. And so I take it that prophecies that speak of Tarsis—since the spirit of prophecy attains everything—can often be accommodated appropriately to the things of the New World.” Similarly, Acosta was willing to allow that those who wanted to read the “cities of the South” in the prophet Obadiah as referring to the Americas might not be mistaken: perhaps the prophet really had pointed to the conversion of America’s indigenous peoples. Even so, the fact remained that even if Scripture offered words of prophecy, it contained no precise geographical information about the Americas. “For the ancients,” Acosta concluded, “much remained to be learned, and for ourselves, in this day, no small a part of the world remains unknown.”

34 [Edd. MacCormack did not complete this reference, and the relationship between the eternal truths of Scripture and the contingent contexts of its reading and transmission is of course a major theme throughout Spinoza’s Tractatus theologico-politicus. For this particular point, see e.g. 7.5, 7.11 and 12.10.]

35 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.13–14.

36 [Edd. Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.13.]

37 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.14.

38 Ibid., I.15: “et veteribus plurima orbis pars restabat incognita, et nobis non minima Hodie quaque restat.” Besides, Acosta added, “I am not particularly surprised about the views
Acosta’s lively interest in natural philosophy, his observational acumen and search for reasons and causes of natural phenomena, was driven by his theological universalism, the conviction that “all are called.” The call was not a theological or philosophical abstraction, locked away in the writings of classical cosmographers and their early modern continuators, or even in Scripture and works of exegesis. Rather, the call was imaged in the orderly and beautiful configuration of the world, in the phases and eclipses of the moon, in sunrise and sunset, which demonstrated “the roundness,” rotunditas, of the world,39 and also in the human capacity, shared by all, to picture in the imagination and hence to understand this cosmic order:

Therefore, whoever denies that the soul, superior to every corporeal nature, and the everlasting energy of truth residing in the highest part of the human being, that his own inner light has been kindled from the highest light, whoever does not know this or doubts it, for sure this person does not know that he is human, or is unsure of it.40

The same sky covered Europe, Asia, Africa, and also America:

At times, I make this argument when some or even many of those who here in Peru sigh for Spain, will only ever speak of their home, and marvel at or become angry with me because they think that I have forgotten and neglect the homeland we share. To them I respond that the desire to return to Spain does not afflict me because I know that the sky is no more distant from Peru than it is from Spain. For, as Saint Jerome wrote to Paulinus, the gate of heaven is as close to Britain as it is to Jerusalem.41

The same remained true in the larger world that now included the Americas, but in Acosta’s reflections Jerome’s theological statement acquired more far-reaching relevance. For it was now enshrined in both the scientific visible

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39 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.3.
40 Ibid., I.7: “quae et animum omni corpore natura superiorem, et aeternum veritatis vigorem in summa hominis sede praesidentem, qui immortale lumen suum ex illo primo, et summo lumine accensum contestetur, qui ignorat, aut dubitat, is profecto se etiam esse hominem ignorat, aut dubitat.”
41 Ibid., I.6.
reality of the shape of the world and also in the cognitive reality that the “reasons and causes” for the “roundness” of the world were accessible to human understanding. Scriptural statements such as “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the globe of lands and all who dwell in it” thus invited the human mind to reflect on theology and cosmology as describing one continuous reality that underpinned the missionary mandate of De procuranda, that all were called to salvation.

Turning to the Natural and Moral History, here the Spanish text of De natura novi orbis prefaced the two further books of natural philosophy in which Acosta described what he had observed not so much about the place of the Americas in the cosmos as a whole, but specifically American nature. Next came three further books about the Incas and the Aztecs, the peoples of Peru and Mexico. These three books complement the universalizing cosmological theme of De natura novi orbis with a specifically human and historical sequel. Here also the dialogue was with ancient authorities, but now not just Scripture, Greek and Roman classical authors, and church fathers, but also the indigenous authorities of the Americas that had been overlooked by other writers “because they did not know the Indian languages or were not interested in knowing about their antiquities.”

In De procuranda, Scripture had spoken in the voice of moral and political exhortation, while in Acosta’s description of the cosmos, it spoke in the voice of prophecy, proclaiming the majesty of God and the beauty of creation. Now, in the concluding books of the Natural and Moral History, in which Acosta wrote about Peru and Mexico, taking the narrative of events as far as “las puertas del evangelio,” the entry of the Gospel, Scripture contributed a theology of history. Theologically speaking, the voyages of discovery had brought to light the many faces of idolatry, whether this was in India, the Americas, in Africa or the islands of the Pacific and the Far East. It was, in its way, a very old story. Quoting the book of Wisdom, “idolatry is the cause, the beginning, and end of all evils,” Acosta produced a classification dividing idolatry into two “lineages.” One arose from phenomena of nature. On the grand scale, there was

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42 Acosta, De natura novi orbis, I.3, writing in text “orbem terrarum super maria fundavit” and citing in the margin Ps. 23:1–2: “Domini est terra et plenitudo eius; orbis terrarum et omnes qui habitant in eo.”

43 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, Preface to the reader: “los hechos y historia propia de los Indios requeria mucho trato y muy intinseco con los mismos Indios, del cual carecieron, los mas que han escrito de Indias: o por no saber su lengua: por no curar de saber sus antiguedades.”

44 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, Prologue to books V–VII.

45 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.2 with Ws 14:32.
the idolatrous cult of the sun, the moon and the elements, and in terrestrial terms there were cults of particular aspects of nature such as streams and mountains. The other lineage of idolatry arose on the one hand from human invention, from cults addressed to idols and statues of deities like Mercury and Minerva, i.e. to things “that are nothing and never were anything;” on the other hand, human invention created cults of “that which really was something, but not what the idoler imagines when adoring it, such as the dead.”46

If in the experience of sixteenth-century Europeans polytheistic public cults such as the ones of Peru and Mexico that Acosta described in the Natural and Moral History were utterly unfamiliar, they were amply documented in Scripture.47 During their years of exile in Babylon, the Jews were confronted with cults of idols, of things “that are nothing and never were anything,” fully supported by the formidable power of conquering, victorious kings. In the words of the prophet Baruch, referred to by Acosta: “In Babylon you will see gods of gold, and of silver and of stone, and of wood, carried aloft and terrifying the gentiles. But when you see the multitude behind and in front of them adoring them, say in your heart: You, Lord should be adored.”48 Indeed, Scripture seemed at times to address the very circumstances that missionaries encountered in the Americas, for example the psalm, cited by missionaries when destroying indigenous objects of cult in Peru and Mexico, and also cited by Acosta: “Their idols are of gold and silver; the work of human hands. They have mouths but speak not; they have eyes and do not see, ears, but do not hear [...].”49 The story was confirmed by classical and patristic writers. The Greeks and Romans “who ruled the world” were all idolaters. One only needed to read “our own authors, Eusebius of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrus, and others, and also theirs, among them Pliny, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Plutarch.”50

Greek and Roman idolatry, along with the idolatry inveighed against in Scripture, thus justified or at least explained the diverse forms of worship current among the peoples of Americas; before the coming of Christianity, how were they to have known otherwise? Acosta made ample use of this argument. Besides, like the Greeks and Romans, so these barbarians—Acosta used this term in its ancient, not its modern sense—had known something

46 Ibid., V.2.
47 See Ibid., V.16 with Exod. 32:4 on the Golden Calf: Aaron excused himself for raising it by claiming that the people wanted it, a situation Acosta found paralleled in China.
48 Bar. 6:3–5.
49 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.9 with Bar. 6:3–5; Ps. 113:12–16.
50 Ibid., Prologue to books V–VII.
of the *ignotus deus*, the unknown God whose altar Paul had seen in Athens.\textsuperscript{51}

In this same way, traces of some understanding of God, not to mention practices of profound devotion such as were rarely if ever found among Christians, had distinguished Mexican and Peruvian religious observance. Yet, unlike Bartolomé de las Casas, Acosta was unable to recognize in these phenomena any substantive anticipation of Christian monotheism. Even the indigenous languages documented a certain prevarication, an uncertain grasp of the concept of deity. An Inca ruler had adopted the name of the Creator Viracocha because the deity had appeared to him in a dream ordering him to do so, and later, the Spanish had been greeted with this same name. It was, Acosta thought, a form of gentle polytheism that resembled the welcome given to Paul and Barnabas as Mercury and Jupiter in the *Acts of the Apostles*.\textsuperscript{52}

Ultimately, Acosta could not bring himself to reach a clear-cut conclusion on gentile religiosity. Plato’s *Timaeus*, the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, the hermetic treatise *Asclepius*, and the poetry of Homer and Vergil all contained indications that the idea of God was not alien to the ancient gentiles—and neither was it entirely alien to the gentiles of the New World. But while these latter readily accepted the idea of a supreme God, “it is extremely difficult to uproot from their understanding that there is no other god, no other deity except one, and all the rest have no power and no being of their own.”\textsuperscript{53} As Acosta had written in *De procuranda*, the task required all possible powers of persuasion along with infinite patience and perseverance. A similar ambivalence pervades Acosta’s reflections on Amerindian cultural and political attainments. The Incas and Aztecs, he thought, lacked the understanding of natural philosophy that distinguished the ancient Greeks and Romans,\textsuperscript{54} although he had the highest regard for Aztec and especially Inca governance. “They outstrip many of our commonwealths,” republicas, he wrote, adducing Athens and Rome by way of comparison.\textsuperscript{55} The fineness of design and workmanship of Inca public architecture and the splendor of the architecture of Mexico elicited his admiration, as did the public rituals of both empires, idolatrous though they were.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., V.3 with Acts 17:23.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., V.3 with Acts 14:11 and also Acts 28:3, Paul greeted as a god in Malta.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., V.3: “Pero esles dificultosissimo de desarraygar de sus entendimientos, que ninguno otro Dios ay ni otra deydad ay sino uno, y que todo lo demas no tiene propio poder, ni propio ser, ni propia operacion, mas de lo que les da, y communica aquel supremo y solo Dios y Señor.”

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., Prologue to books V–VII.

\textsuperscript{55} [Edd. On the admiration for Inca governance among some of the early colonial period, see MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time*, 100–36 and 202–43.]
Recordkeeping on the *qhipus* of the Incas was more efficient, he thought, than its Spanish equivalent, and the subjects of the Incas had lived a happy life, *vida dichosa*.56

The combined themes of idolatry and governance that make up the substance of the “moral” part of the *Natural and Moral History* are what give the book its American tone. Roman religion, history, and government attracted much scholarly interest among Acosta’s contemporaries, and books both learned and popular were published on these topics during the very years when Acosta was working on the *Natural and Moral History*. But in the case of the Greeks and Romans, the intersection of religion and government was not the pressing concern that confronted observers, and especially missionaries in the Americas. For in the Americas, even in the later sixteenth century, polytheism—or be it idolatry—that had until not so long ago been supported by the imperial power of Incas and Aztecs, remained alive in the consciousness of indigenous people who continued to revere the pre-Columbian gods; whereas in Europe, no one thought of offering prayer and sacrifice to “Jupiter and Minerva,” no matter how fascinating the details of their ancient cults might be. How then could one explain the power of idolatry in the Americas?

Acosta did not offer any of the traditional answers to this question. The story of the Fall, of Adam and Eve in paradise, or, to put it in theological terms, of original sin, long established as the key to explaining the shadow sides of human life, figures hardly at all in his writings. Instead, he wrote about the pride of the devil, and his hatred for, and envy of human beings. Pride led the devil to seek to occupy the place of God in human hearts, while his hatred and envy were responses to the providential plan of universal salvation that spoke not only in Christ’s call but in the very fabric of the divinely wrought cosmic order. When thus, in what Acosta classified as the first lineage of idolatry, the Incas offered cult to the Sun and Moon, to rivers and mountains, this was

56 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, VI: “en gran parte hazen ventaja a muchas de nuestras Republicas.” See also VI.15, on the subjects of the Incas: “no se les hacía servidumbre, sino vida muy dichosa.” See VI.8, comparing quipucamayocs to public notaries (escribanos publicos) with the comment, “nos hazen grandes ventajas.” See VI.20, describing Inca Pachacuti as gran repúblicano. See VI.3 on calendars: the Indians had no proper week like that of the Hebrews in which the days were counted by the seven days of creation, or like that of the Greeks and Romans where the days were counted by number of the seven planets. However: “harto es, y aun demasiado, que tuviesen el año y las fiestas y tiempos con tanto concierto y orden, como está dicho.” Joseph Juste Scaliger entered Acosta’s information in his *De emendatione temporum* (Paris: Sebastianum Niullium, 1583). See also Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, VI.11, on royal succession: in Mexico it was by election as in ancient Rome, and in Peru it was by inheritance as in Spain and France.
Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.14: “En todas las naciones del mundo se hallan hombres particularmente diputados al culto de Dios verdadero o falso, los cuales sirven para los sacrificios, y para declarar al pueblo lo que sus dioses les mandan. En Mexico vuo en esto extraña curiosidad, y remedando el demonio el uso de la Iglesia de Dios appointed his own order of lesser, higher and supreme priests, and others as acolytes and Levites. What has astounded me most is that even in terminology the devil desired to usurp the worship of Christ for himself, because in the ancient language of the Mexicans their supreme priests or highest pontiffs as we might say were called papas [popes].

Communities of men and women living in poverty and celibacy, especially the Incan chosen women of the Sun had—as Acosta saw it—been instituted by the devil “not because he is pleased by purity, for he is himself an impure spirit, but to take from the highest God in whatever way he is able the glory of being worshiped in integrity and purity.”

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57 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.14: “En todas las naciones del mundo se hallan hombres particularmente diputados al culto de Dios verdadero o falso, los cuales sirven para los sacrificios, y para declarar al pueblo lo que sus dioses les mandan. En Mexico vuo en esto extraña curiosidad, y remedando el demonio el uso de la Iglesia de Dios, puso tambien su orden de sacerdotes menores, y mayores, y supremos, y unos como Acolitos y otros como Levitas. Y lo que mas me ha admirado, hasta en el nombre parece que el diablo quiso usurpar el culto de Christo para si, porque a los supremos Sacerdotes, y como si dijésemos Summos Pontifices, llamavan en su antigua lengua Papas los Mexicanos, como oy dia consta por sus historias, y relaciones.”

58 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.15: “para que se entienda como el demonio ha tenido cudicia de ser servido de gente, que guarda limpieza, no porque a el le agrade la limpieza, pues es de suyo espiritu inmundo, sino por quitar al summo Dios en el modo que puede, esta gloria de servirse de integridad y limpieza.” The Hebrew Bible chronicled the development of sacrificial ritual from its origins to the elaborate observance laid down by Moses in the book of Leviticus, all of which Acosta found paralleled in the sacrificial rituals in Peru and Mexico (see V.18). Here also, the devil intervened, leading the Incas and especially the Aztecs to offer human sacrifice, for which likewise Scripture offered antecedents, as when the King of Moab for the sake of gaining an advantage in war "sacrificed his eldest son on the wall in the sight of the Israelites, to whom this deed seemed so sad
On his return journey from Peru to Spain, Acosta spent two years in Mexico, where he met the creole Jesuit Juan de Tovar, whose account, Relación, of Aztec history, religion, and culture Acosta used extensively in the concluding book of the Historia natural y moral. This Relación contained a detailed narrative of Aztec origins, of the migration of the original Aztec lineage to Tenochtitlan, which Tovar compared the Exodus of Israel from Egypt: “The Mexicans set forth like the children of Israel to the promised land, taking with them this idol (of Uytzilopochtli) placed in an ark of reeds just like the Israelites took the Ark of the Testament.”

Acosta reiterated and expanded this comparison, which thereby became a major exhibit in his theory of demonic imitation and subversion of rituals honoring the true God.

Perhaps this departure and pilgrimage of the Mexicans will seem similar to the exodus from Egypt, the journey made by the children of Israel, since they, like the Mexicans were exhorted to depart and seek the promised land, and both took their god with them as their guide, and consulted the ark and made tabernacles for it, and there [their god] counseled them and laid down laws and ceremonies, and in this way both peoples spent many years in reaching the promised land.

that they did not want to press the war further but returned to their homes” (See V.19 with 2 Kings 3:27: “semejante crueldad a la que refiere la Escritura, aver usado el Rey de Moab en sacrificar su hijo Primogenito sobre el muro a vista de los de Israel: a los quales parecio este hecho tan triste, que no quisieron apretarle mas, y assi se bolvieron a sus casas.”)

Codex Tovar, John Carter Brown Library, Codex/Ind/2, fol. 5a: “Y así salieron los Mexicanos como los hijos de Israel a la tierra de promisión, llevando consigo este ydolo metido en una arca de juncos como los otros el arca del Testamento.”

Acosta, Acosta, Historia natural y moral, VII.4: “Pareciera, por ventura esta salida y preregacion de los Mexicanos semejante a la salida de Egypto, y camino que hizieron los hijos de Israel, pues aquellos como estos fueron amonestados a salir y buscar tierra de promision, y los unos y los otros llevavan por guia su dios, y consultavan el arca, y le hazian tabernaculo, y alli les avisava y dava leyes y ceremonias, y asi los unos como los otros gastaron gran numero de años en llegar a la tierra prometida. Que en todo esto, y en otras muchas cosas hay semejança de lo que las historias de los Mexicanos refieren, a lo que la divina escritura cuenta de los Israelitas, y sin duda es ello asi. Que el demonio principe de la sobervia, procuró en el trato y sujecion desta gente, remedar lo que el altissimo y verdadero Dios obró con su pueblo, porque como está tratado arriba, es estranño el hipo que Satanas tiene, de asemejarse a Dios, cuya familiaridad y trato con los hombres pretendio este enemigo mortal falsamente usurpar. [...] Y bien se parece quien el era, pues no se han visto
The difference was that in Mexico it was “Satan with his notable craving to approximate himself to God” who manifested his true identity in the “cruel and inhuman sacrifices such as have never been seen or heard of” that he imposed on his Mexican followers.

In Peru, it was the Holy Trinity that the devil projected onto worshippers in illusory reproductions derived from natural phenomena. Acosta had heard that the Sun, the principal deity of the Inca state was represented in three statues called

Apunti, Churiinti and Intiquaoqui, which means to say father and lord Sun, and the son sun and the brother son, and in the same way they gave names to the three statues of Chuquilla, who is the god presiding over the region of the air, where it thunders, rains and snows.

Similar notions were held elsewhere in the Andes. In Chuquisaca, in Upper Peru, a priest showed Acosta documentation about a holy place

where the Indians claimed to adore Tangatanga, which was an idol they said was one in three and three in one. And because the priest was surprised at this, I believe I said to him that whatever the devil is able to steal from the truth for his lies and deceptions, he does it with that infernal embattled pride with which he always seeks to be like God.61

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61 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, V.28: “Las tres estatuas del Sol se intitulaban Apunti, Churiinti, e Intiquaoqui, que quiere dezir, el padre y señor Sol, el hijo Sol, el hermano Sol, y de la misma manera nombravan las tres estatuas de Chuquilla, que es el dios que preside en la region del ayre, donde truena, y llueve, y nieva. Acuerdome que estando en Chuquisaca me mostro un sacerdote honrado una informacion que yo la tuve harto tiempo en mi poder, en que avia averiguado de cierta Guáca, o adoratorio, donde los Indios profesavan adorar a Tangatánga, que era un ydolo, que dezian que en uno eran tres, y en tres uno. Y admirandose aquel Sacerdote desto, creo le dixe que el demonio todo quanto podia hurtar de la verdad para sus mentiras y engaños, lo hacia con aquella infernal y porfiada sobervia con que siempre apetece ser como Dios.” Acosta’s interpretation of the Inca sun as a demonic trinity was vigorously contradicted by the Inca Garcilaso, who saw in Inca religion a foreshadowing of Christian truth. [Edd. MacCormack wished to expand and cite Garcilaso de la Vega, El Inca, Primera parte de los Comentarios Reales de los Incas, ed. Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María (Madrid: Atlas, 1960), II.2.]
In short, in Mexico and Peru, and throughout the Americas, God and devil were contending for human hearts. This was the key to Acosta’s frequent refrain that “all are called.” He believed that the tide in this cosmic battle was turning against demonic illusion and deception, and here also ancient authorities were pointing to what the outcome would be. The art of divination, much practiced in both Mexico and Peru, was forbidden in Scripture. In Deuteronomy Moses had banned soothsayers, augurs, sorcerers, charmers, mediums, wizards, and necromancers. “Whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominable practices the Lord your God is driving them out before you.” Later, Jeremiah warned, “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens.” Acosta accordingly understood the auguries delivered by the idol Uytzilopochtli to his Mexican followers during their migration to Tenochtitlan as demonic deception, Satan’s bids to stand in the place of God. As a result, just as the ancient Israelites had driven the Canaanites from the Promised Land, so the Spanish destroyed the Aztec empire.

And yet, Scripture also recorded instances when signs and portents had truthfully announced great events. The Egyptians saw mysterious fires while God was leading Israel from Egypt, and when Antiochus Epiphanes was planning his assault on Jerusalem people there saw in the sky ghostly armies doing battle, as reported in the second book of Maccabees. Similarly, both Incas and Aztecs had observed signs and portents indicating the overthrow of their empires. Acosta was particularly impressed by the portents seen by the Aztecs that had been described by Juan de Tovar and others, because these portents seemed to him to convey the same message as gospel accounts about demonically possessed persons acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, the message being that at times evil spirits were constrained to speak the truth even against their will. In Mexico, inter alia, Quetzalcoatl, “the idol of the people of Cholola […] announced that strangers were coming to take possession of those kingdoms” and the king of Tezcuco “who was a great magician and had made a pact with the devil” informed Montezuma that his gods had informed him of trials to come. Signs in the sky, in particular a three-headed comet with

62 Deut. 18:10–11 and Jer. 10:2, referred to in Acosta, Historia natural y moral, VII.23.
63 [Edd. Acosta, Historia natural y moral, VII.26.]
64 II Mac. 5:2; I Mac. 11:1; Wis 17:8, referred to in Acosta, Historia natural y moral, VII.23.
a long sparkling tail that was visible by day and night confirmed these demonic auguries.65

Acosta’s design was to conclude the moral part of the *Natural and Moral History* with

the foretellings these peoples received of the new kingdom of Christ our God, that was to extend over those lands and subject them as had happened in all the rest of the world. Certainly it is notable to observe how divine Providence ordained that the light of its word should find an entry in the furthest ends of the world.66

By way of demonstrating that this purpose had been accomplished, Acosta concluded the last book of the *Historia* with several miracle stories that had occurred during the conquest and first evangelization of Peru. Evangelization had been speeded by the imperial languages, Nahua and Quechua, which the Aztecs and Incas had used to unite their subjects, just as in its day Latin had united the Roman Empire. In the time of Christ, Rome was at the height of its power, and similarly, the Inca and Aztec empires were at their height when the Spanish and along with them the Gospel arrived. This secular framework was an outward and visible expression of a prophetic one, of the history of salvation.

At this time, God on high judged that the stone of Daniel that shattered the realms and kingdoms of the world should also shatter those of this New World. And thus, just as the law of Christ came when the empire of the Romans had achieved its height, so also it was in these Indies of the West. Indeed, it was the supreme providence of the Lord; for the world having one ruler and temporal lord—as the sacred doctors point

65 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, VII.23 with Tovar fols. 46b–48b. [Edd. MacCormack observes that the story of Montezuma and the laborer is not in Tovar and wonders whether it was perhaps collected by Acosta himself.] Demons speaking in the Gospel: Acosta cites Luke 4:41.

66 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, Prologue to books V–VII: “hasta mostrar la dispusicion, y prenuncios que estas gentes tuvieron del nuevo eyno de Christo nuestro Dios, que avia de extenderse a aquellas tierras, y sojuzgallas a si, como lo ha hecho en todo el resto del mundo. Que cierto es cosa digna de gran consideracion ver en que modo ordenó la divina providencia que la luz de su palabra hallasse entrada en los ultimos terminos de la tierra.” Cf. V.22, on the internal war of the Incas as the work of providence because it facilitated the Spanish invasion.
Ancient Authorities Intertwined

The stone of the prophet Daniel refers to king Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of a statue consisting of a head of gold, chest of silver, belly of bronze, and legs of iron with feet of iron mixed with clay; in the vision, this statue, representing four kingdoms, was shattered by a stone “cut by no human hand.” Thereafter, in Daniel’s interpretation of the king’s vision, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed [...]. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever.”

The difficulty that concerned exegetes from Christian antiquity onwards was the identity of these four kingdoms, especially the last, and also the nature of the everlasting kingdom. In the *Natural and Moral History* Acosta found it sufficient to say that the New World empires were comprised in the vision and had now been destroyed, that therefore the auguries and prognostications of impending doom that had come to the Indians whether as signs in the sky or as demonic prognostications found not just historical but also scriptural confirmation. The point mattered because New World and Old World equally were included in scriptural prophecy, this being the basis of Acosta’s conviction that “all are called.”

The vision of Nebuchadnezzar and the *Book of Daniel* more generally occupied Acosta again in the Latin treatise *De temporibus novissimis*, “On the End Times,” and in its companion, *De Christo revelato*, “On Christ Revealed.” Both were published in Italy after his first visit to Rome in 1588, and do not represent a specifically American vantage point, although they were written in Lima in response to interest there in millenarian topics. Acosta agreed with other biblical exegetes, both ancient and modern, that Daniel’s last kingdom was that of Antiochus Epiphanes, who had provoked the Maccabean revolt. But he added: “Neither historical accuracy nor the sense of the words are compatible

67 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, VII.28: “A este tiempo juzgó el Altísimo, que aquella piedra de Daniel [Dan. 2.34] que quebrantó los Reynos y Monarchias del mundo, quebrantase tambien los de estotro mundo nuevo, y assi como la Ley de Christo vino, quando la Monarchia de Roma avia llegado a su cumbre, assi tambien fue en las Indias Occidentales. Y verdaderamente fue suma Providencia del Señor. Porque el aver en el orbe una cabeça y un Señor temporal (como notan los sagrados Doctores) hizo que el Evangelio se pudiesse comunicar con facilidad a tantas gentes y naciones. Y lo mismo sucedio en las Indias.”

68 Dan. 4.44.

69 [Edd. MacCormack wondered whether to discuss the purpose of Acosta’s journey to Rome at this juncture. To do so would have required some remarks on the Third Council of Lima. She seems to have postponed this topic for a chapter in the planned monograph on Acosta.]
with the entire account being about Antiochus,” and indeed some church fathers had seen in the figure of Antiochus that of Antichrist who was to bring on the last days.70 With that, Acosta launched into the difficult topic of when to expect the last days. This, he thought, entailed consideration of scriptural statements about the end not coming until all nations throughout the world had heard the word of Christ, which some of Acosta’s contemporaries thought was happening precisely in their own time. Acosta was less sure. He believed that an entire continent remained to be discovered beyond the islands of the Pacific, and possibly another one near the South Pole,71 and in any case, casual preaching in the course of commercial contact such was taking place in Canton and parts of the Portuguese East Indies was not the same as in depth evangelization.72

There was also an obscure passage in Paul who wrote that the end would not come “until the scattering has occurred first.”73 Appealing to an armory of biblical erudition, Acosta argued first that in a vitally important prophetic sense Daniel’s fourth kingdom was not simply the kingdom of Antiochus but the Roman Empire, which he thought still existed in his own day. It was the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, ruled by Philip II’s nephew the emperor Rudolph. Second, he thought that Paul’s “scattering,” which he understood to be a scattering of nations, began with the decline of the Roman empire, when formerly Roman provinces became independent kingdoms. This scattering of nations was continuing even in his own time when the Holy Roman Empire was defending its eastern frontier against the Ottomans. But not all the nations had scattered as yet: “the name of Caesar endures, the imperial title endures, and what matters most, the emperor’s authority of protecting the church, which is derived from the Roman pontiff also endures. And although it is much diminished, and has been transferred to other realms, the Roman emperor retains his own power.”74 In short, the end of the Roman Empire, of the political

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70 [Footnote: Acosta, De temporibus, I.13: “et tamen de Antiocho omnia dici, nullo modo patitur aut historiae fides, aut ratio verborum.”]
71 [Footnote: Acosta, De temporibus, I.18.]
72 [Footnote: Acosta, De temporibus, I.17, on Lusitanorum commercium.]
73 [Footnote: II Thess. 2: 3: nisi venerit discessio primum, discussed in Acosta, De temporibus, II.2. The RSV translates differently: “that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition.” José de Acosta, De Christo revelato libri novem (Rome: Iacobum Tornerium 1590), IV.3: “[…] prophetia Danielis Christum de virgine non humana opera natum, omnia regna orbis terrarum sibi subditurum: quod hodie videmus impletum.”]
74 [Footnote: Acosta, De temporibus, II.2: “Itaque non puto Romanum Imperium penitus extinctum, neque eam discussionem sive defectionem omnino expletam, quamvis maxima ex parte perpetrata sit. Manet Caesarum nomen, manet Imperii titulus, & quod est caput, manet a
dispensation within which Christ was born, to which he acknowledged himself to be subject by paying tax, would endure until the end of historical time. It was within this same dispensation, this same time frame, shaken and ruptured though it was, that “all are called.”

To return now to natural philosophy, or as he described it, philosophy *tout court.* After the last judgment, there would be the final fire. As Paul puts it: “Fire will make manifest of what kind is the work of each person.” But what kind of fire? The question had already arisen, albeit indirectly, in the *Natural and Moral History* where Acosta described the volcanoes of the New World. The difficulty was explaining how the fires coming from volcanoes could continue burning for centuries on end. What were these fires consuming? Having explained the temperate climate of the Peruvian coast as the result of a continuing cycle of vapors rising from the sea, becoming clouds and falling again as rain—which cooled the heat of the equatorial sun—Acosta speculated on the existence of an analogous cycle whereby hot and dry matter rotated out of volcanoes as the combustible of volcanic fire and back into the earth. Thanks to this cycle, matter perennially restocked the volcanic supply. But the fire of hell, the fire Paul had in mind—Acosta added—was something else. In *On the End Times,* he returned to the topic when explaining that the eternal fire that purified the good and tormented the wicked formed part of the eternal fabric of the cosmic order. This “ultimate fire” for the nature of which Acosta appealed not only to Scripture but to the authority of Aristotle and the Peripatetics, would purify the sublunary world but would not touch “the

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74 Romano Pontifice, qui caput est orbis, Ecclesiae tuendae auctoritas. Et quamvis extenuata valde & ad Provincias exteras translatata, stat adhuc sua Romano Imperatori potentia. Namque ut quidam scripsit, in Francorum Reges Romani Imperii summa concessit, quorum imperio successionem usque ad suprema tempora duraturam, quod ille asserit, cur diffidamus, non video. Profecto Patriarchae Iacob praeclaram illam Prophetiam non auferendum sceptrum Iuda nec ducem de femore eius, donec veniret Christus, impletam negare non possumus.”

75 I Cor. 3:13 quoted in Acosta, *De temporibus,* IV.11.

76 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral,* II.7, about solar heat, clouds and rain; see III.25, about volcanoes. The comparison Acosta uses here is springs that constantly flow; they must be attracting the water from somewhere. Acosta posits a cycle whereby this happens. 

77 Acosta, *Historia natural y moral,* III.25: “Quanto mas que el fuego del infierno, segun san Basilio y otros sanctos enseñan, es muy diferente de este que vemos, porque no tiene luz, y abrasa incomparablemente mas que este nuestro.” Acosta cites Basil, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 6.3 and *Homily on Psalm* 28[29].6. [Edd. MacCormack left unresolved the question she put to herself in an aside, which is to say, whether this is really the same fire that burns and purifies the sublunary world in *De temporibus.*]
highest and true spheres” that carried the eternal stars. “This is what Isaiah promises,” Acosta added: “Behold I create new heavens and a new earth; which is what John (the author of the Book of Revelation) wrote he saw.”

This was also the cosmic order that Acosta posited in the Natural and Moral History when writing about the “roundness of the world.” The earth was round, but equally important, the sky, that is, the celestial spheres that carried the stars, was round as well. The stars did not move through empty space on their own, and neither were they carried by angels, as was still imagined by some of Acosta’s contemporaries. Rather, the sun, moon, and stars were carried by the celestial spheres or heavens, “cielos,” at the center of which the earth stood still, as Ptolemy had posited. The spheres and the stars were eternal in accord with the Psalm: “He created them in eternity and forever and ever. He gave the command and it shall not pass.” “I say in addition,” Acosta wrote,

that to confirm this truth that the heavens themselves are moving, and in them the stars go on their courses, that we can declare it with our eyes, because we clearly perceive not only the stars moving, but portions and entire regions of the sky moving as well. I am not merely referring to the shining, radiant portions such as the one we call the Milky Way or in our vernacular the Road of Saint James, but all the more I declare it for other dark and black portions that are in the sky.

In this eternally ordered and eternally stable fabric unfolded the battle between God and devil, between true religion and idolatry, the interaction between divine salvation and human free will. Within this uniquely meaningful,

78 Acosta, De temporibus, IV.10–12. [Edd. MacCormack wrote here a long and incomplete footnote, weaving back and forth between Latin quotation and English paraphrase, and between Acosta and his sources, Augustine in particular. Unlike any other note, the material was broken into a series of paragraphs without logical operand or explanation, and therefore the import of the some of the parallels could not be recovered.]

79 Acosta, Historia natural y moral, I.2: “Dezír pues que aquellos cuerpos celestes son corruptibles, ni viene con lo que la escritura díze en el Psalmo [Ps. 148,6: Statuit ea in aeternum et in saeculum saculi; praeceptum posuit et non praeteribit.] que los hizo Dios para siempre, ni aun tampoco díze bien con el orden y conservacion de este universo. Digo mas, que para confirmar esta verdad de que los mismos cielos son los que se mueven, y en ellos las estrellas andan entorno, podemos alegar con los ojos, pues vemos manifestamente, que no solo se mueven las estrellas, sino partes y regiones enteras del cielo, no hablo solo de las partes luzidas y resplandecientes como es la que llaman via lactea, que nuestro vulgar díze camino de Sanctiago, sino mucho mas digo esto por otras partes oscuras y negras que ay en el cielo.”
providential order, Christ had commanded his followers to “go and preach to all nations,” and therefore it was possible to assert that “all are called.” It was because of this order that history, philosophy, theology and all other fields of knowledge, each represented by authorities both sacred and secular, authorities that human enquiry perennially questioned and interpreted in light of an ongoing search for causes and effects, made up a coherent and intelligible whole.