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**The Indian Church and the Age of the Spirit:
Joachimist Millennialism and fray Toribio de Motolinía's
*Historia de los indios de la Nueva España***

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John Leddy Phelan in *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* and Georges Baudot, in *Utopía e Historia en México: Los primeros cronistas de la civilización mexicana (1520-1569)*, trace the influence of the millennialist tradition of the Franciscan Order, dating back to the Biblical exegeses of medieval theologian Joachim of Fiore, on the Franciscan Order in New Spain. These book length studies pointed to the ways that this theological heritage shaped the role and mission of the Franciscans in the early Colonial years, especially their emphasis on engaging with the languages and cultures of the New World. Part of the argument regarding this theological motive behind Franciscan scholarship in indigenous cultures rests on passages from the early histories of prominent members of the first “twelve” Franciscans to arrive in Mexico.¹ The *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, attributed to

¹ For an excellent summary of Franciscan millennialism that also highlights its impact on the ethnographic and missionary work of the friars, see Luis Weckmann, “Las esperanzas milenaristas de los franciscanos de la Nueva España.”

fray Toribio de Benavente, or “Motolinía,” as he preferred to call himself, is of particular importance in this respect because of Motolinía’s early involvement with Nahua communities.

While there have been questions regarding the work’s circumstances of production, its authorship, and its expression of millennialist ideas, Baudot, in the introduction to his 1985 edition of the *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, brings together the weight of evidence signaling Motolinía’s authorship of the history, and the likelihood that it is an extract of an earlier writing or writings.² In the footnotes, moreover, he underscores the passages that echo millenarian ideas and communicate a sense of urgency in which the friars undertook the work of converting the Indians to Christianity. Left unaddressed, however, are questions, still lingering, about the structure of the work: its seemingly arbitrary division into Three Treatises containing chapters whose wide-ranging subject matter seems at first glance only loosely affiliated with its stated topic. In this article, I contend that if the Joachim-influenced thought of the famous “twelve” Franciscans to arrive in New Spain provides the rhetorical force behind Motolinía’s *Historia de los indios*, it also provides the key to its organization.³

² Lino G. Canedo’s 1973 article, “Toribio Motolinía and his Historical Writings” also provides good insight into the manuscripts attributed to Motolinía, and the questions surrounding them, as well as an excellent summary of his own and previous scholars’ opinions regarding them. Specifically, Canedo challenges the conclusions of Edmundo O’Gorman’s critical study prefacing the edition of the history that he (O’Gorman) published in 1969. For scholarship more reticent about the notion of Joachim-inspired millennialism among the Franciscans, see Cecilia Frost, “¿Milenarismo mitigado o imaginado?”

³ The work is divided into three major Treatises, the first two of which bear titles or headings. The first heading reads: “Aquí comienza la Relación de las cosas, idolatrías, ritos y ceremonias que en la Nueva España hallaron los Españoles cuando la ganaron; con otras muchas cosas dignas de notar que en la tierra hallaron.” The Treatise consists of 15 chapters. It begins by telling of the establishment and work of the early Franciscan mission (chapters 1-4), goes on to address pre-Colonial religious customs and beliefs of the Nahuas (chapters 5-12), and ends with three chapters describing Nahua-Christian religious festivities in the new Colony (chapters 13-15). The heading of the second Treatise reads, “De la conversion y aprovechamiento de estos Indios; y cómo se les comenzaron a administrar los sacramentos en esta tierra de Anáhuac, o Nueva España; y de algunas cosas y misterios acontecidos.” It consists of eleven chapters that mostly center on the administration of the sacraments in the new Church. The first four chapters all revolve around baptism, with the next three treating repentance and confession, as well as marriage. The final four chapters discuss various topics relating to the difficulties involved in proselytizing (the issues of idolatry and superstition) as well as the great successes of the friars. The final Treatise, consisting of nineteen chapters, does not have a distinct title, although the first five chapters continue to focus on the work of the friars in converting the Indians. Chapter six turns to descriptions of the Mexican

Nancy Dyer's excellent study of the text, "La relación postrera de Siuola," mentions in passing that the work fits into the Castilian historical tradition of Lucas de Tuy and Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, medieval historians rooted in the work of Isidore of Seville and precursors to Alfonso X (885). Teófilo Ruíz, in *From Heaven to Earth: The Re-Ordering of Castilian Society, 1150-1350*, notes that Lucas de Tuy and Jimenez de Rada wrote elite histories (written in Latin and aimed at the highest circles of the Castilian court) that "exalted Castile and its mission against Islam, giving a heroic rendering of its history" (34). Certainly, Motolinía's *Historia* has something in common with this exaltation of a "heroic" struggle against non-Christian religiosity. Indeed, the history foregrounds the work of Christianization undertaken by the friars, and it shares the earlier histories' goals (or premises) of lending Castilian monarchs (or the Holy Roman Empire under Carlos V) an elevated importance in the Christian scheme of world history, in bringing it "salvation." Unlike the medieval Castilian histories, however, Motolinía's Christian eschatology bears the urgency and stamp of a belief that history—the discovery of the Americas and the work of conversion undertaken by the friars within it—was unfolding in the three-part scheme first imagined by Joachim of Fiore, as Baudot has argued.

Joachim of Fiore was a Cisterian abbot who lived from 1130-1202 c. e. and led a reform of his order, establishing a monastery in which strict poverty would be observed. According to Delno West, he was, "the most important apocalyptic writer and exegete of prophecy in the Middle Ages" (295). In Joachim's vision of historical time, the writing of the Old Testament is in symbolic harmony with the writing of the New Testament, and both represent progressive stages of history—the Age of God (the Old Testament) and the Age of Christ (the New Testament). The Age of Christ was the time in which the people of God were ruled by the institutional, terrestrial, Church. The third age of history, the Age of the Spirit, would be presided over by the Holy Spirit himself. This age, in the words of Bernard McGinn, would be "the age of the fullness of revelation and the triumph of the *viri spirituales*, the

landscape; chapter twelve to the artistic and technical ingenuity of the Indians in adopting Spanish customs; chapter fourteen to the contributions of Christianized children, some martyred for their beliefs. The final four chapters return to various discussions of the natural beauty and products of the area.

“spiritual men” (34). According to McGinn, Joachim predicted that the third age would be ushered in by the “spiritual men” of two mendicant orders, one of preachers and one of contemplatives; various theologians of the thirteenth century who read Joachim’s work also added a number of concepts that later became associated with him: 1) the acceptance of a strict rule of poverty among all people as a sign of the end of times, 2) the association of the Franciscans and Dominicans with Joachim’s two orders of *virii spirituales* and 3) the notion that third age would begin in the year 1260 (35). Georges Baudot notes that Peter Olivi (1248-1298), a popular writer and a “Spiritualist” reformer of the Franciscan Order, took up Joachim of Fiore’s writings in the late 13th century and made St. Francis into the proclaimed “messiah” of the Age of the Spirit, calling for an end to marriage and property and attempting to found the New Jerusalem in concrete locations. Considered heretical, these “Spirituals” were persecuted by the Church and officially disbanded; their beliefs, however, were carried over into the orthodox “observant” branch of the Franciscan Order, and the influence of the writings of Joachim of Fiore was never lost completely (90-94). Olivi, notes West, introduced a Joachimist sense of history into the Franciscan Order when he amended chapter twelve of St. Francis’ Rule of 1223, on missionary activity, to include, “an expectation of the salvation of the world in the final days of the Second Age” (298).

Indeed, the major avenue by which Joachimist thinking entered New Spain was the ecclesiastical province of San Gabriel, in Extremadura, Spain, the home province of the first “Twelve” Franciscans, Motolinía among them, sent as missionaries to New Spain. San Gabriel, founded by fray Juan de Guadalupe in 1518, advocated a return to a strict observance of the rule of poverty; its reform was inspired by the Joachimist theology and writings of the “Spiritual” Franciscans of the thirteenth century. According to Baudot, the fact that the theology of the newly established ecclesiastical province was deeply influenced by the “Spirituals” meant that the events of the discovery of the New World, and the victory of Cortés in 1519 were interpreted in this light (*Introduction* 14). The Franciscans were convinced that they were beginning the last great preaching of the Gospel before the end of the world, that the New World was, in fact, the platform for the third age of history, the Age of the Spirit (Weckmann 97, Phelan 15). Baudot

believes that perhaps those who instigated and followed the Observantine reform were inspired by the very discovery of the New World to rethink the implications of Joachim of Fiore's exegeses. He writes,

...al reanudar con la tradición de los 'espirituales' y con lo que ésta llevaba consigo de ideología joaquinista, fray Juan de Guadalupe intentaba poner de acuerdo a una fracción decidida y dinámica de sus correligionarios con las posibilidades de una época que daba muestras por muchos signos de que iba a ser muy poco ordinaria. Proporcionaba a los que le seguían la oportunidad de desempeñar un papel decisivo en la ordenación definitiva de la humanidad que había anunciado la Escritura y que proponía la historia de su tiempo. ...Nos sorprende la coincidencia entre la vocación americanista, afirmada muy rápidamente de la Custodia de San Gabriel y el interés de sus miembros por una actualización de las interpretaciones joaquinistas. no dudamos en ver en ellas las premisas de las grandes crónicas etnográficas sobre la humanidad precolombina. Efectivamente, querer desempeñar un papel activo en el cumplimiento de las profecías escatológicas, suponía hacia 1496-1522 acordar una atención prioritaria a una acción llevada en la naciente empresa colonial americana.

.... De la conversión de los indios dependía el cumplimiento de las promesas del Apocalipsis, pero era necesario aún unir éstos, de una manera o de otra, con el linaje de Adán y con los pueblos presentes en el Antiguo Testamento. De ahí viene el interés, a primera vista un poco extraño o con apariencias un poco gratuitas, de los primeros misioneros franciscanos de México por la historia de sus catecúmenos, cuando tantos problemas urgentes les asaltaban por todas partes. (*Utopía* 94-95)

Thus, in Baudot's view, the Indians, as the last link in the chain of unconverted gentiles, became the charge of a Franciscan Order dedicated to playing a vital role in bringing about the end of times and the fulfillment of History with a capital "H."

The three-part structure of the *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* can be seen as a rough superimposition of Joachim's three stages of history onto Mexican reality. The Age of God or the Old Testament (the time of the Israelite's darkness and wandering, their idolatry) corresponds to the description of Aztec religious practices in Treatise One, the vision of Mexico as a world of darkness and deception, in servitude to the "Prince of Darkness." The Age of Christ or the New Testament (the salvation of mankind through the coming of a Messiah—Jesus) corresponds to the descriptions of the Franciscans' establishment

of the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and penitence in Treatise Two.⁴ Finally, the Age of the Spirit, the millennial reign of the saints, corresponds to the extolling of the Mexican landscape and the faithful Indian Christians in Treatise Three.

Dedicated to the powerful Count of Benavente, the *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* was meant to shore-up eroding support for the separate status of the “República de Indios” and the work of the Franciscans as evangelizers and overseers within it (Baudot *Intro* 73-74). It was composed, as Baudot reminds us, in the historical context of the fading power of the Mendicant orders vis-à-vis the secular church hierarchy; at the time of its writing, the impending New Laws of 1542 and their threat to the Spanish conquistadores were seen as a grave impediment to the rapid subjugation and conversion of the Indians (*Utopía* 361). In essence, and assuming that its motives resonated with its audience, Motolinía’s application of Joachim’s historical theology to the work of the Franciscans in New Spain must have functioned rhetorically to remind the Count and the Court of the enormous significance of the success of the Franciscan endeavor and the urgent need for continued civil “order” and support for the missions. To inhibit the work of the friars was to inhibit the realization of God’s plan for History, the proximate reign of the millennium, or, at the very least, the establishment of a truly holy society of saints that lived according to the apostolic ideals of the early church. Baudot writes,

Teniendo todo en cuenta, parece que el inventario, la exploración y la comprensión del mundo precolombino se hallaban inscritos en la parte más sutil del proyecto milenarista de los evangelizadores seráficos. Y únicamente los religiosos más convencidos por las exégesis joaquinistas podían imaginar su interés y asegurar su laboriosa ejecución. Hay que considerar su gestión desde esta perspectiva, para captar completamente la visión de la historia humana que es, entonces, la de los apóstoles de México. (*Utopía* 100)

An especially significant meeting point of politics and millennial theology lies in Motolinía’s rhetorical treatment, in certain passages, of the Indian as a type of noble savage, a crucial aspect of which was the Franciscans’ admiration for the extreme austerity in which they lived. Treatise One of Motolinía’s history, in fact, insists on contrasting an

⁴ With the papal Bulls of Leon X in 1521 and Adrian VI in 1522, the Mendicant Orders were given full authority to carry out the work of the Church on behalf of the Pope.

idolatrous Indian society with a Christian Indian society, and in defining Spaniards as good or bad depending on their role in either aiding or hindering the process of conversion. In *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Norman Cohn notes,

The Age of the Spirit was to be the sabbath or restingtime of mankind. In it there would be no wealth or even property, for everyone would live in voluntary poverty; there would be no work, for human beings would possess only spiritual bodies and would need no food; there would be no institutional authority of any kind. The Empire would be no more and the Church of Rome would give place to a free community of perfected beings who would have no need of clergy or sacraments or Bible. In fact the world would be one vast monastery, in which all men would be contemplative monks rapt in mystical ecstasy and united in singing the praises of God. And this new version of the Kingdom of the Saints would endure until the Last Judgment. (100)

This passage finds its echo in chapter fourteen of the first Treatise, which describes the celebration of Easter Sunday in Tlaxcala. After this description, which involves many pre-conquest elements applied to a Christian holy day celebration, such as the offerings of *copalli* (a type of incense) or precious feathers, the chapter goes on to contrast the religious fervor and simple lifestyle of the Indians with the greed and tepid religiosity of the Spanish. For Motolinía, the Indians have fewer “impediments” for receiving the faith than do the Spanish; they resemble Franciscan monks except that they have families and there are women who bear children. “Sin rencillas ni enemistades pasan su tiempo y vida, y salen a buscar el mantenimiento a la vida humana necesario, y no más,” he writes (189). In other words, the Indians are seen as the ideal candidates for inhabitants of the future Age of the Spirit, of a society founded upon the monastic, Franciscan ideal of poverty. After the description of the Easter celebration, Motolinía notes that it was difficult for the Spanish who lived apart from the Indians to believe that the friars were really converting them—that they indeed came from far off to receive the sacrament of baptism (188). Nevertheless, he writes,

Estos indios que en sí no tienen estorbo que les impida para ganar el cielo, de los muchos que los españoles tenemos y nos tienen sumidos, porque su vida se contenta con muy poco, y tan poco, que apenas tienen con qué se vestir ni alimentar. Su comida es muy paupérrima, y lo mismo es el vestido: para dormir, la mayor parte de ellos aún no alcanza una estera sana. No se desvelan en adquirir ni guardar riquezas, ni se matan por

alcanzar estados ni dignidades. Con su pobre manta se acuestan, y en despertando están aparejados para servir a Dios, y si quiere disciplinar, no tienen estorbo ni embarazo de vestirse y desnudarse. Son pacientes, sufridos sobre manera, mansos como ovejas; nunca me acuerdo haberlos visto guardar injuria; humildes, a todos obedientes, ya de necesidad, ya de voluntad, no saben sino servir y trabajar. (188-89)

Motolinía then concludes the chapter with the requisite condemnation of the avariciousness of the Spanish. His diatribe excoriates those who come to the New World in search for wealth and become corrupt, taking no care for the salvation of their souls or appreciating the true purpose for which the conquest was gained: the conversion of the Indians (190-91). This picture of the Indian as the perfect Christian subject is the key element of the highest aspiration of the Franciscan mission, conceived in terms of Joachim's scheme of history. That aspiration was, of course, to found a society of Christians living in the harmony of spiritual wealth attainable only through disengaging with worldly goods and material riches. Due to what the friars perceived as an innate sense of humility and the extreme poverty of the Indians, the friars believed, as evidenced by Motolinía, that they would have less difficulty attaining internal, spiritual, wealth. It was only left for the friars to disillusion them as to their deception by the devil, and break the habit of idolatry.

The picture of the noble savage is thus not only contrasted in the *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* with the avaricious Spaniard, but also with the vision of the Indian "idolater". The first chapter of Treatise One begins with a description of the "plagues" suffered by the Indians since the arrival of the Spaniards. The implicit comparison is apt: the Indians are children of God, but they suffered for the idolatry in which they lived. They are seen as being (or having been) deceived by Satan, roped into the inhuman and evil practices of their servitude to the enemy of God. In the second chapter, dedicated to exploring the many "ídolos y crueles sacrificios que se hacían," Motolinía notes, "Era esta tierra un traslado del infierno ..." (125). In his imposition of a thoroughly Christian interpretation of Nahua religious practices Motolinía equates indigenous society with the heathen or pagan peoples living in the times before Christ. In chapter four, which tells about the doctrines taught by the friars in an attempt to eradicate idolatry, Motolinía says:

Ya esto declarado, y la inmortalidad del ánima, dábaseles a entender quién era el demonio en quien ellos creían, y cómo los traían engañados; y las maldades que en sí tiene, y el cuidado que pone en trabajar que ninguna ánima se salve; lo cual oyendo hubo muchos que tomaron tanto espanto y temor, que temblaban de oír lo que los frailes les decían, y algunos pobres desarrapados, de los cuales hay hartos en esta tierra, comenzaron a venir a el bautismo y a buscar el reino de Dios, demandándole con lágrimas y suspiros y mucha importunación. (134)

Despite the fact that so many were begging to be baptized, however, the friars soon learned that the work was not done, that many of the ancient rites persisted (135).

To make sure that sacrifices were not practiced or idols worshipped in secret, the friars relied to a great extent upon the aid of “good” Christianized Indians, especially the children of the nobles whom they had strategically catechized early on. In the second chapter, Motolinía describes how the friars took in the sons of the community leaders, and baptized them with the permission of their parents. He says:

Estos niños que los frailes criaban y enseñaban, salieron muy bonitos y muy hábiles, y tomaban tan bien la buena doctrina, que enseñaban a otros muchos; y demás de esto ayudaban mucho, porque descubrían a los failes los ritos e idolatrías, y muchos secretos de las ceremonias de sus padres; lo cual era muy gran material para confundir y predicar sus errors y ceguedad en que estaban. (125)

In Chapter three, Motolinía writes that the resistance of the elders to eliminating the practice of human sacrifice was solved through the epidemic “plagues” that killed many or caused others to convert. Moreover, the sons of those who died, having been “de pequeños bautizados y criados en la casa de Dios” were the new community leaders (129). He concludes: “...el mismo Dios les entrega sus tierras en poder los que en Él creen; y lo mismo ha hecho contra los opositores que contradicen la conversion de estos indios por muchas vías” (129). Motolinía is thus aware of the difficulty of the task of converting, of making sure that idolatry had been eradicated, but he is convinced that the establishment of a Christian Indian society is possible. By having the rights and privileges of the Institutional church (the establishment of the Age of Christ) placed in Franciscan hands, Motolinía and his allies could proceed to found the Age of the Spirit in New Spain; in the

“República de Indios,” they could realize a society like the one envisioned in Joachim’s third age, free of the mediation, bureaucracy and above all the rampant greed of the Old World.

The rest of chapter four and chapters five through twelve describe pre-conquest religious festivals and practices. In chapter twelve, Motolinía returns to a discussion of the early Indian church established by the Franciscans by switching focus from describing the size and extent of pre-conquest temples, to telling about the first post-conquest Franciscan churches where the sacraments were first performed.

Los tres años primeros o cuatro después que se ganó México, en solo el monasterio de San Francisco había Sacramento, y después el Segundo lugar en que se puso fue Tetzcoco. Y así como se iban haciendo las Iglesias de los monasterios iban poniendo el Santísimo Sacramento y cesando las apraiciones e ilusiones del demonio, que antes muchas veces aparecía, engañaba y espantaba a muchos, y los traía en mil maneras de errors.... (179)

Interestingly, this contrast between the pre- and post-conquest “temples” comes up at the beginning of the Treatise, as well, with Motolinía pointing out how the friars, attempting to avoid the images of Jesus and Mary becoming yet another idol in the indigenous pantheon, told their catechumens and new believers that, “si querían tener imagen de Dios o Santa María, que les hiciesen iglesia” (130). He relates that, to please the friars, the Indians began to build,

...algunas ermitas y adoratorios, y después Iglesias, y ponían en ellas imágenes, y con todo esto siempre procuraron de guardar sus templos sanos y enteros; aunque después, yendo la cosa adelante, para hacer las iglesias comenzaron a echar mano de sus *teocalme* para sacar de ellos piedra y madera, y de esta manera quedaron desollados y derribados; y los ídolos de piedra, de los cuales había infinitos, no solo escaparon quebrados y hechos pedazos, pero vinieron a servir de cimiento para las Iglesias; y como había algunos muy grandes, venían lo mejor del undo para cimiento de tan grande y santa obra. (130-31)

The progression of the passage from churches built away from the old temples, to the eventual use of the stones and even the stone idols as the foundations for the new Church reflects Motolinía’s vision of using certain aspects of Indian society (those he regards as fulfilling a Christian ideal) as building blocks of the Church in New Spain.

Treatise Two centers on the efforts of the friars to baptize, marry, and to hear the confessions of the Indians, with the lion's share dedicated to portraying the controversial work of the Franciscans in baptizing the Indians. In its focus on the sacraments, it mirrors the Joachim's second historical Age, the Age of Christ, and the establishment of the institutional terrestrial Church. Early in the Treatise, Motolinía exalts the arduous work of the friars in baptizing enormous numbers of Indians who, to their credit, came from everywhere begging for the sacrament (and later for confession and the presence of friars in their pueblos) (224-36). Emphasizing the great demand for baptism among the Indians, Motolinía tells the story of two women who were rejected for baptism when they had asked for it, because they were not, according to the priest, "bien enseñadas" (235). Motolinía quotes them as saying, "¿A mí que creo en Dios me quieres echar fuera de la iglesia? Pues si tú [me] echas de la casa del misericordioso Dios, ¿a dónde iré?...y si me vuelvo sin bautizar en el camino me moriré? Mira que creo en Dios; no me echas de su iglesia.' Estas palabras bastaron para que las dos viejas fuesen bautizadas y consoladas" (235). Yet, Motolinía also complains that many friars were *too strict* in asking for proofs of faith, "...es el mal que algunos sacerdotes que los comienzan a enseñar, los querrían ver tan santos en dos días que con ellos trabajan, como si ubiese diez años que los estuviesen enseñando, y como no les parecen tales, déjanlos..." (233). Moreover, he argues that the quantity of persons asking for baptism made it difficult for the friars to provide, as the Bull of Paul III had requested, every soul with the proper, full-length, fully equipped ritual of the sacrament (232-33). It was simply not a question for the Franciscan friars that their mission to convert the heathen—the purpose for which the Spaniards had been guided by God to the discovery of the new lands—should be fulfilled as soon as possible, and that this mission involved the baptism, in the most expedient manner available, of all of those who expressed a desire to receive the faith. Questioning the nature or the morality of the conquest and concomitantly the authenticity of the Indians' baptisms was not the type of thinking that Motolinía engaged in.

The most revealing aspect of Motolinía's defense of the Franciscan method and extent of administering the sacrament of

baptism is his insertion of references to their knowledge of Indian languages and cultures. The beginning of chapter four, the chapter which forms the basis of the defense (rather than simple praise) of the quantities of baptisms undertaken by the Order, sets up Motolinía's specific target of attack as those missionaries who come from Spain thinking to correct and undo all of the work of the earlier friars. Inexperienced, they were nonetheless armed with the arguments and the power to put a stop to the mass baptisms, to the detriment of those who asked for it.

Cerca del administrar este sacramento del bautismo, aunque los primeros años todos los sacerdotes fueron conformes, después como vinieron muchos clérigos y frailes de las otras órdenes, agustinos, dominicos, y franciscanos, tuvieron diversos pareceres contrarios los uno de los otros; parecían a los unos que el bautismo se había de dar con las ceremonias que se usan en España, y no se satisfacían de la manera con que los otros le administraban, y cada uno quería seguir su parecer, y aquél tenía por mejor y más acertado, ora fuese por buen celo, ora sea porque los hijos de Adán todos somos amigos de nuestro parecer; y los nuevamente venidos siempre quieren enmendar las obras de los primeros, y hacer, si pudiesen, que del todo cesasen y se olvidasen, y que su opinión sola valiese, y el mayor mal era que los que esto pretendían no curaban ni trabajaban en aprender la lengua de los indios, ni en bautizarlos. (229)

The logic is this: the first Franciscans to arrive took it upon themselves to learn indigenous languages, and to baptize all those they encountered. The new arrivals, in contrast, wanted to simply Christianize; for them, the process of baptism, to be legitimate, had to be carried out as it was carried out in Spain. Uninterested in learning indigenous languages, for them, conversion meant incorporation into Christianity as it was practiced in Europe. The first Franciscans, however, wanted to create a *new* society in New Spain, to maintain the "República de Indios" separate from the world of the Spanish. Given the fact that they were now subjugated to the military and political apparatus of the Spanish monarchy, the Indians, thought the Franciscans, had more chance of forming an ideal society than the Spanish society that conquered them. Baptism saved souls and was the essential first step to the Christianization of the Indians, but for the Franciscans the process of Christianization could not stop there. It had to be followed up by an intense linguistic and cultural engagement on the part of friars. The creation of a new society based on the ideals of the

Joachimist-inspired Franciscan Reform, could happen if the Indian society was given the chance to keep many of its characteristics from the past.

The most explicitly Joachimist passages of the history occur in Treatise Three, a fact that becomes important given the sense of the thematic progression of the work from the Age of the Old Testament, to the Age of Christ and, finally, the Age of the Spirit. These key passages include a quotation from the life of Martín de Valencia and two acclamatory segments inserted into the description of Mexico's natural landscape; they serve as textual indicators that the central motif around which Motolinía structures his text—the conversion of the Indians—had any kind of different significance for Motolinía than, for example, his Dominican or Augustinian colleagues, or even for those Franciscans not taken with the Joachimism of the Guadalupean Reforms.

In the second chapter of Treatise Three, Motolinía presents the life of the first superior of the Franciscan mission in Mexico, Martín de Valencia. Motolinía recounts how one morning while saying prayers, his superior felt a new sense of peace and had a vision of the conversion of the infidels that found resonance in the Psalms that were being recited. One of them in particular, “Eripe me de inimicis meis” (“Deliver me from my enemies”), spoke to him and he is quoted as crying out, overjoyed: “¡Oh, ¿Y cuándo será esto? ¿Cuándo se cumplirá esta profecía? ¿No sería yo digno de ver este convertimiento, pues ya estamos en la tarde y fin de nuestros días, y en la última edad del mundo?” (201). This is a clear reference to and evidence of the influence of Joachimist historical theology upon the Franciscans' conception of their missionary activities. The other passages point to Motolinía's own Joachimism but are more indirect in nature, and occur in Treatise Three, chapters six and nine. Treatise Three, as a whole, is dedicated to a description of the landscape of New Spain. The passage from chapter six reads:

¡Oh México, que tales montes te cercan y coronan! Ahora con razón volará tu fama, porque en ti resplandece la fe y evangelio de Jesucristo. Tú que antes eras maestra de pecados, ahora eres enseñadora de verdad; y tú que antes estabas en tinieblas y oscuridad, ahora das resplandor de doctrina y cristiandad. Más te ensalza y engrandece la sujeción que tiene a el invistísimo César don Carlos que el tirano señorío con que otro tiempo a todas querías sujetar. Era entonces una Babilonia, llena de confusiones y maldades; ahora eres otra Jerusalén, madre de

provincias y reinos. Andabas e ibas a do querías, según te guiaba la voluntad de un idiota gentil, que en ti ejecutaba leyes bárbaras; ahora muchas velan sobre ti, para que vivas según leyes divinas y humanas. Otro tiempo con autoridad del príncipe de las tinieblas, anhelando amenazabas, prendías y sacrificabas, así hombres como mujeres, su sangre ofrecías al demonio en cartas y papeles; ahora con oraciones y sacrificios buenos y justos adoras y confiesas a el Señor de los señores. ¡Oh México! Si levantase los ojos a tus montes, de que está cercada, verías que son en tu ayuda y defensa más ángeles buenos que demonios fueron contra ti en otro tiempo, para te hacer caer en pecados y yerros. (314)

The millennial themes of this passage are centered on the depiction of Mexico as another Jerusalem, after the defeat of the antichrist and the forces of evil. The friars of Mexico have succeeded in establishing a reign of peace, guarded over by heavenly angels. Also of importance is the vision of Indian idolatry as devil-worship, and to that extent, a sort of perverted Christianity. Lucifer, the fallen angel, persecuted Christianity by perverting its rites and dedicating them to himself. The sacrifices of the Indians were thus restored to their rightful form and to their rightful owner through the work of the missionaries.

A couple of chapters later, Motolinía writes,

Hay muchos géneros de árboles no conocidos hasta ahora por los españoles, y como son diversos géneros, y de hoja muy diferente los unos de los otros, hacen las más hermosas y frescas montañas del mundo. Es muy propia tierra para ermitaños y comtemplativos, y aun creo que los que vivieren antes de mucho tiempo, han de ver que, como esta tierra fue otra Egipto en idolatrías y pecados, y después floreció en gran santidad, bien así estas montañas y tierra han de florecer y en ella tiene de haber ermitaños y penitentes comtemplativos, aun de esto que digo comienza ya a haber harta muestra, como se dirá adelante en la cuarta parte de esta narración o historia, si Dios fuere servido de sacarla a luz; por tanto noten los que vivieren, y veremos como la cristiandad ha vendido desde Asia, que es en oriente, a parar en los fines de Europa, que es nuestra España, y de allí se viene a más andar a esta tierra, que es en lo más último de occidente. ¿Pues por aventura estorbarlo ha la mar? No por cierto, porque la mar no hace división ni apartamiento a la voluntad y querer del que la hizo. ¿Pues no allegará el querer y gracia de Dios hasta a donde llegan las naos? Sí, y muy más adelante, pues en toda la redondez de la tierra ha de ser el nombre de Dios loado, y glorificado, y ensalzado; y como floreció en el principio la Iglesia en oriente, que es el principio del mundo, bien así ahora en el fin de los siglos tiene de florecer en occidente, que es el fin del mundo” (333-34).

Here is the classic inscription of Mexico as the locus of the millennium, a province of saintly, hermetic, monastic penitents and contemplatives, combined with the sentiment that the world will end when Christianity reaches all the regions of the globe, the last of which is the most western, the Americas.

A significant topic of Treatise Three, aside from the saintliness of the friars (evident in the biography of Martín de Valencia) and the idyllic landscape, are chapters dedicated to describing the contributions and sacrifices of the Indian converts for the Christian cause. Chapters fourteen and fifteen tell the story of the Christianized children, three of whom are martyred, who confront idolatry in their families and communities. A brief but very telling episode, however, occurs in Chapter twelve, “Que cuenta del buen ingenio y grande habilidad que tienen los indios en aprender todo cuanto les enseñan; y todo lo que ven con os ojos lo hacen en breve tiempo” (353). After noting the Indians’ agility in picking up Spanish, at the end of this chapter, Motolinía embarks on the subject of the Franciscans’ decision to educate the sons of the noble families in Latin. Although it was a controversial decision with which many disagreed, and although it was difficult work, Motolinía points out that the friars’ efforts to teach Latin and grammar paid off, and that there were many “buenos gramáticos, y que componen oraciones largas y bien autorizadas, y versos exámetros y pentámetros” (355). He then goes on to tell the story of the certain “clérigo recién venido de Castilla, quien no podía creer que los Indios sabían la doctrina cristiana, ni *Pater Noster*, ni *Credo* bien dicho,” even though many Spaniards insisted that it was true (356). This priest, Motolinía writes, happened, one day, to come across two students from the Colegio de Tlatelolco, without knowing who they were. He asked one of them to recite both the *Pater Noster* and the *Credo*, and he did so perfectly. However, states Motolinía,

...el clérigo acusóle una palabra que Indio bien decía, y como el Indio se afirmase en que decía bien, y el clérigo que no, tuvo el estudiante necesidad de probar cómo decía bien, y preguntóle, hablando en latín: “*¿Reverendo pater, (nato) cujus casus est?*”. Entonces como el clérigo no supiese gramática, quedó confuso y atajado. (356)

This small episode not only demonstrates the odds against which the Nahua scholars lived and worked, the discrimination that they

confronted, but the minority position of the Franciscan friars in insisting on the importance of educating them. It is, in effect, a brief glimpse of a vision that places a scholarly ideal over a colonial hierarchy of race and culture. In the “República de Indios,” as in the millennial kingdom, souls, not bodies, would be fed; it might be reminiscent of the last, glorious, stage of history, but it was only beginning, and Motolinía did not want his project to end.

In sum, while Baudout mentions particular passages that can be culled from Treatise Three for evidence of Franciscan millennialism in early post-conquest New Spain, it also appears that the *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* takes on the historical theology of Joachim de Fiore as its organizing principle. Treatise One opposes Indian idolatry to Indian Christianity, Treatise Two emphasizes the ardor with which the Indians received Christianity, and Treatise Three praises the Franciscan Order for the fruits of its work. It also extols the landscape and the faithfulness of the first Indian converts, ultimately casting all of Mexico in the mold of a potential millennial utopia. In Joachim’s image of the Age of the Spirit, the Franciscans encountered the vision of a society based on the most radical ideals of St. Francis. The “Twelve” sent from San Gabriel in Extremadura attempted to implement the theology of St. Francis in New Spain, with all of its ramifications for the nature of a social system.

However, while the new Indian society had to be protected from abuse and extermination, it could also service a paternalistic, ecclesiastic and lay, Spanish society. Motolinía never mentions or questions the Franciscans’ dependence on Indian tribute or the “voluntary” or “forced” labor that was responsible for the building of their churches and monasteries. He does not mention the friars’ dependence on Indian tribute for their own economic subsistence. As it turned out, the Franciscans’ Joachimist social utopianism could not be maintained in an increasingly diverse and politically complex colonial society. Charles Gibson notes that after the middle of the 16th century church attendance dropped, as did the respect of the Indians for the friars, who had lost their original fervor and were often interested in personal gain (114). The rise of secular church power over the disputing mendicant orders was weighing on Motolinía as he wrote. His history is a response crafted in the milieu of these pressures that form the political

subtext of his narrative. By imbuing it with the sentiment—and the structure—of Joachimist millennialism, Motolinía responds with the subtle but mighty weaponry of eschatology and with a rhetorical brilliance that defeated the passage of time and kept his most cherished social ideals alive for the witness of posterity.

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