Mapping the Nature of Empire: The Legacy of Theological Geography in the Early Iberian Atlantic

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MAPPING THE NATURE OF EMPIRE:
THE LEGACY OF THEOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY
IN THE EARLY IBERIAN ATLANTIC

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MAPPING THE NATURE OF EMPIRE:

THE LEGACY OF THEOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY

IN THE EARLY IBERIAN ATLANTIC

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

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Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

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This investigation revolves around one central question: if Christianity became the official ideology for sixteenth-century imperial expansion, then how does a theological conception of nature undergird or undermine colonial configurations of knowledge and power? I argue that, in the wake of 1492, Iberian empires racialized religious identity and mapped hemispheric dominion by leveraging a theological geography, that is, a scholastic vision of the natural world.

In Chapter One, I examine the order of nature in late medieval cosmology. By analyzing Fra Mauro’s Mappamundi (c. 1450), I show the ways in which Aristotelian Thomism provides an intellectual framework for subsequent global designs. Mauro’s map receives consideration because it reflects how Christian empires began imagining the modern world and their central place in it. Chapter Two traces the formation of racial and spatial hierarchies in the early Iberian Atlantic. I show how purity of blood discourse (limpieza de sangre) racialized religious identity by making Muslim and Jewish heresy, and Old Christian status, a natural condition passed on through sexual reproduction. Blood purity, therefore, was not about degrees of truth or falsity but rather about which bodies could be considered proper Christian subjects. Subsequently, I examine the accumulation of tropical space. By analyzing Columbus’ writings, royal correspondence, papal bulls, and Iberian cartography, I demonstrate how a racial imagination
emerged from a theological geography that evolved, rather than diminished, throughout the sixteenth century. This chapter ultimately reveals how Christian empires envisioned their mastery over space and bodies as part of the natural order established by God.

In Chapter Three, I explore the colonial legacy of theological geography. I begin by situating the Dominican bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) within the transatlantic economy of slavery and dispossession. I show how Las Casas tries to subvert colonialist exploitation by developing a theological geography that bases indigenous sovereignty on two environmental factors: climate and latitude. I conduct a close reading of the Laws of Burgos (1512) and the Requirement (1513) to show how an ecclesial authority (*plenitudo potestati*), rooted in a doctrine of creation, undergirds the boundary-less desire for global dominion. Chapter Four focuses on barbarian discourse in the historic Valladolid debate (1550–1551) between Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494–1573). I consider how place and language define conceptions of civility/barbarity. I analyze Las Casas’ discourse in conjunction with the Ebstorf mappamundi (c. 1250), a medieval World Map, to expose the geographic implications of his thought. I argue that Las Casas imbues scholastic civility with salvific power by configuring literal locution—alphabetic script deriving from Latin—as the means by which African and Amerindian barbarians reach their God-given end: the beatific vision.

My investigation exposes the theological architecture that undergirds what critical theorists call the colonial matrix of power. Scholars that overlook the implications of theology during the ‘long sixteenth century’ do so at their own peril. By revealing the implications of place in the formation of colonial subjectivities, I show how critiques of capitalism should account for the ways in which undocumented status and linguistic difference signify a racial state of expendability.
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Para Karolina Mercedes y todos los que habitando las fronteras luchan por un buen vivir.

For Karoline Mercedes and all who, inhabiting the borderlands, strive for an abundant life.
INTRODUCTION:

MAPPING THE PROJECT
The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.

—Achille Mbembé

The Holy Scripture is expounded by four methods...The first, is as history, which is a narration of things that happened...The fourth is anagoge, from ‘ana’ which means ‘upward’ and ‘goge’ which means ‘leading’; and this is where the given material is to be understood as describing what is to be desired, namely heavenly glory.

—Thomas Aquinas quoted by Cristóbal Colón

Littera gesta docet: guid credas allegoria; moralis quid agas; quo tendas anagogia.
The literal teaching tells facts; The allegory tells what you should believe; The moral interpretation tells how you should act; The anagogy tells where you are going.

—Jean Gerson quoted by Cristóbal Colón


3 Columbus, The Libro de las Profecias, 101. See also Jean Gerson, Opera Omnia, 4 vols. (Basel: Nicolaus Kesler, 1489).
I.1 Siting ‘Spaces of Death’

“Why is it that, in so many places found in every corner of the global space, so many human beings face that which ‘no one deserves’? What makes possible a mode of existence that spreads beyond the juridical borders of any given state and the ethical borders of every nation?” With such questions, the critical race theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva presses into the contingency of creaturely existence. Her questions seek to decipher the global production of ‘no-bodies,’ namely, human beings that exist as discardable flesh. For Ferreira da Silva, capitalism ultimately presumes that bodies marked by racial and cultural difference inhabit a perpetual condition of discardability. The racial logic of global capitalism also enacts spatial violence. Its systems of accumulation, dispossession, and debt presuppose and reproduce ‘spaces of death.’ Before detailing how my project analyzes this reality, it is first necessary to outline the basic structure of neoliberalism, the dominant economic paradigm of our time.

Neoliberal capitalism became the uncontested global paradigm with the collapse of the Soviet Union. After 1991, Neoliberal proponents essentially sought to decrease the role of government by promising that unrestricted markets would responsibly allocate the world’s resources. The past thirty years, however, have revealed the fallacy of this ‘trickle-down’ model. This result should come as no surprise given that neoliberalism amounts to “policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of

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5 See Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Special Issue: Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime,” *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012); see also Mbembé, “Necropolitics.”
social life in order to maximize their personal profit.” Spearheaded by the United States in the 1990s, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) enabled multinational corporations to cross national and hemispheric borders in order to exploit cheap labor and to profit from lax environmental regulations. Free-trade agreements propelled what economists on the Left described as a ‘race to the bottom.’ Coupled with decades of destabilizing U.S. foreign policy, neoliberal policies went on to exacerbate, rather than decrease, poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Neoliberalism suppressed wages throughout the ‘Third World,’ disenfranchised the U.S. working class, and concentrated wealth among the global financial elite. In sum, Neoliberalism has detrimentally affected the southern hemisphere.

Conversely, despite the liberation movements of the twentieth century, the northern hemisphere has retained its global hegemony. Take, for instance, the geopolitical bloc known as

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7 “[N]eoliberal initiatives are characterized as free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the government.” See Chomsky, Profit over People, 7.

8 Thomas F. Brien, Making the Americas: The United States and Latin America from the Age of Revolutions to the Era of Globalization (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

9 “The hierarchy of coloniality manifested itself in all domains—political, economic, and not least of all cultural. The hierarchy reproduced itself over time, although it was always possible for a few states to shift ranks in the hierarchy. But a change in rank order did not disturb the continued existence of the hierarchy. The Americas would become the first testing-ground too of the possibility for a few, never more than a few, to shift their place in the ranking. The exemplary instance was the divergence of the paths of North America and Latin America, beginning in the eighteenth century.” Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System,” International Social Science Journal 44, no. 4 (1992): 550.
the Group of 8 (G8). Comprised of eight highly industrialized liberal democracies—the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, and Japan—the G8 determines policy that affects every aspect of planetary life. Note how member nations are situated in the northern hemisphere, specifically between 30°–70° latitude north of the equator (see Figure 0.1). Under the guise of development, entities like the G8 collaborate with the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank to promote their global designs. By burdening Europe’s former colonies with agonizing debt, free trade policies reintroduce colonial dynamics of power. While neoliberal capitalism claims no formal center, it rearticulates a global hierarchy in which the north continues to subjugate the south.

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10 Founded in 1975, the G6 initially consisted of France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Canada joined in 1976 and Russia obtained full membership in 1998. The EU, which is represented by the president of the European Council and European Commission, is considered a “nonenumerated ninth” member. See “The Group of Eight (G8) Industrialized Nations” at cfr.org/backgrounder/group-eight-g8-industrialized-nations#chapter-title-0-3

11 The Council on Foreign Relations has identified the following as central topics: Defense and Security; Development; Economics; Energy and Environment; Global Governance; Health, Peace, Conflict, and Human Rights; Politics and Strategy; Society and Culture; Technology and Science; and, Terrorism. To see the Council’s description of these eleven topics visit: cfr.org/issue/?groupby=3&cid=2&filter=2017

12 “Changes in the global economy, especially the huge growth of finance capital centered in New York, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo, reinforced the economic advantage of the old imperial centers.” Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados, “The Global South,” Context 11 (2012): 12–13. Figure 0.1 was created by the author by using mapchart.net

13 Joseph E. Stiglitz, Globalization and its Discontents, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); According to Forbes, 14 of the top 20 billionaires are from the United States. Moreover, 19 out of the top 20 billionaires are from the Global North. To view the complete list of “The World’s Billionaires,” visit: forbes.com/billionaires/list/#version:static.
Neoliberalism enacts a form of spatial violence by displacing populations throughout the Global South. Critical race theorist John D. Márquez notes that “neoliberalism has spurred an epic migration of workers from Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia to the United States and European Union, [and that] those immigrants have been frequently scapegoated as adulterating national identities, spreading crime and disease, and stealing jobs and other economic resources across the global north.” \(^4\) While commodities and money seamlessly cross national and hemispheric barriers, immigrants, migrant workers, and refugees—who represent

labor-power—are widely prohibited from crossing those same geographic borders. This paradox constitutes neoliberalism’s “double bind.”

Neoliberal intellectuals from the Global North have resisted immigration from the Global South by defending Western civilization. The late political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, is a quintessential example. Throughout his illustrious career as a Harvard professor, Huntington promulgated a form of White Nationalism at home and abroad. According to Huntington, Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and to propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies. This phenomenon is most notable among Muslims in Europe, who are, however, a small minority. It is also manifest, in lesser degree, among Hispanics in the United States, who are a large minority. If assimilation fails in this case, the United States will become a cleft country, with all the potentials for internal strife and disunion that entails. In Europe, Western civilization could also be undermined by the weakening of its central component, Christianity.

The racial dimensions of Huntington’s New World Order become more prominent in his domestic agenda. In “The Hispanic Challenge,” Huntington decries Spanish-speaking immigrants as threats to the racial, cultural, and religious integrity of the U.S. Accordingly, Latin Americans and Mexicans in particular will jeopardize the “white, British, and Protestant” national creed, which


is “the product of the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers.” Muslims and Hispanics, therefore, pose an existential threat to the racial/religious identity of the nation.

The European Union (EU) has responded similarly to Middle Eastern and African immigrants. At the turn of the century, many European countries began erecting physical barriers along peripheral zones. Spain, Greece, and Hungary, for instance, built walls and fences along strategic points of entry to prevent immigration from predominately Muslim countries. These policies, however, were almost totally ineffective. According to Frontex, the European Agency charged with managing border operations within the EU, the number of undocumented migrants that crossed the Central Mediterranean increased by 18 percent in 2016, reaching a total of


The UNHCR reports: “Over the past two decades, the global population of forcibly displaced people has grown substantially from 33.9 million in 1997 to 65.6 million in 2016, and it remains at a record high. The growth was concentrated between 2012 and 2015, driven mainly by the Syrian conflict along with other conflicts in the region such as in Iraq and Yemen, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa including Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Sudan. “Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2016,” UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency. Accessible at: unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5943e8a34/global–trends–forced–displacement–2016.html

20 See Frontex, “Annual Risk Analysis–2017.” “As in the case of the Central Mediterranean, never before had detections on the Western Mediterranean route been as high as in 2016, with more than 10,000 detections. This is 46% more than in 2015 on the same route, and 21% more than in 2011, the previous record-breaking year. As in the Central Mediterranean, most migrants were from Africa, which indicates the growing pressure of illegal immigration from this continent towards the EU.” Accessible at: frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf
181,459. Not only were physical barriers inefficient but, more importantly, they proved fatal for those who were then forced to use alternative dangerous sea routes. In fact, Frontex reports that “the number of deaths and missing persons—a rough estimate due to the absence of passenger lists and the few bodies actually recovered—increased from 3,175 in 2015 to over 4,500 in 2016.”

No-bodies are sacrificed on the altar of European sovereignty.

Moreover, in the U.S. Republicans and Democrats have tried for decades to restrict unauthorized border crossings under the guise of national security. Recently, however, violence against Latinx immigrants and citizens alike has intensified under the Trump administration. Throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, then candidate Trump promised to protect law

21 Never before had detections been so high in the Central Mediterranean area, with 181,459 in 2016, which is 18% more than in 2015. For the third consecutive year, detections in the Central Mediterranean Sea have exceeded 100,000.” Ibid.

22 See Frontex, “Annual Report Analysis–2015.” “According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), more than 600 merchant ships have been diverted from their routes to rescue persons at sea in 2014. These deviations are, in the words of the Secretary General, detrimental to shipping and are not offset by any realistic prospects of salvage awards. In addition to migrants leaving from Libya, since September 2014, an increasing number of cases have been reported of cargo vessels being used to smuggle migrants from Turkey directly to Italy. This new trend affects the Eastern Mediterranean route, as the departure area, and the Central Mediterranean area, as the arrival area. This practice is further developed under the section related to the Eastern Mediterranean route.” Accessible at: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2015.pdf.

23 Ibid.

24 In 1994 the Clinton Administration introduced Operation Hold the Line, Operation Gatekeeper, and Operation Safeguard. “By increasing the number of Border Patrol agents and building obstacles (fences), the flow of migration was successfully moved to remote and dangerous desert regions. The underlying strategy was that deaths of migrants attempting the hazardous crossing would deter others from crossing.” Miguel A. De La Torre, Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 191. With the signing of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, the Clinton Administration “double the number of Border Patrol agents over five years; began construction of ‘The Wall’ to serves as a barrier; eliminated due process for immigrants; tightened claims for possible asylum; increased penalties for the undocumented; and enacted tougher legislation against smugglers of immigrants.” Ibid.
abiding (White) Americans from a “Latino Threat” by building a wall along U.S./Mexico border.\textsuperscript{25} The characterization of Latin Americans and Latinxs as violent criminals, drug-dealers, and gang-members served to justify an increase in border militarization.\textsuperscript{26} At the Republican National Convention on July 22, 2016, Trump stated:

> Our convention occurs at a moment of crisis for our nation. The attacks on our police, and the terrorism in our cities, threaten our very way of life...Nearly 180,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records, ordered deported from our country, are tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens. The number of new illegal immigrant families who have crossed the border so far this year already exceeds the entire total from 2015. They are being released by the tens of thousands into our communities with no regard for the impact on public safety or resources...We are going to build a great border wall to stop illegal immigration, to stop the gangs and the violence, and to stop the drugs from pouring into our communities. I have been honored to receive the endorsement of America’s Border Patrol agents, and will work directly with them to protect the integrity of our lawful immigration system. By ending catch-and-release on the border, we will end the cycle of human smuggling and violence. Illegal border crossings will go down. Peace will be restored...Tonight, I want every American whose demands for immigration security have been denied—and every politician who has denied them—to listen very closely to the words I am about to say. On Jan. 20 of 2017, the day I take the oath of office, Americans will finally wake up in a country where the laws of the United States are enforced.\textsuperscript{27}

The implications of such rhetoric deserve critical scrutiny because border militarization 1) “has not been effective as a deterrence strategy,” and 2) “generally exceeds the legal rights of those who have been victimized.”\textsuperscript{28} Every year countless migrants—mostly women and minors—die


\textsuperscript{26} Márquez, “Latinos as the ‘Living Dead,'” 484.


\textsuperscript{28} Márquez, “Latinos as the ‘Living Dead,'” 474. “This model is a blend of two different paradigms: (1) more general theories regarding the relationship between race, systemic violence, the law, sovereignty, and European modernity; and (2) literature that theorizes settler colonialism as a violent component of White supremacy in the United States and that considers how this violence has been manifest, in particular, within the US-Mexico borderlands and in ways that have victimized the Latino population writ large.” Ibid., 476.
attempting to cross the southern border.\textsuperscript{29} They fall victim to treacherous waters and dangerous terrain. From its inception, the border wall has forced into spaces of death those who presumably compromise ‘white, British, and Protestant’ identity.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, with the introduction of the Sensenbrenner Bill in 2005, Congress nearly made it illegal to provide immigrants with medical assistance or food.\textsuperscript{31} To dismiss the death toll as an ‘unintended consequence,’ as elected officials have done for decades, conceals the engineering behind such carnage. By producing spaces of death, border militarization constitutes a form of racialized violence.

Any thorough critique of neoliberalism must therefore address the racist patriarchy imbedded within neoliberal exploitation. Proponents of the “neoliberal entrapment model” fall short in this regard. They claim that “state agents have conspired with capitalists” in order to “appease the anxieties of those concerned with border inviolability, while trapping and rendering displaced workers more vulnerable to exploitation either in the United States or in Latin America by erecting deadly impediments to their migration from and back to their home nations.”\textsuperscript{32} This


\textsuperscript{30} “A resolution passed by Amnesty International-USA in 2000 noted that the Gatekeeper strategy is an abuse of the right to control the border ‘in that it maximizes, rather than minimizes the risk to life.’” De La Torre, Trails of Hope and Terror, 15.

\textsuperscript{31} In 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act which “made it a crime to assist an undocumented person to remain in the United States; if apprehended, the offender would receive the same prison term as that of a removed alien.” Ibid., 192.

\textsuperscript{32} Márquez, “Latinos as the ‘Living Dead,’’ 475. Quijano and Wallerstein advance a similar argument. “The post-1945 ascension of the United States to hegemony in the world-system made it ideologically untenable for the United States to maintain formal segregation. On the other hand, the very same hegemony made it necessary for the US to permit widespread legal and illegal migration from non-
argument seems to ignore that capitalists cannot, after all, exploit the dead. As Márquez points out:

> expendability with legal impunity, is not a mere consequence of or a tool for broader plans for economic exploitation. By contrast, expendability represents a base or foundational effect of power through which plans for economic exploitation can be and have been instantiated.\(^{33}\)

Márquez introduces a *racial state of expendability* to describe the precondition for the exploitation and criminalization of Latinxs. A racial state of expendability identifies something the juridical and economic system takes for granted, namely that Latinas/os broadly and undocumented people in particular are fundamentally disposable. Neoliberalism sacrifices their bodies on the altar of state sovereignty. For this reason, Gloria Anzaldúa calls the U.S./Mexico border “*una herida abierta*,” an open wound, “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”\(^{34}\)

When confronted with these realities, defenders of neoliberalism issue a simple response: this system is our only option. “Communist societies, social democracies, and even modest social welfare states like the United States have all failed, the neoliberals proclaim, and their citizens have accepted neoliberalism as the only feasible course.”\(^{35}\) Neoliberals dismiss capitalism’s deadly consequences and internal contradictions by simply reaffirming its hegemony. This posture

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European countries such that the concept of the ‘Third World within’ was born, once again a contribution of Americanity to the world-system.” Quijano and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept,” 551.

\(^{33}\) “What then has allowed for Latino immigrants (and often citizens) to die so routinely at the border, as part of a law enforcement strategy that does not work, in ways that are irreducible to a conspiracy for capitalist exploitation and in ways that seems to clearly exceed their legal rights?” Márquez, “Latinos as the ‘Living Dead,’” 476.


\(^{35}\) Chomsky, *Profit over People*, 8. “The ultimate trump card for the defenders of neoliberalism is that there is no alternative...It may well be imperfect, but it is the only economic system possible.” Chomsky, *Profit over People*. 8.
reflects more than a failure of imagination; it rearticulates the logic of empire. Although formal imperialism ended in the middle of the twentieth century, colonial relations of power continue to structure our world and to shape our imaginations. Liberation theologian Joerg Rieger explains how empire manifests through “forms of top–down control that are established on the back[s] of the empire’s subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes.”

Finance capital represents a form of empire because it reproduces “massive concentrations of power” whose effects “permeate all aspects of life.” Financial elites secure their interests by presenting capitalism as the world’s only option. The status quo, they contend, is simply part of the natural order. Our inability (or unwillingness) to think beyond neoliberalism reflects this logic. My project seeks to undermine this paradigm by exposing how racial and spatial violence undergirded the modern/colonial world from its very inception.

To accomplish this task, I use World–Systems Analysis as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and Aníbal Quijano. An analysis of social time (temporality) called the longue durée is central to this paradigm. These scholars approach “structural time,” which is long–lasting and


38 World–Systems Analysis derives from the Annales School of French historiography, initially developed my Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in the 1920s, and then galvanized in the post-1945 era by Fernand Braudel. “Annales group argued several counter doctrines: Historiography should be ‘total’—that is, it should look at the integrated picture of historical development in all social arenas. Indeed, the economic and social underpinnings of this development were thought to be more important than the political surface, and furthermore it was possible to study them systematically, not always in the archives. And long–term generalizations about historical phenomena were in fact both possible and desirable.” Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *World–Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 15; see also Quijano, and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept.”
reflects “continuing (but not eternal) structural realities,” as a fundamental unit of analysis. Wallerstein defines world-system as a “spatial/temporal zone” with integrated “activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules.” In contrast to nomothetic historiography, which uses so-called objective and quantitative methods to arrive at law-like conclusions, World-Systems Analysis uses an idiographic approach based on narrative data and qualitative methods to interpret social realities. Applying an inductive approach to history reveals that an economy based on accumulation, dispossession, and debt developed between 1450 and 1650. And so, the “world in which we are now living, the modern world-system, had its origins in the sixteenth century.”

In this regard, the Columbus Enterprise marks a crucial moment. In 1492, the story goes, Christopher Columbus would “Discover” and lay claim to las Indias Occidentales (the West Indies) on behalf of God and Crown. With royal patronage and papal sanction, Columbus’ enterprise would initiate “a historical system defined by the priority of the endless accumulation of capital.”

39 See Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis, 97.
40 Wallerstein explains that the hyphen was intended to underline that we are talking not about systems, economies, empire of the (whole) world, but about systems, economies, empires that are a world (but quite possibly, and indeed usually, not encompassing the entire globe). Ibid., 16–17.
41 See Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis, 94. Further, Wallerstein responds to critics by arguing that “our inductive classification is more useful than alternative ones, because it comprehends more easily and elegantly what we collectively know at present about historical reality, and because it affords us an interpretation of this reality which enables us to act more efficaciously on the present.” Immanuel Wallerstein, Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization, (London: Verso, 2003; 11th repr.), 20.
42 See Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis, 23. Further, “in previous historical social systems, one or more of these elements was not ‘commodified’ or was insufficiently ‘commodified’...Historical capitalism involved therefore the widespread commodification of processes—not merely exchange processes, but production processes, distribution processes, and investment processes—that had previously been conducted other than via a ‘market.’” Wallerstein, Historical Capitalism, 15.
43 See Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis, 92. “Historical capitalism, is, thus, that concrete, time-bounded, space-bounded integrated locus of productive activities within which the endless accumulation
Soon after realizing the magnitude of the New World, and the fact that the Indies were not part of Asia, Spanish cosmographers would invent a fourth continent and name it America.44 Wallerstein and Quijano explain how the Americas was “a badge and a burden assumed from the outset” because it “became the pattern, the model of the entire world–system.”45 The invention of the Americas, what they term ‘Americanity,’ would introduce an axial division of labor between core and periphery zones. This colonial dynamic would precipitate the hierarchical relationship between the Global North and the Global South still at work today.

Like postcolonialism, decoloniality critiques European modernity.46 Postcolonialism, for instance, traces the “historical archeology” of European empires to “shed light on the aftermath of that imperialism.”47 Whereas postcolonial theory stems from South Asia, I pursue a parallel task of capital has been the economic objective or ‘law’ that has governed or prevailed in fundamental economic activity.” Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, 18.


45 “Americanity has always been, and remains to this day, an essential element in what we mean by ‘modernity.’ Quijano, and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept,” 549–550.


47 “Introduction: Alien/Nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground,” in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 7–8. Further, “Postcolonial discourse is not about the territorial ejection of imperial power or about learning, Caliban—like, the art of cursing the evils of empire. Rather, it is an active interrogation of the hegemonic systems of thought, textual codes, and symbolic practices which the West constructed in its domination of colonial subjects. In other words, postcolonialism is concerned with the question of cultural and discursive domination.” Rasiah Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 17.
by thinking from the colonial history of the Americas. I use a decolonial paradigm to analyze that historical process by engaging the narrative laid out by Walter D. Mignolo and Sylvia Wynter. In her account of 1492, Wynter highlights a seismic shift in medieval geography. According to Wynter, the “theo–political difference between the lands that were habitable thanks to divine grace and those which were supposed to be uninhabitable in the Christian medieval imaginary would be translated in this context into the colonial and racial difference between humans and subjects who are not entirely human or whose humanity is in question.”49 While Columbus strained the limits of medieval geography, the Discovery would reify the northern knowledge systems by universalizing a Christian view of the cosmic order.50 By putting America on the map, Iberians would incorporate previously uninhabitable landscapes and their inhabitants into the triadic world populated by Noah’s descendants.51


50 Wynter asserts that the Columbian Enterprise challenged the “mainstream geographic knowledge of his time, and especially his apocalyptic millenarian projection of the earth as having been created ‘for life and the creation of souls,’ which should be ‘understood as a central component of that generalized ‘utopian’ challenge by both Christian humanism and humanism proper to the Ideology of the scholastic order of knowledge.” Sylvia Wynter, “Columbus and the Poetics of the Propter Nos,” Annals of Scholarship 8, no. 2 (1991): 254.

51 My language borrows from Philosopher of Liberation, Enrique Dussel. “Modernity is a world phenomenon, commencing with the simultaneous constitution of Spain with reference to its periphery, Amerindia, including the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru. At the same time, Europe, with diachronic precedents
Columbus’ Discovery, Mignolo notes, presupposes a “triumphant European and imperial perspective on world history, an achievement” called “modernity.” This perspective, however, entails a violent underside: coloniality, “the logical structure of colonial domination.” On this point, Quijano makes a seminal contribution by introducing the ‘colonial matrix of power.’ With this concept, Quijano identifies the way in which coloniality operates in four overlapping domains:

control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity).

By organizing economics, authority, gender/sexuality, and subjectivity/knowledge, the colonial matrix of power provides the infrastructure for the modern world-system. In recent years, scholars such as Maria Lugones and Nelson Maldonado-Torres have further developed ‘coloniality in Renaissance Italy and Portugal, proceeds to establish itself as the center managing a growing periphery.”

Dussel, Invention of the Americas, II.


53 According to Mignolo, “the imposition of a specific set of values” relies “on the logic of coloniality for their implementation.” Ibid., 7. Further, structures of social control maintained by colonial difference assume “there are people, out there, beyond Christianity, Reason, Development, Modernization, and Market Economy that need to be brought to the level summarized by each of the preceding words. For this reason, coloniality is constitutive of modernity. There cannot be modernity, as has been conceived and implemented through the past five hundred years of history, without coloniality.” Walter Mignolo, The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 453.


55 See Globalization and the Decolonial Option, ed. Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London: Routledge, 2010), 3; emphasis added. Postcolonial theology articulates a similar approach to the hegemonic systems of empire. “Rather, we espouse a genre of inquiry highly sensitive to textual nuance, historical ambiguity, and the ways that colonial power shapes not only the outer limits of the globe but also the inner reaches of subjectivity. Domination deforms not only politics but also language—logos itself—and those who utter it.” Keller, Nausner, and Rivera, “Introduction,” Postcolonial Theologies, 8.
of gender’ and ‘coloniality of being,’ respectively. Yet there is a crucial geographic component at work. Ramón Grosfoguel has shown how the “theories based on the social–historical experience of men of five countries”—the United States, England, France, Germany, and Italy—”constitute the foundation of the Social Sciences and the Humanities in the Westernized universities today.”

Building on Enrique Dussel and Boaventura de Santos Sousa, Grosfoguel traces modernity’s racist/sexist foundation back to ‘four genocides/epistemicides’ that transpired during the long sixteenth century. These four axial moments are: the political and religious conquest of the Americas, the racial/religious purification of Spain culminating in the Reconquista, the enslavement of Africans, and the slaughter of women as witches.

One of the shortcomings of the decolonial paradigm, which my project seeks to address, is its cursory treatment of history. This issue deserves attention given that historical–social processes are foundational for its claims. My dissertation focuses spatially and temporally on the early Iberian Atlantic, that is, the first half of the long sixteenth century. I analyze a wide range of visual and written sources—medieval mappaemundi, Atlantic maps, treatises, charters, letters, bulls, first-hand accounts, and theological texts—to narrate the historical process by which Iberian empires established global configurations of knowledge/power between 1450 and 1550.


While it may seem trite, this investigation revolves around 1492 because decolonial theorists such as Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, and Grosfugel tend to misunderstand or ignore the ways in which theological discourse defined coloniality and how, as the logic of empire, coloniality reproduces hierarchies of knowledge/power in the modern world. Historians widely recognize natural philosophy’s influence on sixteenth-century Iberian Christianity. Natural philosophy “not only provided the mechanisms of explanation for natural phenomena but also served as a gigantic filter through which the world was viewed.”

Historians widely recognize natural philosophy’s influence on sixteenth-century Iberian Christianity. Natural philosophy “not only provided the mechanisms of explanation for natural phenomena but also served as a gigantic filter through which the world was viewed.”

Iberian scholastics primarily relied on two authorities: Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. These figures defined Christendom’s dominant conceptual apparatus, which Iberian empires would later use to reconfigure the Atlantic world. In fact, historian Lewis Hanke remarks that Renaissance Aristotelianism continued the medieval scholastic tradition without any visible break.

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At the most fundamental level, Aristotle defines “Nature” as “the primary underlying matter of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change.” As a Church Father, Aquinas employs theology to develop this notion. Aquinas declares that the “very order of things created by God shows the unity of the world. For this, world is called one by the unity of order, whereby some things are ordered to others. But whatever things come from God, have relations of order to each other, and to God Himself, as shown above.”


60 “Renaissance Aristotelianism continued the medieval scholastic tradition without any visible break.” P. Kristeller, “Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance,” Byzantion 17 (1944). “The principal objective espoused by all the main actors in the debate was the conversion of the natives, the eternal salvation of their souls. Evangelization was the theoretical banner that the Spanish state waved during the conquest.” Luis Rivera, A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 25.
“preserved a firm hold on the university chairs in Spain and the New World, and was even prescribed for the Indian students who attend the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Mexico.”61 That said, my investigation revolves around one central question. If, as Luis Rivera–Pagán maintains, the “Christian religion becomes the official ideology for imperial expansion,” then how does a theological conception of nature undergird or undermine colonial configurations of knowledge and power?62 The next section outlines how I approach this question by exploring the legacy of the Dominican friar and Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas.


62 Rivera, Violent Evangelism, 25.
I.2 Scholarly Interventions

Few characters in the colonial history of the Americas have received more attention than Bartolomé de Las Casas.\(^63\) My research draws on theologians,\(^64\) historians,\(^65\) critical theorists,\(^66\) and literary scholars\(^67\) who have examined his writings, biolography, and social context. For over

\(^{63}\)According to Daniel Castro, there “are more than one thousand printed works, including more than three hundred authored by Las Casas himself.” Daniel Castro, *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas, Indigenous Rights and Ecclesiastical Imperialism*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 188 endnote 8.


a century, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have either praised or condemned Las Casas’ accomplishments.68 The historiography associated with the ‘Black Legend,’ on the one hand, and with the ‘White’ or ‘Golden Legend,’ on the other, reflects the gamut of responses.69 These dual-legend approaches, however, tend to present Las Casas in one of three ways: as a traitor who authored anti-Catholic propaganda, as a racist who orchestrated the transatlantic African slave-trade, or as a true Spaniard who faithfully embodied the scholastic concern for justice. While these approaches have highlighted important aspects, they tend to overlook Las Casas’ imperialist and subversive contributions, which Rieger and Rivera-Pagán (among others) have explored.

Latin American historian Daniel Castro recently sought to transcend this dual-legend approach in Another Face of Empire. Castro calls for a critical reassessment, noting that Las Casas’ contribution remained an invaluable source for understanding the gestation and development of the alluring, mysterious, and contradictory Indoamerican continent, but any analysis of Las Casas and his work must diverge from the distortions of mythmaking, mystification, and hagiography if it is to be illuminating.70


Castro ultimately reproaches Las Casas for being an ecclesiastical imperialist who, in refusing to work with (rather than for) Amerindians, left the dominant legal apparatus intact. Indeed, Bartolomé became a proficient lobbyist. But in retrospect, his efforts did little to remedy the material conditions of the oppressed people he sought to defend. I agree with Castro on the need to reevaluate Las Casas, particularly from the perspective of coloniality. Nevertheless, by misunderstanding how Las Casas engaged his scholastic heritage, Castro erroneously considers Spanish imperialism to be based on a “tenuous argument.” One cannot comprehend Spain’s claims of possession by thoroughly analyzing the scholastic tradition. This is, after all, one of the central objectives of the Valladolid debate. My approach goes beyond Castro’s by analyzing the broader intellectual tradition that informed Spanish imperialism. My project reexamines Las Casas’ legacy within the history of race and empire, and this requires a brief discussion of the Black Legend.

The Black Legend derives from the way Europeans characterized Spain as an ignorant, superstitious, and fanatical nation throughout several centuries. Originally coined by the journalist Julián Juderías in 1912, the term Black Legend refers to a “narrative that chastises Castilians for the brutality they committed in the New World, a narrative told from the

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71 Castro insists that “we must see the Dominican friar as the incarnation of a more benevolent, paternalistic form of ecclesiastical, political, cultural, and economic imperialism rather than as a unique paradigmatic figure.” Castro, Another Face of Empire, 8.

72 “A reinterpretation of Las Casas must necessarily move beyond the mythological dimensions of his legacy, and beyond the multiple-legend construct, in an attempt to define him in light of his participation in the dialectical reality of the construction of a new world built on the ruins of another.” Castro, Another Face of Empire, 5.

73 “In an attempt to justify Las Casas’ vocation to convert the Indians to Christianity, his advocates point out that, in his case, conversion is acceptable and desirable, insofar as it is done by peaceful means and to implement assimilation to the dominant culture. At the same time there is no rationale offered to justify an imposition from the perspective of the Spaniards, other than the tenuous argument that conversion implies spiritual salvation.” Ibid., 6
perspective of England and dating back to the reign of Elizabeth I."74 Las Casas unwittingly made a seminal contribution by writing *Brevisima Relación de la Destrucçion de la Indias*.75 This short text, written in 1542, detailed the violence inflicted upon indigenous people by Spanish conquistadores. Soon after its initial publication in 1552, Spain’s northern rivals would commission multiple translations of it.76 And with the printing press, they effectively promulgated anti-Catholic propaganda throughout Christendom. While Las Casas wrote *Brevisima Relación* from the perspective of the colonies, Protestants in England, Holland, and Germany would deploy his words against the Catholic Crown to bolster their own political agendas.77 Contrary to the barbarity of Spain, Protestants’ empires claimed to use civilized means to extend their influence. While initially corresponding to Christendom’s religious conflicts, in subsequent generations the Black Legend acquired a racial dynamic.


76 Las Casas’ text was first translated into French in 1579. It was supposed to show the Netherlands the religious repression exercised by Catholic sovereigns. See Tyrannies et Cruautez des Espagnols Perpetrées és Indes Occidentales, Qu’on Dit Le Nouveau Monde [Brevisima Relación de la Destrucçion de las Indias], trans. Jacques de Miggrode (Anvers: Chez François de Ravelenghien, 1579). The text was translated into English in 1583. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Spanish Colonie, or, Briefe Chronicle of the Acts and Gestes of the Spaniardes in the West Indies, Called the Newe World, for the Space of XI Yeeres* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1583).

The Enlightenment would racialize the Black Legend. We see this shift in works such as those by Immanuel Kant, who based Spanish inferiority on its Moorish and Jewish ancestry. In his discourse on anthropology, Kant declares:

The Spaniard’s bad side is that he does not learn from foreigners; that he does not travel in order to get acquainted with Other nations; that he is centuries behind in the sciences. He resists any reform; he is proud of not having to work; he is of a romantic quality of spirit, as the bullfight shows; he is cruel, as the former auto-da-fé shows; and he displays in his taste an origin that is partly non-European. Spain’s racial mixture justified a geographic shift in power from southern Europe to northern Europe. The Black Legend, therefore, produced what Mignolo calls an imperial internal difference: “the racialization of the Latin and Catholic south in the mouth and pen of the Anglo and Protestant north.” The Black Legend would embed a racial hierarchy within legacies of empire. In fact, Kant would construct an ‘ethnocontinental tetragon’—Africa—black, Asia—yellow, Europe—white, and America—red—that linked location (place) and skin color (race).

Scholars that use this paradigm situate modern racism within the rise of secular Enlightenment. This approach, which I call the North Atlantic School, derives from what Hegel

78 “The Spaniard, who evolved from the mixture of European blood with Arabian (Moorish) blood, displays in his public and private behavior a certain solemnity” that is marginally superior to that of Orientals. Immanuel Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 231–32; emphasis added.

79 Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” Rereading the Black Legend, 315. See also Carter, Race, 432 endnote 2: “For the subsequent intellectuals of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the religious optic through which coloniality and raciality will come to work (as the center of gravity shifts from the Catholicism of southern Europe in Spain and Portugal to France, England, and Germany in northern Europe) is principally Protestantism.”

called the ‘heart of Europe’—England, France, and Germany. Proponents of this camp view “race” as a post-Enlightenment concept that “corresponds in time and in space with the New World order that emerged after the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789.” Race, the argument goes, stems from northern Europe’s colonial history. Using scientific terminology, it relies on factors such as skin color as the marker of racial difference. Medieval historian David Nirenberg identifies a fundamental flaw in this argument and warns that too many of the arguments against premodern racism still depend on the demonstrably false assumption that there exists a truly biological racism against which premodern forms of discrimination can be measured and judged innocent. What does it mean to say that although a premodern ideology was expressed in biological terms, it was not racial because the differences it reinforced were not really biological? This could be said of any racial ideology. All racisms are attempts to ground discriminations, whether social, economic, or religious, in biology and reproduction. All claim a congruence of ‘cultural’ categories with ‘natural’ ones.

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82 Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 312.

83 To a certain extent, the critique of modern raciality leveled by Denise Ferreira da Silva and J. Kameron Carter assumes this view. Ferreira Da Silva summarizes her central thesis by writing: “My intent here is to address the apparatus, the racial guides, the *analytics of raciality*, as a productive symbolic regimen that institutes human difference as an effect of the play of universal reason. My analysis of the context of emergence, the conditions of production, and the effects of signification of the racial shows how the writing of modern subjects in the post–Enlightenment period would also require the deployment of scientific tools, strategies of symbolic engulfment that transform bodily and social configurations into expressions of how universal reason produces human difference.” Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 3–4.

In the Prologue, J. Kameron Carter explains how chapter 2 addresses the problem of raciality: “It is here that I focus on the modern racial reasoning’s initial maturation into something of a coherent outlook or its congealing into what can be called a racial-anthropological theory that is at the same time a *Weltanschauung*. This moment of initial, discursive maturity is realized in the Kantian racial vision, which...is part and parcel of Kant’s general, philosophical vision of the social process or political economy of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).” Carter, *Race*, 5.
None of these claims, not even the most ‘scientific’ ones of the twentieth century, reflect biological reality.\footnote{David Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages: The Case of Spain and its Jews,” in \textit{Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires}, ed. Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 74. “I am not making these admittedly general criticisms in order to claim that race did exist in the Middle Ages, or that medieval people were racists. Such statements would be reductive and misleading, obscuring more than they reveal. But the same is true of the opposite, and far more common, assertion. The underdetermined and easily exorcised specter of a ‘true racism’ against which premodern discriminations can be measured and exonerated has negatively affected both the medievalist and the modernist...In other words, the practice of defining race reductively for the purpose of summarily dismissing it from the premodern has effectively short-circuited the very process of comparison and analogy upon which any argument about the relations of past and present forms of discrimination must depend,” 74.}


I take a different approach to race spearheaded by Iberian and Iberoamerican scholars. My project turns to a genealogy grounded in the transatlantic history of Spanish America.\footnote{For a summary of the debate on identity as a concept, see “Who Needs Identity?” in Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall, \textit{Questions of Cultural Identity} (London: Sage, 1996), 13. Rather than developing a theory about identity formation, I aim to describe the way Iberian scholastics constructed social hierarchies through discourses on nature.}

The second perspective, which I call the Trans–Iberian School, traces the emergence of race to the Renaissance.\footnote{In fact, “it is not only necessary to develop a historical perspective which considers the processes of circulation between the two continents, but also to apply this type of approach to questions regarding the historicity of racism.” Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood,” \textit{Race and Blood in the Iberian World}, 13.}

Prior to the Enlightenment, Iberians began formulating racial/religious
hierarchies around two world-historical moments: the Reconquista of Al-Andalus and the conquest of the New World. As I show in subsequent chapters, purity of blood discourse helped launch the Reconquista by constructing Jews as an internal threat and Ottoman Muslims as an external threat to Christendom. And as the debate of Valladolid demonstrates, barbarian discourse contributes to the racialization of Amerindian and African peoples. Therefore, Mignolo rightly contends that “when the secular and scientific discourse on race (which covered up racism as ideology) was formed in the nineteenth century, the conceptual frame had already


88 Mignolo labels the former an external imperial difference and the latter an external colonial difference. See Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 319–22. Within the “conceptual map of the emergent modern Europe, the notion of the idolater is replaced by the Aristotelian concept of the natural slave.” Maldonado-Torres, “Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Modern/Colonial World,” 647.


90 “I know of no more extensive pre-modern discussion about the relationship between biology and culture than that in the literature produced in the debate over converso exclusion between 1449 and 1550.” Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 82.
been in place since the Renaissance. What secular science and philosophy did in the nineteenth century was to *translate and adapt the racial system put in place by theology in the sixteenth century.*

While there are notable differences between these two articulations of race, the point I want to stress is that Aristotelian Thomism provided the conceptual architecture for modern raciality.

Theologian J. Kameron Carter commends Mignolo’s critical insight. In *Race: A Theological Account,* Carter acknowledges that

Mignolo has his intellectual finger on the fact that coloniality as linked to raciality is tied to—indeed, is situated within—the theological imagination of Renaissance and subsequent modernist intellectuals, an imagination that, certainly for the Renaissance intellectuals, is tied to their Aristotelian and often Thomist/Roman Catholic sensibilities.

Tragically most Thomist retrieval efforts tend to avoid the scholastic roots of coloniality. This poses a seismic problem for modern theological studies. Carter describes this dilemma:

The modern vision of the human being as the bearer of race or as marked with racial identity was made possible by fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century Portuguese and Spanish Thomist-Aristotelian intellectuals. Which is to say, modern colonialism and the world born of it arose within a Thomistic discursive space. This is undeniable, and it therefore raises questions that have been utterly evaded by modern theologians and philosophers who are turning—at least as far as this matter is concerned, in an uncritical and ahistorical way—back to Aquinas’s thought.

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91 Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend,* 312; emphasis added. Discourses “of religious and racial difference in the European Renaissance became naturalized in the subsequent centuries and established the epistemic foundation of modern colonial racism.” Greer, Mignolo, and Quilligan, “Introduction,” *Rereading the Black Legend,* 2.

92 Carter, *Race,* 432 endnote 2.


94 J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 431 endnote 100. “Contemporary philosophers and theologians who turn to Aquinas can no longer evade these
David Lantigua is one of the few theologians that boldly take on this issue. Lantigua argues that “this genealogical suspicion of the Spanish Thomistic tradition” ultimately “ignores a real, historically momentous, crisis related to the race question that prompted contentious debates in the royal councils, ecclesiastical courts, and universities of Renaissance Spain—the challenge posed by evangelizing the infidel other.”

Such efforts, he maintains, obscure internal conflicts of Iberian Catholic culture. In this regard, Mignolo’s account leaves much to be desired. Decolonial theory fails to explain precisely how theology functions as a racializing discourse. As Carter notes, Mignolo “insufficiently narrates the nature of the shifts that took place within theology itself as a discourse that made colonial conquest amenable to discursive articulation inside of the discourse of theology in the first place.” Indeed, this weakness registers throughout Mignolo’s body of work. And while Carter identifies this gap, his own treatise circumvents the Renaissance.

Carter, in fact, leaves these two penetrating questions to the endnotes of his Epilogue: “what was

questions or let them go unasked in their work, for they are the elephant in the intellectual room. For those on the darker underside of the renaissance and modernity, Thomism particularly and theology generally is part of the problem, not necessarily the answer. And it is they who must be persuaded of the viability of theology as a discourse, given this history. This book is a step in the direction for theology’s viability by taking up the colonial-racial problem, not evading it.”


it about the Thomistic vision that made it susceptible to such racial–colonial usage? And when theology began to function in the fifteenth century in the discursive interests of European, global conquest, what was it about Thomism that lent itself to the justification of this new enterprise?"\(^{98}\)

It is here that I seek to make an intervention.

I proceed by engaging *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. In this formidable text, theologian Willie Jennings narrates how a logic of displacement reconfigures Christianity within colonialist modalities.\(^{99}\) Discovery ignited a “newness coupled with European power, greed–filled ambition, and discursive priority drew distorting form out of Christian theology.”\(^{100}\) The opening chapter focuses on Gomes Eanes de Azurara, or Zurara (1410–1474), the chronicler for Prince Henry of Portugal the Navigator (1394–1460). Jennings traces a foundational moment in the modern/colonial world to Zurara’s account of sub-Saharan Africa. In it, Zurara begins to reconceptualize human difference on a global scale:

> And these [Africans], placed all together in that field, were a marvelous sight; for amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned; others were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops [Ethiopians], and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a lower hemisphere.\(^{101}\)

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\(^{98}\) Carter, *Race*, 431 endnote 100.

\(^{99}\) “This act of analysis is coupled with an act of retrieval in which I attempt a recalibration of a theological trajectory in order to posit a new vision for theology itself. In effect, I am attempting to do theology in a different modality—disciplinary analysis of theology’s social performances—in hopes of articulating a vision more faithful to the God whose incarnate life established and establishes the contours, character, and content of Christian theology.” Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 10.

\(^{100}\) “Herein lies the deepest theological problem. Zurara brings into view the crossing of a threshold into a distorting vision of creation. This distorting vision will lodge itself deeply in Christian thought, damaging doctrinal trajectories My use of the word *distortion* does not imply a prior coherent healthy, and happy vision of creation that will be lost in the age of discovery.” Ibid., 25.

Jennings notes how modern hierarchies begin to form around white bodies.\textsuperscript{102} Similarly, Maldonado-Torres refers to this transformation as a ‘chain of colonial signification.’\textsuperscript{103} Fifteenth-century Iberian explorations had a four-fold effect: “first, people are being seized (stolen); second, land is being seized (stolen); third, people are being stripped from their space, their place; and fourth, Europeans are describing themselves and these Africans at the same time.”\textsuperscript{104} This four-fold process would lay the foundation for a capitalist world-system.

Jennings contends that a racial hierarchy emerges from a conceptual vacuum left behind by a decaying geography. According to Jennings

land and body are connected at the intersection of European \textit{imagination} and \textit{expansion}. The imagined geography diminished in strength as a more authentic and accurate geography emerged. The scale of existence, however, with white (unharmed) flesh at the one end and black (harmed) flesh at the other, grew in power precisely in the space created by Portuguese expansion into new lands.\textsuperscript{105}

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81; emphasis added. Jennings suggests that Zurara may be drawing from a medieval book of knowledge. See Nancy Marino, \textit{El Libro del Conocimiento de Todos Los Reinos/Book of Knowledge of all Kingdoms} (Temple: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

\textsuperscript{102} “Black is the result of environmental harm. Such harmed flesh, burnt flesh is not present among whites.” Jennings, \textit{Christian Imagination}, 23

\textsuperscript{103} “This ‘chain of colonial signification’ does not appear out of thin air, but nor is it completely determined by a given material structure: it exists in productive relation with those institutions that maintain the ‘coloniality of power.’ In this case, when the Spanish and other conquistadors looked for slaves in Africa to replace or complement the indigenous workforce, both the available old forms of religious differentiation (derived in part from the Portuguese contact with Africa), as well as the new imperial and dehumanizing discursive forms that were crafted in the Américas, intervened in the legitimization of African slavery. This justification, then, no longer needed to be based strictly on religious differences. The ‘negro’ and the ‘negra’ would come to be conceived as inherently slave; slavery was part of the very being of the negra/o and vice-versa.” Maldonado-Torres, “Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Modern/Colonial World,” 654–55.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{105} Jennings, \textit{Christian Imagination}, 24; emphasis added. My project also registers “the effects of the reconfiguration of bodies and space as a theological operation” that, while “heretical in nature, binds spatial displacement to the formation of an abiding scale of existence,” 24.
Presumably an ‘imagined geography’ decreased as ‘accurate geography’ increased. This disparity, Jennings insists, creates the possibility for whiteness, as a racist/sexist ideology, to arbitrate the commodification of people and places. Ultimately, scholars may remain unconvinced by critical approaches to coloniality. In fact, Lantigua concludes that “the burden will rest on Mignolo, and especially Jennings and other theologians, to convincingly show the direct Thomistic theological underpinnings of Iberian colonialism and racial discourse.”106 My dissertation assumes this burden.

To accomplish this task, I interrogate a repository of knowledge/power that is widely ignored by theologians and scholars of religion: medieval and early modern maps.107 Although Atlantic exploration transformed preexisting convictions about the earth’s shape and size, Iberian cosmographers continued to use medieval cosmology as an epistemic foundation to map the tropics. Like Zurara, who referenced a ‘lower hemisphere,’ other scholastics would use factors such as climate and latitude to determine the natural capacities and racial identities of colonial subjects. If, as Jennings suggests, the “deepest theological distortion taking place is that the earth, the ground, spaces, and places are being removed as living organizers of identity,” then understanding how Iberian empires dispossessed the tropics is indispensable.108 I approach maps


107 My definition of maps comes from J. B. Harley, The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press/Center for American Places, 2001), 54: Maps “are a class of rhetorical images and are bound by roles which govern their codes and modes of social production, exchange, and use just as surely as any other discursive form. This in turn can lead us to a better appreciation of the mechanisms by which maps—like books—became a political force in society.”

Maps deserve careful analysis because as abstract representations of creation they provide windows into the Christian imagination. While using Jennings’ method, which “registers the effects of the reconfiguration of bodies and space as a theological operation,” my project enters new terrain by tracing the way a geographic imagination operated in the modern/colonial world.

Ultimately, this dissertation develops what I call a theological geography. I use this term to describe a scholastic conception of the natural world that imbues hemispheric location with geopolitical significance. After delineating the order of nature in medieval cosmology, I show how Iberian empires employ a theological geography to conceptualize global expansion. I examine the way Las Casas uses it to articulate indigenous sovereignty and to conceptualize Christian civilization as a global project. As we will see, Las Casas’ barbarian discourse at Valladolid intersects with the racial geography depicted in medieval maps. My scholarship offers new insight into Christianity’s entanglements with race and empire. By uncovering a central yet overlooked aspect of Las Casas’ legacy, this project expands the intersection between Latinx and Latin American theology and decolonial theory.

I shed light on these issues by examining Las Casas’ geographic imagination within the Iberian transatlantic context. Despite the extensive attention given to Las Casas, scholars have yet to consider adequately consider the geographic dimensions of his thought or how it relates to

109 “The idea of a cartographic language is also preferred to an approach derived directly from semiotics which, while having attracted some cartographers, is too blunt a tool for specific historical enquiry. The notion of language more easily translates into historical practice. It not only helps us to see maps as reciprocal images used to mediate different views of the world but it also prompts a search for evidence about aspects such as the codes and context of cartography as well as its content in a traditional sense. A language—or perhaps more aptly a ‘literature’ of maps—similarly urges us to pursue questions about changing readerships for maps, about levels of carto-literacy, conditions of authorship, aspects of secrecy and censorship, and also about the nature of the political statements which are made by maps.” Ibid., 53.
the shifts in hemispheric knowledge reflected in early Iberian cartography. Few (in any) have explored how environmental factors, like latitude or climate, inform his conception of human difference or how Las Casas’ barbarian discourse intersects with the scholastic geography displayed in mappaemundi. My analysis will expose the theological architecture of imperial and colonial difference.

It is important to note that the term tropics refers to latitude. Technically, the belt of the tropics, as medieval cosmographers called it, corresponds to the northern and southern—most latitudes over which the sun passes directly. It is demarcated by the Tropic of Cancer (23.5° N) and the Tropic of Capricorn (23.5° S), which are equidistant from the equator. In order to probe the scholastic impact of latitude, my investigation draws from Nicolás Wey Gómez’s groundbreaking text *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*. Wey Gómez avers that latitude has been misleadingly construed as a technological (i.e. nautical) issue rather than a “philosophical problem involving the sciences” within the late medieval and early modern context.110 Given the scholastic heritage, late medieval cosmology enabled Columbus, Las Casas, and other Iberian Christians to determine the nature of tropical people and places. As my research shows, early Iberians contested the rights, capacities, and possibilities for the people of the southern hemisphere by employing natural law arguments based on Aristotelian physics. Terrestrial location would have profound implications.

Before outlining the chapters, I should mention that my investigation focuses on elite discourse. My decision to focus on male authors who belong to the ruling classes is strategic. I take this approach in order to deconstruct what became the hegemonic perspective from the

Global North. Yet my critical vantage point remains grounded in the colonial history of the borderlands. To the best of my ability, I think from the colonial wound. This methodological approach, moreover, should not imply that indigenous peoples were passive victims of Spanish oppression. As thirty years of scholarship has shown, indigenous peoples throughout the Americas played crucial and often complicated roles in European colonialization. My initial intent was to incorporate Aztec mapmakers into my account of theological geography. However, to accomplish this task with integrity would require substantially more research. I foresee pursuing that chapter of scholarship in the years to come.

I.3 Dissertation Outline

My central thesis is that Spanish imperialism racializes religious identity and maps its dominion over the tropics by leveraging a scholastic vision of the natural world. In the wake of the Columbian Enterprise, the Dominican bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) develops a subversive theological geography to advocate for indigenous rights by predicing their natural sovereignty on hemispheric location. Yet by employing a scholastic conception of the proper

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human, Las Casas’ notion of Amerindian and African salvation augments northern systems of knowledge/power that ultimately betrays his subversive impulse.

My dissertation includes four main chapters and a Conclusion in addition to this Introduction. Chapter One, “Natural Order in Late Medieval Cosmology,” analyzes how hierarchy and motion structure Fra Mauro’s Mappamundi (c. 1450), arguably the most comprehensive European map prior to Columbus. I situate the mappamundi tradition within the cultural milieu of fifteenth-century Venice by drawing from historians of science, art historians, and historians of cartography.\textsuperscript{112} Responding to scholarship that misunderstands or diminishes the full impact of late medieval cosmology, this chapter exposes its geopolitical dimensions by examining the four corner legends (on solar and lunar effects, the cosmic order, climate theory, and earthly paradise). I show how Fra Mauro’s use of the scholastic tradition produces a global imaginary for imperialist expansion.

Chapter Two, “Mapping Race and Space in the Iberian Atlantic,” examines how natural theology informs religious difference in fifteenth-century Spain and how it undergirds imperial dominion over the tropics. In the first section, I trace the origins of Western racism by analyzing Iberian discourses on limpieza de sangre (purity of blood). Drawing on historians María Elena Martínez and David Nirenberg, I argue that blood purity discourse operates as a form of ‘bio-power’ that racializes religious identity by configuring Jewish and Muslim heresy and ‘Old

Christian’ status as natural outcomes of sexual reproduction.

Turning to the Line of Demarcation, Section II analyzes the process by which the Catholic Church allocates Spanish and Portuguese dominion over the Global South. Through a critically reading of Columbus’ texts, I outline how dispossession and slavery galvanize the transatlantic political–economy. Engaging feminist critiques of Discovery, I argue that the Columbian Enterprise transforms the tropics into private property by invoking a racialized discourse of nature rooted in patriarchal scholasticism. My examination of the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1480), Alexander VI’s Bulls of Donation (1493), and the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) reveals how a theological geography undergirds the cartographic projects that propel early modern science.

Chapter Three, “The Colonial Legacy of Theological Geography,” engages the ambiguous legacy of Aristotelian Thomism in the New World. After situating Las Casas within Spain’s transatlantic empire, I examine the Laws of Burgos (1512) and the Requirement (1513) to show how a scholastic conception of ecclesial authority (plenitudo potestati) consolidates imperial power. I argue that Las Casas attempts to eliminate violent evangelization and to restrain economic exploitation by developing a theological geography that foregrounds Amerindian sovereignty on two environmental factors: climate and latitude.

Chapter Four, “Saving Barbarians through Scholastic Civility,” explores the intersection of race, space, and language in the historic debate of Valladolid (1550–1551) between Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494–1573). Barbarian discourse at Valladolid deserves renewed attention because it constitutes “one of the foundational moments of the racial classification of the world” by arranging “human beings in a top-down scale assuming the ideals of Western
Christians as the [universal] criteria.’

This chapter demonstrates how barbarity, as a theological term signifying deprivation, reconfigures ethno-religious difference around what Wynter calls ‘Man-as-human.’ I argue that Las Casas imbues scholastic civility with salvific power by rendering literal locution—alphabetic script deriving from Latin—as a necessary skill for barbarians to achieve their supernatural purpose: the beatific vision. Ultimately, location and locution function as conduits of grace that establish the salvific trajectory for black and indigenous colonial subjects. And thus, in accordance with Aquinas’ dictum that ‘grace perfects nature,’ Las Casas and Sepúlveda aim to perfect the tropics through scholastic civilization.

In the Conclusion, I discuss the implications of my argument on how we understand colonial violence operating today under global capitalism. I consider, for instance, how undocumented status in the U.S. constitutes a racial state of expendability.

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113 The working concept of race in this chapter approaches racial identity as a natural condition passed on through bloodlines. In this way it differs from Mignolo. “Race,’ of course, at this level is not a question of skin color or pure blood but of categorizing individuals according to their level of similarity/proximity to an assumed model of ideal humanity. ‘Race’ would become interchangeable with ‘ethnicity,’ as race itself refers only to a genealogy of blood, of genotypes, or of skin color, while ‘ethnicity’ includes a language, memories, and shared past and present experiences.” Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 17.
CHAPTER 1:

NATURAL ORDER IN LATE MEDIEVAL COSMOLOGY
The very order of things created by God shows the unity of the world. For this, world is called one by the unity of order, whereby somethings are ordered to others. But whatever things come from God, have relations of order to each other, and to God Himself, as shown above.

—Thomas Aquinas†14

So I say that in my own day I have been careful to verify the texts by practical experience, investigating for many years and frequenting persons worthy of faith, who have seen with their own eyes what I faithfully report above.

—Fra Mauro†15

Maps are never value-free images; except in the narrowest Euclidean sense they are not in themselves either true or false. Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.

—J. B. Harley†16


1.1 Introduction

Chapter One lays the foundation for subsequent chapters by outlining the structure of late medieval cosmology. To understand the geographic imaginary undergirding the Columbian Enterprise, this chapter outlines how medieval scholastics envisioned the natural world and Christendom’s place in it. Chapter One charts the conceptual architecture of scholastic cosmology by focusing on a Venetian cartographer-monk by the name of Fra Mauro. Mappamundi scholar Angelo Cattaneo remarks that “Fra Mauro combined principles of natural philosophy with mercantile considerations and seafarers’ knowledge to create one of the most fully articulated reflections on the natural properties, size, shape and ‘habitability’ of the Ocean in the mid-fifteenth century.”

Mauro’s mappamundi (c. 1450) deserves close consideration not only because it constitutes the most comprehensive geographic representation prior to the age of discovery but also because of the author’s ecclesial affiliation.

This chapter engages the Black Legend’s lingering spell by exposing how Fra Mauro, as a medieval scholastic, uses scientific knowledge. As discussed below, Mauro cites first-hand accounts from Portuguese expeditions into sub-Saharan Africa. By adjusting the scholastic

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117 Cattaneo, Mauro’s Mappa Mundi, III. Cattaneo also remarks: “the mappa mundi provides a spatial and visual dimension to contemporary written descriptions of navigation and commerce in Asia and the Indian Ocean as narrated in merchant’s books and letters, as well as in merchants’, diplomats’ and missionaries’ travel accounts, which constituted the cornerstone of representations of both maritime and terrestrial travels from Europe to the Orient and vice versa from the thirteenth century onwards,” III–112. As a leading scholar on Fra Mauro, Angelo Cattaneo has published several monographs and articles on the mappamundi tradition. Other relevant publications include: Angelo Cattaneo, “European Medieval and Renaissance Cosmography: A Story of Multiple Voices,” Asian Review of World Histories 4, no. 1 (January 2016); Angelo Cattaneo, Diogo Ramada Curto, and André Ferrand Almeida, La Cartografia Europea Tra Primo Rinascimento E Fine Dell’illuminismo: Atti del Convegno Internazionale [the Making of European Cartography], Studi / Accademia Toscana Di Scienze E Lettere La Colombaria (Bncf-Èui, 13–15 Dicembre 2001) (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2003); Angelo Cattaneo, “Geographical Curiosities and Transformative Exchange in the Nanban Century (C. 1549–C. 1647),” Études Épistémè 26 (2014).
tradition considering empirical evidence, Mauro’s mappamundi reflects a hybrid epistemology.\textsuperscript{118} This position remains a point of scholarly debate. Scholars employing a secularist lens tend to misrepresent Fra Mauro’s worldview by diminishing the role of theology.

Piero Falchetta, the historian of cartography and mappamundi specialist, advocates this view. Falchetta, for instance, locates the map’s “scientific” or “experimental” features within the circular image yet relegates what he considers “traditional” or “doctrinal” features to the margins.\textsuperscript{119} In fact, Falchetta stresses

a sharp distinction between the epistemological status of geographical knowledge, which can be subjected to critical evaluation and judgement, and religious doctrine, which is simply to be observed and followed and offers no space for critical comments that contradict it.\textsuperscript{120}

Mauro’s legends are thereby emptied of epistemic value. Falchetta misleadingly assumes that ‘religious doctrine’ has no bearing on the central planisphere. Cattaneo makes the same argument. He notes “the total absence of doctrinal or theological references throughout the work, which can thus be defined as ‘secular’ and ‘scientific’ for all that its author is a cleric.”\textsuperscript{121} Art historian Susy

\textsuperscript{118} For an opposing view, see Patrick Gautier Dalché, “The Reception of Ptolemy’s Geography (End of the Fourteenth to Beginning of the Sixteenth Century),” in \textit{Cartography in the European Renaissance} ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward, vol. 3, \textit{The History of Cartography} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 316: “[Mauro] is claimed to have stood against the religious and scholastic prejudices of his day, favoring concrete fact and information gleaned from direct experience, thus obtaining more positive results in his work. Fra Mauro’s criticism of the authority of Ptolemy plays an essential role in this rather simplistic view, while one would be closer to the truth in claiming that awareness of the experiential origin of knowledge tempted him to measure empirical facts against the Ptolemaic model.”


\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 131.

\textsuperscript{121} Cattaneo, \textit{Mauro’s Mappa Mundi}, 698. Here, Cattaneo is commenting on inscription number 2834.
Marcon arrives at a similar conclusion. After noting the marginal place of Earthly Paradise in the corner of the map, Marcon remarks that in

a context that was becoming increasingly secular and ‘scientific’, it remains part of the overall image; but the fact that it is not included within the geographical account proper shows Fra Mauro breaking with the tradition exemplified in the great historiographical works of the Late Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{122}

Mauro does offer a critical contribution to early modern cartography. However, it would be inaccurate to assert that he makes a clear break from his inherited intellectual tradition. Falchetta, Cattaneo, and (to a lesser extent) Marcon exploit a false assumption. For these scholars seem to disregard the legends because of their peripheral location. Ultimately, their assessment relies on a modernist interpretation of the Renaissance that forces a post–Enlightenment bifurcation between secular and sacred knowledge onto fifteenth-century cosmology. This chapter will show how Fra Mauro uses the scholastic tradition to map the natural order.

Chapter One examines how a theological conception of nature operates in Fra Mauro’s cosmology.\textsuperscript{123} To this end, I draw on J. B. Harley’s critical geography to deconstruct the way in which the map, as a value–laden image, exerts and exhibits global relations of power.\textsuperscript{124} I apply Harley’s method to uncover “the social forces that have structured cartography and to locate the presence of power—and its effects—in all map knowledge.”\textsuperscript{125} Deconstruction, Harley insists,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Mignolo calls this dynamic the privileged “locus of enunciation. It is from the West that the rest of the world is described, conceptualized, and ranked: that is, modernity is the self-description of Europe’s role in history rather than an ontological historical process.” Mignolo, \textit{The Idea of Latin America}, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} J. B. Harley, \textit{Maps, Knowledge, and Power}, ed. Stephen Daniels, The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments (Cambridge: Cambridge
“urges us to read between the lines of the map—‘in the margins of the text’—and through its
tropes discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the
image.”126 Following this insight, I focus on the map’s four corner legends: on solar and lunar
effects, the cosmic order, climate theory, and earthly paradise.

I argue that Fra Mauro employs the scholastic tradition to conceptualize a hierarchy
within the natural order created by God. Doing so allows Fra Mauro to incorporate scientific
knowledge into a theological image of the natural world. In the end, Fra Mauro anticipates the
colonial moment by providing Iberian empires with a comprehensive, scientific, and ostensibly
neutral map for geographic expansion.

Chapter One has five sections. Section I frames the central argument by situating Fra
Mauro and the mappamundi tradition within the context of fifteenth-century Venice. In addition
to discussing the map’s authorship, dating, and patronage, the first section explains how it
galvanizes territorial expansion. Section I elucidates the geopolitics of cartography by showing
the way in which it furthers Portugal’s global designs. Sections II to V shift focus by examining
Fra Mauro’s cosmology in detail. Each section analyzes one of the four corner legends.

Section II examines the legend on solar and lunar effects (upper right corner). It shows
how Fra Mauro uses the doctrine of divine providence (grace) to explain the earth–to–water ratio.
Section II outlines how Mauro incorporates empirical evidence by illustrating the possibility of
sailing into the southern hemisphere. Section III addresses the legend on the cosmic order (upper
left corner), which depicts the celestial spheres. This section shows how Fra Mauro uses the

American Geographers 46 (1956): 289. Sauer describes this idea as the “eloquence of maps.”

126 Harley, Iconography of Landscape, 153.
scholastic tradition to address scientific questions regarding the physical universe. This section briefly discusses the continuities between Fra Mauro’s mappamundi and Columbus’ World Map, which signal the geopolitical legacy of late medieval cosmology. Section IV examines the legend on climate theory (lower right corner), revealing how temperature and genealogy determine the habitability of the southern hemisphere. Section V analyzes the final legend, which depicts Earthly Paradise (lower left corner). It examines the way Mauro employs Scripture and Christian doctrine to delineate the natural order established by God. The conclusion ends by indicating how Fra Mauro’s mappamundi provides a conceptual foundation for the Columbian Enterprise (see Figure 1.1)."
Figure 1.1 Mappamondo di Fra Mauro [Marciana World Map], c. 1450 ©Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice
1.2 Fra Mauro and the Mappamundi Tradition

Although biographical information on Fra Mauro is scant, archival records indicate his birth occurred in Venice during the last quarter of the fourteenth century. A 1409 manuscript belonging to the Camaldolese monastery of San Michele contains the earliest reference to *frater Maurus de Veneciis conversus*. This dating suggests that Mauro made holy vows as an adult, spending his later years as a friar. As a young man Mauro worked as a traveling merchant and then briefly as a soldier. Such occupations likely exposed him to sea charts and diagrams of the broader Mediterranean context.

During Fra Mauro’s lifetime, the Camaldolese monastery stood out as a premier institution in the region. Located on the scenic island of Murano, the monastery formed part of the Venetian archipelago in northern Italy. San Michele was renowned for its architecture and manuscript collection. Apparently, a generous endowment sustained its academic life. Historian of cartography Evelyn Edson notes that the neighboring Camaldolese Order in Florence hosted “daily gatherings of humanists in the mid-fifteenth century, often for the purposes of studying geography.” As a member of this religious order, a robust intellectual community shaped Mauro. Understandably, his ability soon drew the attention of the local government. In 1444, for instance,

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128 Venice, Archivio di Stato, San Michele di Murano, busta 3, loose manuscript on vellum, drafted by the notary, Prosdocimo Domenico da Padova, July 9, 1409. See “Documentary Appendices: Chapter I – A critical survey of sources related to Fra Mauro and his mappa mundi to c. 1600, context and transcription notes,” in Cattaneo, *Mauro’s Mappa Mundi*, 35 footnote 8; 331.

129 Paolo Benier (1367–1448), who served as abbot from 1367 until 1448, apparently made San Michele “a centre for intellectual study and home to an increasingly sizeable library.” Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 137. In fact, by the eighteenth century, the monastery possessed 40,000 items, including 2,532 manuscripts, and 1,203 printed works. See Marino Zorzi, “Presentation,” in Falchetta, *Mauro’s World Map*, 13–18.

Venetian authorities requested his assistance in diverting the River Brenta, thereby preventing a natural disaster. He subsequently participated in similar projects throughout the region. Yet such endeavors were only the start of an illustrious career. Mauro ultimately embarked on a massive effort to map the physical world and its place within the cosmic order. This comprehensive endeavor became the planisphere-manuscript under consideration.

In all, Fra Mauro produced two mappaemundi. A close assessment of the surviving records suggests that the first map, commonly referred to as the ‘Marciana map,’ was completed around 1450; the second ‘Portuguese map’ (discussed later on) was a replica of the original. According to the nineteenth-century scholar, Cardinal Placido Zurla, monastery records from 1448–1449 reflect expenditures “for paints, gold leaf, etc. to make mappamundi” that were likely used on the Marciana map. Recent studies of new financial documents from 1453–1460 found no expenses related to the first mappamundi recorded after 1453. Mauro apparently began working “around 1448” and finished “prior to 1453.” These dates, however, do not apply to the four corner paintings, which are called ‘legends.’ An inscription on a backside panel indicates they were subsequently added, but no later than August, 26, 1460. Marcon notes how these “figurative works in the corners

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132 Zurla, the nineteenth-century scholar, is responsible for producing the first and most formidable analysis of the Marciana map. The inscription reads “per colori, per oro batto, ecc. Per formar mappamondi.” See Placido Zurla, Il Mappamondo Di Fra Mauro (Venezia, 1806), 79–80. See also Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 143.


134 Zurla, Mappamondo Di Fra Mauro, 84–85.

135 The mappamundi adorned the Camaldolese sanctuary for nearly four hundred years. During this period, it was the object of admiration rather than study. With the incursion of Napoleonic forces in the early nineteenth century, Italian authorities sold off or distributed most of the monastery’s collection. Fortunately, Jacopo Morelli, the chief librarian at the Biblioteca Marciana, secured possession of Mauro’s
complete the map in a way that is true to the theories Fra Mauro outlines within it.”136 The images and texts associated with the first three legends (upper left, upper right, and lower right) exhibit the way in which Aristotelian Thomism plays a vital role in Mauro’s cosmology. Although the fourth legend (on Earthly Paradise) is explicitly theological, it too relies on Natural Philosophy to explain how the earth’s water supply stems from Eden. So, with the inclusion of those supplemental images, the project took over a decade to complete.

The identity of the patron remains a contested issue. This question merits consideration because, as sociologist of religion Otto Maduro asserts, “knowledge is capital—one particular form of capital which, as all forms of capital, might be used to acquire other forms of capital and might serve to enhance, reinforce, and protect different forms of capital ‘owned’ by the ‘knower,’ those associated with her/him, as well as the institutions of which s/he is part.”137 One of the inscriptions on the map names the Doge, a title granted to the Venetian governor, as the patron.138 According to the inscription, it was commissioned “upon the request of” or “in homage to” the “illustrious governor.”139 Scholars disagree on whether this phrase constitutes a nominal gesture

magnum opus in 1811. As such, it derives the title Marciana map from its current location. To this day it remains one of the archive’s most prized possessions. See Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 146.


138 The Venetian constitution distributed power between a ducal figure or Doge, the Senate, and the Great Council, reflecting respectively monarchical, aristocratic, and popular elements. See Robert Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 312.

139 Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 144.
or actual patronage.\textsuperscript{140} However, Marcon believes it reflects “rapport between Fra Mauro’s work as a cartographer and the Venetian State.”\textsuperscript{141} In fact, Marcon claims that

this extraordinary, artistic rendition of contemporary geographical knowledge could well have been intended for presentation to the doge—or even have been commissioned to hang in the Doge’s Palace itself.\textsuperscript{142}

This factor sheds light on the geopolitical nature of cosmology. Venetian authorities apparently began exhibiting largescale maps in public buildings around the late 1300s. This practice was meant to display geopolitical prowess.\textsuperscript{143} Mappaemundi functioned as epistemic capital by offering political elites a panoramic view of the world. It stands to reason that the Republic of Venice would gain from such an image.\textsuperscript{144} For reasons unknown, however, no records indicate that it ever hung in the Doge’s palace; it would remain on display at the monastery until 1811. At that time, the Library of Saint Mark (Bibliotheca Marciana) would secure its ownership.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{140} The inscription reads “a contemplation da questa Illustrissma Signoria.” Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 144–145. Marcon, however, doubts the inscription squarely identifies the Doge as the patron, calling the notion an “ambiguous interpretation.” Moreover, Lionello Puppi translates it as “upon the request,” while Vittorino Meneghin renders it as “in homage to.” For more on the controversy on the issue of translation, see Loredana Olivato and Lionello Puppi, \textit{Mauro Codussi} (Milano: Electa, 1977), and Vittorino Meneghin, \textit{San Michele in Isola Di Venezia}, 2 vols. (Venezia: Stamperia di Venezia, 1962).

\textsuperscript{141} Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 145.

\textsuperscript{142} Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 144.

\textsuperscript{143} For a history of the Doge’s Palace and the role of maps in it, see Lorenzi Giambattista, \textit{Monumenti Per Servire Alla Storia del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia}, vol. 1, Dal 1253 Al 1600 (Venezia: Tip. del Commercio di M. Visentini, 1868), 80–82, 89, 92, and 259.


\textsuperscript{145} The British Museum commissioned a copy of the Mappamundi in 1804. See Fra Mauro, “A Copy of the Large Planisphere, or Mappa Mondo, Compiled and Drawn in the Year 1459, by Frà Mauro, a Monk of the Order of Camaldoli, and Preserved in the Monastery of S. Michele Di Murano, near Venice,” (London: British Museum, 1804).
Historians have widely noted that fifteenth-century Venice functioned as a metropole for the Mediterranean world. Travelers, merchants, pirates, clergy, and government officials from the British Isles to the Arabian Peninsula disembarked in its harbors on a regular basis. Its location along the northern Italian coast enabled the island city to facilitate an expansive economic network. Yet to do so, Venice relied on precise geographic information and knowledge of ocean tides. For this reason, professors at the illustrious University of Padua dedicated considerable effort to lunar-solar theory. Its faculty, trained in the scholastic tradition, would employ late medieval cosmology to determine weather forecasts, trading routes, and locations of international ports. Mauro, in fact, directly engages this discourse. He cites Albertus Magnus' text De Causis to explain the rise and fall of oceans levels. Combining visual and textual media, Mauro's map provides European pilots and their patrons with an idea of how to circumvent Africa. Fra Mauro even illustrates the possibility of sailing beyond the torrid zone.

146 Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice. For a foundational text on Venice's contribution to early modern capitalism, see Frederic Chapin Lane and Reinhold C. Mueller, Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

147 See Frederic Chapin Lane, Venice, a Maritime Republic (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

148 “The lunar-solar theory (definitely accepted in 1726 when Isaac Newton published his Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica) remained peculiar to Venetian physics and, in particular, the Paduan teaching of Jacopo Doni and his successors to the Chair of Astronomy, Federico Crisogono (first half of the sixteenth century), Federico Delfino (1477–1547) and Marc'Antonio de Dominis (1560–1624) up to the end of the seventeenth century.” Cattaneo, Mauro's Mappa Mundi, 116. For a biographical account of Jacop Dondi’s life and work, see Andrea Gloria, L’orologio di Jacopo Dondi Nella Piazza Dei Signori in Padova, Modello Aghi Orologi Più Rinomati in Europa (Padova: Tip. G.B. Randi, 1885).

149 “Fra Maruo’s Mappa Mundi presents a complex cosmographic analysis of the ocean and the seas and included a detailed analysis of tides, their navigability and an in-depth description of the main maritime and commercial routes linking Asia and the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the circumnavigation of Africa.” Cattaneo, Mauro’s Mappa Mundi, III.
In addition to facilitating trade, Venice also mediated an intellectual exchange between East and West. Educated residents of this urban center were regularly exposed to innovative ideas, diverse manuscripts, and engaging interlocutors. It was an ideal setting for an aspiring cartographer. And, as a Camaldolese friar, Mauro counted on the monastery’s financial support to secure the necessary materials to create a comprehensive image of the world. Cattaneo claims that World Maps by virtue of their linguistic and narrative forms, as well as the specific history of their reception and their relationship with the cultural matrix to which they refer, furnish important interpretational keys for ‘decoding’ historical moments that, because they are not documented in a serial way, would otherwise be little known and much misunderstood. Such documents, precisely due to their exceptional character...can be studied to reveal the practices, themes, and aspects that were both central and normal...in the cultures and civilization in which they were created.150

Mappaemundi, as a form of knowledge/power, depend on economic chains of production and consumption throughout the Mediterranean. “Knowledge and the interest that constitutes it as such,” Maduro writes, require the concentration and oftentimes the exploitation of “previous and concomitant labor.”151 Analyzing the Marciana map through this lens can illuminate how a natural theology relies on, and contributes to, the accumulation of various forms of capital.152

After learning about Mauro’s mapmaking capabilities, the Portuguese King, Alfonso V (1438–1481) commissioned his services in 1457.153 This request came precisely at a moment when

150 Ibid., 24 footnote 13.
151 Maduro, “An(other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility,” 144
152 See Cattaneo, Mauro’s Mappa Mundi, 118–21. Cattaneo mentions that the Chinese admiral Zheng, who effectively extended China’s dominion into eastern Africa from 1405–1433, was the primary source for the section on the Indian Ocean. The incorporation of Zheng attests to the map’s synthetic composition.
Iberian dominion was spreading throughout the southern Atlantic. Commanding one of the finest European fleets, Prince Henry ‘the Navigator’ (1394–1460) spearheaded a series of pathbreaking expeditions into the southern Atlantic. After expelling the Lueso-Muslim population from the peninsula in 1340, the Portuguese Crown turned its attention outward. As geographer Francesc Relaño remarks, once “Cape Bojador was finally overcome by Gil Eanes in 1434, after twelve years of repeatedly failed attempts,” many more “seafaring exploit[s]” were carried out. In addition to colonizing the Canary Islands and waging wars in northern Africa, it also made innovative advances in maritime technology.

The royal chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1415–1474), who narrates Prince Henry’s ventures, describes a historic precedent. Archivist and cartographic scholar David Buisseret explains how “Portuguese progress was systematic: in the 1450s the Cape Verde Islands were reached, and the Azores were settled, in the 1460s the Gulf of Guinea was explored, and by 1488 Bartholomew Diaz (d. 1500) had reached the Cape” of Good Hope. A careful examination of the

154 “Around 1450, African conquests began to offer European powers the sense of limitless opportunities in the tread of slaves, gold, and salt through a direct connection of sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean and Atlantic.” Cattaneo, Mauro’s Mappa Mundi, 49.

155 Francesc Relaño, The Shaping of Africa: Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 150. The Arabic name Abū Khaṭar translates as ‘father of danger.’


map reveals Mauro’s awareness of those exploits. For instance, an inscription near Cape Verde reads:

I have several times heard many people say that there is here one column with a hand showing an inscription which prevents [one] from going any further. But I would like the Portuguese who sail this sea to say if what I heard is true, for I do not dare to affirm it.159

Zurara’s first-hand accounts began to cast doubt that the Pillars of Hercules demarcated the boundary of human habitation.160 Iberian voyages into the tropics proved that, contrary to the ancient authorities, the torrid zone was tranquil and its waters conducive for navigation.161

To create the Portuguese map, Mauro relied on fellow monks and external scribes.162 Producing a replica required substantial labor. The “monastery could not supply suitable scribes for such professional work and therefore entrusted the task to outside copyists (a practice which was common at other monasteries and convents in the lagoon, and at the Doge’s Palace itself).”163 The Renaissance painter Francesco da Cherso was one such contributor. Mauro also summoned Andrea Bianco, a close friend and trusted ally. An experienced cartographer and veteran sailor,

159 Relaño, Shaping of Africa, 150.

160 Cañizares-Esguerra, “Iberian Roots of the Scientific Revolution,” 14. “Some readers may be familiar with the frontispiece to Francis Bacon’s Instauratio magna (1620), which shows a ship sailing through the pillars of Hercules (fig. 2.1), standing for the voyage of empirical and experimental discovery of nature’s secrets on which Europeans embarked as soon as they put the authority of ancient texts behind them.”


Bianco had authored numerous nautical charts. They collaborated for six years. Unfortunately, Mauro died suddenly in 1459, which left Bianco with the responsibility of completing the task. Marcon notes that “entries for 10 May 1459 in the monastery’s [register] contain a reference to sums still ow[ed] to him for that work.” This means Bianco oversaw the final stage of production. And with the help of a small team, Bianco completed the map later that year.

Painted on thick parchment paper and glued onto heavy wooden panels, the planisphere measures over five feet in diameter. Countless place-names, rivers, castles, religious sites, and islands are included throughout. Over two hundred descriptive texts, written in a Venetian dialect of Latin, supplement the drawings. It exhibits considerable detail in both form and substance. Contemporary scholars generally divide medieval maps into five broad categories: World Maps, Broadsides, Judicial, Portolan Charts, and Large-Scale Plans of Cities and Buildings. Mauro makes a unique contribution to Western cartography by integrating three distinct genres—sea charts, mappaemundi, and Ptolemaic atlases—into a single document.

Though scholars have previously questioned whether the replica ever arrived in Lisbon, recent studies conclude that it was successfully “delivered to [Alfonso’s] court in 1459 by the Venetian ambassador, Stefano Trevisan.” The precise means by which it was lost remains a

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165 According to Gerardo’s findings, the year 1459 is “the latest possible date for Fra Mauro’s death.” See Marcon, “Bellini and the Earthly Paradise,” 144; Zurla, Mappamondo di Fra Mauro, 83–84; Mauro Mazzucotelli, Cultura Scientifica e Tecnica del Monachesimo in Italia, 2 vols., Orizzonti Monastici (Milano: Abbazia San Benedetto, 1999), 79.
167 See Buisseret, Mapmaker’s Quest, 1–9. For an example of a Portolan Chart see Biblioteca Estense, Modena C.G. A. I: Catalan World Map, c. 1450–1460.
mystery, however. Fortunately, a critical addendum has survived. It is a letter from the Venetian Doge to Henry the Navigator, Alfonso V’s uncle. In the letter, the Doge solicits Prince Henry’s commitment to continue financing Atlantic exploration. This detail not only bolsters the Doge’s connection to the original map but also indicates the way in which geographic knowledge relates to imperial designs. According to Cattaneo, sponsoring the creation of a World Map formed part of the

Portuguese diplomatic and cultural effort which, through papal bulls and diplomatic letters to major European powers, sought to promote, claim and defend Lusitanian rights to navigation and expansion along the African coast. Since at least 1455 this geopolitical goal was achieved through the divulgation of Portuguese plans of navigation to the major European courts. In the specific case of the commission of a map from Fra Mauro, the main goal was to frame them in and spread them through one of the most impressive representations of the mid-fifteenth-century imago mundi.

Comprehensive knowledge of the world—its territories and oceans—would provide Portugal, and eventually Spain, with the imagination needed to build a global empire. Buisseret notes that “extensive mapping of overseas territories” not only meant that “the mind could now dwell in remote places” but “that the body could also return there, thanks to maps and charts which eventually made the whole world the Europeans’ oyster.” Equipped with increasingly accurate maps, Iberian cosmographers would galvanize a capitalist world-economy by charting trade routes throughout the globe.

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169 Edson, *World Map, 1300–1492*, 141. The map was last “seen in the royal monastery of Alcobaça in the seventeenth century, it is now lost, perhaps a victim of the great earthquake of 1755. Recent discovery of relevant documents in Venetian archives suggests that these two events should be reversed, the first map being made for Venice about 1448–53, and a copy produced for Portugal between 1457 and 1459.”


Contemporary scholars tend to interpret Fra Mauro’s mappamundi through a secularist framework. Compared to the Ebstorf or the Hereford mappamundi, the Marciana map does emphasize accuracy.\footnote{172} Fra Mauro omits images of Christ, Jerusalem, and the Last Judgement.\footnote{173} Cartographic historian Peter Whitfield remarks: “Gone are the images from religious history and from pagan mythology; gone are the grotesque creatures inhabiting the edges of the world...the Atlantic and Indian Oceans are real seas, not merely a conceptual ring of water.”\footnote{174} As previously mentioned, Marcon sees the marginalization of biblical scenes as a move towards objective representation. While reducing the number of ‘mythological’ symbols, Fra Mauro’s intervention constitutes a different kind of transition.

Rather than becoming obsolete, Christian theology begins to function at an implicit level in the mappamundi. In fact, Mauro internalizes the scholastic tradition to such an extent that it becomes the conceptual architecture for the map. These legends reflect how a theological imagination, grounded in Aristotelian-Thomism, undergird Mauro’s creation. Making these dimensions explicit requires a detailed analysis of the four legends. The following sections will thus examine the images and texts associated with each corner legend. Doing so should illuminate the nature of late medieval cosmography.

\footnote{172} The Ebstorf mappamundi, which measured 3 meters across, was destroyed by an air-raid during WWII in Hannover, Germany. For a more on this map, see P. D. A. Harvey, Medieval Maps (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 19–37. The Hereford is the largest surviving mappamundi, measuring 5 feet 2 inches high and 4 feet 4 inches wide. For a more on this map, see The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context (London: British Library, 2006).


\footnote{174} Whitfield, Image of the World, 32. Once again Mauro emulates al-Idrīsī by portraying the Indian Ocean as an open body of water in accordance with Ptolemaic instruction.
Figure 1.2 Legend on Solar and Lunar Effects
1.3 On Solar and Lunar Effects

Fra Mauro’s legend on solar and lunar effects (upper right corner) draws heavily on natural philosophy (see Figure 1.2). Mauro’s image represents the physical universe as five concentric circles. To delineate how motion and hierarchy inform Mauro’s cosmology, it is necessary to outline the basic structure of Greek physics. Plato (429–347 B.C.E) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), the two pillars of the Hellenistic tradition, maintain that the physical universe is composed of four elements—earth, water, air, and fire, or what Aristotle also called ‘simple bodies.’ These elements have hierarchical relationship, such that higher elements effect (or move) lower ones. Phrased differently, lower things are governed by higher things. And finally, each element possesses two physical qualities, which in turn determine climate.

As a theologian trained in the scholastic tradition, Fra Mauro inherits this Aristotelian conception of nature. At the most fundamental level, Aristotle defines Nature as “the primary underlying matter of things which have in themselves a principle of motion or change.” Natural philosophy dominated Western systems of knowledge until the early modern era. Edward Grant

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176 Lang contends that each section (or logoi) of Physics puts forth a distinct argument, which must be assessed on its own merits, independently from the other sections and the remainder of Aristotle’s corpus. On these grounds, “it is inappropriate within the structure of Physics 8 to identify the first mover as God or to ask how it produces motion, that is, whether as a moving cause or a final cause; the first mover is not the proper subject of the argument.” See Helen S. Lang, Aristotle’s Physics and Its Medieval Varieties, SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 11–12.

177 For instance, fire is hot and dry; air, hot and wet; water, cold and wet; and earth, cold and dry. See Evelyn Edson and Emilie Savage-Smith, Medieval Views of the Cosmos: Picturing the Universe in the Christian and Islamic Middle Ages (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2004), 12.

comments that natural philosophy “not only provided the mechanisms of explanation for natural phenomena but also served as a gigantic filter through which the world was viewed.” Motion, as a form of change, is therefore constitutive of the natural order.

Mauro uses scholastic theology to conceptualize a natural hierarchy. He observes that physical objects move in conformity with “the natural inclination of things.” Rocks, like all earthly things, naturally fall towards the ground. Soil automatically sinks under water because gravity is the natural appetite of earthly things. Likewise, flames are carried upward because the inclination of fire is towards the sky. While such dynamics are ‘natural,’ Mauro affirms God as the final cause. According to Mauro,

The earth, therefore, has no need for any support. All it requires is its natural inclination, which results from the order of proportion and relation that God has instilled in the elements, as Boethius claims in his book De consolatione philosophiae.

In other words, God has created the natural order. Natural inclinations, therefore, form part of God’s design. This means that elements, independent of supernatural grace, move in accordance with their nature. This paradigm, however, presents medieval scholastics with a scientific problem. If, as Aristotle maintains, earth is by nature the heaviest element, then why is the oikumene above sea level?

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180 Ibid., 728, line 12.

181 Ibid., 728, line 14. Earth “by its own nature the earth is inclined to be in the middle [i.e. center] of the world, and that inclination would still be its own even if no other material substance existed.”

182 Edson, World Map 1300–1492, 144. See Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 728, line 16.

183 Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 729, line 17.

184 Ibid., 726, line 1. The legend’s first line reads: “How by Divine Providence the earth is raised above water.”
A theological argument based on divine providence enables Mauro to explain the earth-to-water ratio. According to Edson, this was “an important issue in the later Middle Ages as scientists struggled with the Aristotelian concept that the sphere of earth was surrounded by the sphere of water.”¹⁸⁵ Fra Mauro responds by pointing out that humans require ecological diversity to survive. Yet flora and fauna require adequate space to grow. Therefore, God created parts of the earth with lower density (“light and of clear porosity”) so that soil could rise above sea level.¹⁸⁶ In this way, Fra Mauro uses theology to resolve a scientific question. On such grounds, he concludes that such “things have been predisposed by God with wonderful providence.”¹⁸⁷ Theologically speaking, grace (divine providence) elevates nature for the benefit of humanity.

Fra Mauro uses the first paragraph to explain the cause of ocean tides. As Cattaneo maintains, the “legends, together with those within the circular mappa mundi, employ one of the most complex scientific vocabularies in the vernacular, not only in Venice, but anywhere in Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century.”¹⁸⁸ He attributes oceanic vacillation to the effects of the sun and moon as they revolve around the earth. As Ptolemy outlines, heat from the sun evaporates sea water throughout the day.¹⁸⁹ The density (“thickness”) of the depths delays evaporation.¹⁹⁰ After sunset, the moon begins its course toward the meridian circle. Its nocturnal cycle causes an ‘ebullition,’ which draws vapor up from the depths. Water in the form of vapor

¹⁸⁵ Edson, World Map 1300–1492, 144.
¹⁸⁶ Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 727, line 2.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸⁸ Cattaneo, Mauro’s Mappa Mundi, 129.
¹⁹⁰ Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 726, line 6.
extends to the shoreline, causing the tide to rise.\textsuperscript{191} The moon’s power, moreover, diminishes as it passes through the tropic of Cancer. At the end of the daily cycle, vapors return to the depths thereby lowering the tide once again.

Mauro employs lunar–solar theory to explain the possibility of circumnavigating Africa. In accordance with Albertus’ lunar–solar theory, Mauro contends that water around the equator evaporates at a higher rate. Furthermore, lunar cycles expose the Arctic and Antarctic to more moonlight. Quoting from \textit{Tetrabiblos}, Mauro argues that the moon’s natural properties attract vapor and increase humidity.\textsuperscript{192} In turn, this causes water levels to rise at the earth’s poles. The effects of equatorial heat based on lunar cycles enable Mauro to conceptualize sailing around the African continent. The planisphere displays water encircling the known world, which suggests that Mediterranean sailors could reach Asian markets. In this way, Mauro’s theological imagination breaks down the secularist bifurcation between scientific and religious knowledge.

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\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 726, line 8.

\textsuperscript{192} See Cattaneo, \textit{Mauro’s Mappa Mundi}, 114; Falchetta, \textit{Mauro’s World Map}, 724, lines 5–6.
Figure 1.3 Legend on the Cosmic Order

Figure 1.4 Detail of the Nine Heavenly Spheres
1.4 On the Cosmic Order

In the legend’s first paragraph, “The authority of the holy theologians as to the number of the heavens,” Fra Mauro discusses biblical and Patristic views on the number of heavenly spheres (see Figure 1.3 and Appendix A). Mauro begins by engaging three Church Fathers. He notes that John Chrysostom affirms the existence of a single heaven, whereas Basil the Great and John Damascene uphold numerous. Apparently, Chrysostom uses ‘heaven’ in a general sense, referring to everything that resides above the earth. According to Mauro, in order “to understand this subdivision of the heavens, one has to know that the Scriptures refer to the heavens in three ways.” Therefore, Mauro explains, the “difference is more a question of words than substance” because Hebrew, unlike Latin, has words that are only in the plural form. Mauro turns to delineate each biblical reference accordingly.

Fra Mauro claims Scripture refers to heaven in the ‘natural sense.’ To interpret scripture, Mauro borrows from natural philosophy, which considered higher elements to increase in radiance and to be utterly devoid of change. According to the ancients, a fifth element called ether

193 Scripture referred to the third heaven when it records the apostle Paul ascending to the third heaven. Mauro refers to Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, which reads: “I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.” See II Corinthians 12.2–4 in The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version, ed. Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). The third reference defines heaven in a metaphysical sense. Mauro compares this supernatural usage to the biblical references to the Trinity. The third definition applies, for instance, when Lucifer ‘rose up to heaven,’ seeking equality with God. The same term also describes the eschatological reward of the saints. Scripture outlines three kinds of supernatural visions, which Augustine terms corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual.

194 Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 720, line 8.

195 Ibid., 720, line 5.
governs the realm beyond the moon (the extra-lunar realm). In Plato’s cosmology “there are two concentric layers of air outside those of earth and water, with aér closer to earth and ether outside it, and fire forming the outermost circle.” Plato describes ether as a translucent fiery substance that constitutes celestial bodies like spheres, stars, and planets. According to Mauro’s reading of Scripture, heaven is a “sublime body that is luminous in act—that is, through its own power—and incorruptible by nature.” He maintains that heaven contains three natural divisions: empyrean (luminous); aqueous (crystalline); and starry (sidereal). All planets and fixed stars inhabit the starry (lowest) division, which contains a total of nine spheres (see Figure 1.4). The aqueous (second) division is transparent, devoid of celestial bodies. And as the highest division, empyrean lies in a perpetual state of splendor because God created it out of ether, the “purest” and only “permanent element,” so that its luminosity may inspire our divine contemplation.

In the legend’s next section, Mauro elaborates on the nine concentric spheres that comprise the cosmic order. He explains that the outermost sphere sets the eight concentric spheres in to motion. All the ‘fixed stars’ (non–planets) correspond to the eighth sphere. And he associates spheres one through eight with the cycles of planets. Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars are assigned to spheres seven, six, and five, respectively. The sun, located mid-way between empyrean and the earth, occupies the fourth sphere. And finally, Venus, Mercury, and the moon occupy of the last three spheres. For Mauro, as for the ancient Greeks, the sphere’s seamless form precludes it from deviating in motion. Its natural qualities reflect God’s wisdom in creation.

197 Ibid. “The term originally referred to “clear air as opposed to aér, or mist” and was also spelled “aither” or “aether.”
198 Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 720, line 9.
199 Barton, Ancient Astrology, 104.
Figure 1.5 Detail of Cosmic Order on Columbus’ World Map, c. 1488
While pagan philosophers attribute heavenly motion to a First Mover, Christian scholastics attribute cosmic revolutions to the Triune God. Fra Mauro insists that God orchestrates the movement of concentric spheres by first setting the outermost sphere into motion. Several medieval manuscripts, like Sacrobosco’s *Spheres of the Heavens*, replace Aristotle’s First Mover with the God of Scripture. This view of the cosmos provides a framework for Iberian cosmographers in the age of discovery. For instance, the Portuguese World Map (c. 1488), historically attributed to Columbus, includes an image of the cosmic order that closely resembles Fra Mauro’s legend (See Figure 1.5). Furthermore, Columbus’ map depicts a crucial element also found in Mauro’s mappamundi—the southern coast of Africa. Iberian exploration was therefore made possible by a theological knowledge of the natural order. The chronological and conceptual proximity of these two sources highlights the transatlantic impact of late medieval cosmology. As discussed in the following chapter, Columbus would borrow from the scholastic tradition to conceptualize his relationship to the tropics.

One final aspect of the legend deserves attention. Fra Mauro relates hierarchy and motion to God’s plan of salvation by attributing the rotation of stars and planets to divine action. Mauro, for instance, states that “future recompense envisages two kinds of glory, the *spiritual* and the *corporeal*, and this involves not only the glorification of human bodies but also the renewal of the whole world.” Christ’s return will glorify all of creation. Mauro thus attributes an eschatological function to the luminous sphere because it offers a glimpse of what awaits us all. Mauro declares:

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it was necessary that, from the very beginning corporeal glory should have its seat in some body that was incorruptible, immutable and luminous with its own light—as will be the case with each corporeal creature after the resurrection of the flesh. Therefore, that heaven was called the empyrean—that is, the enflamed—but not because it burns but because it shines. 202

And so empyrean exhibits by nature what the created order will inevitably exhibit through grace. 203 Its ‘congruity of brightness’ reflects a supernatural purpose. The natural hierarchy of creation, therefore, exemplifies God’s plan of salvation. Mauro’s employs the foundation of Christian doctrine—Scripture and Patristic theology—to articulate the way in which motion and hierarchy structure the natural world. Ultimately, Mauro formulates a scholastic vision of the cosmic order.

202 Ibid., 721, line 13–14.

203 Ibid., 721, line 17. According to the second biblical reference, heaven possesses the “property of a celestial body,” which means “being sublime and luminous through act and potential.”
1.5 On Climate Theory

Mauro’s legend on climate theory (lower right corner) discusses the size of the natural world (quantity of elements) and the inhabitability of the earth (see Figure 1.6). While scientific in nature, these topics have geopolitical implications regarding the possibility of human beings populating the torrid zone. If people inhabit torrid regions, then Christendom can potentially extend its intellectual, economic, and political order. In the mid-fifteenth century, wealthy merchants expressed great interest in reaching India. Circling Africa would enable Western ships
to access Asian markets while avoiding territories under Ottoman control. And so, the prospect of sailing southbound around the African continent presented alluring options for investors and rulers alike. This section will examine the planisphere and the legend to assess how Mauro used climate theory to populate the tropics.

The first paragraph, located to the left of the image, analyzes competing scientific accounts regarding the size of the universe, an issue determined by the quantity of elements. Mauro contrasts Aristotelian physics with Euclidean geometry to expose their limits. He takes issue with Aristotle’s theory because it multiplies elements by ten with each sphere. According to Aristotle, there is ten times more water than earth, ten times more air than water, and so on. But given that the oikumene lies above sea level, the earth’s sphere must be equal to or greater than water. That factor undercuts Aristotle’s calculation. Mauro then considers Euclid’s method, which uses the “square of the diameter of one sphere that is in ratio with the square of the other sphere.” So if the earth’s sphere measures $10^2$ units in diameter, then the diameter of water would measure $100^2$ units. Empirical evidence, however, appears to undermine Euclidean theory. He claims that both Aristotle and Euclid mistakenly assume that “the entire terrestrial circumference is of equal distance from the centre of the world as the part where we live.” As Falchetta mentions, Mauro ends up “criticising both and implicitly supporting the measurements obtained using Ptolemy’s

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mathematical–geometrical method, without however mentioning it as such.”

In the end, using the oikumene’s location to determine the size of the cosmos produces inaccurate results.

The legend’s second paragraph turns to address habitability directly. Its title alludes to the main argument: “How the earth which is below the Equator and the torrid zone may be habitable.” Here Fra Mauro engages in what later scholars called zonal or climate theory.

Medieval Zonal Maps are widely attributed to Macrobius (d. 425). His treatise *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* introduced the idea of five latitudes into Latin geography (see Figure 1.7). As cartographic historian Alfred Hiatt explains

Zonal maps represented a theory of classical geometry that posited the division of the earth into five latitudinal zones: two zones of extreme cold at the far south and north; an equatorial ocean within a central band of extreme heat; and two temperate zones, one in the northern hemisphere, and one in the southern.

Mauro’s legend reflects these divisions with horizontal lines demarcating the North and South Pole, the tropic of Cancer and Capricorn, and the equator (see Figure 1.6). Medieval cosmographers would also divide each zone into seven small climates (‘climes’) based on the duration of the longest day of the year (summer solstice). Evelyn Edson mentions that even

206 Ibid., 732.

207 According to Mauro, “given that this part is more elevated than the surface of the water, it results that the said measurements of the earth are greater or at least equal to that of the circumference of the water.” Ibid., 731, line 12.

208 Ibid., 732, line 1.

209 Figure 1.7 Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. d’Orville 77, fol. 100r, Germany, c. 1000. Accessible at: bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl-1-1-38279-111583:Commentary–on–Cicero–s–Somnium–Scip For another classical source, see Capella Martianus, Capella Martianus and the Seven Liberal Arts *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).


211 The word klima (plural klimata) means an “inclination, referring to the angle between the axis of the celestial spheres and the horizon.” See Cattaneo, *Mauro’s Mappa Mundi*, 106–07.
though “the concept was known and passed on in geographical texts, ‘climes’ rarely appeared on Western European maps until the revival of Ptolemy” in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{212} The inclusion of a zonal map in Fra Mauro’s mappamundi therefore reflects Ptolemy’s impact. In fact, the legend goes on to list the corresponding climates for each zone. It identifies the northern parallel (extremely cold), northern temperate (moderately warm), torrid (extremely hot), southern temperate (moderately warm), and southern parallel (extremely cold).

\textsuperscript{212} Edson and Savage–Smith, \textit{Medieval Views of the Cosmos}, 53.
One dominant position, initiated by Macrobius, held that environmental factors rendered the torrid zone naturally uninhabitable. Proponents viewed the “frigid and torrid zones were too cold and too hot, respectively, to support human life, which meant that all humans must live within the temperate zones.” Human civilization could only thrive in temperate climates, that is, within Mediterranean latitudes. According to Cattaneo, by late antiquity cosmographers

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affirmed that the central zone (perusta zona), delimited by the Tropics, with the equator at its center, was uninhabitable because of the unbearable heat of the sun’s rays, which in this area were almost always perpendicular to the surface of the earth.\(^{214}\)

As subsequent chapters will show, Columbus and Las Casas would use hemispheric descriptors to configure the nature of Amerindian and African peoples. By defining natural capacities, their position ‘under the sun’ would determine their colonial identity. And Fra Mauro’s map offers an early glimpse of the extent to which climate played a factor in configuring the nature of place.

The idea of a populated southern hemisphere appeared to threaten a central Christian doctrine: homogenesis. Edson explains that even if medieval cosmographers “were willing to believe such lands existed, they did not think they could possibly be inhabited.”\(^{215}\) In the *City of God*, Augustine “dismissed such an idea as mere ‘scientific conjecture’” because if “all men were descended from Adam and the intervening ocean was impassable, how then could these lands have been populated”?\(^{216}\) In this way, the tropics constitute a natural ‘space of death,’ creating a border for human migration. The torrid zone therefore functions as a migratory barrier because its solar rays formed an impassable band of heat along the equator, that is, the belt of the tropics.\(^{217}\)

Mauro refutes these views on two grounds. First, based on first-hand accounts, he rejects the idea that the torrid zone creates a natural barrier. As previously mentioned, Mauro knew the reports of Portuguese explorers. The mappamundi, in fact, refers to Gomes Eanes’ venture beyond Cape Bojador (modern day Western Sahara), which occurred in 1434. Second, Mauro mentions

\(^{214}\) Cattaneo, *Mauro’s Mappa Mundi*, 106.

\(^{215}\) Edson and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, 52.


\(^{217}\) Edson and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, 52.
that if the “earth below the Equator is habitable; in that part, in fact, there is no heat such as would prevent human settlement. This can be deduced and proved by simple reasoning.”\textsuperscript{218} Mauro reasons that if tropical heat affects the planet’s surface equally, then regions situated equidistant from the equator would exhibit similar environments. Thus, if the northern temperate zone is populated, then it is plausible for the southern temperate zone to be populated as well. No natural cause would prevent human being from living below the tropic of Capricorn.\textsuperscript{219} His reasoning raises a theological question that would eventually be echoed by Las Casas: why would God create vast territories only to leave them empty? For Portuguese slave-traders, however, the assurance of a populated southern hemisphere would arouse colonialist desires.

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\item \textsuperscript{218} Falchetta, \textit{Mauro’s World Map}, 732, line 2.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Medieval scholars commonly described the torrid zone as “uninhabitable and impassable and the two polar or frigid zones are equally uninviting.” Ibid., 732, line 15.
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1.6 On Earthly Paradise

Fra Mauro’s fourth and final legend, On Earthly Paradise (lower left corner), depicts the biblical story of Creation. From the outset, Mauro identifies Paradise as both a physical and spiritual space. He describes it as a “real place on the earth” pregnant with “spiritual meaning.” Mauro agrees with Augustine, Bede, Lombard, and Albertus, who all locate it in the East. Its specific location, however, remains uncertain because it “is far from all human settlements and knowledge,” outside the oikumene. Isolation from civilization renders its whereabouts a mystery.

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220 Ibid., 729, line 2.
221 Ibid., 729, line 3.
And so, by placing the image of Paradise in the margins, “Mauro arrived at an effective solution for the theological subtlety of a paradise on earth that was simultaneously not part of the oikumene, but which was an integral part of the story of creation and was thus a part of the macro-space of cosmography and cosmology.” Notably, Mauro justifies its marginal location by suggesting that oceanic exploration may produce knowledge of its whereabouts. In this way, Fra Mauro describes Discovery as a sacred endeavor.

An analysis of the legend reveals how Fra Mauro envisions Paradise as masculine space. The legend's text briefly recounts how God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to live in a ‘state of innocence’ (devoid of sin). Rather than eating from the Tree of Life, Mauro says, Adam disobeys God by consuming the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam’s transgression ushers Original Sin into Creation. Notably, however, Mauro omits Eve’s participation. It may be tempting to dismiss this gendered overdetermination by claiming that ‘Adam’ represents the entire human race. Yet this rebuttal lacks support since it deviates from Scripture and the illustration. First, the legend’s text contrast with the biblical narrative in which Eve plays a vital role. Also, if the reference to Adam encompasses both sexes, then why would the miniature depict male and female figures? Bellini’s painting, therefore, effectively undermines the universal application of Adam.

The legend’s theology of salvation also construes Paradise as masculine space. Mauro insists that mankind’s sinful condition must be eradicated in the place where it began—

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Men are the only ones that participate in his account. Mauro recalls the Hebrew stories of Enoch and Elijah, two male prophets, who were physically carried to Paradise and transported to heaven. This gendered reading, which also applies to the Triduum (i.e. Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday), entails a movement through space. According to Mauro, “the souls of the Holy Fathers” await the Messiah’s arrival in a state of Limbo. And so, the Word of God took on flesh and suffered death “to obtain possession of the place of beatitude, which he had opened to men by means of his Passion.”

And thus, after Christ died on the cross the soul of our Redeemer, united with God, descended into Limbo until the day of his Resurrection; and that the Fathers were freed from the bonds of Original Sin and placed in this Paradise until the day of Ascension, as St. Augustine says in his sermon De passione Domini.

Here Fra Mauro provides a gloss on the apostolic proclamation, “he descended to the dead,” which points to the spatial dimensions of salvation. Christ’s descent into Limbo—movement from a

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224 The term “mankind” is used intentionally to highlight the masculine presupposition in the text.

225 Mauro references several Hebrew Scriptures: “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.” Genesis 5:24. The reference, presumably from Ecclesiastes, “Few have ever been created on earth like Enoch, for he was taken up from the earth,” actually comes from Sirach 49:14. “Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal...As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.” II Kings 2:1 & 11. Although not referenced by Mauro, another text worth noting reads, “David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven.” I Maccabees 2:57–58.

226 Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 730, line 8.

227 Ibid., 730, line 10, emphasis added.

228 Ibid., 730, line 8.

higher to a lower place— earns “for men entrance into the paradise of the blessed.”

230 By gaining possession over Paradise, a physical space with spiritual meaning, Christ provides humanity with access to beatitude. Theologically speaking, Christ charts humanity’s path back to the Father. 

231 As the next chapter will show, Columbus would employ a similar rhetoric to describe his claims of possession over the New World. Columbus, however, saw the Indies as an earthly paradise that symbolized feminine, rather than masculine, space. Discovery would construe ‘America’ as virgin land, ripe for the taking.

Fra Mauro draws from Patristic theology to explain the geographic allocation of water. The miniature depicts a sole source water springing forth from the center of the garden. The water then branches into four separate rivers. In the legend, Mauro assigns a name and region to each one: the Ganges in India, the Tigris and Euphrates in Armenia, and the Ghion (or Nile) in Ethiopia.

232 Real bodies of water emerge from Paradise. Returning to the illustration, the rivers flow out of the garden and into a mountainous landscape. Then they reappear as a single stream on the other side of the mountains. The stream then circles back to encircle Paradise (see Figure 1.9). By including these four rivers in the planisphere, Mauro directly links the legend to the planisphere. Yet this geographic distribution presents Mauro with a scientific problem: how can rivers, separated by vast distances, originate from the same source? He responds by deferring to

230 Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 730, line 10. For late medieval Catholics, the “miseries of purgatory continued to be feared; anniversary masses continued to be endowed; the exercise of charity continued to embrace not only the living but also the dead.” See Francis Oakley, The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 121.


232 See Falchetta, Mauro’s World Map, 730, line 13.
Augustine. Mauro explains that “these rivers, whose sources are known to us, are linked by underground routes, running through many regions and then coming to the surface in different places.” Rather than rejecting Patristic authority, Mauro draws on it to explain the global allocation of water. This application of Patristic authority bolsters the convergence of scientific and theological knowledge. Fra Mauro integrates both in the mappamundi.

1.7 Conclusion

Chapter One examined the structure of medieval cosmology by identifying the role of motion and hierarchy in Fra Mauro’s World Map and its multiple sources. I traced the way in which medieval cosmology, rooted in natural philosophy, organized the physical universe according to hierarchical laws of motion and causation. I showed how Christian Aristotelianism, as a conceptual framework, enabled Fra Mauro to determine the earth’s size, habitation, and climate by considering the movement of the planets. Ultimately, Fra Mauro conceptualizes the natural hierarchy of the cosmos as part of God’s design.

This chapter sought to dispel the lingering shadow of the Black Legend by showing how medieval cosmology comprised empirical knowledge and Christian theology. Contrary to secularist readings, which disregard its religious dimensions, I outline the way in which Fra Mauro incorporates science and theology to cast a comprehensive vision of the natural world. To do so, I focus on the four corner legends: On Sun and Lunar Effects, On the Cosmic Order, On Climate Theory, and On Earthly Paradise. Through a detailed study of their images and

233 Ibid. See also Augustine, Literal Meaning of Genesis.
corresponding texts, I expose the correlation between the planisphere and the legends. Rather than dismissing the legends because of their marginal location, I explain how and why they are crucial to understanding Fra Mauro’s overarching worldview and therefore to interpret his map.

In addition to situating the mappamundi tradition within its Renaissance context, Chapter One also outlined its increasingly political role. As discussed, mappaemundi helped further the interests of Venetian governments and Iberian empires by providing an epistemic tool for geographic expansion. Nevertheless, Fra Mauro’s geography remained a point of contestation for several decades. In fact, historian of science Nicolás Wey Gómez comments that Columbus and his adversaries would continue to disagree on “whether the spheres of earth and water configured an open or closed geographical system.”234 In the wake of 1492, Iberian empires expressed heightened interest in cartography. The pressing question concerned the habitability of the Global South. According to Wey Gómez, “what ultimately lay at stake in this second disagreement between Columbus and his detractors was the nature of the lower latitudes of the globe we know today as the belt of the tropics.”235 With support from the Spanish Crown, mapmakers and theologians would calibrate the spatial and juridical limits of empire.

As subsequent chapters address, the hemispheric location of the Indies would directly inform the inferiority ascribed to Amerindian peoples. However, to understand adequately how a vision of the natural order shaped the early Iberian Atlantic, it is necessary to consider how scholastics construed religious and racial difference in late medieval Iberia. As we will see,

234 Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire*, III.

235 Ibid., III. “Columbus’s detractors also cited the theory of the five zones in arguing that the lonely island of the earth was itself besieged to the north and south by the intolerable cold and heat of the frigid and torrid zones. By contrast, Columbus and his supporters argue that the inhabited world generally extended not just farther east and west than some believed but also farther north and south, into the allegedly inhospitable regions of the globe.”
discourse on blood purity would establish a social hierarchy by racializing Jews and Muslim bodies. Iberian Christians would racialize religious identity and map dominion over the tropics by deploying the scholastic tradition. The subsequent chapter turns to examine this process.
CHAPTER 2:
MAPPING RACE AND SPACE ACROSS THE IBERIAN ATLANTIC
This bio-power was, without question, an indispensable element in the development of capitalism...If the development of the great instruments of the state...ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomobiopolitics...They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.

—Michel Foucault²³⁶

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

—Psalms 2:8²³⁷

Columbus’ deployment of the concept of idolater within the terms of his triple aims: (1) that of converting all non-Christians in preparation for the second coming of Christ, 2) that of expropriating their terra nullius to the State in the context of its this-worldly goal, and 3) that of legitimately enslaving the new peoples, and exacting tribute from others in order to ensure his financial backers a return on their investments and by the way to secure his own financial situation can therefore be seen as part of the transformational process by which the West ‘secularized’ the religious model of the Judeo-Christian true-self.

—Sylvia Wynter²³⁸


²³⁷ “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” Psalm 2:6–8 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One outlined the structure of late medieval cosmology. I detailed how hierarchy and motion order the scholastic conception of the natural world. By analyzing a mappamundi commissioned by the Portuguese Crown and produced by Fra Mauro in the mid-fifteenth century, Chapter One examined the cosmographic tradition Columbus inherited. Drawing inspiration from Christian cosmographers like Fra Mauro, Columbus would exploit the idea of an inhabited hemisphere to the south. And before the turn of the century, Columbus would venture ‘south–by–southwest’ into the belt of the tropics.239

The year 1492 would introduce the modern/colonial world–system. As postcolonial theologian Catherine Keller remarks, the “rise of the capitalist world economy is directly indebted to the native peoples and the silver, gold, and resources their slave labor yielded for Europe. The new heaven and earth of which Colón was the messenger would liberate Europeans not from private property but for its limitless pursuit.”240 Indeed, Columbus’ so–called Discovery would dispossess las Indias Occidentales (the West Indies) on behalf of God and Crown. And although straining the limits of medieval geography, Columbus’ Discovery would reinforce northern systems of knowledge. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Iberian cartographers would

239 Before the second voyage (1493–1496), the Spanish Crown encouraged Columbus to venture farther south. “The Catholic Monarchs noted that during their conversations with the Portuguese ambassadors sent to negotiate with Castile the possibility had been mentioned that the Atlantic space now divided between Portugal and Castile might harbor numerous islands — or even an continent—all of which might be richer and most profitable than the ones Columbus had discovered on the first voyage, precisely because they were ‘in the part of the sun,’ (en la parte del sol)” as in the belt of the tropics. Wey Gómez, Tropics of Empire, 22. (emphasis in original text); See also Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, La historia general y natural de las Indias 1.9 (1535, 12v–13v).

map the Americas as the fourth continent and incorporate it into a tripartite world populated by
Noah’s descendants.241 A theological geography would, in effect, configure the nature of empire.

Chapter Two engages scholarly debates about the way Iberian empires conceptualized
race, religion, and space in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. First, I respond to an
account posited by decolonial scholars. I engage religious studies scholar Nelson Maldonado-
Torres’ account on the emergence of race and religion in modernity.242 In his assessment, the
Columbian Enterprise introduces a “new regime” of difference “based more on degrees of being
than on degrees of truth or falsity.”243 According to Maldonado-Torres,

Upon having judged the indigenous as subjects ‘without religion,’ Columbus had
altered the medieval idea regarding the ‘chain of being’ and had made it possible to
think of the ‘condemned’ no longer in exclusively Christian and theological terms,
but rather in terms that were modern and anthropological.244

By construing Amerindians as people ‘without religion’ and therefore ‘without a soul,’ Columbus
transforms them into dehumanized racial subjects. Maldonado-Torres contends that Iberian
purity of blood discourse (limpieza de sangre), which scrutinized Muslim and Jewish converts, “still
did not constitute a properly racist mentality, since the humanity of the subjects in question was
taken for granted, and all that was in doubt was their political and religious loyalty. The lack of

241 My language here borrows from Enrique Dussel. “Modernity is a world phenomenon,
commencing with the simultaneous constitution of Spain with reference to its periphery, Amerindia,
including the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru. At the same time, Europe, with diachronic precedents in
Renaissance Italy and Portugal, proceeds to establish itself as the center managing a growing periphery.”
Enrique D. Dussel, The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity, trans. Michael D.
Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995) (emphasis in original text).

242 See Maldonado-Torres, “Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Modern/Colonial World”; see also
Ethics 42, no. 4 (2014); Maldonado-Torres draws from Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,”


244 Ibid., 651.
such cleanliness of blood reveals one as a potential traitor or enemy, but not as a member of another species or as a formal exception from the human.”

Likewise, ethnic studies scholar Ramón Grosfoguel rejects blood purity discourse as properly racial because it focuses on whether subjects practice the “wrong religion” or worship the “wrong God.” Since conversion remained an option for Jews and Muslims, he claims, their humanity was essentially left intact. On similar grounds, decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo contends, “if Jews and Moors were classified according to their belief in the wrong God,” then in the New World, “Indians (and later black Africans) had to be classified as having no religion.” I will show how these conclusions misunderstand the way in which religious and racial difference was conceived in the Iberian Atlantic.

In late medieval Iberia, Old Christians developed blood purity discourse to identify and exclude conversos and moriscos as New Christians, who would, they assumed, contaminate the Christian body politic. This chapter shows how Iberian scholastics racialized religious identity by linking it to sexual reproduction. I concur with David Nirenberg who notes that all “racisms are attempts to ground discriminations, whether social, economic, or religious, in biology and

245 Ibid., 646.

246 “The social classification used at the time was related to a theological question about having the ‘wrong God’ or the ‘wrong religion’ to stratify society along religious lines. In sum, what is important here is that the ‘purity of blood’ discourse used in the conquest of Al-Andalus was a form of religious discrimination that was not yet fully racist because it did not question in a profound way the humanity of its victims.” Grosfoguel, “Structure of Knowledge,” 78–79.

247 Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” Rereading the Black Legend, 316. “Unlike the imperial hierarchy which placed Christians above Jews and Moors, the colonial hierarchy between Iberians, Indians and blacks was devoid of religion.” According to Mignolo, “religion is a non-existing entity and so Spaniards and Portuguese in the New World become the substitute for Christians in the Iberian Peninsula.” Ibid., 318. For a thorough analysis of how Iberians became white in the New Spain in the eighteenth century, see Santiago Castro-Gómez, La Hybris del Punto Cero: Ciencia, Raza e Ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750–1816), 2nd ed. (2010).
reproduction. All claim a congruence of ‘cultural’ categories with ‘natural’ ones.” Blood purity discourse is racial because it ties religious identity to the body. Decolonial scholars cited above seem to repeat a secularist tendency that either minimizes or misconstrues the true impact of Christian theology. Yet what does purity of blood have to do with the mapping of space?

Chapter Two address this question by examining the racial logic that undergirds the dispossession of the tropics. I will engage Willie Jennings, who observes that in the age of discovery “land and body are connected at the intersection of European imagination and expansion.” Jennings, however, mistakenly situates the emergence of race within the supposed vacuum left by a waning geography. Jennings claims that an imagined geography diminished in strength as a more authentic and accurate geography emerged. The scale of existence, however, with white (unharmed) flesh at the one end and black (harmed) flesh at the other, grew in power precisely in the space created by Portuguese [and Spanish] expansion into new lands.

Columbus, Alexander VI, and Iberian mapmakers, working on behalf of the Spanish crown, would reconfigure land and bodies according to a Christian cosmology. Rather than diminishing in force, a scholastic conception of the world, fueled by Aristotelian Thomism, would calibrate race and space across the Atlantic. Indeed, a theological geography would provide the architecture for the demarcation of imperial boundaries and simultaneously racialize tropical bodies. In the Americas, as we will see, hemispheric location plays a much more significant role in the formation of race than the idea of people ‘without religion.’

Chapter Two argues that Iberian empires map dominion over the tropics by employing a scholastic vision of creation that undergirds the racial discourses that construe Jewish and

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248 Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” Rereading the Black Legend, 75.
249 Jennings, Christian Imagination, 24.
250 Ibid.
Muslim bloodlines as natural impediments to authentic Christian conversion. In other words, a theological view of the natural order not only racialized religious identity but it also reconfigured the tropics into colonial space. Chapter Two carries out this argument in two sections.

Section I examines the emergence of purity of blood discourse (limpieza de sangre) in late-medieval Iberia, with a specific focus on 1350–1492. Building on María Elena Martínez and David Nirenberg’s scholarship, I argue that Iberian discourse on blood purity racialized religion by linking heretical behavior to sexual reproduction. Section I examines the regulation of religious boundaries in Lateran IV and the Council of Basil to show how medieval Catholicism enacts a form of what Michel Foucault calls “bio-power.” Ultimately, ecclesial pronouncements establish a precedent for the racial imaginary that reconfigured ‘Old Christian’ status into a natural outcome of pure bloodlines.

Turning to the final decades of the fifteenth century, Section I address the way racial ideology gained force through the investigatory methods of the Spanish Inquisition. It explains how the Holy Office investigated ‘proof of faith’ (probanzas de fe) as a way of eradicating the Jewish trace from the Christian body politic. Section I focuses on Jews and conversos, rather than on Muslim and moriscos, to highlight the way Israelite supersessionism—the rejection of Jewish particularity—configures the supremacy of Christendom. Lastly, Section I delineates how the

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conversion, deportation, or execution of virtually all non-Christians from the Iberian Peninsula laid the foundation for a capitalist world-system by galvanizing the Columbian Enterprise.252

Shifting to the transatlantic world, Section II analyzes the demarcation of tropical space. After providing background on fifteenth-century Iberian conflicts, this section examines the theological dimensions of the Treaty of Alcáçovas signed by Spain and Portugal in 1480. Section II illuminates a foundational moment of early capitalism by showing how Alcáçovas shifts the axis of the global economy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Through a close reading of Columbus’ charter, his journal entries, and royal correspondence, Section II outlines the way Spain articulates hemispheric expansion as a plan for universal salvation.

Section II builds on feminist critiques of possession by exposing the natural theology that informs Columbus’ discourse on desire. It shows how Columbus reconfigures the tropics into mysterious feminine space by invoking a patriarchal view of nature rooted in the scholastic tradition. And finally, Section II examines the mapping of imperial boundaries. It considers how Alexander VI’s papal bulls (1493) and the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) provide the conceptual foundation for the scientific cartography sponsored by the House of Trade (Casa de Contratación). In this way, Chapter Two narrates how Iberian empires map racial and geopolitical hierarchies as natural facets of the created order.

252 Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 317. “Racism, in other words, is not a question of blood or skin color but of a discursive classification entrenched in the foundation of modern/colonial (and capitalist) empires.”
2.2 Racializing Religious Identity

Late Medieval Antecedents

From the ninth to the fifteenth century, Iberia exhibited one of the most diverse populations in western Europe. In general, scholars have characterized the peninsula’s Abrahamic traditions as either harmonious or adversarial. Advocates of the former view underscore long periods of cultural exchange among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, a controversial approach known as *convivencia* (living together). In addition to lauding a Jewish ‘Golden Age,’ *convivencia* proponents also represent Al-Andalus under the Islamic Umayyad dynasty as a place where ‘people of the Book’ (*dhimmi*)—meaning Jews and Christians—could peacefully co-exist along with Muslims. Yet whatever harmony existed in the early and high Middle Ages came to a halt by the 1400s.

In celebrating Iberia’s religio-cultural hybridity, *convivencia* proponents overlook a crucial factor. These scholars tend to diminish the impact of religious persecution and the way it

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materializes throughout the Atlantic. If, as Nirenberg contends, the birth of the Spanish monarchy entailed “massacre, segregation, conversion, Inquisition, and expulsion” of its Arab and Semitic populations, then its Atlantic empire would reasonably reflect such dynamics.  

Building on Nirenberg’s insight, Section I illuminates the theological dimensions of blood purity discourse. In doing so, it shows how Spain’s solidified its imperial power by racializing religious difference.

Iberian elites began reconfiguring religious identity around the mid-fourteenth century. Christendom’s borders fluctuated throughout the late Middle Ages. And in this context, Castilian and Aragonese writers, legislators, and ecclesial authorities—those who controlled dominant discourse—began using notions of purity to conceptualize social deviants: heretics, witches, Jews, Muslims, prostitutes, homosexuals, and lepers. Eventually, this discourse encompassed recent Jewish converts (conversos) and Muslim converts (moriscos) to Christianity. Nirenberg observes that by “the early fifteenth century ‘raza,’ casta,’ and ‘linaje’ were part of a complex of interchangeable terms that linked both behavior and appearance to nature and reproduction.” And so, purity discourse would emerge from this cultural milieu stepped in the scholastic tradition. “This naturalization of a religious-cultural identity,” as Martínez argues, “coincided with the emergence of a lexicon consisting of terms such as race (raza), caste (casta),

256 Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” Rereading the Black Legend, 75


258 After the fall of the Córdova caliphate in 1031, Aragon’s realm doubled in size and its Muslim population tripled during the reign of James the Conqueror (r. 1213–1276). See Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 22–24.

259 Richards, Sex, Dissidents, and Damnation.

260 Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” Rereading the Black Legend, 77. Nirenberg refers to Guiterre Diez de Games, who in 1435 explained treason as an outcome of Jewish lineage.
and lineage (linaje) that was informed by popular notions regarding biological reproduction in the natural world and, in particular, horse breeding.”

Iberian Christians would conceptualize religious identity as an immutable condition transmitted through blood. In this way, a scholastic understanding of nature, grounded in a Thomist view of the natural world, would help formulate racism in the West. And as subsequent chapters discuss, this ideology would influence the racial divisions of labor in colonial Spanish America (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4).

In the late medieval context, the rise of religious persecution would coincide with major shifts in Europe’s economy. Western Europe began transitioning from an exchange to a monetary system around the thirteenth century, which in turn precipitated the modern banking industry.

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262 “The point, in short, is that words like raza and linaje (and their conjugates in the various Iberian romance languages) were already embedded in identifiable biological ideas about breeding and reproduction in the first half of the fifteenth century.” Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 79.

263 “Nevertheless the genealogical turn was taken, and it proved to be one of extraordinary power. The reasons for its success are many and complex, but one which should not be underestimated is the power of its appeal to medieval ‘common knowledge’ about nature.” Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 81.

264 Since birth ultimately determined caste, status was ascribed rather than earned. In the colonial context, terms such as generación or calidad were oftentimes used in place of raza or casta. See Laura Lewis, “Between Casta and Raza: The Example of Colonial Mexico,” in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, 104.

Secular law generally banned Christians from working in the banking industry because charging interest conflicted with biblical teaching against usury. Since secular law did not apply to non-Christians, Jews were widely permitted and, in fact, encouraged to work as moneylenders.266 Yet by serving in that capacity, Jews acquired a negative reputation, as Christian regularly accused them of amassing wealth through exploitive lending practices. Food shortages, poor harvests, and the Black Death heightened political unrest during this period.267 The association of Jews with financial misfortune instilled resentment among the French, English, and Spanish merchant–class, especially during such times of economic hardship.268

Religious tensions escalated when Christian residents in Castile and Aragon began protesting what modern historians consider a rebellion against the crown’s centralizing policies.269 Jews that worked in the financial sector were responsible for collecting taxes on behalf of the crown. And after a wave of anti-Jewish persecution, monarchs would oftentimes lay claim to the debts owed to local moneylenders.270 In turn, Christians from the urban upper-classes

266 “Lastly, we decree that the Jews be compelled by the same punishment (avoidance of commercial intercourse) to make satisfaction for the tithes and offerings due to the churches, which the Christians were accustomed to supply from their houses and other possessions before these properties, under whatever title, fell into the hands of the Jews, that thus the churches may be safeguarded against loss,” canon 67. See Henry Kamen, The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Benzion Netanyahu, Toward the Inquisition: Essays on Jewish and Converso History in Late Medieval Spain (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

267 Greer, Mignolo, and Quilligan, “Introduction,” Rereading the Black Legend, 11.


269 Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 43–51.

expressed frustration, claiming that Jews unfairly benefitted from royal protection, access to circles of power, and control over financial institutions. Responding to pressure from social elites, King of Castile Enrique II (1334–1379) granted monarchical support to “a series of anti-Jewish lawsuits in the cortes of Burgos.”

Blood purity discourse, therefore,

broadly intertwined [with] changes in class hierarchy, legitimation, and state building that constituted the consolidation of state power in these centuries [and in turn] underlay the imposition of ideological control and the persecution of groups such as lepers, heretics, and Jews.

The year 1391 marked a pivotal moment as popular segments began expressing anti-Jewish sentiment through public violence. Large crowds rioted in Sevilla, Córdoba, Valencia, Toledo, Ciudad Real, and Barcelona; protestors destroyed Jewish property and, in some cases, even executed residents in public space. It is unclear who incited the masses. Clear is, however, that by the turn of the century, Iberian Jews inhabited a paradoxical state of existence. They had become targets of systemic exclusion and popular violence while at the same time remaining necessary to the social order.

Widespread persecution drove thousands of Jews into the Roman Catholic Church, raising suspicions about new converts. At least theoretically, conversion would help them achieve a degree of acceptance. Ironically, however, mass conversion had the opposite result. Cultural theorist Max Hering Torres explains that “forced assimilation ensured a process of socio-cultural

273 Kamen, Spanish Inquisition, 28–65.
camouflaging” that ultimately rendered Jewishness “invisible.” Fernando II (1452–1516) and Isabel I (1451–1504) expressed this concern. In the Letter on the Inquisition (1480), the royals declare that “despite receiving the sacrament of baptism and being baptized,” many “apostates, heretics, and confessos” in our realm, regularly “turn and convert, to the sect, superstition, and faithlessness of the Jews.” The waters of baptism, apparently, left Jewishness, as their true nature, intact. Such notions thus lay the theological framework to imagine religious identity as an immutable characteristic.

Furthermore, the idea of heresy as a genealogical condition gave limpieza de sangre a theological architecture. Iberian Jews and conversos had been widely associated with heinous acts ranging from ritual infanticide and demonic allegiance to Eucharistic desecration and the promulgation of disease. Without question, the most severe indictment was deicide: the execution of Christ. Yet these stereotypes stemmed from a physical condition. For instance, the Castilian historian Andrés Bernáldez (1450–1513) insisted that Jews exhibit “perpetual blindness,” for deceived “by the false book of the Talmud,” they refuse to “listen to the truth” of

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276 “Desde la muerte de Alexandre acá nunca traición se hizo que no fuese judío o su linaxe,” Gutierre Díaz de Gámez, El Victoria, (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1940), 17. For an example from the discipline of art history, see Sara Lipton, “The Temple is My Body: Gender, Carnality, and Synagoga in the Bible Maralisée,” in Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other: Visual Representation and Jewish–Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, ed. Eva Frojmovic, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
277 Richards, Sex, Dissidents, and Damnation, 89–92.
the gospel. Their refusal to recognize Jesus as Messiah weakened ecclesial authority, and in doing so threatened Christendom’s foundation. For this reason, Bernáldez proposes an extreme measure: every Jew should be burned “until none is left, not even their children,” especially “if they were infected by the same leprosy” of heresy. This sadistic analogy implies that inability to see the truth of Christian doctrine (‘blindness’) is spread through natural causes. Like a disease, the ‘faithlessness of the Jews’ is transmitted through impure bloodlines. On such grounds, incinerating Jewish flesh would impede the spread of contamination from infecting the Christian body politic.

Yet because of the historic ties to Judaism and proximity to actual Jews, Iberian Christians expressed a troubling ambivalence towards Israelite existence. Jewish bodies represented an “anterior” (temporal) and “interior” (physical) marker of alterity—a negation of Christian-ness. King Alfonso X ‘the Wise’ (1221–1284) captures this notion in the legal treatise Siete Partidas. In it, Alfonso declares that

the reason the Church, emperors, kings, and other princes permitted the Jews to reside among Christians is this: that they might live forever as in captivity and serve as a reminder to mankind that they are descended from those who crucified Our Lord Jesus Christ.

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278 Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood,” in Race and Blood in the Iberian World, 17 footnote 22. According to Hering Torres, some Spaniards considered the Jewish disbelief as a curse that resulted from Christ’s crucifixion.

279 Ibid., 17.

280 See Boyarin, Unconverted Self.


A Jewish presence, therefore, serves a dual function. First, their subjugated status (captivity) confirms the superiority of Christianity, which is confirmed by history. Second, Jewish bodies bear witness to the implications of bloodlines. By connecting the crucifixion to ‘descent,’ Alfonso suggests that opposition to Christ derives from nature, that is, impure blood. In due time, this idea would undergird Iberia’s global aspirations. Regarding Christendom’s universal impulse, intellectual historian Jonathan Boyarin observes that “Christian thought, rhetoric, symbolism, narrative, and doctrine have all been profoundly shaped by the tension between the Church’s assertion of itself as the true Israel and the desire to become at last fully Christian precisely by expunging the Jewish trace from each Christian body and from the universal body of Christ.”283 Boyarin captures the way Israelite supersessionism—the notion that Christ’s body (the church) has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people—undergirds imperial expansion. By replacing Israel with the church, Iberian Christians effectively made themselves God’s mediators for the world. Notably, this theological vision justifies their need to identify any ‘Jewish trace’ and expunge it from the body politic.284

Iberian efforts to remap religious boundaries occur within broader geopolitical shifts. The advance of North African Berbers into Al-Andalus, as well as the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate, forced countless Jews and mozárabes (Christians residing in Islamic territories) to migrate into historically Christian provinces.285 Because of their linguistic and administrative skills, recent Jewish immigrants were, to a certain degree, accepted by Castilian and Aragonese authorities. Rather than becoming vassals under regional lords, Jews came under the direct

283 Boyarin, Unconverted Self, vii; emphasis added.
284 See Nirenberg, Communities of Violence.
285 See Greer, Mignolo, and Quilligan, “Introduction,” Rereading the Black Legend, 11.
authority of the king. As such, they paid taxes directly to the crown, counted on it for protection, and, in many cases, served as official accountants, physicians, ambassadors, and translators in the courts. Comprising about five percent of the total population, urban Jews were forced to wear distinctive clothing and relegated to live in separate quarters called juderías. This dynamic culminated with the Decree of Expulsion of 1492. In it, the Catholic kings “ordered the separation of those Jews in all the cities, towns, and places in our kingdoms and domains, creating separate places for the Jews, hoping that with this separation the problem [of apostasy] would be solved.” This decree illuminates the extent to which the crown sought to configure its body politic around distinct religious identities. Although the Spanish crown and its allies took deliberate steps to demarcate religious difference and to expunge the ‘Jewish trace,’ they were not alone. The executive council of the Roman Catholic Church also contributed to the racialization of religious difference.

The Fourth Lateran Council (Lateran IV) articulates a theological precedent for Iberian blood purity discourse. In 1215, Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), ‘the greatest of medieval popes,’

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286 “In an economy of violence fragmented by boundaries of religious and legal status the Crown was more successful in controlling violence against Jews and defining the challenges within which such violence flowed than it was in the case of Muslims or Christians.” Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 37.


290 Roman Catholic Church upholds a total of twenty-one councils: Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (450), Constantinople II (553), Constantinople III (680–681), Nicaea II (780), Constantinople IV (869–870), Lateran I (1123), Lateran II (1139), Lateran III (1179), Lateran IV (1215), Lyon I (1245), Lyon II (1274), 15th Ecumenical Council (1311), 16th Ecumenical Council (1409), 17th
convened “more than 400 archbishops and bishops, including the Latin patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem,” as well as the “delegates of those of Alexandria and Antioch.”

The Roman Catholic Church considers Lateran IV, the Twelfth Ecumenical Council, to be of primary importance. Its aim was to offer a response to the heresy of the Cathars, a heterodox sect that had gained popular influence in southern France and northern Italy. Lateran IV condemns the Cathars on theological grounds because, as intellectual descendants of Manichaeism, their philosophy and ascetic practices rejected the goodness of the body. In the end, the council authored a document containing 71 canons, that became the Lateran Creed of 1215 (De fide catholica). With it, the council “renewed the Crusades, forbade the establishment of new monastic orders, required annual sacramental confession, reformed criminal procedures, and officially announced the dogma of transubstantiation.” Such a robust doctrinal orthodoxy was only part of what Caroline Walker Bynum calls an “extraordinary concern” with “boundaries, Ecumenical Council (1433), 18th Ecumenical Council [Lateran V] (1512–1517), Trent (1545–1547; 1562–1563), Vatican I (1869–1870), Vatican II (1959–1965).

291 Glazier and Hellwig, Modern Catholic Encyclopedia, 260 and 352.

292 Of the twenty-one ecumenical councils, five are of considerable importance: Lateran I (1123), Lateran II (1139), Lateran III (1179), Lateran IV (1215), 18th Ecumenical Council [Lateran V] (1512–1517); see ibid., 350–355. The question “is a council above a pope?” was contested throughout church history. As Wilhelm points out, “The Councils of Constance and of Basle affirmed with great emphasis that an Ecumenical council is superior in authority to the pope, and French theologians have adopted that proposition as one of the famous four Gallican Liberties.” See Joseph Wilhelm, “General Councils,” in The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, ed. Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee, Special ed., 18 vols., vol. 4 (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), XII.

293 Knights of Columbus, Catholic Encyclopedia, 356.

294 The Lateran Creed states, “Jesus’ body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been transubstantiated, by God’s power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us.” See Pelikan and Hotchkiss, Creeds and Confessions of Faith, 741–742.

295 Boyarin, Unconverted Self, 28; see footnotes 41–44.
definitions, self–definitions, and classifications” by which medieval Christianity articulated its identity. In this context, Christendom vacillated between a universal imperative of salvation, on the one hand, and the desire for a unified doctrine, on the other.

Yet to achieve this required more than mere theological formulation: In the interests of protecting Christian orthodoxy, the council attempted to regulate sexual reproduction as well. Lateran IV thus enacts a scholastic version of ‘bio–power’ by regulating sexual boundaries. Canon 68, for instance, decries widespread miscegenation caused by religious ambiguity. The Lateran Creed states:

Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.

By demanding that ‘secular princes’ enforce the visual demarcation of religious and gender difference within their respective domains, the council introduces expulsion as a punishment. Foucault’s notion of bio–power captures the logic behind the hegemonic organization of sexuality. In an extended passage from The History of Sexuality, Foucault elaborates on what he describes as the institutional operation of power over life. He writes:


297 See Boyarin, Unconverted Self, 32–36.


299 “It was Innocent whose 1215 Lateran Council decreed the introduction of a distinguishing badge for Jews so that they could be recognized as different from and separate from Christians. Innocent introduced into the relationship between Papacy and Jews a contractual element, creating the possibility of their expulsion for breach of the contract.” Richards, Sex, Dissidents, and Damnation, 94.
The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology—anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed towards the performances of the body, with attention to the process of life—characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through. 300

Thus, requiring Jews and Saracens to wear distinctive clothing as a way of averting Christians from having ‘prohibited intercourse,’ became part of “an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio–politics of the population.” 301 Taking into consideration the policies outlined in the preceding and succeeding canon reveals the way in which sexuality forms part of a broader social vision. 302 Canon 67, for instance, insists that Jews should compensate the Catholic Church for all the ‘stolen’ tithes and offerings that resulted from their usury. And Canon 69 anticipates Iberian purity statues by prohibiting Jews from assuming any ‘public office.’

Religious concerns with purity discourse, which entailed regulating sexual boundaries between Christians and non–Christians, would ultimately reconfigure social hierarchies around a racial logic. The Ordinance on the Enclosure of the Jews and Moors, for instance, would

300 See the discussion on the “Right of Death and Power over Life,” in Foucault and Rabinow, The Foucault Reader, 262. “If the development of the great instruments of the state, as institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomy- and bio-politics...operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony,” 263.

301 Ibid., 263.

302 Canon 67 Summary: “Jews should be compelled to make satisfaction for the tithes and offerings to churches, which the Christians supplied before their properties fell into that of the Jews.” Canon 69 Summary: “Jews are not to be given public offices. Anyone instrumental in doing this is to be punished. A Jewish official is to be denied all intercourse with Christians.” Holy Land Decrees [canon 71] Summary: “A series of decrees dealing with the preparation of a crusade to the Holy Land.”
criminalize sexual intercourse between ‘people of the book.’\textsuperscript{303} The ordinance, signed in the city of Valladolid in the early 1400s, implements the policies delineated in the Lateran Creed of 1215. In this way, the medieval theology articulated by Lateran IV contributes to the racialization of religious difference which stratified Iberian society at the dawn of Atlantic exploration.

\textit{Naturalizing Blood Purity}

By the mid-fifteenth century, Iberian policies of religious exclusion began to be articulated using the discourse on blood purity. To understand its racial dimensions, it is crucial to recall that “all racisms are attempts to ground discriminations, whether social, economic, or religious, in biology and reproduction. All claim a congruence of ‘cultural’ categories with ‘natural’ ones.”\textsuperscript{304} Iberian elites would introduce, and contest, a series of laws known as purity statutes, which barred persons of ‘impure blood’ from assuming positions in financial, academic, and ecclesial institutions or from marrying into ‘Old Christian’ families.\textsuperscript{305} Soon thereafter military regiments, monastic orders, universities, juridical councils, and cathedral chapters began enforcing purity requirements. As the center of Castilian power, Toledo would play a pivotal role in this process.

Fifteenth-century Toledan statutes reveal the way in which Iberian Christians conceptualized religious identity in racial terms. \textit{Conversos}, who comprised almost a fifth of the population, had “gained positions in the church and the governing councils of Toledo as \textit{regidores...}
(city councilors) or jurados, members of a non-voting advisory council.” As a method of exclusion, the Archbishop of Toledo demanded that all Cathedral offices be occupied by “Old Christians without race [raza] of Jew, Moor, or heretics.” Possessing “impeccable, spotless or flawless” bloodlines, Old Christians were presumed to be devoid of racial contamination. Racial discourse appears in various Toledan sources that refer to Old Christians (cristianos viejos) as ‘natural’ Christians (cristianos de natura) or simply as the ‘pure ones’ (limpios). The implication being that heretical proclivities are naturally transmitted through impure blood.

Suspicious of Jewish and Muslim bloodlines, ‘natural’ Christians proposed a series of anti-Jewish and anti-converso policies. In one case, judicial authorities in Toledo convicted fourteen conversos of tax extortion, forcibly removing them from their official posts. Inspired by this event, members of the nobility authored the Toledo Decree of 1449. In it, they declared that the converts of Jewish lineage, for their suspect faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which they frequently spew forth lightheartedly while practicing Judaism, may not hold public or private office or benefices where they can cause injuries, insults or ill treatments to pure Old Christians [cristianos viejos lindos].

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308 Ibid., 16.
311 Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood,” Race and Blood in the Iberian World, 16; See Gamero, Historia de la Ciudad de Toledo, 1037.
To protect the natural rights of ‘pure Old Christians,’ the decree impedes converts from assuming ‘public or private office.’ In this regard, Toledo builds on Lateran IV, which commanded governments to obstruct Jews from overseeing commerce. Canon 67 declared: “if in the future under any pretext Jews extort from Christians oppressive and immoderate interest, the partnership of the Christians shall be denied them till they have made suitable satisfaction for their excesses.” An etymological analysis of the Toledo Decree exposes its racial dimensions. The word *lindo*, translated as “pure,” shares a root with *limpio*, which means “clean or clear.” Both words derive from the Latin term *limpidus*. And so, by defining Old Christian status as ‘pure,’ the text suggests that *converso* lineage was naturally impure. Christian identity is thereby reconfigured through a racial logic.

Employing a similar logic, Iberians authors began associating race with positive qualities to naturalize social privilege. For instance, the prominent Castilian writer Alfonso Martinez de Toledo (1398–1470) interpreted social hierarchies as natural. Martinez collapses a descriptive and prescriptive view of society, insisting that

> Nature ensures this; thus, every day in the places where you live, you will see that the noble man is of noble race [raza] and still shows his origins, and the unfortunate

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312 (Twelfth Ecumenical Council, 1215, The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council), canon 67: “The more the Christians are restrained from the practice of usury, the more are they oppressed in this matter by the treachery of the Jews, so that in a short time they exhaust the resources of the Christians. Wishing, therefore, in this matter to protect the Christians against cruel oppression by the Jews, we ordain in this decree that if in the future under any pretext Jews extort from Christians oppressive and immoderate interest, the partnership of the Christians shall be denied them till they have made suitable satisfaction for their excesses. The Christians also, every appeal being set aside, shall, if necessary, be compelled by ecclesiastical censure to abstain from all commercial intercourse with them. We command the princes not to be hostile to the Christians on this account, but rather to strive to hinder the Jews from practicing such excesses. Lastly, we decree that the Jews be compelled by the same punishment (avoidance of commercial intercourse) to make satisfaction for the tithes and offerings due to the churches, which the Christians were accustomed to supply from their houses and other possessions before these properties, under whatever title, fell into the hands of the Jews, that thus the churches may be safeguarded against loss.”


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man is of a vile race [raza] and lineage [linaje]; no matter how great he is or how much he has, he will only show the wretchedness of his descent.\textsuperscript{314}

Yet by inferring status from ‘lineage’ and ‘descent,’ Martínez conceptualizes class hierarchy as a natural phenomenon. Rather than being a social construction, class status is determined by sexual reproduction.\textsuperscript{315} As an immutable condition, it is grounded in nature. This conflation signals the way in which biology and culture are mutually dependent. It would therefore be misleadingly to think that while “the language of race—gens, natio, ‘blood,’ ‘stock,’ etc.—is biological, its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural.”\textsuperscript{316} Instead, visible behavior (what one ‘sees’ or ‘shows’) reflects one’s racial lineage precisely because neither wealth nor honor can modify what God creates. The case of Martínez de Toledo indicates how ideas about nature inform Iberian discourse on race.

In the 1430s, the Catholic Church issued theological pronouncements that called into question the immutability of Jewishness. The Council of Basel (1431–1445), for instance, offers a theological defense of converso rights based on sacramental efficacy.\textsuperscript{317} Historical theologians

\footnote{Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, Arcipreste de Talavera: O, Corbacho, ed. E. Michael Gerli (Madrid: Catedra, 1992), cap. 18, 108; emphasis added.}

\footnote{See Deborah Root, “Speaking Christian, Orthodoxy and Difference in 16th-Century Spain” Representations, no. 23 (Sum 1988): 132.}

\footnote{Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350 (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 197; emphasis added. For a recent work that also covers race in the modern period, see “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 31, no. 1 (2001).}

Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss insist that the decree was “based on the writings of Thomas Aquinas,” which systematized “the Western doctrine of the seven sacraments as no previous creedal statement had.”

Aquinas is critical to the account of baptism. The council convened its nineteenth session in September 1434. And at the conclusion, it produced a four-part statement. In the section on conversion it declared:

Since by the grace of baptism converts have been made fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, and since regeneration in the spirit is of far greater worth than birth in the flesh, we determine by this edict that they should enjoy these privileges, liberties and immunities, of the cities and localities in which they are regenerated by holy baptism, which others obtain merely by reason of birth and origin.

As a means of grace, the sacrament of baptism subsumes and, in fact, reconfigures bloodlines (‘birth and origin’). To use Aquinas’ dictum, “grace does not destroy nature, but brings it to perfection.” Here the council summons a radical and ancient Christian tenet, namely, the

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318 For an introduction and a partial English translation of the text, see “Decree of Union of the Council of Basil-Ferrara-Florence-Rome, 1431–45,” in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition, vol I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 752. “This peripatetic council, which is now usually treated as a single council, was called by Pope Martin V and convened in Basel, but later moved to Ferrara by Pope Eugenius IV...the primary goal of the council was reconciliation of the church in East and West,” 751.


321 “Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit.” Thomas Aquinas, Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Doctoris Angelici, Opera Omnia (Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882), II d. 9 q.1 a arg.3 For more on this axiom, see Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Complete English ed., 5 vols. (Allen: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia q. 1 a.8 ad 2; Ia q. 2 a. 2 ad I; Ia IIae q. 99 a. 2 ad I; IIa IIae q. 10 a. 10; IIa IIae q. 104 a. 6.
possibility of uniting many people into one spiritual body through baptismal regeneration in Christ.\textsuperscript{322} Baptism, therefore, has the power to transcend social hierarchies.

Unfortunately, the Council of Basel buries this subversive insight by demarcating religious difference between Christians and non-Christians. In the section on Jews and Neophytes, the council spells out a series of segregation policies. It commands “diocesan bishops and secular powers to prohibit in every way Jews and other infidels from having Christians, male or female, in their households” and “from joining with them in festivities, marriages, banquets or baths, or in much conversation.”\textsuperscript{323} Yet enforcing such rules would require the visual demarcation of religious difference. For this reason, the council says that Jews “are to be compelled, under severe penalties, to wear some garment whereby they can be clearly distinguished from Christians.”\textsuperscript{324} In line with Lateran IV, the Council of Basel excludes non-Christians from assuming positions of authority. It insists that Abraham’s seed “should not be given other public offices, or admitted to any academic degrees, or allowed to have on lease lands or other ecclesiastical rents.”\textsuperscript{325} The council suggests

\textsuperscript{322} “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28–29 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.

\textsuperscript{323} Tanner, Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, I.

\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{325} “There should be careful inquiry into all these things in provincial councils and synods, and an opportune remedy should be applied not only to negligent bishops and priests but also to converts and infidels who scorn the above. If anyone, of whatever rank or status, shall encourage or defend such converts against being compelled to observe the Christian rite or anything else mentioned above, he shall incur the penalties promulgated against abettors of heretics. If converts fail to correct themselves after a canonical warning, and as Judaizers are found to have returned to their vomit, let proceedings be taken against them as against perfidious heretics in conformity with the enactments of the sacred canons. If there have been granted to Jews or infidels, or perhaps shall be granted to them in the future, any indults or privileges by any ecclesiastics or secular persons, of whatever status or dignity, even papal or imperial, which tend in any way to the detriment of the catholic faith, the Christian name or anything mentioned above, this holy synod decrees them quashed and annulled; the apostolic and synodal decrees and constitutions enacted about the above remaining in force. In order that the memory of this holy constitution may be perpetually retained and that nobody may be able to claim ignorance of it, the holy synod orders that it should be
that heresy, as a sinful condition, is ultimately transmitted through the body. The Council of Basel thus delineates a theological paradigm that led to and gave authority to the purification efforts executed throughout the Iberian Peninsula.

Yet not everyone obeyed these edicts. Given their protected status, Iberian royals spoke out against *converso* and Jewish persecution. In 1433, for instance, Eleanor of Aragon (1402–1445) rejected hierarchical distinctions that favored ‘natural’ Christians residing in Barcelona. King Alfonso of Aragon (1396–1458) obstructed a series of anti-*converso* law suits in Barcelona and Lleida, because Jews, as wards of the crown, fell under his protection. Support also came from the Vatican. After Catalan *conversos* appealed to the Vatican in 1437, Pope Eugene IV (r. 1431–1447) reproached those “sons of iniquity” who were “Christians only in name” for refusing converts administrative positions and marriage licenses. Such examples, unfortunately, became increasingly rare and virtually nonexistent by the late 1400s. Many *conversos*, like Diego de Valera, spearheaded their own defense by inverting the dominant discourse. For instance, Valera stressed

promulgated at least once a year during divine service in all cathedral and college churches and other holy places where the faithful gather in large numbers.” Ibid.

326 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, “For example, beliefs about the role of both biology and culture in the transmission of all sorts of characteristics from parents to child, the more prominent role of the father in this process, and the possibility of mutability over time were partly responsible for the tendency of laws on heretics to transfer ‘sins’ through more generations in the paternal line of descent than in the maternal one,” 49.

327 The term “by nature,” for instance, was used to distinguish Old Christians in Colegio Notarial de Barcelona, *Privilegios y ordenanzas históricos*, ACA:C 3124: 157r–v: “separatio aut differentia nulla fiat inter christianos a progenie seu natura et neophytos...et ex eis descendentes.” For further discussion, see Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 341 endnote 33.

328 See Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 80.

329 Vicente Beltrán de Heredia and Agueda María Rodríguez Cruz, *La Autenticidad de la Bula in Apostolatus Culmine*, Publicaciones de la Universidad De Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo: Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 1965); See also Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 341 endnote 36.
a shared “lineage [with] the Virgin Mary” to bolster his pure blood status, claiming that “old Christians” were less pure because they “descended from idol-worshiping gentiles.”\textsuperscript{330} This strategy points to the inescapable ambivalence of hegemonic discourse.\textsuperscript{331} In a context marked by stark power inequalities, conversos, as racialized subjects, would understandably appropriate and redeploy dominant discourse to further their own interests. Nevertheless, even when intervening on their subjects’ behalf, royals strictly employed genealogy to define Christian identity. In the following decade, King Juan II (1405–1454) directed Sevilla residents, still recovering from a civil war, to treat conversos “as if they were born Christians.”\textsuperscript{332} Notice the subtle implication: King Juan suggests that religious identity is determined by birth, or through what modernist would later call biology. This scholastic conception of nature suggests that religion is a by-product of procreation. And when it came to determining blood purity, no institution wielded more power than the Holy Office of the Inquisition. By the end of the century, the Holy Office would oversee a complex system of genealogical investigation.

\textit{Interrogating Heretical Bloodlines}

After extensive negotiations, the Catholic Kings obtained approval from Pope Sixtus I to establish an Office of the Inquisition in 1478.\textsuperscript{333} Upon making the necessary preparations, Isabel and Fernando inaugurated the Office two years later. In accordance with papal instructions, the


\textsuperscript{331} The notion of “ambivalence” here comes from Homi Bhabha. See Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

\textsuperscript{332} Pedro Carrillo de Huete, \textit{Crónica del Halconero de Juan I}, ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo, Colección de Crónicas Españolas (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1946), 152.

\textsuperscript{333} See Kamen, \textit{Spanish Inquisition}, 44–45.
royals appointed “the venerable and pious fathers Friar Miguel de Morillo, master of holy theology, and Friar Juan de San Martin, prior of the monastery of San Pablo of the city of Sevilla and the Order of Preachers,” as the first Inquisitors.\textsuperscript{334} Initially, the Inquisition focused on Al-Andalus, “where it appeared that [Judaizers] had done the most damage;” but its jurisdiction rapidly extended into other regions.\textsuperscript{335} In fact, the following year Córdoba housed its own tribunal and seven more Dominican friars were appointed to its ranks. And by 1492, the Holy Office formed tribunals in eight major Castilian cities.\textsuperscript{336} Its genealogical investigations expose the way probanzas de fe relied on racialized conceptions of religious identity.

Other scholars of early modern Spain arrive at different conclusions. Stewart Schwartz, for instance, contends that a “mass of the population” responded to hegemonic ideologies with “sentiments and attitudes” of dissent.\textsuperscript{337} Analyzing a series of Inquisition trials, Schwartz concludes that peasants, prostitutes, and laity openly rejected or privately ignored Church doctrine and disregarded segregation policies issued by government officials. He interprets these factors as evidence of widespread religious plurality and tolerance. Yet Inquisition trials usually took place when a person appeared to transgress religious or social norms. Schwartz’s assessment, therefore, overlooks the fact that defendants were being denounced by fellow citizens presumably for violating the regulations established by ecclesial or civic institutions. Although blood purity

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[335] Fernando and Isabel, “Expulsion of the Jews (1492),” 21.
\item[336] The Inquisition established offices in Ávila, Córdoba, Jaén, Medina del Campo, Segovia, Siguenza, Toledo, and Valladolid. See Kamen, Spanish Inquisition, 48.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
was an elite discourse, its power derived from a widespread “appeal to medieval ‘common knowledge’ about nature.”

The Office commissioned ‘inquisitions of heretical depravity’ (inquisitio hereticae pravitatis). These tribunals were designed to identify, prosecute, and eradicate ‘crypto–Judaism.’ Informed by natural law, these courts assumed “that the reproduction of culture is embedded in the reproduction of the flesh. It is upon this logic that new boundaries would be built between Christian and ‘Jew’ in Spain.” The process began when candidates—usually wealthy, educated males—sought to marry ‘Old Christian’ women or to work in an institution that enforced purity statutes. In addition to paying a substantial court fee, the candidate would submit to the Inquisition’s tribunal an application of blood purity status (información de limpieza de sangre) consisting of various documents. After evaluating the application, the tribunal would determine whether to approve the candidate for further investigation. In other words, tribunal judges (oidores) would have to find the application convincing before proceeding to the second stage.

Subsequently, tribunal judges would assign agents (comisarios), typically local clergy who assisted in administrative tasks, to conduct further investigation into the candidate’s background. Since agents oftentimes had to travel long distances to reach a candidate’s place of birth,

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338 Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” Rereading the Black Legend, 81.

339 See Fernando and Isabel, “Letter on the Inquisition, 1480,” 11. See also Lewis, “Between Casta and Raza,” Race and Blood in the Iberian World, 102. The legal method of inquisitio (‘inquiry’) was inherited from Roman law, and became common in high-medieval Europe to determine guilt in court. While an ‘inquisition’ was used for many other crimes, both religious and secular, its most famous version was an inquisitio hereticae pravitatis (‘inquisition of heretical pravity’) to discover and punish heresy.” Christine Caldwell Ames, Medieval Heresies: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 336.

340 Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages,” Rereading the Black Legend, 82.
investigations could last anywhere from a few months to well over a year. The prime objective was to verify firsthand the veracity of the baptismal records, letters of reference, and other documents submitted as part of the application. Using a set questionnaire, *comisarios* would ask neighbors, colleagues, and relatives whether the candidate or his family had ever exhibited characteristics that seemed to be Jewish or Muslim or whether they expressed hostility towards the Catholic faith.\(^{341}\) Tribunal agents would gather additional evidence from regional informants (*familiares*) to assess a candidate’s lineage. In the end, agents would consolidate all relevant information on a candidate into a single report, and then submit it to the Inquisition tribunal for a final review. Since race, in this context, did not correspond to skin color, investigator relied on other visible markers. Historian Tamar Herzog indicates that agents received testimony based on insider/outsider distinctions that were oftentimes inconsistent.\(^{342}\) Factors such as birth place, tax payments, church membership, military enrollment, accent, education, and even clothing determined whether a person was considered an Old Christian, a natural neighbor (*vecino natural*), or an unreliable foreigner (*forastero o extranjero*).\(^{343}\) Yet it is precisely grounding these cultural traits in reproduction that establishes their racial connotation.

\(^{341}\) See “Appendix: Questionnaire Used by the Spanish Inquisition,” in Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 279–280.

\(^{342}\) Herzog examines letters from the Junta de Comercio y Agricultura de Valencia, 3.4.1773 in the Archivo Histórico Nacional. For a complete list of archival sources, see Tamar Herzog, “Beyond Race: Exclusion in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America,” in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, 164.

\(^{343}\) Herzog contends that a myopic focus on race overshadows “the omnipresence and enormous weight of other means for stereotyping, marginalizing, or excluding the ‘other.’ Such means existed alongside, added to, and at times replaced, a discourse on race and it is only by integrating them into our analysis that we can come to understand fully the ways by which early modern individuals understood both similarities and differences.” See Herzog, “Beyond Race,” *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, 153.
As a last step, the tribunal reviewed the comisario’s report in order to reach a final decision on the candidate’s purity claims. If the tribunal found impure origins, it would deny the candidate outright regardless of the person’s “estate, position, or status,” effectively terminating his professional aspirations. However, if the court found the applicant to be pure, it would issue a certificate, known as proof of purity (probanza de limpieza) or proof of faith (probanza de fe), verifying his Old Christian status. With that certificate in hand, a candidate could assume positions in administrative or academic institutions that enforced purity statutes. The system of probanzas would ostensibly assure that only Old, pure, natural Christians dominated its centers of power. In this way, the racialization of religious identity would protect the body politic from noxious infection.

Iberian purity statutes formed part of the imperial matrix of power that redefined religion as a natural (biological) and therefore racial condition passed on through blood. Yet the crown lacked authority in the kingdom of Granada; Al-Andalus remained under Islamic control. Fernando and Isabel would therefore seek to expand their geopolitical power to the south by eliminating the epicenter of Islamic power in the peninsula. In the end, this crusade would not only consolidate an imperial identity, it would also galvanize Columbus’ enterprise.

344 Kamen, Spanish Inquisition, 11.
345 “In sum, what is important here is that the ‘purity of blood’ discourse used in the conquest of Al-Andalus was a form of religious discrimination that was not yet fully racist because it did not question in a profound way the humanity of its victims.” Grosfoguel, “Structure of Knowledge,” 79.
Reconquista of Al-Andalus

In the late-fifteenth century, the Spanish crown orchestrated the overthrow of Al-Andalus in what became known as the Reconquista. For centuries, Muslim forces dominated various regions throughout the Mediterranean. The union of Castile and Aragon, in fact, “coincided with a period in which Latin Christendom was reeling from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottoman Turkish Empire and feared for its survival.” Muslim dominion over the Holy Lands exacerbated Christendom’s islamophobia. In 1491, Fernando and Isabel obtained papal approval to carry out a series of military campaigns aimed at dispossessing the kingdom of Granada. The Reconquista, as Ramón Grosfoguel notes, signified an “ethnic cleansing of the Andalusian territory,” which “produced a physical genocide and cultural genocide,” because “Jews and Muslims who stayed in the territory were either killed (physical genocide) or forced to conversion (cultural genocide).” Indeed, Castile laid claim over Al-Andalus by overthrowing the Nasrid caliphate. It succeeded by starving out the city and exploiting a family rivalry between two rulers: El Zagal, and his nephew, Abí Abdilehi or Mohammed XII (more commonly known as Boabdil). According to the Surrender Treaty of 1491, Abí and his subjects were to concede the Alhambra fortress in forty days’ time. Abdilehi begrudgingly surrendered the urban stronghold in January that same year. While the capitulation of Alhambra dealt Islam an existential blow, the

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Reconquista would symbolize the natural superiority of Western Christianity in the modern world.349

The Spanish crown began reconfiguring the religious landscapes of Al-Andalus based on what they called ‘natural lordship.’ In accordance with medieval norms, military victory granted Spain natural lordship. Muslim residents were supposed to “do what good and loyal vassals are obliged to do for their kings and natural lords.”350 If inhabitants surrendered, the crown would leave Sharia Law intact. Spain believed that “Moors shall be judged under their own laws and courts by the Islamic law they are accustomed to observing, under the authority of their judges.”351 The royals promised to approve favorable terms (capitulaciones) that allowed their ‘natural subjects’ to keep practicing their religion. Subjects would also be able to retain property and forgo paying taxes for three years (except for the Autumn harvest tithe). Although Castile did respect certain customs, rites, and levies, it went on to implement religious segregation. It allowed Muslims to frequent mosques under one condition: Christians had to obtain written approval from Spanish lords before entering Islamic places of worship. By restricting religious mixing, the policies put into effect after the Reconquista would reconfigure Al-Andalus according to the same system of blood purity that structured northern kingdoms.


In addition to physical bloodshed, the Reconquista resulted in epistemic violence. Muslim and Jewish inhabitants would be enslaved or deported for two reasons: rebelling against Spanish lordship or refusing Christian conversion. Grosfoguel explains how the “massive destruction of Islamic and Judaic spirituality and knowledge through genocide, led to the forced conversion (cultural genocide) of those Jews and Muslims who decided to stay in the territory.”

In 1487, Muslims residing in the city of Málaga eventually succumbed to military attacks despite a prolonged resistance. And as “a punishment for their defiance,” historian Michael Carr points out, “virtually the entire population was sold into slavery or given as ‘gifts’ to other Christian rulers.”

In fact, the Catholic Kings designated ten large ships to deport Muslim insurrectionists to the Berber lands in Northern Africa. Muslims could also leave voluntarily. If Muslims submitted requests fifty days in advance, then Castilian authorities guaranteed a “safe and free passage” at any point during a three-year period. Jews suffered a similar fate. As in the northern kingdoms, Jews were banned from assuming high-ranking positions. According to the Surrender Treaty, the royals “shall not permit Jews to have any power or authority over Moors, nor shall they be allowed to collect any kind of rent from them.” Moreover, Jewish “natives of Granada and the Albaicin and its surrounding areas” who refused conversion had to “leave for the Berber lands within three

352 Grosfoguel, “Structure of Knowledge,” 78
353 Carr, Blood and Faith, 7
356 Ibid.
In this way, physical and epistemic violence were simultaneously introduced; genocide/epistemicide followed from the Reconquista.

March 1492 marked a watershed moment. Two months after the overthrow of Granada, the Catholic Kings eradicated Jews from their territories by signing the Expulsion Decree. In this decree the Spanish crown

order[ed] all of the Jews and Jewesses of any age who live and reside and are in our kingdoms and domains, including natives as well as those who are not natives, and who for whatever reason or purpose may have come here or are here, to leave all of our kingdoms and domains along with their sons and daughters and male and female servants and Jewish family members small and large of any age by the end of this coming July of the present year.

The authorities would execute Jews who remained and harshly punish Christians who provided refuge. And government officials were authorized to seize all property. According to one Hebrew account, prominent Jewish members of the court drafted an alternative agreement. They presented it three months prior to the date of deportation. In it, Jews committed to pay a “large sum of money” to remain in Spain. Their plea, however, was ignored; in the end, the sovereigns rejected the proposal. When members of the court asked Queen Isabel about her decision, she replied by paraphrasing King Solomon: “Do you believe that this comes upon you from us? The Lord hath put this thing into the heart of the king.” Jews that remained risked death; they lived

357 Ibid., 19.
358 Fernando and Isabel, “Decree of Expulsion of the Jews (1492),” 22.
359 “The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1495),” in Early Modern Spain, 25. This anonymous text, originally written in Hebrew, is translated by Alexander Marx. See Alexander Marx, “The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: Two New Accounts,” The Jewish Quarterly Review 20, no. 2 (1908): 240–271. “The two texts here published seem to me to form interesting contributions to the last chapter in the history of the Jews in the Iberian peninsula. They are both written by contemporaries of the expulsion, the one based on materials gathered from the exiles, the other being from an eye-witness,” 240.
360 See Kirstin Downey, Isabella: The Warrior Queen, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2014), 230. Isabel appears to be paraphrasing Scripture: “My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my
in a state of illegality. Apparently Castilian authorities deported thousands of families to Portugal, Italy, or northern Africa in what became known as the Iberian Exodus.\textsuperscript{361} The Expulsion Decree purported to solidify the empire’s Christian identity.\textsuperscript{362} And in this way the genocide/epistemicide of Al-Andalus would purge Christian space of religious/racial impurity.

In this section, I showed how theologically informed discourses of blood purity racialized religious identity in late medieval Iberia. By implementing purity statutes, Spanish rulers, in conjunction with their allies and the Holy Office of the Inquisition, consolidated power around natural Christian bloodlines. Only Iberians who offered proof of genealogical purity could hold governmental, financial, or ecclesial positions of authority. In the end, by defining Old Christian status an outcome of reproduction, *limpieza de sangre* reconfigured Jewish and Muslim blood as an insurmountable impediment to genuine conversion. In this way, moriscos and conversos embodied a noxious threat to the social order.

After the Reconquista, Fernando and Isabel would turn their focus abroad. They established two objectives: recuperate Jerusalem from the Muslims and secure economic

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\textsuperscript{361} “By means of this accusation the Spanish king had many thousands of the Marranos burned and confiscated their fortunes without number...When they asked them in which religion they wanted to die, they chose Christianity, in order to die an easier death, and they did with a cross in their hands. Only a few of them died as Jews, and of these few, most were women.” Marx, “Expulsion of the Jews (1495),” 256.

\textsuperscript{362} One Hebrew account declares: “I heard that the bitter persecutions of 1391 in Catalonia were caused by the desire of the Jews to have disputations with the Christians. Finally, when the latter found themselves vanquished they arose and killed them. Many, almost all, were then baptized, and gave up their faith. From this persecution resulted that of 1492, when the Spanish king exiled nearly six hundred thousand persons. Many of them died on the way, and in the vessels, but more were baptized. The aforementioned king saw that the Jews of his country taught the Marranos the Torah, and he thought: Once I expel all the Jews, all the Marranos in my kingdom—and the country is full of them—will become real Christians. And so it was. All this happened to them because they did not observe the covenant of our forefathers, and the teachings of the sages, who advised against disputations on questions of faith.” Marx, “Expulsion of the Jews (1495),” 246.
advantages over Portugal. Fortunately for the Catholic Kings, a Genoese sailor by the name of Cristobal Colón promised to fulfill both by establishing a lucrative trading route to Asia. This project would not only require fortuity but also considerable resources. If achieved, however, it would enable Spain to accomplish its global ambitions. Columbus would extend imperial dominion into the tropics by sailing “south to the Indies.”\textsuperscript{363} Within a few years, Spain and Portugal would carve up the Atlantic world and, by the end of the century, divide up the rest of the globe (see Figure 2.13). Mapping what became the Global South would solidify the North Atlantic as the epicenter of knowledge/power. Section II turns to analyze this process by exploring the ways in which scholastic theology informed the Columbian Enterprise.

\textsuperscript{363} Wey Gómez, \textit{Tropics of Empire}, 4.
Figure 2.1 Imperial Lines of Demarcation. Detail of the Carte Nautique Portugaise de l'Océan Atlantique, Jorge Reinel, c. 1550 © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
2.3 Columbus and the (Dis)possession of the Tropics

The year 1492 introduced the modern/colonial world that would develop during the long sixteenth century. It gave rise to the African slave trade, dispossession of land, and destruction of indigenous ecologies. Imperial maps galvanized this process by transforming the southern hemisphere into colonial space. Columbus, and the Iberian cosmographers that followed, employed a scholastic vision of nature to map the tropics. In this section, I offer a close reading of key primary sources that reflect how Iberians conceptualize global expansion through the dispossession of space (see Figure 2.1).

Proscribing Southern Latitudes

The Treaty of Alcáçovas, signed in 1480, resolved fifteenth-century disputes between Spain and Portugal. From 1475 to 1479, Iberian empires had engaged in military conflicts over


365 Figure 2.1 Jorge Reinel (1518?–1572), Carte Nautique Portugaise De L’océan Atlantique (1550). Département Cartes et Plans, GE B–II48 (RES). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Accessible at: gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52503222v/f1.item

“Early portolan charts were compiled primarily by using rough estimates of the linear distances between various points. Latitude measurements taken from astronomical observations were usually far more precise and eventually came to supplant traditional linear distances in the minds of cartographers of the true definition and determinant of one’s location on earth (at least in the north-south directions). Portuguese cartography reflected this change: the first portolan charts that included a scale of latitude were made by the Portuguese in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and came to be known as plan charts.” Cartography in the European Renaissance, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward, vol. 3, The History of Cartography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 519.

the northwestern coast of Africa and its surrounding islands. Intending to reach a diplomatic truce and define commercial terms of ownership, the Portuguese royals, King Alfonso V (1432–1481) and Prince João II (1455–1495), convened a meeting with the Catholic Kings of Spain. Both kings, along with their advisors, met in Toledo on September 4, 1479. After extensive communication and negotiations, the sovereigns authored a joint draft. Portugal revised it immediately, while Spain made revisions five months later. The Treaty of Alcáçovas, moreover, received approval the following year from Pope Sixtus IV (1414–1484), who had just commissioned the Spanish Inquisition. Through the bull Aeterni regis (1481), Sixtus IV validated the agreement on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church.

Alcáçovas deserves careful analysis because its theological discourse provides the basis for imperial expansion. The treaty begins by equating adherence to its terms with Christian obedience. Signatories claim to emulate Christ’s “infinite goodness and clemency” by entering into this agreement. After all, Christ “ordered that peace be procured,” thus instituting the legal precedent for imperial dominion. Spain and Portugal swear before God and the Virgin Mary to


367 Alcáçovas is comprised of four minor interdependent treatises. For more on the events leading up to its signing, and its textual composition, see Margarita Prieto Yegros, El Tratado de Tordesillas: Antecedentes Medievales, el Tratado Alcáçovas, el Descubrimiento de América, las Bulas Alejandrinas, Objetivo, Principal, Esquema y Texto de Tratado, Capitulaciones (Asunción: Intercontinental, 2006), 38–43.

368 For a decent English translation of the Bull Aeterni Regis (June 21, 1481), see Davenport and Paullin, European Treaties, 49–55.


370 Ibid.
uphold the agreement, making its terms “firm and valid forever.”

Alcáçovas, therefore, grounds imperial dominion on Christ’s identity as the Prince of Peace. Serving more than a formality, theological considerations also appear in Isabel and Fernando’s concessions. The Spanish monarchs “renounced all rights, laws, customs, usages, actions, and opinions of doctors” (i.e. theologians) that could be invoked to claim Portuguese territories. These terms restrict scholastic theology from justifying Spanish incursions into Africa. In this way, the theological discourse of Alcáçovas “opened for the first time in history a distinct perspective that enabled Iberian kingdoms to henceforth allocate dominion” of territories outside Christendom. In subsequent years, imperial and ecclesial authorities would have to configure global expansion in accordance with these terms.

Alcáçovas’ geographic demarcation reveals the way in which Iberian empires mapped space and race together. Although the treaty omits specific figures, we can derive latitude and longitude from the text. Alcáçovas begins by prohibiting Spanish ships to sail “from the Canary Islands down toward Guinea.” The distance between the Canary Islands and Guinea is roughly 961 nautical miles. Covering half the torrid zone, it intersects the Tropic of Cancer (see Figure 2.2). A route between these two places would approximately start at N 28˚ latitude, head south along a longitude of W 18˚, and end at N 11˚ latitude. The Portuguese Cantino Map, produced

371 Ibid., 46.
372 “[P]ero lo más importante de este punto del tratado fue que por primera vez en la historia se abría una perspectiva distinta para futuros dominios que estos reinos comenzaron desde entonces a repartirse.” Prieto Yegros, Tratado de Tordesillas, 39.
373 “Treaty of Alcáçovas,” European Treaties, 44; emphasis added.
around 1502, substantiate Alcáçovas (see Figure 2.2). The map’s iconography actually provides a visual representation of Alcáçovas’ spatial allocation. In the treaty Spain agrees not to disturb, trouble, or molest, in fact or in law, in court or out of court, the said King and Prince of Portugal or the future sovereigns of Portugal or their kingdoms, in their possession or quasi possession all the trade, lands, and barter in Guinea, with its gold–mines, or in any other islands, coasts, or lands, discovered or to be discovered, found or to be found, or in the islands of Madeira, Porto Santo, and Desierta, or in all the islands of the Azores, or the islands of Flores, as well as the islands of Cape Verde, or in all the islands hitherto discovered, or in all other islands which shall be found or acquired by conquest from the Canary Islands down toward Guinea.

In addition to identifying these places by name, the map depicts imperial mastery over space by inserting Spanish and Portuguese flags throughout the northwestern African coast and its surrounding islands. Alcáçovas even includes terms for reparation in case a commercial dispute required litigation. Accordingly, Portugal could “defend” itself against, and legally “prosecute,” any foreign incursion. Notably, by awarding Portugal exclusive rights over “all the trade” east of this line, Alcáçovas grants legitimacy to the transatlantic slave trade. Furthermore, the Cantino Map also exhibits a racial imaginary, as evidenced by the depiction of black bodies in the southern

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375 “Treaty of Alcáçovas,” European Treaties, 44; emphasis added. According to modern-day calculations, the Azore Islands are located W 25º, N 37.75º and the Cape Verde Islands at W 25º, N 17º.

376 Any “guilty party shall incur a fine of 300,000 gold doblas of the grade of good gold and of just weight.” Ibid.,46. For a classic historical analysis of the Treaty of Alcáçovas, see Henry Harrisse, The Diplomatic History of America: Its First Chapter (1452–1493–1494) (London: B.F. Stevens, 1897), 1–10.
hemisphere (see Figure 2.2). In this way, Iberian empires link spatial dispossession to racial commodification.

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377 Describing the “ideological reinforcement through decoration,” Harley comments that “decoration plays a part in attaching a series of racial stereotypes and prejudices to the areas being represented. This is manifestly so with Africa. The decoration on maps produced in Europe disseminated the image of the Dark Continent.” J. B. Harley, The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press/Center for American Places, 2001), 76.
Figure 2.2 Detail of Portuguese and Spanish and territories along the West African coast, Portuguese Cantino Map, c. 1502. ©Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena, Italia
Alcáçovas would galvanize the Columbian Enterprise. The treaty awards Spain exclusive rights over the Canary Islands—located at approximately 28° north of the equator and directly west of Cape Bojador (see Figure 2.2).378 Sailor-merchants from Catalunya entered this archipelago in the late 1300s.379 And although Castile did not fully subjugate the native Guanche people until 1496, Alcáçovas transformed this group of islands into colonial space. Iberian settlers began using the Canaries to test agricultural production and to exploit indigenous labor.380 Atlantic historians William and Karla Rahn Phillips indicate that countless “enslaved Guanches were taken to be sold in Spain or in the Madeira Islands settled by the Portuguese,” while “other slaves remained in the Canaries to work for European settlers.”381 By confirming the lucrative possibilities of tropical climates, the Canaries provided the conceptual and literal “point of departure” for Columbus’ enterprise.382 Apparently, the Canaries incited the first ‘shock of discovery.’ According to Mediterranean historian David Abulafia, Iberian colonialists who crossed the Atlantic were surprised to see that Amerindians were

isolated, simple, living unadorned lives, more like the ‘Stone Age’ Canary islanders than like the silk-clad natives of the Far Eastern empires. Not for nothing did the

378 There are eight Canary Islands in all. From east to west they are: Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Isla Graciosa, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Isla de la Gomera, Isla de la Palma, and Hierro.


380 “Reciprocal contracts and influences, in both the administrative and economic terms, are so important that we must consider the various colonies and metropolises as forming part of one large historical area...By doing this, we find that certain phenomena are continuous, and we are thus able to understand the transfer of colonial techniques.” Charles Verlinden, “The Transfer of Colonial Techniques from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic,” in The European Opportunity, ed. Felipe Fernández-Armesto (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 226.


382 Phillips and Phillips, Worlds of Columbus, 145.
earliest printed accounts of Columbus’ first voyage to the Caribbean refer to his discoveries as the ‘New Canaries.’

Alcáçovas’ repercussions reverberated across the Atlantic. After 1492, Iberian merchants would begin transferring manufacturing techniques and systems of labor from sugar plantations (ingenios de azúcar) in the Azore, Madeira, and Canary islands “to the newly discovered Caribbean Islands early in the colonizing process.” In fact, “Columbus had come from the Canary Islands on his second voyage in 1493 when he introduced sugar cane into Haiti.” Less than two decades later, colonialists would transform the Caribbean basin, and eventually Mexico, Peru, and later Cuba, into the epicenter of sugarcane production. And so, by granting Spain this strategic foothold, Alcáçovas helped shift the axis of the world economy from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic world.

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385 “In addition to the small establishments which employed only Indian slave manpower, larger establishments soon appeared which used horses or hydraulic power for the mills. The increase in production augmented the need for slaves on the big plantations, and since the supply of Indians was rapidly exhausted, Negroes were brought from Africa in ever increasing quantities.” Verlinden, “The Transfer of Colonial Techniques,” in Fernández-Armesto, The European Opportunity, 244.

386 “In the 1520s wealth encomenderos with a stake in Hispaniola’s future began to invest in sugar mills, with the help and encouragement of royal officials. This marked the modest beginnings of a plantation economy in the Spanish Antilles which in 1558, at its peak, produced 60,000 arrobas of sugar for export to Seville, before it was outpriced on the Iberian markets by sugar produced more cheaply in other parts of the Americas.” J. H. Elliott, Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 92. For more on the development of the plantation economy in the Caribbean and New Spain, see David Watts, The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change since 1492, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 125–126; Robin Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800 (London: Verso, 1997), 137; Frank Moya Pons, Historia Colonial De Santo Domingo, 2 da ed., Colección Estudios (Santiago: Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1976).
Figure 2.3 Columbus’ Charter from the Catholic Kings, Capitulaciones de Santa Fe, May 4, 1492. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla. ©Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Archivos Estatales, España
Inscribing Colonial Order

The Catholic Kings inscribed official terms for the Columbian Enterprise in the Capitulaciones de Santa Fe, signed in Granada on April 17, 1492 (see Figure 2.3). In five short articles, this charter outlines Columbus’ objectives and lists the rights and privileges of both parties. From the outset, the royals direct Columbus to “discover” and thereby “acquire” new “mainlands and islands” on behalf of Spain. In the syntax of the day, the word descubrir, which is translated ‘to discover,’ “often means to explore or reconnoiter a territory in preparation for an incursion of a commercial or military nature.” Discovery expeditions provided new avenues for class mobility. In the late fifteenth century, this system “had become a new route,” Sylvia Wynter explains, “to an acquired mode of meritocratic noble status, as well as a route to the enrichment needed to support this status.” By authorizing territorial expansion on the crown’s behalf, these “discover-and-gain deeds” enabled explorers to join the feudal nobility. Columbus’ charter “was thus a form of land-grant within the culture-specific judicial terms of the Spanish monarchy” that

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387 Figure 2.3 Fernando II (1452–1516) e Isabel I (1451–1504), Capitulaciones de Santa Fe, 17–4–1492. INDIFERENTE, 418, L.1, F.I.R. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de Indias, España. Accessible at: pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas/servlets/Control_servlet?accion=3&txt_id_desc_ud=245187&fromagenda=N


389 Ibid., 156.

390 Margarita Zamora, Reading Columbus, Latin American Literature and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 24.

facilitated the primitive accumulation of capital.\textsuperscript{392} From its inception, the enterprise intended to fulfill an imperialist desire for expansion.

The charter’s terms also foreground capitalist accumulation. Using generic terms such as ‘islands and mainlands,’ which function as “empty signifiers constituting a semantic void,” the text leaves the places “unnamed and undefined,” or as \textit{terra nullus}.\textsuperscript{393} Literary scholar Evelina Gužauskytė describes this silence as “a work of true craftsmanship of diplomacy and intuition.”\textsuperscript{394} Gužauskytė maintains that it “la[idd] the ground for naming as an instrument for announcing territorial claims.”\textsuperscript{395} In stark contrast to this silence, the text identifies Columbus as the one who fills this semantic void. As Juan de la Cosa’s map displays, the words, memories, and interests of colonialists would reconfigure the tropics (see Figure 2.4).\textsuperscript{396} Rather than using generic terms, the

\textsuperscript{392} Wynter’s argument stands in opposition to the idea that Columbus’ enterprise was, in effect, a ‘two-way encounter’ or cross-cultural exchange. Ibid., xvi: “Still, the theme of the discovery of these lands and peoples now faces a challenge from those who say, with some justice, that the native peoples had mostly been there a long time, and were perfectly aware of themselves; so to talk of ‘discovery’ is to write a Eurocentric interpretation of history that insults their identity. But, frankly, coming into contact with these peoples, was such a major event in human history, resulting in the creation of great empires and the destruction of entire peoples, that the European dimensions stand very much to the front. It was the beginning of the process that started with the establishment of a Spanish and a Portuguese empire, but continued in later centuries with the creation of English, French and Dutch dominions across the globe. The important point to remember is that this was a two-way encounter.” Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{393} Abulafia, \textit{Discovery of Mankind}, 155.

\textsuperscript{394} “Place names are likely omitted to avoid unnecessarily constricting the agreement’s scope by situating the objective of the upcoming voyage in any known or hypothetical geography as well as to protect the secrecy of the enterprise.” Zamora, \textit{Reading Columbus}, 3.

\textsuperscript{395} Evelina Gužauskytė, \textit{Christopher Columbus’s Naming in the Diarios of the Four Voyages (1492–1504): A Discourse of Negotiation}, Toronto Iberic (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2014), 3. Gužauskytė fundamentally “challenges the idea that the language of Columbian naming stemmed exclusively from the political power and cultural vocabulary imposed via European institutions and technologies, and that it carved, unerringly, the shapes of European visions onto silent and passive landscapes of the Americas.” Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{396} Figure 2.4 Juan de la Cosa (d. 1510), Carta Universal (1502–1503) ES–DF, Colección: PMNM, Signatura: MNM–257, Inv. 2603. Biblioteca Virtual del Ministerio de Defensa. Museo Naval de Madrid, España. Accessible at: \url{bibliotecavirtualdefensa.es/BVMDefensa/i18n/consulta/registro.cmd?id=16822}
charter refers to Columbus specifically as ‘Admiral of the Ocean.’ In turn, this title authorizes him to name the anonymous islands and mainlands. 397 Upon conferring the titles of “Viceroy” and “Governor General,” the text establishes political order by authorizing Columbus to name “three persons for each [government] office.” 398 He embodies imperial authority. The charter also delineates the commodification of natural resources. According to the agreement, the crown would retain ninety percent of all commodities, leaving Columbus with ten percent of any “goods, whether they be pearls, precious stones, gold or silver, [and] spices.” 399 The crown anticipates investment opportunities, allowing Columbus to become part-shareholder in subsequent expeditions; he may invest up to eight percent in future voyages. If a commercial dispute should arise, plaintiffs were to bring charges before a Spanish judge who would oversee the lawsuit discreetly. Columbus’ charter, therefore, initiates a political-economic-legal apparatus, which would come to define the modern world-system.

397 See “Appendix: A Comprehensive List of Columbian Place Names,” in Gužauskytė, Columbus’s Naming in the Diarios, 170–195. The titles conferred are as follows: San Salvador (Guanahani or Watling Island); Santa María de la Concepción (Rum Cay); Fernandina (Long Island); Isabela (Crooked Island); La Juana (Cuba); La Española or Hispaniola (Haiti/Dominican Republic); Cathay (China) and Cipango (Japan).

398 Fernando and Isabel, “Charter of Columbus,” 384.

399 Ibid.
In his journal’s prologue, Columbus outlines the religious ideology undergirding imperialist expansion. Columbus begins by extolling the crown’s success in “combating the religion of Mahomet and all idolatries and heresies” and subsequently “expelling all the Jews from your kingdoms and territories.” As postcolonial theologian Catherine Keller remarks, “the crusades, as apocalyptically inspired movements against dark unchristian peoples, had already

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400 Gužauskytė, Columbus’s Naming in the Diarios, 81.
provided the transitional inversion of the apocalypse into imperial aggression.” And so, basking in the Reconquista, he sees the defeat and deportation of non-Christians as a precondition for his enterprise. According to Columbus, the crown first had to bring “to an end the war against the remaining Moorish kingdom on European soil, terminating the campaign in the great city of Granada.” Only after doing so, was the crown able to commission “me to sail to those regions of India.” Columbus situates his enterprise within the global conflict against Islam. In the March 4 letter, Columbus promises to help finance the liberation of the Holy Lands from Muslim control. He assures the crown that “in seven years from today I will be able to pay Your Highnesses for five thousand cavalry and fifty thousand foot soldiers for the war and conquest of Jerusalem, for which purpose this enterprise was undertaken.” And so, the genocide/epistemicide against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus functions as the alpha and the omega, the precondition and the purpose of Columbus’ enterprise.

401 Christopher Columbus, The Voyage of Christopher Columbus: Columbus’s Own Journal of Discovery, trans. John G. Cummins, Newly Restored Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 67; hereafter it will be cited as Voyage.


404 See Columbus, Voyage.

405 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns of 4 March 1493,” 194–195. From here on it will be cited as Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (March 4).” A full transcription of the Spanish text is also included in Zamora, Reading Columbus, 181–197. For a facsimile reproduction see Antonio Rumeu de Armas and Christopher Columbus, Libro Copiador de Cristobal Colón: Correspondencia Inedita Con Los Reyes Católicos Sobre Los Viajes a América, ed. Dolores Alonso Roldan, Estudio Histórico-Critico, 2 vols., Tabula Americae (Madrid: Testimonio Compañía Editorial, 1989), 3579.
Columbus identifies three main objectives in Al-Andalus: 1) to meet their rulers; 2i) to ascertain the distribution of towns and lands; and, 3) to determine how they could be converted to the Holy Faith. Mapping political, geographic, and religious landscapes was a central function of his enterprise from its inception. However, to fund Christendom’s war against Islam, the Indies would have to generate profits (see Figure 2.5). To arouse the interest of potential investors, Columbus invoked a discourse of desire rooted in the scholastic tradition.

406 Figure 2.5 Cristóbal Colón, Carta De Cristóbal Colón a Los Reyes Católicos, En Que Da Su Parecer Sobre Población Y Negociación De La Isla Española Y De Las Otras Descubiertas Y Por Descubrir (1496–1497). Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, RES/261/69/2 Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid. Accessible at: http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000202198
Mapping the Tropics

From the start, Columbus set out to map the tropics. To verify the faithful execution of his orders, Columbus tells the Spanish royals he will write “down each day full details of everything I do and see and experience on this voyage” because “I intend to make a new chart in which I will
set out the whole of the Ocean Sea, with sea and land properly laid out with true positions and courses.”407 By recording the ‘true positions’ of islands and mainlands, this ‘new chart’ would ostensibly enable Iberian pilots to sail to and from the Indies. In this historical context, the “rediscovery of the Ptolemaic system of coordinate geometry in the fifteenth century was a critical cartographic privileging a ‘Euclidean syntax’ which structured European territorial control.”408 The recent translations of Tetrabiblos and Geography from Arabic to Latin would galvanize Ptolemy’s influence.409 In fact, Columbus plans to use Ptolemy’s mathematical grid-system to provide an accurate geography. He describes his objective by stating: “I also intend to compose a book including a true depiction of everything, giving its latitude from the Equator and its western longitude.”410 The plan to create a geometric map based on coordinates sheds light on the scientific nature of his task. To date, however, only one cartographic text, the Oceanic Chart and World Map, has been attributed to the Navigator.

To understand Columbus’ theological geography, it is important to outline the way in which Ptolemy conceptualizes the natural order. As an Aristotelian thinker, Ptolemy affirms a natural hierarchy in which higher elements wield power over lower ones. Ptolemy, for instance, describes the primordial effects of ether, the highest element, by writing:


409 In Latin, Tetrabiblos translates as Quadripartitum.

410 Columbus, Voyage, 82.
A very few considerations would make it apparent to all that a certain power (*dynamis*) emanating from the eternal ethereal substance is dispersed through and permeates the whole region about the earth, which throughout is subject to change, since, of the primary sub lunar elements, fire and air are encompassed and changed by motions in the ether, and in turn change all else, earth and water and the plants and animals therein.\(^{411}\)

In other words, fire and air effect lower elements such as water and earth. At the sublunar level, the movement of sun impacts everything; solar rays determine the earth’s climate, reproductive cycles, and even animal life. Ptolemy declares:

> For the Sun, together with the surrounding environment, is always in some way affecting everything on earth, not only by the changes that accompany the seasons of the year to bring about the generation of animals, the productiveness of plants, the flowing of waters, and the changes of bodies, but also by its daily revolutions furnishing heat, moisture, dryness and cold in regular order and in correspondence with its positions relative to the zenith.\(^{412}\)

This cosmology enables Columbus to convey the allure of the tropics. While returning from the first voyage, Columbus writes a Letter to the Sovereigns, dated March 4, 1493. In it, he says that upon arriving in the Indies, “I found innumerable people and very many islands, of which I took possession in Your Highnesses’ name.”\(^{413}\) Yet he mentions a deviation from the closed geography of the ancients. Columbus declares that all “these islands are densely populated with the best people under the sun.”\(^{414}\) The phrase ‘under the sun’ refers to the torrid zone, which had been considered uninhabitable. This hemispheric region is located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of

\[^{411}\text{Ptolemy, }\textit{Tetrabiblos}, \text{ book I.2.}\]

\[^{412}\text{Ibid. See Barton, }\textit{Ancient Astrology}, \text{ 105.}\]

\[^{413}\text{Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” }190.\]

\[^{414}\text{Ibid., 192; emphasis added.}\]
Capricorn (see Figure 2.6).\textsuperscript{415} Here Columbus is drawing from Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420), Chair of Theology at the University of Paris, who also served as the Bishop of Cambrai and then as Cardinal.\textsuperscript{416} Intellectual historian Valerie Flint notes that Columbus closely engaged two texts before embarking on the first voyage: d'Ailly's encyclopedic treatise \textit{Imago Mundi} (1480) and a printed Latin edition of \textit{Historia Rerum} (1477) by Pope Pius II.\textsuperscript{417} Flint maintains that “these two treatises as a whole could, at least, have constituted a vital part of Columbus’s mental cargo from the very beginning.”\textsuperscript{418} D'Ailly provides Columbus with a way to theorize the solar effects on the tropics.\textsuperscript{419} Location determines the Indies’ value.

\textsuperscript{415} Figure 2.6 Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420), Illustrations de Tractatus de imagine munidi Petri de Aliaco et varia ejusdem auctoris et Joannis Gerson opuscula (1483). Jean de Paderborn de Westphalie/Louvain, 9464/R15482. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Accessible at: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b2100027r/f2.item

\textsuperscript{416} For more on d'Ailly’s political theology and role in late medieval Catholic reform, see Louis B. Pascoe, \textit{Church and Reform: Bishops, Theologians, and Canon Lawyers in the Thought of Pierre D’ailly, 1351–1420}, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 9–34, 163–197.

\textsuperscript{417} Francis Oakley, \textit{The Political Thought of Pierre D’ailly: The Voluntarist Tradition}, ed. David Horne, Yale Historical Publications. Miscellany (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 47. “The text of D’Ailly's \textit{Imago Mundi} itself clearly commanded a large measure of Columbus's attention, if we are to judge by the number of notes he made on it (475), but each of the other twenty treatises and extracts, save six, seems to have fallen prey to his pen. All of the treatises and the overwhelming majority of the annotations are in Latin,” 45. Columbus bequeathed a total of five annotated texts, the most important of which is \textit{Imago Mundi}. It resides in the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville, Spain. See Pierre d’Ailly, Jean Gerson, and Christopher Columbus, \textit{Imago Mundi} (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927).


\textsuperscript{419} For a text that continues to be the most in depth study of d’Ailly’s, see Laura Ackerman Smoller, \textit{History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre D’ailly, 1350–1420} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 59–82; 161–176. See also Valerie I. J. Flint, \textit{The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 162.
Other journal entries illuminate how Columbus employs medieval cosmology. Columbus tells the royals that after seeing the precious jewelry worn by Taínos, “I kept my eyes open and tried to find out if there was any gold.” He claims to have “gathered from their signs that if one goes south, or around the south side of the island there is a king with...enormous amounts” of gold.\(^{420}\) After departing from the island of Fernandina, Columbus declares:

It was my intention to follow the coast to the SE...because according to all these Indians I have on board, and another from whom I received directions, the island of Samoset, where the gold is, lies to the south.421

But how could Taínos provide Columbus with such detailed instructions? After all, neither he nor his crew spoke their language. It seems, rather, that Columbus arrives at this presupposition by reading d’Ailly, who theorized that precious metals were created by the effects of the sun. On such grounds, a concentration of solar rays would generate greater quantities of gold along the equator. The movement of the planets, the argument goes, would imbue tropical climates with natural resources. According to God’s design, territories under the sun are naturally lucrative space.

Columbus’ cosmology also configures the identity of colonial subjects. In the journal entry for October 12, Columbus remarks that Amerindians “must be good servants, and intelligent, for I can see that they quickly repeat everything said to them. I believe they would readily become Christians; it appeared to me that they have no religion.” Maldonado-Torres sees this statement introducing a modern concept of race. According to Maldonado-Torres,

Since the indigenous people were subjects without religion, Columbus did not need to resort to the established parameters of the encounters with idolaters and ‘false religions’ to dictate how he should interact with them. Here, Columbus proposes servitude as something which is part of the very nature of the natives that he encounters. This conception will persist even after it has been conceded that indigenous people had religion or after they have converted to Christianity. This is why the later recognition of the indigenous as Christians would not lead Columbus to alter the way he saw them.422

Indeed, Columbus’ view of indigenous peoples may not have changed; after all, he died believing he had discovered India. However, Maldonado-Torres exaggerates the impact of Columbus’ idea that indigenous people were ‘subjects without religion.’ Within a few years, a number of colonial

421 Columbus, Voyage, 100; emphasis added.
writers would describe Amerindians as idolaters, pagans, or Muslims. Where one was placed geographically was of far greater importance. Location, rather than being ‘without religion,’ would determine the human nature of colonial subjects.

Columbus uses latitude to formulate a racial calculation. Columbus echoes the Portuguese chronicler Zurara.423 “In the early morning” of October 13, Columbus writes,

many of the islanders came to the beach, all young...tall and handsome, their hair not curly, but flowing and thick, like horsehair. They are all broader in the forehead and head than any people I have ever seen, with fine, large eyes. None of them is black.424

Columbus uses almost homoerotic terms—young, tall, handsome with thick flowing hair and large fine eyes—to describe Amerindian bodies. Yet he makes sure to distinguish them from Africans by mentioning that ‘none is black.’ His ambiguity about curly hair and blackness conveys a disdain for African features. Like Zurara, Columbus articulates a racial scale of existence.425 In the Letter to Santángel, dated February 15, 1493, Columbus emphasizes their latitude. He recounts, “I have not yet found any human monsters, as many expected,” but rather,

people of very pleasing appearance; they are not Negroes as in Guinea, except that their hair flows freely, and they do not live where the sun’s rays are too strong. It is true that the sun is very strong there, that place being only twenty-six degrees from the equator.426

423 “The scale of existence, however, with white (unharmed) flesh at the one end and black (harmed) flesh at the other, grew in power precisely in the space created by Portuguese expansion into new lands.” Jennings, Christian Imagination, 24.

424 Jennings, Christian Imagination, 95.

425 “The scale of existence, however, with white (unharmed) flesh at the one end and black (harmed) flesh at the other, grew in power precisely in the space created by Portuguese expansion into new lands.” Jennings, Christian Imagination, 24.

Notice how Columbus initially expresses ambivalence about the sun. He seems to equivocate about the intensity of the heat. As he uses climate to distinguish the Indies from the African tropics, a racial hierarchy emerges from his geographic imagination. Columbus contrasts Amerindian bodies, who are of ‘very pleasing appearance,’ with the Negroes of Guinea, whose bodies are displeasing presumably because ‘the sun’s rays are too strong.’ Latitude, in particular, informs the enslaveability of indigenous people. After situating the Indies at 26˚ N latitude, Columbus assures the crown that the Caribbean “is in a place, as I have said, signaled by the hand of Our Lord,” from where you can obtain “so many slaves that they are innumerable.” As such, Columbus grounds indigenous enslaveability on the fact they inhabit a place where ‘the sun is very strong.’ Location determines their state of expendability. This dynamic resurfaces in the way Columbus uses the color of indigenous bodies to justify dominion over the tropics.

The ‘colour’ of indigenous bodies serves to bolster the legal basis for the Columbian Enterprise. Historian of science Nicolás Wey Gómez indicates that “Columbus evidently meant to reassure his royal patrons that he had never steered below the Canarian latitudes on the outward passage.” According to Wey Gómez, Columbus intentionally recorded a western

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427 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 194. As a point of comparison, the scholastic theologian José de Acosta articulates a similar point. Commenting on Peru, Acosta writes: “Hence we see that the lands in the Indies that are richest in mines and wealth have been those most advanced of our desires to serve his sovereign ends.” José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), IV:2.

428 “Columbus must have known that he had ended up declining slightly to the south across the Atlantic, for this fact would even be reported by Peter Martyr on the basis of Columbus’s documents as early as November 1493. But caution must have played some role in Columbus’s official stance that the lands discovered on this first voyage—the Bahamas, Cuba, and Hispaniola—were not south of the Canaries.” Wey Gómez, *Tropics of Empire*, 16. In response to objections regarding Columbus’ cartographic limitations, Wey Gómez concludes that “one should also be content to state that Columbus simply overestimated by nearly four degrees that latitude of the island he reached on 12 October, and that in the early moments of the first voyage he did truly believe that San Salvador stood neck to neck with El Hierro,” 16.
(rather than a southwestern) trajectory to avoid suggesting he violated Alcáçovas, which prohibited Spanish vessels from sailing south towards Guinea. Therefore, Columbus declares that Amerindians are “the same colour as the folk on the Canary Islands, which is what one might expect, this island being on the same latitude as Hierro in the Canaries, which lies due E.” On such grounds, early Iberian cartographers place the Caribbean islands north of the Tropic of Cancer. Juan de Cosa’s Map and the Cantino Map are two telling examples (see Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.10). This rationale turns indigenous bodies into a tool for their own oppression. Columbus’ racial imagination undergirds the dispossession of space.

Columbus transforms the Indies into feminine space through a patriarchal discourse of desire. Literary scholar Margarita Zamora shows how his language “inscribes ‘the Indies’ in a psychosexual discourse of the feminine whose principal coordinates are initially beauty and fertility and, ultimately, possession and domination.” Indeed, throughout his journal, Columbus juxtaposes northern and southern landscapes. He constantly emphasizes that tropical flora and fauna are “very different from ours.” Accordingly, “the rivers and harbors are so abundant and

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429 “Columbus evidently meant to reassure his royal patrons that he had never steered below the Canarian latitudes on the outward passage: as an explanation for his claim that the ‘Indians’ he had just found displayed the same skin color as the inhabitants of the Canaries, ‘neither black nor white,’ Columbus underscored that the island of San Salvador stood on the very same parallel as the Canarian island of El Hierro, that is, somewhere above the twenty-seventh parallel.” Columbus, Voyage, 95; emphasis added; see also Wey Gómez, Tropics of Empire, 11.


431 Keller, “Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey,” 162.

432 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 192.
of such extreme excellence when compared to those of Christian lands, that it is a marvel.” His numinous language attempts to bridge this hermeneutical gap.

Zamora, however, misunderstands the way theology informs Columbus’ discourse on desire. Unable to account fully for the natural environment, he portrays the tropics as something which cannot be expressed nor explained. The Indies, he claims, exhibit “marvelously temperate breezes, and marvelous meadows and fields incomparable to those of Castile.” Zamora claims that for “Columbus, ‘marvel’ is analogous in the natural realm to ‘miracle’ in the realm of faith.” This claim, however, applies a false dichotomy between faith and nature. Throughout his corpus, Columbus uses theological language, as in the lens of faith, to interpret the natural world. For Columbus, nature is primarily divine creation. Moreover, the marginal notations recorded in his library collection shed light on this conviction. In his personal copy of Geography, Columbus inscribes: “For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy” (Mirabilia elationes maris; myrabilis in altis Dominum). In fact, the Latin word mirabiles (‘work’), which stems from mirabilia translates into “wonders, wonderful things, marvelous works.” Columbus sees the natural world as God’s creation; he interprets nature through the lens of faith.

433 Ibid.
434 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 194.
435 Zamora, Reading Columbus, 158.
436 “For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work at the works of your hands I sing for joy.” Psalms 92:4 in Oxford Bible: NRSV. Columbus appears to have cited from a Septuagint translation of the Bible. See Simón de la Rosa y López, Libros y Autógrafos de Cristóbal Colón, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 44 footnote 7.
437 Flint, Imaginative Landscape of Columbus, 162.
Similarly, Columbus uses theological language to feminize the tropics. His account seduces the reader by conjuring images of beauty beyond words. Columbus insists that the islands “are so extremely fertile, that even if I were able to express it, it would not be a marvel were it to be disbelieved.”

Notice how the trope of fertility supplements the reader’s imagination. Christian audiences would likely hear an echo of the Creation story. Columbus’ words would draw power from the Genesis passage in which God tells Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over...every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Columbus construes the tropics as feminine space precisely by invoking this biblical language. This rhetorical practice also manifests in early modern maps. “Female sexuality in depictions of African women and allegories for America and other continents is often explicit for the benefit of male-dominated European societies.”

Above any single commodity the land herself becomes the primary object of colonialist desire; the implication is clear: virgin terrains await male domination.

Columbus queers indigenous men as justification for colonial domination. Columbus praises the Arawak physique one of his first encounters, writing: “All the men I saw were quite young, none older than thirty, all well–built, finely bodied, and handsome in the face,” for they

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439 Genesis 1:28 in Oxford Bible: NRSV; emphasis added.


441 See Carolyn Merchant, Reinventing Eden, 93–116; see also Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169–196.
“are all the same size, of good stature, dignified and well formed.”442 The climate has made indigenous men like their natural environment: remarkably beautiful. Columbus decries their vulnerable condition, however. Apparently all the “women and men alike, go about naked,” possessing “neither iron nor weapons.”443 Their natural condition reflects a deeper problem: moral deficiency. According to Columbus, Amerindians are incapable of wielding steel blades and guns, “not from any deformity of body, but because they are incredible cowards” even to the point that “fathers forsook their children” in the face of danger.444 Their deficiency, moreover, derives from religious ignorance. Because the power “to transform nature” into tools “is a crucial part of what it is to be a man; for Nature had been given by God to man for his use.”445 This scholastic paradigm justifies “the projection of European power in the subjugation of the natives.”446 While physically developed, Amerindians are morally underdeveloped. Like infants, they require proper protection.

A scholastic conception of nature undergirds the dispossession of the tropics. Columbus claims his crew had “found many settlements and innumerable people, but no government of any importance.”447 Seen from a colonialist perspective, the absence of political organization is surprising because the “land is the finest, most fertile, level, rich and temperate on the face of the

442 Columbus, Voyage, 94.
443 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 192.
444 Cristóbal Colón, Textos y Documentos Completos: Relaciones de Viajes, Cartas y Memoriales (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982), 141–142; emphasis added.
445 “Men were thus encouraged to see in the natural world a design of which they were the final beneficiaries.” Anthony Pagden, European Encounters: From Renaissance to Romanticism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.
446 Zamora refers to this dynamic as “metaphors of disparity.” See Reading Columbus, 167.
earth.”448 This assertion reaffirms Amerindian inferiority. Columbus remarks, “I have not learned that any one of them has private property.”449 Like children, Amerindians fail to recognize the potential of their natural environment. “Nature,” according to Aristotelian Thomism, “had been created in a state of potentiality, as an inert undriven mass whose actuality could only be realized through the purposeful action of men.”450 By exchanging gold and precious jewels for broken glass and worthless objects, Amerindians fail to understand, and perhaps contradict, the natural order established by God. And so, by transforming native land into private property, Iberians would be actualizing the God-given potential of the Indies. This logic of dispossession would provide the “horse-power of modernity” by integrating the Americas into a global economy that revolves around endless accumulation.451

Demarcating Imperial Boundaries

In this part, I examine how Spain and Portugal map their geographic boundaries. I accomplish this task by analyzing the theological discourse undergirding the Papal Donation and the Line of Demarcation. In the wake of the first voyage, Columbus’ writings received considerable attention from the Vatican. Rodrigo de Borgia (1431–1503), a member of the eminent Borgia family of Spain, was ordained Pope Alexander VI on August 11, 1492. He served as ‘Vicar of Christ’ until

448 Columbus, Voyage, 102.
449 Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 192; emphasis added.
450 Pagden, European Encounters, 6.
451 Columbus would “encode and enact a pervasive mood of late medieval Europe and therefore shed light on its movement into the subsequent period, indeed they provide a religious passage from patriarchal past to patriarchal future.” Keller, “The Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey,” 70.
his death on August 18, 1503, becoming the last pope of the fifteenth century. His papacy would profoundly shape the modern world. Alexander authored a series of bulls, or official letters, which granted papal authority to the Columbian Enterprise. His intervention included but went beyond evangelism. Issuing what became known as the Papal Donation, Alexander played a leading role in determining the scope and nature of imperial dominion over the globe.

Alexander envisions the Reconquista as an integral part in Spain’s imperial expansion. In the Inter Caetera I, dated May 3, 1493, the pope describes Columbus’ enterprise as a continuation of the historic events “achieved in these very times.” He links the Discovery to Spain’s recovery of “the kingdom of Granada from the tyranny of the Saracens,” which brought remarkable “glory to the Divine name.” After the “barbarous nations” (i.e. Jews and Muslims) were “subjugated and


453 Hanke captures the issue by asking: “Did the Pope intend to entrust the Spanish monarchs with only a missionary task, and grant such power and privilege as would enable them to achieve this limited objective?” Lewis Hanke, *Spanish Struggle for Justice*, 29. For a critical summary on the debate regarding the nature of Alexander VI’s donation, see also Silvio A. Zavala, *New Viewpoints on the Spanish Colonization of America*, trans. Joan Coyne (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1943), 17–28; Manuel Giménez Fernández, “Nuevas Consideraciones Sobre La Historia, Sentido y Valor de las Bulas Alejandrinas de 1493 Referentes a las Indias,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 3, no. 1 (1944); Anne Fremantle, *The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context* (New York: Putnam, 1956), 77–81.

454 See Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 25–69. Scholars debate the legal weight ascribed to Papal Bulls. For a synopsis of the debate, see Giménez Fernández, “Nuevas consideraciones Sobre las Bulas Alejandrinas,” 137: “pero al mismo tiempo afirmamos que la mentalidad ideológica en que se fundamentó su concesión...fructificó más adelante con talcontal vigor, que constituye eslabón imprescindible de la moderna cultural jurídica cristiana en sus distintos aspectos, político, social e internacional.”


456 Ibid.
brought to the very true faith,” Isabel and Fernando could concentrate on global expansion.\textsuperscript{457}

Alexander insists that

as it has pleased the Lord, the aforesaid Kingdom [of Al-Andalus] having been recovered...you have appointed our beloved son Christopher Columbus...to seek diligently such remote and unknown lands by sea, which had not been navigated before...through western parts in the Ocean, as it is said towards the Indies.\textsuperscript{458}

Alexander’s understanding of the religious landscape derives from Columbus. The Admiral had written:

Nowhere in these islands have I known the inhabitants to have a religion, or idolatry, or much diversity of language among them, but rather they all understand each other.\textsuperscript{459}

Notice the association of linguistic homogeneity with religious deprivation, an issue which Las Casas takes up at Valladolid (see Chapter 4). In honor of their victorious crusade, the Spanish royals received a new title; Fernando and Isabel become the “true Catholic Kings.”\textsuperscript{460} But as a result, Alexander tells them, “you are bound by apostolic demands...to prosecute such an expedition” because, driven by a zealous “orthodox faith,” you will surely “induce the peoples living in such islands to accept the Christian profession.”\textsuperscript{461} This title confers a responsibility that parallels that of Saint Peter. By doing so, Alexander merges imperial interests with those of the church.

Here Maldonado-Torres extrapolates from Columbus more than reason permits. He claims that with “Columbus’ description of the natives as beings without religion rather than

\textsuperscript{457} Ibid.; emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{459} Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 192.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 23; emphasis removed.
subjects with false religiosity, we see the initiation of a new regime, one based more on degrees of being than on degrees of truth or falsity.”462 Whereas infidels or heretics in Iberia were “lacking truth,” Amerindians, as beings “without religion,” were “lacking what was deemed to be a universal feature of humankind, therefore putting their very humanity in question.”463 By denying their religious subjectivity, Columbus would justify their perpetual enslavement. This argument forces a discontinuity between the religious logic undergirding the Reconquista and the Conquest that both Columbus and Alexander deny. Alexander, in fact, commands the royals “to subdue to [yourselves] with the aid of God’s clemency and to lead to the Catholic faith the foresaid lands and islands, their natives and inhabitants.”464 The command to ‘subdue’ the Amerindians echoes his earlier statement that praises Islamic ‘subjugation.’ The genocide/epistemicide of Jews and Muslims in Al-Andalus serves as a template for the “propagation of the Christian Empire” in the Americas.465

As head of the church, Alexander envisions his donation as the extension of divine sovereignty. Alexander awards Spain all the “dominions, states, camps, places and villages, with all right and jurisdictions and everything else belonging thereto,” on the “authority of the omnipotent God granted to us in Saint Peter and of the vicariate of Jesus Christ which we are

463 “Subjects with the wrong religion are to be refuted, while subjects without religion are ‘discovered,’ indoctrinated, perpetually enslaved, and colonized.” Ibid., 650. See also Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” Rereading the Black Legend, 316: “if Jews and Moors were classified according to their belief in the wrong God, Indians (and later black Africans) had to be classified as having no religion.”
464 Alexander VI, Papal Bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas, 23; emphasis added.
465 See Ibid., 21. The word “subdue” comes from the Latin subicere.
exercising on earth.”\textsuperscript{466} \textit{Inter Caetera} defines the transatlantic enterprise as an ecclesial project. Christ’s authority sustains, rather than subverts, imperialist expansion. Like Columbus, the pope attentively complies with the terms set out in Alcáçovas. Spain’s territorial claims stand only if the new lands “are not established under the actual temporal sovereignty of any Christian Sovereigns.”\textsuperscript{467} And thus, none of Portugal’s existing privileges are “annulled” nor “taken away.”\textsuperscript{468} Concern for Iberian privileges, however, starkly contrasts with a blatant disregard for Amerindian sovereignty. The Admiral declared that despite encountering large populations, his men found no government of importance on Española (present-day Haiti).\textsuperscript{469} Concurring with Columbus, the pope donates all “of these [lands] with full, free and every sort of power, authority and jurisdiction” to Spain for “all eternity.”\textsuperscript{470} Neither Columbus nor Alexander acknowledge, let alone respect, the sovereignty of indigenous people. Wielding Apostolic authority (\textit{plenitudo potestatis}),

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[466] Ibid., 23. The Roman Catholic Church approached the question of papal versus conciliar authority. But in the end, it understood the pope and the councils working in conjunction rather than in competition. “The principles hitherto set forth supply a complete solution to the controversy. General councils represent the Church; the pope therefore stands to them in the same relation as he stands to the Church. But that relation is one of neither superiority nor inferiority, but of intrinsic cohesion: the pope is neither above nor below the Church, but in it as the center is in the circle, as intellect and will are in the soul. By taking our stand on the Scriptural doctrine that the Church is the mystical body of Christ of which the pope is the visible head, we see at once that a council apart from the pope is but a lifeless trunk, a ‘rump parliament’, no matter how well attended it be.” See Joseph Wilhelm, “General Councils,” \textit{The Catholic Encyclopedia}, 4.XII.
\item[468] Ibid.
\item[469] Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 191.
\item[470] Alexander VI, \textit{Papal Bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas}, 23; emphasis removed. Alexander tells the Spanish royals that the church will “grant to you and our said heirs and successors, that in the islands thus discovered by you and to be discovered, all general and particular grants, privileges, exemptions, liberties, powers, immunities and indults of such sorts...you may and shall use, possess and enjoy freely and legitimately, wholly and also in all ways as if they had been specially conceded to you and your abovementioned heirs and successors, by like motion, authority, knowledge and plenitude of apostolic power by a gift of special grace.” Ibid., 25.
\end{itemize}
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the pope sanctions the perpetual subjugation of the Global South without any apparent hesitation.
Figure 2.7 Carta Universal de Juan de la Cosa, c. 1500
Inter Caetera II, signed on May 4, 1493, builds on the first bull by delineating the hemispheric boundaries of Iberian empires. Alexander gives specific instructions, telling the Spanish royals to draw a “line from the Arctic pole, that is the north, to the Antarctic pole, that is the south.” Establishing this boundary should keep Spanish vessels “one hundred leagues towards west and south” away “from any of the islands which are commonly called the Azores and Cape Verde.” Alexander therefore prescribes a line of demarcation three hundred nautical miles (approximately 555 kilometers) southwest of Portuguese territory (see Figure 2.6). Sustained efforts to determine its precise location would galvanize the modern discipline of cartography.

Fortunately for the Spanish crown, a cosmographer by the name of Juan de la Cosa (1450–1510) accompanied Columbus on three separate occasions. Cosa is credited with producing the Carta Universal, the earliest European map of the Indies (see Figure 2.7). Historian of science María Portuondo remarks that while cosmographic concerns “occupied some university scholars, by the late sixteenth century cosmographical production in Spain shifted to the Casa de la

471 Alexander VI, Papal Bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas, 35.
472 Ibid.; emphasis removed.
474 Marta Luisa Martín-Merás, Cartografía Marítima Hispana: La Imagen de América, Colección Ciencia y Mar (Barcelona: Lunwerg, 1993), 80.
Contratación," namely, the House of Trade. With the appointment of a Major Pilot (primer piloto major) and Major Cosmographer (cosmógrafo major), the production of seafaring technology would increasingly be taken up by trained professionals working for royal institutions. The empire’s unbounded desire would transform mapmaking into a secret science. And Alexander VI would chart a way forward by granting the Papal Donation and establishing the first Line of Demarcation.

Although scholars question its authorship, the Chart and World Map contain several theological and empirical tenets that emerge throughout Columbus’ writings. Instead, Aristotelian Thomism operates at an implicit level. The curricular world map, which depicts a


477 “Chartered with overseeing all navigation to the Indies, in 1508 the Casa named its first pilot major, [Amerigo Vespucci] responsible for establishing—after sanctioned carrera de Indias (navigation routes to the Indies).” Ibid., 60; see also Víctor Navarro, Jerónimo Muñoz: Introducción a la Astronomía y la Geografía, ed. Encarna Pastor, Colleccio Oberta (Valencia: Consell Valenciá de Cultura, 2004); Víctor Navarro Brotons, Enrique Rodriguez Galdeano, and Jerónimo Muñoz, Matemáticas, Cosmología y Humanismo en la España del Siglo XVI, Cuadernos Valencianos de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia (Valencia: Instituto de Estudios Documentales e Históricos sobre la Ciencia, 1998).


tripartite geography based on Noah’s lineage, connects directly to Columbus’ scholastic tradition. The map depicts a geocentric world encircled by nine heavenly spheres in accordance with Aristotelian physics (see Figure 2.8). This image visualizes Aquinas’ conception of God as the unmoved mover. Two extended descriptions on the cosmic order by Pierre d’Ailly, which are fixed on either side of the image, testify to the influence of Aristotelian Thomism. It would be misleading therefore to conclude, as Edson does, that its theological or “supernatural element is greatly reduced.” Moreover, like Fra Mauro’s mappamundi, the circular image illustrates the possibility of circumnavigating Africa. The map reflects Bartolomeo Dias’ voyage to the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 (see Figure 2.7). Dias apparently presented the king of Portugal with visual representation of his recent travels. To which Columbus remarks: *In quibus omnibus, interfui* (“At all these events, I was present”). A close analysis of the Oceanic Chart exhibits a concern with Columbus’ commercial interests. In addition to details of Africa’s northern and southern coastline,

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480 Figure 2.8 Christophe Colomb (1450?–1506). Carte Marine de l’océan Atlantique Nord–Est, de la mer Baltique, de la mer Méditerranée et de la mer Noire, accompagnée d’une mappemonde circulaire. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département Cartes et plans, CPL GE AA–562 (RES). Accessible at: gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b59062629/f1.item

481 Again Edson asserts: “In this popular work *Ymago Mundi* (1410), Pierre d’Ailly examined all these theories and concluded that the land area of the globe was greater than that of the sea, an opinion enthusiastically approved by Columbus, who annotated his copy with extensive notes.” Edson, *World Map 1300–1492*, 207; see also “De Quantitate Terre Habitabilis,” in d’Ailly, *Ymago mundi*, 1:206–215.


483 Ibid., 214. As evidence for this claim, Edson writes “[t]he small...world map displays some 250 place-names, and unlike the sea chart, shows all of Africa, including the results of Dias’s voyage—the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the premise that one could sail around Africa into the Indian Ocean” Ibid., 213.

484 Again Edson asserts: “In this popular work *Ymago Mundi* (1410), Pierre d’Ailly examined all these theories and concluded that the land area of the globe was greater than that of the sea, an opinion enthusiastically approved by Columbus, who annotated his copy with extensive notes.” Edson, *World Map 1300–1492*, 207; see also “De Quantitate Terre Habitabilis,” in d’Ailly, *Ymago mundi*, 1:206–215.
the chart indicates “where wheat could be grown and where it needed to be imported.” And, more importantly perhaps, the chart identifies “places where gold might be found” throughout the tropics. These theological and historic points of connection make it difficult to deny that this World Map reflects Columbus’ geographic imagination. So, while the author’s identity may not be settled, this image of the world provides a glimpse of Columbus’ theological geography.


Figure 2.8 Chart of the Atlantic Ocean (right side) with a circular World Map (left side). Columbus’ Oceanic Chart and World Map, c. 1488 ©Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Figure 2.9 Detail of a tripartite geography surrounded by the nine spheres comprising the cosmic order in Columbus’ World Map.
In *Inter Caetera* II, Alexander employs a scholastic rationale to bolster Spain’s hemispheric sovereignty. While it may appear insignificant, Alexander recounts how Santa María, one of Columbus’ ships, crash-landed on the northeastern coast of Española on Christmas day. Crew members used the shipwreck to construct a “fortification” in a village they named “La Navidad.”

The pope reiterates that Columbus’ crew has built “one sufficiently well-fortified tower,” which was currently occupied by “certain Christians” on the island. Columbus ostensibly supplied thirty men “with provisions to last over a year,” so they could stay behind to locate “other remote and unknown islands and lands” that may contain “very many other precious things,” specifically, gold and spices. In doing so, the colonialists demonstrate their mastery over nature, a capacity which, they say, eludes the native savages. Pagden describes this Christian Aristotelian theory in the following way:

> All trees, as Aristotle said, were potentially, but not actually, chairs. It required man’s art, his *techne*, to release from the tree its essential ‘chairness’. *Techne*, or as we would say technology, and what in Latin was called *scientia*, is man’s capacity to transform the world according to his needs...Those who understood this, and hence could use science to control nature, were ‘civil’ or ‘civilized’, and those who did not were either ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian’.

Read in this light, it is possible to grasp the theological implications of the event. Equipped with superior technology and knowledge of nature’s true potential, Columbus’ men transform barbarian space into Christian territory. By including this incident in *Inter Caetera* II, Alexander anticipates the objections raised by Northern European merchants who “challenged the notion

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489 Ibid., 21, 23; see Columbus, “Letter to the Sovereigns (4 March),” 194.

Since Columbus’ men already inhabit La Navidad, the pope prohibits any European vessels from venturing into the tropics without first obtaining “special license” from the Spanish crown.\footnote{Alexander VI, \textit{Papal Bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas}, 23.} In this way, Alexander draws on the scholastic tradition to outline regulations for transatlantic commerce. The bull concludes with a harsh punishment for all who violate its terms: definitive excommunication from the Catholic Church (\textit{excommunicatio late sententie}).\footnote{Ibid. \textit{Excommunicatio}: “excommunication; a censure by which an individual Catholic is excluded from communion with the faithful within the limits determined by the law,” \textit{Láte}: “broadly, extensively, widely,” \textit{Senténtia}: “sentence; a legitimate and definitive pronouncement by which a judge settles a question or a case that was proposed by litigants and tried judicially.” Stelten, \textit{Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin}, 306, 148, 244.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
In the immediate aftermath, Spain and Portugal disputed the demarcation’s longitudinal location. Conflicting reports, different methods of calculation, and the clandestine nature of cartography complicated their efforts.\(^{494}\) Intending to resolve the dispute, Iberian royals, along with their cosmographers and legal advisors, met in the Spanish city of Tordesillas. After prolonged negotiations the participants reached a new agreement, and signed the Treaty of

\(^{494}\) See Henry Harrisse, *The Discovery of North America; a Critical, Documentary, and Historic Investigation, with an Essay on the Early Cartography of the New World, Including Descriptions of Two Hundred and Fifty Maps or Globes Existing or Lost, Constructed before the Year 1536; to Which Are Added a Chronology of One Hundred Voyages Westward, Projected, Attempted, or Accomplished between 1431 and 1504; Biographical Accounts of the Three Hundred Pilots Who First Crossed the Atlantic; and a Copious List of the Original Names of American Regions, Caciqueships, Mountains, Islands, Capes, Gulfs, Rivers, Towns, and Harbours* (London: H. Stevens and son; H. Welter J. Clegg, 1892).
Tordesillas (1494). The treaty built on *Inter Caetera* I and II by extending the line of demarcation westward and providing additional mapping instructions. In the end, both empires agreed that a boundary or straight line be determined and drawn north and south, from pole to pole, on the said ocean sea, from the Arctic to the Antarctic pole. *This boundary or line shall be drawn straight, as aforesaid, at a distance of three hundred and seventy leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, being calculated by degrees, or by any other manner as may be considered the best and readiest, provided the distance shall be no greater than above said.*

Tordesillas therefore situates the parallel at 370 leagues, approximately 1,110 nautical miles (or 2,005 kilometers) west of the line established by Alcáçovas. Spain and Portugal commit to send a team of “pilots, astrologers, sailors” to the Canaries, and from there, to the Cape Verde Islands, in order to “study and examine to better advantage the sea, courses, winds, and the degrees of the sun or of north latitude, and lay out the leagues.” After sailing 370 leagues west of Cape Verde, ‘pilots, astrologers, sailors’ would “mark and bound” their exact longitude. With the aid of new technologies, such as the cross staff, torquetum, and quadrant, Iberian agents assessed the

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495 Spain ratified the Treaty of Tordesillas on July 2, 1494 and Portugal on September 5, 1494.
496 “Treaty of Tordesillas,” *European Treaties*, 95; emphasis added.
497 These calculations are based on Wey Goméz’ estimate that 1 league equals 3 nautical miles (or 1.85 kilometers). For Ferrer, 1 league equals 4 miles, while for Marchant 1 Spanish league equals 3.18 nautical miles, which totals 1,176 nautical miles or 2,177 kilometers. See Wey Gómez, *Tropics of Empire*, 18–23; Marchant, *Papal Line of Demarcation*, 71. For more on the controversy, see “The Determination of the Length of a Terrestrial Degree by Columbus,” in Nunn, *Geographical Conceptions of Columbus*, 1–30.
movement of celestial bodies to plot their geographic location. In sum, knowledge of the created order enabled them to produce astronomical calculations.

This systematic demarcation of space marks the birth of modern cartography. As Portuondo explains, Ptolemaic cosmography became “the science that explained the earthly sphere by locating it within a mathematical grid bounding space and time.” By quantifying entire hemispheres in this way, the map projected an imperial image of the world which naturalized imperial boundaries. The Cantino map, for instance, shows the Alcáçovas line cutting through the Belt of the Tropics, indicating how all of the mainlands and islands “toward the east, in either north or south latitude,” permanently belonged to Portugal (see Figure 2.11). In accordance with the Treaty of Tordesillas, the map displays which territories to the “west, in either its north or south latitude, shall belong to, and remain in the possession of, and pertain forever to, the said King and Queen of Castile.” This partition of Atlantic space, as outlined in Tordesillas, would have far-reaching consequences. By calibrating the spatial scope of Iberian empires, it solidified knowledge/power in the Global North.

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500 “In various juntas called to discuss the ‘Tordesillas Questions,’ cosmographers compared methodologies, shared skills, and developed ways of argumentation to support cosmographical facts, while in the process coalescing as a community and establishing a professional identity as specialized scientific practitioners.” Portuondo, Secret Science, 61.

501 See Anna Firedman Herlihy, “Renaissance Star Charts,” in Cartography in the European Renaissance, 3, 101

502 Portuondo, “Cosmography During the Century of Discovery,” 59.


Figure 2.11 Detail of the Line of Demarcation as established by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Cantino World Map, c. 1502
Six months after Tordesillas, Jaume Ferrer de Blanes (1445–1523) would map the meridian line of demarcation (see Figure 2.11). Isabel and Fernando commissioned Ferrer, along with a team of specialists to accomplish this task. As Spain’s chief cosmographer, Ferrer relied directly on the Aristotelian tradition to chart Spain’s hemispheric dominion.505 “A product of Renaissance humanism,” Portuondo explains, “cosmography combined the mathematical tools and epistemology of Ptolemaic geography with the classic descriptive geography, modeled after Strabo and Pomponius Mela, while resting firmly upon an Aristotelian understanding of nature.”506 In the 1495 letter to the royals, Ferrer explains his synthesis of scholastic knowledge. He describes his conceptual framework by writing:

And likewise, you will see the equinoctial circle and the two tropics of the declination of the sun, and the seven climates, and each one of these circles put in its proper place as in the treatise on the sphere and in the situ orbis [which] learned men direct and divide into degrees.507

By citing these ancient authorities, Ferrer situates his work squarely within Western geographic tradition. He refers to Plato’s text On the Sphere and cites Situ Orbis written by the first-century geographer Pomponius Mela (d. 45). Ferrer likely had access to a Latin edition of Mela’s treatise, a text printed in 1477 and circulated among Iberian cosmographers.508

505 Harrisse, Diplomatic History of America, iv.
506 Portuondo, “Cosmography during the Century of Discovery,” 59.
508 For the earliest printed edition, see Pomponius Mela, Cosmographia, Sive de Situ Orbis (Milan: Tipografo del Mela, 1477).
(1460–1533), Portugal’s official cartographer and one of the Tordesillas signatories, served as Ferrer’s inspiration. Duarte would demonstrate his cosmographic prowess by publishing a treatise *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (1506), which he dedicated to King Manuel I ‘the Fortunate’ of Portugal (r. 1495–1521). Scholars consider Duarte to be one of the ‘learned men’ to whom Ferrer refers.509

Along with other royal cosmographers, Ferrer integrated geometry and first-hand experience into maps. He admits that his “sailing chart is not wholly useful” because it “does not suffice for the mathematical demonstration.”510 Given the pragmatic concerns of Iberian sailors, Ferrer recognizes the need to modify his approach and so advocates for a method that fuses Ptolemaic geometry and nautical expertise within Aristotelian Thomism. He insists, “it is necessary to be a cosmographer, arithmetician and navigator” to excel in cartography because he who does not possess all these three sciences, cannot possibly understand (the rule) nor (can he succeed) by any other way or rule if he is not expert in the three said sciences.511

The Spanish cosmographer Martín Fernández de Enciso (1470–1528) would accomplish this task.512 Enciso, in fact, wrote a navigation manual in 1519 titled *Summa de geographia*, which “was one of the first works to meld the different theoretical strands that made up the discipline of

509 For the earliest printed edition, see Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, ed. Raphael Eduardo de Azevedo Basto, Edição commemorativa da Descoberta da America por Christovão Colombo no seu Quarto Centenario ed. (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1892); see also *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society. 2nd Series (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).


511 Ibid.

cosmography with practical aspects of navigation.” By the mid-sixteenth century, Iberian cartographers would base their projections on this epistemic framework. With the introduction of a coordinate system, Iberians maps wielded scientific authority (see Figure 2.12). A theological geography would undergird the scientific cartography commissioned by Spain.

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513 “Enciso’s text established the format followed by subsequent navigation manuals. It begins by explaining the theoretical underpinning of astronomical navigation, the theory of the sphere. That is, how projecting the celestial poles and equator onto the terrestrial sphere results in a grid of tropics, meridians, and parallels that forms the basis for latitude and longitude coordinates.” Portuondo, “Cosmography during the Century of Discovery,” 63.

Simultaneously, early modern maps would conceal a Eurocentric perspective and an imperial function by representing North Atlantic conceptions of the world as objective reality. In other words, Ptolemaic cartography produces the illusion of objectivity through a dual act of concealment. A geometric grid-system, as cartographic historian David Woodward indicates, “implies that the position of one place is no more important than that of another, and that both geometric center and bounding frame are arbitrary constructions resulting from the assumptions...
about the reference lines from which longitude and latitude are measured.” Ferrer, for instance, advocates for the creation of a “world map in spherical form” that would depict “two hemispheres by its lines and degrees, and the situation of the land, islands and sea, each in its place.” Note how Ferrer uses latitude to inscribe a hemispheric division between the East (Orient) and the West (Occident). This geographic imagination, therefore, anticipates the Orientalist and ethnocontinental hierarchies perpetuated in the Enlightenment. Construing geometric projections as neutral representations of space conceals the political nature of Iberian maps. This conceptualization of space obscures the racial ideology embedded within the natural order of things.


516 Dawson, Lines of Demarcation and Tordesillas, V:543.

2.4 Conclusion

In the wake of Tordesillas, Iberian sovereigns would extend the line of demarcation around the entire globe. With the signing of the Treaty of Zaragoza in 1529, Spain and Portugal delineated their respective claims over the tropics (see Figure 2.13). Pedr de Lemo's

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518 Figure 2.13 Pedro de Lemos and Sebastiã£o Lopes, Planisphere (c. 1590). Département cartes et plans, GE SH ARCH–38. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Accessible at: catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40592157x For a thorough biographical account of Lemos, see Eduardo José
Planisphere (1590) illustrates how Iberian empires mapped a colonial presence in East Asia, the Philippines, India, the Arabian Peninsula, and Eastern Africa. Mapping the tropics would graph a hierarchy between East and West and, perhaps more importantly, between North and South. In retrospect, it is clear how the Columbian Enterprise and the Papal Donation enacted the colonial matrix of power. These continental divisions continue to order the way in which we organize our globalized world.

This chapter engaged a decolonial account of race and religion in the modern/colonial world by tracing two axial moments: the Reconquista and the Columbian Enterprise. Section I examined the reconfiguration of religious difference in Iberia between 1350 and 1492. By analyzing the segregationist policies articulated by Lateran IV, the Council of Basil, and the Inquisition, I showed how ecclesial pronouncements enacted a type of ‘bio-power’ that galvanized religious persecution throughout Iberia. Using a critical theological reading, I detailed how blood purity discourse racialized religious identity by redefining Old and New Christian status as a natural condition passed on through sexual reproduction.

Jews and Muslims suffered exclusion, deportation, or death not because they believed in the ‘wrong God' or practiced the ‘wrong religion,' but rather, because they inhabited the wrong bodies. If they were truly able to convert, conversos would not have been scrutinized. In fact, as I have shown, blood purity discourse would make converso and morisco bloodlines immutable impediments to Christian conversion. For them, real conversion was never truly an option. Spain would ultimately solidify its Christian empire through a dual process of genocide/epistemicide, which culminated in the expulsion of the Jews and the overthrow of Islamic Al-Andalus in 1492.

Spanish efforts at eradicating the internal racial/religious threat set the stage for the second axial moment, namely the conquest and invention of the Americas.

Section II of the chapter explored a crucial yet misunderstood aspect of Columbus’ enterprise—the racial logic undergirding the dispossession of space. In this section, I engaged Willie Jennings, who avers that a racial hierarchy emerges from a diminishing geographic imagination. I tried to show how the opposite was taking place through a close reading of primary documents. My analysis of the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1480) showed how it defined the terms for the Portuguese transatlantic slave trade and granted Spain dominion over the Canary Islands, both of which galvanized the primitive accumulation of capital. My reading revealed that Spain and Portugal deployed theological discourse to articulate global expansion in a way that concurrently mapped racial and spatial hierarchies.

I then examined the way Columbus invoked a patriarchal view of nature rooted in the scholastic tradition. Building on feminist critiques of possession, I showed how Columbus transforms the Indies and its inhabitants into imperial property by feminizing the tropics. Moreover, while Maldonado-Torres does well to note a changing conception of religion in this moment, he mistakenly attributes that to Columbus. I showed how Maldonado-Torres misleadingly augments the idea of the indigenous as people ‘without religion.’ Geography came into play by leading Columbus to see their location ‘under the sun’ as the basis for the dispossession of space and the racialization of bodies. An ‘imagined geography’ would in fact undergird a racial scale of existence.

Finally, I analyzed the ways in which Alexander VI’s *Inter Caetera* I and II (1493) and the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) coincide with the cartographic projects commissioned by Iberian

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sovereigns. My analysis of the Papal Donation and the Line of Demarcation shows how Iberian empires used a theological geography to map their dominion throughout the Atlantic and, in turn, over the entire globe. In the immediate aftermath of 1492, coloniality of power went on to reconfigure conceptual and physical landscapes across the Atlantic. To a far greater extent than any Iberian scholastic, the African and Amerindian peoples under the sun would particularly feel its effects. And it is within this condition of colonial violence that the Dominican friar and Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas would seek to make an intervention. As the next chapter will explore, Las Casas would draw explicitly on Aristotelian Thomist tradition to develop a theological geography. To that end, we now turn to explore the significance of place in Las Casas’ imagination.
CHAPTER 3:

THE COLONIAL LEGACY OF THEOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY
Finally, the brief remarks which I have made respecting an imaginary description of the fabric of the world are sufficient. It demonstrates that, however admirable it may be from the magnitude of its parts, from its multiple diversities and its variegated beauties, the Creator and Ruler is far more marvelous, as the Apostle said (Rom 1.20) ‘The invisible things of God are clearly seen through the visible things of the world which were made by Him’ and form the admiration of the creature; we are led to the admiration and contemplation of the Creator: to whom be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

—Pierre d’Ailly

The map is not the territory: yet it is the territory. In America, cartography is part of the process by which territory becomes. The paper dispositions and anticipations of the map often preceded the ‘real’ geography which we seek so earnestly to triangulate.

—J.B. Harley

520 D’Ailly, Ymago Mundi, 39, col. 2

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two examined two foundational moments in the birth of the modern/colonial world. I traced the way in which blood purity discourse reconfigured late-medieval Iberia by racializing religious identities, a historical process which culminated in 1492 with the Jewish expulsion and the Reconquista of Al-Andalus. In addition, I critically assessed the Columbian Enterprise to show how Iberian empires employed a theological geography to map their hemispheric dominion over the tropics. In doing so, my investigation exposed the religious and racial logic of spatial dispossession by which Spain and Portugal articulated global expansion. This chapter responds to opposing views concerning the role of scholastic theology in the colonization of the Americas by exploring the legacy of theological geography. To this end, Chapter Three turns to one of its main architects, Bartolomé de Las Casas.

Chapter Three studies Bartolomé de Las Casas within the relations of power that shaped the early Iberian Atlantic. In this chapter, I critically engage the moral theologian David Lantigua, who offers a positive interpretation of Aristotelian Thomism’s role in the New World. According to Lantigua, “Spanish debates of this imperial age provoked a profound interrogation of the idea and practice of coercing unbelievers inside and outside Christendom, and among its strongest critics there developed an unprecedented scholastic theological reflection on the Gospel’s promotion of human freedom.” Accordingly, Spanish Dominicans trained in the scholastic tradition were the first to critique Spain’s wars of conquest and to defend the religious freedom of Amerindian peoples. Lantigua contends that “Aquinas’s scholastic concept of the natural

law, or what the Spanish theologians referred to as ‘el derecho’ offered the “most critical purchase on the widespread injustice of the Iberian conquest.”

On such grounds, Iberian scholastics opposed the universal dominion of Christian empires. Lantigua’s nuanced discussion, however, disregards the way influential Dominicans, like Matías de Paz and Bernaldo de Mesa, helped to formulate coloniality of power. He ignores how scholastic Thomism structures two colonial pieces of legislation: the Laws of Burgos (1512) and the Requirement (1513).

Chapter Three builds on the scholarship of Willie Jennings, who sees Aristotelian Thomism playing a seminal role in the formation of modern racial hierarchies. Jennings indicts José de Acosta (1536–1600), the Jesuit theologian and missionary to Peru, for marking “the theological beginning of imperialist modernity,” which was “articulated within” and “born of an

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525 The concept of natural law used here draws from Jean Porter. “The tradition of the natural law as the scholastics received it was mediated through a wide variety of texts, all of them considered authoritative, although only one of them, namely, Scripture, was taken to be supremely authoritative. In addition to Scripture, these included the writings of the church fathers especially but not only Augustine, and a wide variety of classical authors, including Aristotle, the Roman jurists collected by Justinian, a number of other Roman and Hellenistic philosophers, and most importantly of all among the non-Christian sources, Cicero.” Jean Porter, Nature as Reason, 8–9. See also Jean Porter, Ministers of the Law.

Lantigua, “Freedom of the Gospel,” 328 footnote 77: “For example, the Dominican Vicar General of Cubagua Tomas Ortiz argued before the Council of the Indies in 1524 that the Indians were like beasts incapable of self-rule. The president of the Council was Cardinal García de Loaysa, who had just served as Master General of the Order of Preachers following Cajetan. Unlike his predecessor, García de Loaysa had a poor opinion of Amerindian peoples and encouraged Sepúlveda to write the Democrats secundus. Loaysa strengthened Dominican proponents of Amerindian subjugation from the most extreme views of Bernardo de Mesa and Ortiz to the more moderate one of Matías de Paz.” For more on the divergence among Dominicans regarding the affair of the Indies, see Daniel Ulloa, Los Predicadores Divididos (Mexico: El Colegio Mexico, 1977).
Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.\footnote{Jennings, \textit{Christian Imagination}, 71. As “an Aristotelian-Thomist, Acosta understood himself to be doing exactly this, evaluating truth-claims about the world, separating through his experience in the New World the actual case of material specifics from Old World speculations,” 86.} Jennings highlights the way ecclesial authority (\textit{plenitude potestatis}) galvanized Christendom’s “boundary-less desire” for territorial accumulation; a “supersessionist logic,” which entails displacing Israel as God’s chosen people, propels this universal impulse.\footnote{Jennings, \textit{Christian Imagination}, 26.} Becoming a universal conduit of salvation, permits Christian empires to extend their global reach. This theological paradigm also corresponds to racial thinking. According to Jennings, “in the age of discovery and conquest supersessionist thinking burrowed deeply inside the logic of evangelism and emerged joined to whiteness in a new, more sophisticated, concealed form. Indeed, supersessionist thinking is the womb in which whiteness will mature.”\footnote{Ibid., 26.} Lantigua’s emphasis on religious freedom circumvents the racial implications of the scholastic tradition.

Indeed, Iberian agents would use a supersessionist optic to reconfigure bodies and space around themselves. Ultimately, Spanish scholasticism “reveals in a very stark way the future of theology in the New World, that is, a strongly traditioned Christian intellectual posture made to function wholly within a colonialist logic.”\footnote{Ibid., 83.} My study of Las Casas builds on this premise. However, it expands Jennings’ account, which largely omits Las Casas’ contribution. By analyzing Las Casas’ theological geography, I uncover the colonial legacy of Aristotelian Thomism.

\footnote{“The colonial moment changed the trajectory of the theological framework of Christianity. This new trajectory established a strange kind of insularity and circularity for Christian traditions of inquiry. The telos of Christian faith and life was yet in place, but faith’s intellectual way of proceeding was now unclear and trouble in relation to the earth, the ground, new spaces, and landscapes.” Ibid., 83.}
I argue that Las Casas attempts to eliminate violent evangelism and to restrain economic exploitation by developing a theological geography that foregrounds Amerindian sovereignty on two environmental factors: climate and latitude. Despite Las Casas’ efforts, the Spanish empire solidified its hemispheric dominion by deploying a scholastic notion of ecclesial authority (*plenitudo potestati*). In this way, Aristotelian Thomism helped produce a colonial hierarchy as part of the natural world. I carry out this argument in four sections.

I begin by situating Las Casas in the immediate aftermath of 1492. I sketch out Las Casas’ role in the Caribbean conquest and describe his entry into the Dominican Order. In agreement with Lantigua, I show how the early Dominican missionaries exhibited a prophetic witness that spurred Las Casas’ critical consciousness. Section II shows how the systems of exploitation reflect the empire’s “boundary-less desire” for accumulation. I outline the ways in which the encomienda and repartimiento systems racialize indigenous bodies and reconfigure space around a logic of commodification.

Section III concentrates on Las Casas’ theological geography. I begin by discussing how Aristotelian Thomism provides the Laws of Burgos (1512) with a theological architecture. I show how Las Casas employs a medieval cosmology to uphold Amerindian sovereignty. In Section IV, I turn to examine the theological basis of the Requirement (1513). By providing a close reading of the Requirement’s theological discourse, I reveal the way in which Iberian scholasticism operates within a colonial modality. Chapter Three exposes the ways in which competing theological visions of the natural world bolstered and subverted the subjugation of the tropics.
3.2 Situating Las Casas in the Early Iberian Atlantic

Although details about his nascent years are scant, historical records indicate that Las Casas directly participated in the early Spanish conquest. Las Casas essentially held a front row seat to the Columbian Enterprise. Bartolomé’s father, Pedro de Las Casas was among the first encomenderos in the New World. Pedro, in fact, accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, and in 1498 returned to Sevilla on a ship carrying over three hundred enslaved Amerindians. The Admiral rewarded Pedro with a young Amerindian slave named Juanico, whom he gave to his adolescent son, Bartolomé, as a gift.530

Bartolomé de Las Casas completed his first transatlantic venture in 1502, just ten years after Columbus’ initial voyage. At the age of eighteen, Las Casas, along with his father, sailed with Nicolás de Ovando, a Cistercian friar and member of the military order of Alcántara. The Spanish monarchs commissioned Ovando, who commanded 32 ships and 2,500 men, to replace the unruly Francisco de Bobadilla as Governor of Santo Domingo. Serving in this official capacity for eight years, Ovando “set the stage for the establishment of royal government in Spain’s New World colonies.”531 Las Casas set foot on Española (modern day Haiti/Dominican Republic) for the first time on April 15, 1502. Besides managing the agricultural production on his father’s encomienda, located near the city of La Vega, Las Casas also traveled throughout the island. He partook in (or

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531 Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 23.
heard about first hand) several excursions in which Ovando's army forced the Tainos, the indigenous people of the Caribbean, into submission. He was thus aware of how military interventions, under the pretext of just war, served to procure slaves. These experiences went on to inform his *Brief Account* (1542), the well-known text that would fuel the infamous Black Legend.\(^{532}\) After this four-year venture, he returned to Iberia in 1506 and soon thereafter arranged to take holy vows; Las Casas entered the priesthood the subsequent spring.\(^{533}\)

Las Casas crossed the Atlantic a second time in 1509. This time, as a twenty-six-year-old priest, he arrived in Santo Domingo with members of the nobility and Columbus' immediate family.\(^{534}\) As before, Las Casas oversaw the Amerindians held at his father's encomienda based along the Yanique River.\(^{535}\) He also participated in additional expeditions. In 1512, Las Casas accepted Panfilo de Narváez's invitation to join Diego de Velázquez in the conquest of *Juana* (Cuba). Las Casas would continue participating in such Taino raids until 1515. In doing so, he acquired more slaves who, by working the mines or fields, generated additional wealth for Las Casas. Years later, he “acknowledged that he took more care of this [business] than of teaching them the faith.”\(^{536}\) Bartolomé directly participated in what he would later denounce as the ‘destruction of the Indies.’

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\(^{534}\) Christopher Columbus' sons Diego and Hernando, and their uncles, Bartholomew and Diego, were aboard this fleet. See *Ibid.*, 51.


\(^{536}\) Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings of Las Casas*, 7; see also Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias I*, cap. 38.
The arrival of the Dominicans (i.e. Order of Preachers) would lead Las Casas down a path of resistance. Under the leadership of Fray Pedro de Córdoba, the first Dominican missionaries disembarked on Española’s shores in 1510.\textsuperscript{537} Hailing from the priory of San Estebán in Salamanca, they were sent by the Master General Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio) to start a convent. During this period, Iberian universities and monasteries were undergoing theological reform. The scholastic ideal of \textit{contemptus mundi} (i.e. “the fullness of life”) would define the “mentality of the Spanish renaissance.” Salamanca apparently embodied the highest virtues of the Catholic reformation.\textsuperscript{538} Steeped in this religious and intellectual milieu, Dominicans adopted practices of austerity, devout spirituality, Aristotelian Thomism, humanism, and a missionary impulse. All these would shape Las Casas’ identity.

The Dominicans would shift Las Casas’ social location. Like other Mendicant orders, Dominicans made vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. Lantigua explains that these missionaries spurned personal wealth and decided to live among the indigenous people. Inhabiting a marginal location, Lantigua suggests, allowed these friars to perceive and eventually criticize their inhumane treatment.\textsuperscript{540} And so, when confronted by the systemic violence of the encomienda, this ethical impulse led Fray Antón Montesinos to preach a scathing condemnation.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[539] See Brufau, \textit{Escuela de Salamanca Ante el Nuevo Mundo}, 33.
\item[540] “They did exactly what no one would expect from a colonial culture: they lived in solidarity with the indigenous people crushed by the weight of the Spanish forced labor system known as the encomienda.” Lantigua, “Freedom of the Gospel,” 316.
\end{footnotes}
On the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 1511, Montesinos famously asked the encomenderos: “by what right and with what justice do you so violently enslave these Indians?” Risking personal harm, Dominican friars persisted in their critique of indigenous exploitation and, in some cases, withheld the Eucharist from encomenderos. In the end, their prophetic witness compelled Las Casas to join the Order in 1522.

Direct exposure to the systems of labor had a profound impact on Las Casas. After becoming a Dominican friar, Las Casas renounced all personal property. Doing so would alter his relationship to the Amerindians, since he no longer benefitted from their labor. Living in close proximity to indigenous people made Las Casas aware of their suffering. This enabled him to perceive the unethical nature of the encomienda and to reevaluate the method of evangelism. A reconfigured doctrine of Christ (Christology) spurred this transformation. Rather than seeing God on the side of the powerful, he began to see Christ—the embodiment of God—on the side of the poor and the oppressed. Las Casas drew on first-hand experience, and from the Salamanca School, to reconceptualize the spread of Christianity in the New World. He dedicated several years to writing the influential text *De Único Modo* (1534). In it, Las Casas would persuasively argue that evangelization of the Indies must be based on Christ’s teachings and example; as such, it may be carried out only through non-violent means. In retrospect, Las Casas attributes his

541 See Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias III*, cap. 4:1761–1765.

542 Helen Rand Parish indicates that Las Casas “having prepared a preliminary document in Santo Domingo—his first treatise, *De Único Modo*—later developed it into the primary text of 1536 that was signed by all the bishops, and which later informed the celebrated encyclical *Sublimus Deus*.” Parish and Weidman, *Las Casas En México*, 36. “Las Casas sí preparó un documento preliminar en Santo Domingo—su primera obra, *De único modo*—y después lo reelaboró en el acta principal de 1536, firmada por todos los obispos, que desembocó en la gran encíclica *Sublimis Deus*.”

543 See Las Casas, *The Only Way*. 186
transformation to the Dominicans’ prophetic witness; they shifted his theological imagination by altering his social location.

3.3 Establishing Colonial Order

From its inception, Christianity in the Americas was inextricably linked to systems of production. Labor and religion were configured together. After subjugating the Taíno and Arawak natives of the Caribbean islands, Governor Ovando introduced a system of labor called the encomienda in 1502. Under this system, the crown awarded conquistadores who had faithfully completed their military service with land and with Amerindian workers. Historian Lawrence Clayton explains how the encomienda, as “the central instrument of Indian despoliation and exploitation,” was “later exported to other islands and finally to the mainland as the Spanish conquest proceeded in the next half century.”

The encomienda would, in effect, introduce a system of exploitation that would enslave vast segments of the indigenous population. In fact, historian Nancy van Deusen “discovered that in the sixteenth century at least 650,000 indigenous people were enslaved and forced to relocate to foreign lands throughout the inter-American and

544 Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 28.

transatlantic Iberian world.”546 In the Americas, encomenderos were also expected to educate their subjects in the Christian faith. But rather than functioning as faithful conduits of Christianity, conquistadores turned encomenderos would focus on extracting tribute from their subjects.547 For this reason, Las Casas proclaimed that in “the nine years of his government of this island, [Ovando] was no more interested in the indoctrination and salvation of the Indians than if they were stick and stone, or cats and dogs.”548 The encomienda would simultaneously generate revenue for Spain and produce new converts for the church. This system of labor became an integral part of the disciplinary practices through which native peoples would acquire a colonial identity.

During the sixteenth century, the Spanish crown established colonial hegemony by creating organs of governance throughout the Atlantic world. Historian C. H. Haring characterizes the first period of political organization (1492–1530) as the age of the adelantados.549 Immediately after Columbus’ first voyage, Charles V appointed Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, “archdeacon of the cathedral of Seville and the queen’s chaplain, to take care of all matters relating

546 Van Deusen, Global Indios, 2. “On a day during the cold months of 1549, the slave Catalina de Velasco waited to meet the friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, a famous man whom she fervently hoped would testify on her behalf as she petitioned for her freedom in a Spanish court,” xi.

547 “The encomienda grants that organized early Spanish sovereignty gave to favored Spaniards the right to take tribute in good and labor from native lords and their people. Under encomiendas indigenous production, social ways, and tributes would persist, to the extent possible amid depopulation and demands for Christianization. Some encomienda grants recognized native lords in place at conquest; some deposed ruling Nahua, Tarascans, and others and replaced them with lords recently displaced in indigenous conquests.” John Tutino, Making a New World: Founding Capitalism in the Bajío and Spanish North America (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 72.

By the 1600s, “silver production came to take precedence over all other requirements, including those of the encomenderos.” Elliot, Empires of the Atlantic World, 98.

548 Las Casas, Historia de las Indias I, cap. 4:1345–1355.

to the newly discovered lands.” And in 1503, at the behest of Queen Isabel, Fonseca founded the House of Trade (Casa de Contratación), which regulated travel and commerce to and from the Indies and oversaw the production of maps and cosmographic guides for navigation. After Fonseca’s death in 1524, Charles formed the Council of the Indies (El Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias) to oversee juridical administration and provide the royals with counsel on colonial affairs. The crown also asserted jurisdiction over what became the southwestern United States, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean by forming the Viceroyalty of New Spain upon the ruins of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán (See Figure 3.1).

550 Ibid., 94.
Figure 3.1 Map of Viceroyalties in Spanish America with places cited in litigation suits. ©Sarah Bell
Beginning with Columbus, Iberian authorities in the Americas authorized another system of exploitation called *repartimiento* (literally, distribution). This method scattered Amerindians among the colonialists to labor in private estates or on public projects. Theoretically, they were supposed to receive wages and to be protected from slave-raids. It was hardly a new system. “[M]odeled on the long conquest of the Canary Islands over the course of the fifteenth century,” it was conveniently applied when manual labor became scarce or encomenderos faced legal opposition. In the Americas, this division of labor would entail the racialization of *indios*; for only their bodies were conscribed to forced labor. Las Casas describes this arrangement in *Historia de las Indias*, declaring that

> even the beasts usually have some liberty to go graze in the pastures, a liberty which our Spaniards denied the poor miserable Indians. And so, in truth, they were in perpetual slavery, for they were deprived of their free will to do anything other than what the cruelty and avarice of the Spaniards desired, not like prisoners but like beasts whose owners keep them tethered.

As historian Laura Lewis indicates, all “race’ based classifications nevertheless satisfied the need for different kinds of labor, became the basis for rules about individual privileges and obligations, and helped to maintain the fiction of the religious and ancestral ‘cleanliness’ (limpieza) of Spaniards.” Yet racial classification of entire populations was part of Spain’s broader reconfiguration of local ecologies, which entailed mastery over space. Historian Alejandro Cañeque explains how the repartimiento transformed indigenous “principles of rotation and compulsion,” such that “community work that had characterized the pre–Hispanic modality

rapidly disappeared” and matured into a “system of exploitation of native labor for the benefit of the population of European descent.”  

By mid-century, colonial authorities began engineering the displacement and relocation of indigenous people throughout central Mexico. In doing so, administration officials filled the swelling demand for agricultural labor, urban construction, and mineral extraction in surrounding regions. Colonialist exploitation presupposed the racial inferiority of Amerindian peoples.

From the outset, the encomienda and repartimiento subsumed local ecologies within transatlantic networks of production and consumption. The circulation of New World commodities—sugar, tobacco, and silver—would ignite a racialized labor market that began with the commodification of brown indigenous bodies, and soon thereafter, black African bodies. In turn, incorporation of the Americas into a global market would present investment opportunities for financial institutions in Europe. The colonial matrix of power came to undergird a capitalist world-system. However, the colonial violence that generated such wealth remained largely hidden. Across the Atlantic, Amerindians and Africans were forced to labor in the fields, mines, estates, and bedrooms of their natural lords. Their labor not only yielded return on investment; it

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557 Cañeque, King’s Living Image, 201.


559 “Let us remember, first of all, that the conquest, colonization, and baptism of America by the Iberians at the end of the fifteenth century occurred at the beginnings of the world market, of capitalism, and of modernity. The arrival of the British to the northern parts of America more than a century later took place when this new historical process was already fully underway. Consequently, the colonizing societies were radically different from each other, as would be the modalities of colonization and its implications for the respective metropoles and colonial societies.” Quijano and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept,” 553.
also generated taxes for the crown and tithes for the church. Las Casas would inhabit, benefit from, but ultimately seek to reform these colonial structures. And as the ensuing debates reveal, Las Casas, and his fellow scholastics, would deploy a theological geography to either to justify or to scrutinize the nascent colonial order.

3.4 Servile Because of the Earth

The Laws of Burgos (1512) was meant to address the ethical and legal concerns caused by the encomienda system. Encomenderos and their allies responded to Montesinos’ criticism by treating Dominican friars as insubordinate brethren. Colonialists wrote to the king, claiming that the Dominicans openly denounced imperial sovereignty. In turn, encomenderos dispatched Alonso del Espinal, a seasoned Franciscan, to lobby the king on their behalf. Montesinos and Córdoba, eager to share the truth of the encomienda with the crown, also set sail for Spain. After struggling to gain a royal audience, the Dominicans effectively related their version of events to Fernando. As they had done in Española, Montesinos denounced the abuses inflicted by the encomenderos.


Perturbed by these reports, King Fernando commissioned a special council (junta) in the city of Burgos to investigate this issue and, in turn, to author legislation. He instructed participants to determine the true “disposition of the land and the capacity of its people.” Notably, the king’s directive links location (place) to capacity (nature). The phrase la dipusición de la tierra, rendered as ‘disposition of the land,’ can also be translated as ‘position of the earth.’ This latter translation strengthens the correlation between environment and rationality, which has political consequences for Spain’s colonial subjects. As we will see, the special council would employ theological geography to determine the social hierarchy of the Indies.

The special council, comprised of seven royal jurists and four Dominican theologians, met in Burgos later that year. Matías de Paz, the Chair of Theology at the University of Salamanca and Dominican friar, played a crucial role. Paz essentially mapped out the theoretical framework for the discussion. As an Aristotelian Thomist, Paz endorsed the empire’s boundary-less desire by affirming plenitudo potestatis. He claimed that the Papal Donation justified Spain’s hemispheric over the tropics. Nevertheless, Paz rejects Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery. And in this way, he differs from the Vicar General of Cubagua Tomás Ortiz and the Cardinal García de Loaysa, who consider the indigenous little more than beasts.

562 “La dipusición de la tierra y la capacidad de las personas.” Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. 8:1781.

563 The seven jurists were Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Hernando de Vega, Lic. Luis Zapata, Lic. Santiago, Doctor Palacios Rubios, Lic. Mújica, Lic. Sosa; and, the four Dominican theologians were Fray Tomás Durán, Master Fray Pedro de Covarrubias, Lic. Gregorio, and Fray Matías de Paz. See Wagner and Parish, Life and Writings of Las Casas, 8.

564 Hanke notes that Matías de Paz’s text, Concerning the Rule of the Kings of Spain over the Indians, “is not only the first study of this question by a Dominican but also the first known statement that the American Indians are not slaves in the Aristotelian sense.” See Lewis Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, 15; V. Beltrán de Heredia, “El P. Matías De Paz, O. P. Y Su Tratado ‘De Dominio Regum Hispaniae Super Indios,’” Ciencia Tomista 40 (1929), 173–190. See also Ulloa, Los Predicadores Divididos.
Attempting to regulate labor and religion in the Indies, the council issued a total of thirty-five clauses (or conclusions); these provided the basis for the Laws of Burgos. Although Las Casas was not present, he devoted considerable attention to its conclusions. As detailed in Historia de las Indias, Las Casas affirms the first, second, and sixth clauses but considers all the rest to “smell and taste like endorsements of tyranny” because they insufficiently curtail exploitation. Las Casas focuses the following seven clauses:

1. *The Indians are free.
2. *They should be instructed in the faith with all possible diligence.
3. The Indians can be obliged to work, but in such a manner as not to impede their religious instruction and to be useful to themselves, the republic, and the King; and this is by reason of the King’s lordship and the service due him to maintain them in the faith and in justice.
4. This labor should be such as they can stand, with time to rest every day and all through the year at convenient times.
5. They should have houses and property of their own, such as seems fit to those who govern them now and henceforward, and they should be allowed time to farm and keep their property in their own manner.
6. *It should be provided for them always to have contact with the settlers, so that they may be better and more rapidly instructed in the holy faith.
7. They should be given suitable wages, not in money but in clothing and other things for their houses.

When read closely, these clauses assume a scholastic conception of the common good, a vision of the proper order. They “represented the first step to set things straight and were part of the need

See Richard Konetzke, Colección de Documentos para la Historia de la Formación Social de Hispanoamérica, 1493–1810 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953), vol. I, 38–57; see also Rafael Altamira, “El Texto de las Leyes de Burgos de 1512,” Revista de Historia de América, no. 4 (1938); “Facsimil y Transcripción de Las Leyes de Burgos,” in Rafael Sánchez Domingo and Fernando Suárez Bilbao, Leyes De Burgos De 1512, V Centenario (Madrid: Dykinson, S.L., 2012), 315–365. For the original manuscript, see Archivo General de Simancas, RGS, 1512–XII.

“Suponían que los indios habían de ser repartidos y en poder de los españoles, como los tenían.” Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. 8:1781–1782.

Wagner and Parish, Life and Writings of Las Casas, 8–9. The seven conclusions are listed in their entirety in Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. 8:1779–1783. The asterisk indicates which clauses Las Casas affirms.
to make royal and civil actions conform to the natural law.” In other words, they exhibit a theological architecture. Notice how the third clause assumes a chain of being: Indians › encomenderos › king › God. Like Jews in Iberia, indigenous people are placed under imperial authority; as the king’s vassals, they must now render payment in the form of tribute. This ontological hierarchy situates Christian formation within the confines of forced labor. Because, after all, Amerindians ‘can be obliged to work.’ None of this would be possible without first rejecting “native authority over space itself.” The reconfiguration of bodies, lands, and souls would rest on colonial processes of displacement.

The special council configures indigenous subjectivity through a colonial logic. The first clause affirms Amerindian freedom. Whatever degree of freedom exists, however, is subsumed within material processes of production. Again, clauses three and four permit encomenderos to assign arduous task if they do not inhibit catechism. Colonialism introduces Christianity within new rhythms of work and rest, within a new structure of time. The fourth clause even upholds the biblical practice of Sabbath by mandating rest so that subjects may ‘recreate themselves’ (recrearse). Moreover, the council encourages inter-ethnic integration. The sixth clause urges Spaniards to interact with natives under the pretext that integration will help the gospel take root. In this way, the encomienda system approximates what Pierre Bourdieu calls habitus, namely,


569 “The reconfiguration of living space is the first reflex of modernity in the New World, that is, the denial of the authority of sacred land.” Jennings, Christian Imagination, 75.

570 “In the first generation the parish was included within the encomienda, integrated, dependent upon, and subordinate to it, rather than parallel.” See James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil, Cambridge Latin American Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 108.
social structures designed to instill subjective dispositions. Indigenous subjectivity is thereby recalibrated within colonial dynamics of power.

When the council concluded, Fernando requested a written brief from each of the participants summarizing their positions. The Dominican friar Bernaldo de Mesa laid out a reply that elucidates the political implications of colonial Christianity. Mesa, who took a moderate yet realistic position, bases evangelism on Alexander’s donation. “It is clear,” Mesa asserts, “that one of the primary reasons that motivated the Pope to grant the said donation, was the prompt implantation of the faith in those lands, and with it, all the other virtues.” Evangelization appears to be one of multiple reasons. In fact, Mesa seems to emphasize the outcome, “all other virtues,” which he previously defined as “good customs.” This claim makes civilization the final objective; evangelism serves as a means to an end.

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572 See Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias III*, cap. 9.
574 “Y esto por el estrecho mandamiento que el papa le puso por su bula de la donación, en la cual se mostraba claramente que una de las principales cosas que le movió a hacer la dicha donación, fue para que la fe se plantase en aquellas tierras, y con ella las otras virtudes, tanto cuanto fuese posible.” Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias III*, cap. 9:1784.
575 Carlos de Siguenza y Góngora, when explaining his choice representation of Viceroyal power, “adds that because the ‘ethnic’ virtues (i.e. the ‘Indian virtues’) were deficient for lacking the light of knowledge of the true religion, they had to be supplemented with the virtues that, of necessity, princes must possess.” Cañeque, *King’s Living Image*, 30.
576 As I discuss in Chapter 4, Las Casas, like Mesa, would emphasize the civilizing effects of Christian evangelism at Valladolid. Rieger makes a similar observation. “Reversing the trajectory of the conquest, Las Casas put his emphasis on religious powers first, arguing that economic and political success would come as a result of religious work.” Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 161.
Mesa uses medieval cosmology to address the king’s request. Recall that Charles had asked the council to determine the true “disposition of the land and the capacity of its people.”\textsuperscript{577} In opposition to Ortiz and Loaysa, Mesa rejects natural slavery, insisting that “Indians are not slaves by war, purchase, or birth.”\textsuperscript{578} Instead, he considers them to be natural servants. Mesa elaborates this view by writing:

The only reason for [their] servitude is a natural lack of understanding and capacity and perseverance in the faith and good customs, and perchance the nature of the country (\textit{there are some lands which the aspect of the heavens makes servile}). They cannot be called slaves, but for their own sake must be ruled in some sort of servitude.\textsuperscript{579}

Mesa suggests that natural servitude is based on the ‘nature of the country,’ that is, their environment, which he attributes to the ‘aspect of the heavens.’ Here is where Mesa relies on cosmology. According to medieval cosmology, a man’s nature was “influenced by the soil on which he was born, each territory being under the influence of a particular planet,” or zodiac, from “the time of his birth.”\textsuperscript{580} The rotation of the planets, therefore, turn the people of the Indies into natural servants. This condition, however, does not negate their individual freedom. Like other factors, the stars influence (but do not annul) human will. On such grounds, Mesa concludes that Amerindians are ‘servile because of the nature of the earth’ (\textit{son siervos por la naturaleza de la tierra}). Attributing their servitude to the cosmic order means that God created them to serve.

\textsuperscript{577} Las Casas, \textit{Historia de las Indias III}, cap. 8:1781; “La dipusición de la tierra y la capacidad de las personas.” Las Casas, \textit{Historia de las Indias III}, cap. 8:1781.

\textsuperscript{578} Wagner and Parish, \textit{Life and Writings of Las Casas}, 9.

\textsuperscript{579} Ibid.; emphasis added; see also Las Casas, \textit{Historia de las Indias III}, cap. 9:1784–1785.

\textsuperscript{580} “It is no wonder that astrology was a popular and highly regarded science throughout the Middle Ages in both the Islamic and Christian worlds. Even through Christian theology was based firmly on free will, it was clear that one’s temperament and ‘stars’ had a great influence on one’s fate.” Edson and Savage-Smith, \textit{Medieval Views of the Cosmos}, 15.
Mesa’s theological geography builds on Thomist notions of rationality. Moral theologian Jean Porter explains how Thomists “identify the natural law in the primary sense with a capacity for moral discernment, or the fundamental principles through which such a capacity operates.”

As Mesa claimed, Amerindians lack ‘understanding and capacity’ (rationality) for ‘perseverance’ (moral fortitude). Such deficiencies manifest in a lack ‘good customs’ (barbarity). This means that Amerindians cannot properly govern themselves. And, therefore, they must be ruled ‘for their own sake.’ Not only does Mesa reinforce the council’s views; he also configures indigenous subjugation as a form of freedom. Earlier in his reply Mesa states: “there is no truer freedom other than the submission that obstructs sin [against God], which in actuality, makes people subjects” of the empire. Christian obedience entails imperial dominion. On such grounds, encomenderos should not treat Amerindians with excessive force, lest they become slaves, nor grant them complete freedom, lest excessive liberty cause them harm. Because Iberians possess the rational capacity for moral discernment, they can determine the proper order of things. Ultimately, they are responsible for civilizing barbarians.

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582 “No hay otra libertad verdadera sino aquella servidumbre que nos estorba el pecado, el cual verdaderamente no hace siervos.” Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias III*, cap. 9:1786–1787.
583 Ibid.
584 “Mas, como quiera que sea, los indios no se pueden llamar siervos, aunque para su bien hayan de ser regidos con alguna manera de servidumbre, la cual no ha de ser tanta que les pueda convenir el nombre de siervos, ni tanta la libertad que les dañe, pues para su bien fueron dados principalmente a los reyes de Castilla y no para el de los reyes, puesto que justamente se les piden a éstos los servicios y ellos son obligado a los dar, asolada etc.” See ibid., cap. 9:1785.
3.5 Las Casas’ Geographic Turn

Las Casas’ theological geography builds on three foci: 1) first-hand knowledge of indigenous societies; 2) latitude; and 3) climate theory. He accuses Bernaldo de Mesa of speaking out of ignorance. Mesa apparently is unaware that indigenous “kings and lords govern with peace and abundance over extensive lands and large populations.” As he does throughout his career, Las Casas refers to the realities “we have seen with our own eyes” to advance his argument. He proclaims that indigenous lords and commoners alike govern their respective domains effectively. According to Las Casas

there exist extraordinary kingdoms among our Indians who live in the regions west and south from us. There are large groupings of human beings who live according to a political and social order. There are large cities, there are kings, judges, laws, all within civilizations where commerce occurs, buying and selling and lending and all the other dealings proper to the law of nations.

Yet what ‘extraordinary kingdom’ occupies Las Casas’ imagination? Lascasian scholar Helen Rand Parish suggests that Las Casas wrote this account during his “enforced idleness at the Dominican House of Studies in the city of Santo Domingo, where he could use the best library on the island of Hispaniola.” Taking Santo Domingo as a point of reference would place Las Casas at 19° N latitude. As depicted in the Lemos Planisphere (c. 1590), the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán/Mexico

585 “Debiera también considerar el padre fray Bernardo...que, pues tenían sus pueblos y grandes poblaciones y tenían sus reyes y señores muy grandes y de grande tierra...y vivían en paz y tenían abundancia de provisiones...[todo esto] era señal de guardarse entre ellos justicia.” Ibid. cap. 11:1792.

586 “La gente, como estas naciones crecían en inmenso y las vimos con nuestros ojos ser sin número.” Ibid., cap. 11:1793; emphasis added.

587 Las Casas, The Only Way, 64; emphasis added. See also Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas, Apología: De Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda Contra Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas y de Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Contra Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975), ff. 22v–33.

588 Parish and Weidman, Las Casas en México, 214.
City is located directly to the ‘west’ and to the ‘south’ of Santo Domingo (see Figure 3.2). Furthermore, historical records indicate that Las Casas was familiar with Tenochtitlán. In fact, Parish places Las Casas in Mexico City on four separate occasions. Through a close examination of rare manuscripts, Parish details how Las Casas visited the city in 1535, 1536, 1539, and 1546 to meet with the ecclesial hierarchy of New Spain. Given where the Dominican House of Studies is located, in terms of its latitude and its relation to Mexico City, one can reasonably infer that Las Casas had the Aztec capital in mind. These factors may illuminate the subversive nature of Las Casas’ theological geography.

589 According to Parish, Las Casas met with Bishop Zumárraga of Mexico City, Bishop Julián Garcés of Tlaxcala also ex-Bishop of Santo Domingo, and former President of la Audiencia de México, Sebastián Ramirez de Fuenleal, to discuss, and formulate legislation on, the following issues: baptism of Amerindian adults, indigenous slavery, and proper methods of evangelization. See Parish and Weidman, Las Casas En México, 9–11.

590 Pope Paul III became interested in the Amerindian question in part due to “an eloquent and erudite letter from the Dominican Julián Garcés.” See Hanke, All Mankind is One, 20 endnote 58.
Las Casas evaluates native societies through natural law. He claims that Amerindians live according to Aristotle and Augustine’s definition of what constitutes a rational society. In what undoubtedly surprised Iberian audiences, Las Casas contends that Amerindians “run their governments according to laws that are often superior to our own.” Many native customs, he says, surpass those of the “English, the French and some groups in our native Spain.” Even some

591 “Porque la paz y sosiego de los pueblos y vivir cada uno seguro y ser señor de lo suyo, donde concurre multitud de gente, no suele conseguirse sino donde hay orden y justifica, según el Filósofo, y también Agustín lo afirma; y es claro de sí.” Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. II:1792–1793.
592 Las Casas, The Only Way, 64.
593 Ibid., 66.
Roman and Greek customs are inferior when compared to Amerindian practices, he says.\footnote{594} This rhetorical move reveals Las Casas’ subversive disposition. He essentially uses the scholastic tradition to classify Amerindian societies as superior to Christian empires. A colonial logic, however, upholds this argument. Las Casas presupposes the universal scope of northern systems of knowledge. This assumption enables him to use Aristotle and Augustine in order to evaluate civilizations across the Atlantic world. In doing so, Las Casas leaves his epistemic authority intact. He, like his opponents, can properly discern the order of things.

Las Casas uses cartographic knowledge to develop his argument. He begins by situating the Indies “between the two tropics, the stretch of forty-five degrees to either side of the equator, to use nautical terms.”\footnote{595} This places the islands and mainlands between a latitude of 23.5˚ N and 23.5˚ S. Las Casas’ theological geography reflects the cartographic knowledge of his day. The Portuguese cosmographer Jorge Reinel (1518–1572), for instance, maps Iberia’s Atlantic colonies within Tropicus cancri and Tropicus capricorni (see Figure 3.3).\footnote{596} Las Casas and Reinel deviate from Columbus, who had placed the Caribbean on par with the Canaries at 26˚ N. Las Casas’ concerns, however, are not strictly speaking scientific. He references latitude to highlight the natural causes that grant indigenous people their capacities.

\footnote{594} “Their society is the equal to that of many nations in the world renowned for being politically astute. They surpass many another. They are inferior to none. Those they equal are the Greeks and Romans. And in a good many custom they outdo, they surpass the Greeks and Romans. They surpass the English, the French, and some groups in our native Spain.” Ibid., 65–66.

\footnote{595} Ibid., 64; emphasis added.

\footnote{596} Figure 3.3 Jorge Reinel, Carte nautique portugaise de l’Océan Atlantique (c. 1550). Département des Cartes et plans, CPL GE B–1148 (RES). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Accessible at: gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52503222v/f1.item
In addition to providing a positive ethnography, Las Casas relies on medieval cosmology to bolster native sovereignty. He refutes Mesa by claiming that Amerindians “are not servants by nature; and neither due to the nature of the earth nor the effect of the heavens” as “Father Bernaldo O.P. affirmed in his second proposition.”⁵⁹⁷ In essence, Las Casas inverts the argument. He insists that indigenous peoples’ natural capacity “comes from the fostering influence of the heavens, from the

⁵⁹⁷ Las Casas writes, “no eran siervos por natura por ello; y tampoco por la naturaleza de la tierra ni por el aspecto del cielo como los destruidores dellos levantaron y el padre fray Bernaldo, dádolel algún crédito, en su proposición segunda dice.” See Historia de las Indias III, cap. 11:1793; emphasis added.
kind conditions of the places God gave them to live in, the fair and clement weather.” Las Casas employs a natural philosophy that imbues space with moral significance. As medieval scholar Debora Higgs Strickland notes, Hippocrates (460–370 B.C.) explains in detail both the physiological and moral effects of a given physical environment on the individual, citing factors such as heat and cold, type of water supply, proximity to mountains, and duration of the seasons.

In the text *Airs, Waters, Places*, Hippocrates states “you will find assimilated to the nature of the land both the physique and the characteristics of the inhabitants.” The nature of space (environment) determines the nature of people (character). On such grounds, inhabitants of frigid regions are phlegmatic, “owing to the cold and damp, they are necessarily a large, fair, slow-moving people,” while the “great heat of the extreme south produces inhabitants who are melancholic, dark, and puny.” Conversely, inhabitants of temperate climates exhibit “well-balanced choleric and sanguine” characters because “the temperature is adequate to conserve the heat of the body while still allowing the evaporation of excess moisture.” The natural capacity of people is directly influenced by climate. For this reason, Las Casas declares that Amerindians’ ability for self-government stems from “the temperate nature of the region, its even gentle, wholesome, delightful climate.” The place where one is born makes a difference.

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598 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 63.
602 Ibid., 30.
603 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 64. A few decades later, the scholastic theologian, José de Acosta would reach a similar conclusion. “I shall tell what happened to me when I went to the Indies. As I had read the exaggerations of the philosophers and poets, I was convinced that when I reached the equator I would not be able to bear the dreadful heat; but the reality was so different that at the very time I was crossing it I felt such cold that at times I went out into the sun to keep warm, and it was the time of year when the sun is
Las Casas employs medieval cosmology to assert indigenous sovereignty. Amerindians are capable in all matters of government, he says, because of how the cosmic order effects their bodies. He elaborates by writing:

Due to all these influences—the broad/celestial, the narrow/terrestrial, the essential/accidental—the Indians come to be endowed, first by force of nature, next by force of personal achievement and experience, with the three kinds of self-rule required: (1) personal, by which one knows how to rule oneself, (2) domestic, by which one knows who to rule a household, and (3) political, knowledge of how to set up and rule a city.604

The hierarchical role of causation in this extended passage reflects the influence of Aristotelian physics. Note how Las Casas emphasizes the way in which higher elements affect lower ones: heavenly ('celestial') motion affects the earth ('terrestrial'), which in turn, shapes human ('accidental') bodies. On such grounds, tropical habitats provide the proper conditions for human flourishing. The ‘forces of nature,’ however, do not negate human agency. Rather, Amerindians acquire the ability for self-rule ‘by force of personal achievement and experience.’ In the end, “even without Christian faith and knowledge of the true God,” Amerindians are rightful lords of the Indies.605 Las Casas proclaims that they “have and hold their realms, their lands, by natural law and by the law of nations,” and hence, “owe allegiance to no one higher than themselves, outside

604 Las Casas, The Only Way, 65.
605 “Esto es verdad, cierto, que tánto entendimiento y capacidad tenían las gentes desta isla cuanto les era necesary para regirse y bien regirse….cuante sin fe y cognoscimiento del verdadero Dios se pudo hallar entre otras munchas naciones, en lo cual a munchas otras excedieron.” Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. II:1793.
themselves, neither de jure nor de facto.” Through God’s providential design, their sovereignty is conferred by nature itself. In Aristotelian terms, they actualize their God–given capacity because of the quality of the tropics.

Las Casas’ theological geography, however, implies a racist logic. As outlined above, he uses Aristotelian Thomism to derive meaning from indigenous bodies. Contrary to Mesa, Las Casas considers “their good natural complexion and innate inclination” to be the result of environmental factors. For instance, he attributes the “fine state of bodies and sense organs” to the quality of the air, flora, and landscape. Relying on a Thomist intuition, Las Casas associates the good with the beautiful. Amerindians, therefore, behave in a “calm, quiet, and controlled” (i.e. rational) manner because of their physical condition. Las Casas sees their attractive bodies as a sign of moral virtue. Yet what happens if this calculus is applied to Africans? If beauty indicates virtue, then blackness, as a sign of deformity, would signify depravity. Black bodies, according to this logic, become visual signs of moral corruption. As the subsequent chapter will show, Las Casas’ intervention at Valladolid leaves intact the enslaveability of African peoples.

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606 Las Casas, The Only Way, 66.

607 “Y, si fuéramos nosotros tan dichosos que, como Dios nos dio noticia dellos para que a ellos y a nosotros salvásemos, los instruyéramos según cristianos debíamos—por su buena innata y natural complección e inclinación—en cristianidad—y virtudes morales y pacífica y ordenada policía...pero por nuestros grandes pecados de ambición, crueldad y codicia no fuimos dignos.” Las Casas, Historia de las Indias III, cap. II:1793.

608 Las Casas, The Only Way, 64; see also Júan Gines de Sepúlveda, Demócrates Segundo: O, de las Justas Causas de la Guerra Contra los Indios (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco de Vitoria, 1951), 33.

609 Las Casas, The Only Way, 64.
3.6 Reinscribing Ecclesial Authority

At the behest of jurists, theologians, and merchants on both sides of the Atlantic, who wanted to delineate the terms for colonialist extraction, the crown agreed to amend the Laws of Burgos six months later. This time the council met in the capital city of Valladolid. Under the guidance of the royal jurist Juan López de Palacios Rubios, it authored the infamous Requirement (Requerimiento). After 1513, Spanish agents were instructed to read this legal document out loud to the indigenous peoples and ensure they understood what it required: either submit willingly to papal-imperial authority and convert to the Catholic faith, or undergo violent conquest. Colonialists were accused of making “a mockery of the requerimiento” for reading it to people who, unfamiliar with the language, were oblivious of its terms; on such grounds, they committed “illegalities under the guise of legitimacy.” Scholars have understandably dismissed it as a “meaningless ritual” filled with “absurdities,” or a “Christian veneer” symptomatic of

610 See Arthur Helps, The Spanish Conquest in America and its Relation to the History of Slavery and to the Government of Colonies, ed. Michael Oppenheim, 4 vols., (London: John Lane, 1900), I:264–67; Altamira, “Las Leyes de Burgos de 1512”; Konetzke, Documentos de Hispanoamérica. An unofficial precursor can be found as early as October 1503 in Queen Isabel’s royal decree, which “required” the conquered to submit; see also Rivera, Violent Evangelism, 33.

611 “If the Indians accepted the rule of Spaniards—as read to them by the Requirement—then all was well and good, If they should resist, then the Spaniards claimed the right to enforce their will—and, of course Christianity—by force.” Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 66.

612 Elliott, Empires of the Atlantic World, 98; see also Hanke, Spanish Struggle for Justice, 33–35. For the earliest known attempt to record the Requirement, see José María Chacón y Calvo, Cedulario Cubano: Los Orígenes de la Colonización, Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de Hispano-América (Madrid: Compañía Ibero-americana de Publicaciones, 1938); see also Cedulario Cubano (Los Orígenes de la Colonización), Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de Hispano-América (Madrid: Compañía Ibero-Ameriana de Publicaciones, 1938), 318–319.

613 Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 66.

614 Helps, Spanish Conquest in America, 1:264–267.

615 Rivera, Violent Evangelism, 33.
Spain’s “notorious legalism and religiosity.” Yet Lantigua, for instance, judges this example of “missionary warfare policy” to be “an outright denial of Amerindian political authority on the basis of Christian imperial claims.” Yet this document deserves close reconsideration because of the theological underpinnings that justify imperial conquest. It interjects by outlining the theological geography of empire.

Palacios Rubios starts the Requirement by delineating the continuity between the Reconquista and the Americas. He identifies Fernando and Isabel as “subduers of the barbarous nations,” a title also used in Inter Caetera I. Palacios Rubios echoes Pope Alexander VI, who had praised the crown for subduing the “barbarous nations,” as in the Jews and Muslims, prior to commissioning Columbus’ first voyage that same year. In this way, the text portrays the conquest as an extension of the Reconquista. The Requirement incorporates Islamic elements and this substantiates its geohistorical continuity. Historian Patricia Seed has shown that its tribute policy replicates the jizad or “head tax” system that Christian authorities demanded from Iberian subjects of Jewish and Muslim descent. Amerindians, who became “subjects and vassals of the king,” therefore, occupied a parallel position to the religious minorities residing in Iberia. Unlike

616 Haring, Spanish Empire in America, 7.
619 According to Alexander VI, the Spanish sovereigns could turn to explore the southern hemisphere having “subjugated and brought to the very true faith” all the “barbarous nations,” namely, Muslims and Jews. See Alexander VI, Papal Bulls and the Treaty of Tordesillas, 21.
in the Canary Islands, however, encomenderos in the Americas were required to instruct their subjects in the Christian faith. The tropics would be engrafted into a new global order.

The Requirement imbeds imperial dominion within Christian doctrine. Palacios Rubios introduces the indigenous people to a new origin story. Paraphrasing Genesis, the text declares: “the Lord our God, living and eternal, created the heavens and the earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, and all the men of the world, were and are descendants.” Whoever read the Requirement out loud would essentially be saying, ‘I know your beginning,’ and by extension, ‘what you should become.’ Notably, this account maintains that Amerindians and Spaniards are members of the same humanity. Its affirmation of a common human origin undermines Maldonado-Torres’ argument regarding the non-homogeneity of humankind in the colonial imaginary. The doctrine of God elucidates this point. The Requirement reveals God’s identity. It identifies God as the Creator of the cosmos; God fashioned the ‘heavens and the earth’ and ‘all the men of the world.’ Palacios Rubios alludes to the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—by referring to God’s activity in the act of creation. Nevertheless, he refers to ‘one Lord’

621 See Hanke, All Mankind is One, 4.
622 Palacios Rubios, “The Requirement,” Early Modern Spain, 34; emphasis added. For the original text in Spanish, see Helps, Spanish Conquest in America, I:264–267.
623 “The theo–political difference between the lands that were habitable thanks to divine grace and those which were supposed to be uninhabitable in the Christian medieval imaginary would be translated in this context into the colonial and racial difference between humans and subjects who are not entirely human or whose humanity is in question (Wynter 1995). In this conceptual map of the emergent modern Europe, the notion of the idolater is replaced by the Aristotelian concept of the natural slave. As Sylvia Wynter indicates, the religious view of the social, terrestrial, and cosmological order is gradually supplanted by a post-religious vision based in the non-homogeneity of the human species.” Maldonado-Torres, “Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Modern/Colonial World,” 647; see also Wynter, “1492,” 36.
throughout the text, emphasizing God’s oneness. Linking monogenesis to monotheism draws a parallel between the singularity of humanity and divinity. Humankind, like its Creator, is one.

After providing this account of creation, Palacios Rubios deploys the concept of *plenitude potestatis* to bolster imperial dominion over the Indies. This Latin phrase, meaning the ‘fullness of power,’ undergirds ecclesial authority.625 Palacios Rubios outlines its theological architecture by writing:

> Of all these nations God our Lord gave charge to one man, called Saint Peter, that he should be lord and superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the *head of the whole human race*, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should follow; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction.626

This allocation of power follows a trinitarian logic: God the Father through the Spirit sends the Son, who, through the Spirit, bestows Peter with global authority. Christ awards all “others who after him have been elected to the pontificate” with universal authority in temporal and spiritual matters.627 Ecclesial authority, however, was never designed to serve as the basis for coercion. Understood theologically, it is an invitation to join in the liberative work of God in history. By granting ecclesial authority, God invites the church to participate in the liberation of world—

625 Joseph Höffner explains the intrinsic relation between Alexander’s Donation and the Requirement by introducing the similar idea of *orbis christianus*, a notion that “not only tenaciously defends patrimony but is also a religious and political motto for the conquest of the world. Therefore the propagation of the reign of Christ was entrusted to the emperors and kings in liturgical solemnity as a sacred duty…” See Joseph Höffner, *La Ética Colonial Española del Siglo de Oro: Cristianismo y Dignidad Humana* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1957), 6. See also Paulino Castañeda Delgado, *La Teocracia Pontifical y la Conquista de América*, vol. 25, Victoriensia Publicaciones del Seminario de Vitoria (Vitoria España: Editorial Eset / Seminario Diocesano, 1968).


627 Ibid.
particularly, the poor and the oppressed. Christendom transforms this invitation into a tool of empire, as the basis for colonial violence. And in the wake of 1492, Pope Alexander VI, as the ‘head of the whole human race,’ granted Iberian empires dominion over the Atlantic. Yet it should be noted that Palacios Rubios articulates *plenitudo potestatis* by first establishing the singularity of humankind. Ecclesial authority, universal in scope, applies to the Amerindians precisely because humankind is one.

The doctrine of *plenitudo potestatis* provides for a global epicenter. The authority to “rule the world,” as well as the ability to “judge and govern all Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects,” revolves around the northern hemisphere. This centrifugal dynamic yields a dual function. First, it anchors Western Christendom’s ever-expanding domain. Take for instance the numerous papal arbitrations over maritime conflicts during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Alexander’s demarcation offers an illustrative example. It also cements an epistemic locus in the Global North. The ‘superior of the universe,’ enthroned in the eternal city, embodies the ubiquitous reach of northern knowledges. In fact, the ability to effectively “judge” the nations revolves around the universal reach of this site. For this reason, Christ “permitted [the pope] to have his seat in any other part of the world.” Drawing on this spatial imaginary, colonial agents disrupted and reconstituted countless local identities. Jennings describes this phenomenon by writing:

> As all the European empires draw on the flexibility of the racial scale, they pull themselves into this boundary-less reality. This is nothing less than a theological operation. Like the designations of sinner and saint, convert and heretic, believer and unbeliever, faithful and apostate, this linguistic deployment alters reality, blowing by and through the specifics of identity bound to land, space, and place.

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628 Ibid.
629 Ibid.
and narrating a new world that binds bodies to unrelenting aesthetic judgements. The European himself is the key to this theological act of displacement.\textsuperscript{630}

This epistemic power, however, is not only boundless in space but also in time. The decree states that it “will continue till the end of the world,” namely, until Christ’s return.\textsuperscript{631} Because of its temporal and spatial universality, this dynamic relies on “circles whose circumference is everywhere and whose center is nowhere.”\textsuperscript{632} Regardless of what marvels the New World might present, the colonial imaginary would channel energy from its ubiquitous center in order to assert itself across the globe. This centrifugal dynamic became increasingly useful as agents of empire continued to explore, exploit, and reconfigure the belt of the tropics.

Yet this geographic vision presupposes a problematic axiom—Israelite supersession. Imperial Christendom articulates territorial expansion by supplanting Israel as God’s chosen people. Though listed as one among many, Christianity operates as the dominant paradigm through which to “judge and govern” every religious tradition—“Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects.” It asserts this role by positing Christians in contradistinction to Gentiles, who, per Scripture, are those outside of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh. Jennings makes a similar observation regarding the bull \textit{Romanus Pontifex}, in which Nicolas V (1447–1455) grants Portugal dominion over West Africa. Jennings contends that “papal power over space, which will be exercised repeatedly, rested on an abiding Christological and

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\textsuperscript{630} Jennings, \textit{Christian Imagination}, 31. Jennings’ commentary follows a passage from García de Escalante Alvarado historical account of the Japanese c. 1548.

\textsuperscript{631} Palacios Rubios, “The Requirement,” \textit{Early Modern Spain}, 34.

\end{flushright}
ecclesiological principle—that the church exists for the sake of the world.”633 The church-world relation, thereby, substitutes the Israel-gentile relation. “Here Israel has been superseded and the framework reconstituted through the Vicar of Christ so that the whole world is viewed through boundless desire.”634 Hence by negating a gentile identity, Christendom articulates its salvific responsibility vis-à-vis the incredulous nations. This supersessionist logic propels the imperial drive for geographic expansion.

While imperial projects deployed theological discourse, key Dominicans, associated with the renowned School of Salamanca, summoned Thomism to analyze certain colonial practices. As Lantigua emphasizes, Spanish conquest depended on major tenets of the Just War tradition. Scholars have noted how the medieval crusades against the Turks, Ottomans, Moors, and other ‘Oriental’ enemies provided fertile ground for Just War theory.635 Latin Christianity primarily (though not exclusively) summoned a longstanding Augustinian tenet. For Augustine declared:

Not that anyone can be good against his will, but by fear of enduring what he does not want, he either gives up the hatred [of God] that stands in his way, or he is compelled to recognize the truth he did not know.636

Fear of punishment or even death, as indirect methods of coercion, could compel heretics and pagans to accept the one true religion. Although technically, they could not be converted by force, since, as Augustine noted, “man cannot believe unless he is willing,” impediments to the faith may

634 Ibid.
be removed through violent means. Yet as Rieger indicates, “Las Casas, Sepúlveda, and Vitoria all agree on one point: the purpose of war in relation to the Christian message is not to convert by force but to remove obstacles to the faith.” Either hostility towards missionaries or idolatry, as violations against natural law, could provide the necessary justification for military incursions. In the New World context, the notorious conquistador Hernán Cortés would use the eradication of idolatry to justify his invasion of Tenochtitlán (1517–1521). Abolishing the Aztec practice of human sacrifice would serve as a basis for war.

Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, Tommaso de Vío (Cajetan), and, most importantly, Las Casas are quintessential representatives of this tradition. Lantigua extols their contribution by writing:

The interpretive key for Spanish Dominican arguments against religious coercion and in support of Amerindian spiritual and political freedom followed from the dictum that ‘grace does not destroy nature but perfects it’ (ST I 1.8 ad 2). This Thomistic discursive space supplied the intellectual armature for resisting violent colonial practices deemed contrary to natural law and divine law. This turn to Aquinas leads Lantigua to conclude that “Thomistic critique abolished the traditional medieval link between idolatry and warfare and preaching and conquest.”

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638 Rieger, Christ and Empire, 163.
639 See Hernán Cortés and J.H. Elliott, Letters from Mexico, ed. Anthony Pagden, trans. Anthony Pagden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 207. The “principal motive and intention must be to dislodge and root out idolatry from all the natives of these regions and to bring them, or at least desire to bring them, to salvation and that they should be converted to the knowledge of God and to the holy Catholic faith. If the said war were fought with any other intent, it would be unjust.” Silvio Zavala, “Hernán Cortés Ante la Justificación de su Conquista,” Revista de Historia de América, no. 92 (1981): 60–61.
640 Rivera, Violent Evangelism, 35.
642 Ibid., 324.
takes an ambiguous stance on Amerindian freedom. If read closely, its terms echo the Dominican arguments against indigenous coercion. The decree, for instance, assures that conquistadors “shall not compel you to turn Christian, unless you yourselves, when informed of the truth, should wish to be converted to our holy Catholic faith.” This language coincides with that of the Iberian scholastics. The treatise attempts to persuade indigenous audiences by appealing to their reason. Colonialists were to declare: “we ask and require you that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it.”

Palacios Rubios even alludes to non-violent methods of evangelism. He claims that “all these, of their own free will, without any reward or condition, have become Christians.” This view seems to heed Aquinas’ emphasis on the voluntary nature of conversion, namely, that the “act of faith is an action proper to the will.” Apparently, nearly every native has freely accepted the faith after thoughtful consideration. And so, it concludes by urging the natives to “consent and allow these religious fathers to declare and preach the aforementioned [message] to you.” If they consented, native sovereignty would be respected. The text alleges that the Crown “shall receive you in all love and charity” and leave your people and lands “free without servitude, that you may do with them and with yourselves freely that which you like and think best.”

The Requirement nominally upholds the rational capacity, spiritual freedom, and political sovereignty of

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643 Ibid., 316.
645 Ibid.
646 Ibid.
647 Aquinas, Summa, II–II.10.8.
649 Ibid.
Amerindians. In essence, this Thomist discourse serves as a foil that hides the coloniality of power at work.

The Requirement’s last section situates colonialists between divine and royal power. It explains that violent subjugation awaits those who reject the natural right of missionaries to preach the gospel. Refusal to submit to ecclesiastic–royal authority would result in bondage. Imperial agents were to pronounce the following warning:

> But if you do not [accept the holy faith], I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you...and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of Their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as Their Highnesses may command. 650

In other words, resistance would result in slavery. Scholars have noted the ways in which colonialism altered the spaces, relations, and practices that constituted indigenous ways of life. 651 Spiritual practices, agricultural rituals, migration patterns, and hunting traditions, connected to terrestrial as well as conceptual ecologies, would be utterly transformed, if not destroyed, under colonialism. 652 This transformation cannot be understated given that identity “requires spatial realities endowed with irreducible, even irreplaceable points of reference.” 653 As commodified bodies, moreover, Amerindians would be abstracted from their places of belonging and “disposed of” (literally and figuratively) according to the demands of the encomienda.

650 Ibid., 35–36; emphasis added.
651 Ibid.; see also Miguel León Portilla, The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico, Expanded and Updated ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Visión de los Vencidos.
653 Jennings, Christian Imagination, 40.
3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I engaged David Lantigua and Willie Jennings’ accounts of Aristotelian Thomism in the early Iberian Atlantic. It sought to expand those theological accounts by investigating the ways in which natural law rendered terrestrial location a determinative factor for imperial discourse. I traced the role of theological geography in the debates regarding conquest and the encomienda system. One way to describe the problem would be as follows: “Could slavery or war be used as coercive procedures to make conversion of infidels easier?” But what if we reverse the question? Could conversion through peaceful means extend the political and economic interest of empire? This chapter provided a theological analysis of the Laws of Burgos and the Requirement. It revealed how a scholastic view of nature, grounded in Aristotelian Thomism, allowed Iberian empires to conceptualize their hegemony over the tropics.

I situated Las Casas within the transatlantic Iberian context. I examined the prophetic witness that compelled Las Casas to join the Dominican order. The early Dominican missionaries aligned themselves with an ancient and radical Christian tendency: solidarity with the poor and oppressed. This shift in social location would lead Las Casas to confront the empire from within its own structures. I showed how Las Casas’ theological geography revolved around three foci: 1) first-hand experience; 2) latitude; and 3) climate. While Las Casas criticized the imperial exploitation and violent evangelization of Amerindians, his theological geography assumes a universal vantage based on Western history. He posits the North Atlantic as the global.

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As Daniel Castro points out, although Las Casas’ ideas made their way into legal and papal reforms, these laws had minimal effect on the material conditions of those he sought to defend. But the outcome of Las Casas’ efforts requires a more nuanced interpretation than Castro provides. To further probe these aspects of Las Casas’ thought, the subsequent chapter will explore the geographic dimensions in the Valladolid debate and his discourses on African slavery. Mapping the nature of empire will lead to a critical evaluation of Las Casas’ views on salvation and its geopolitical and cultural implications. Las Casas’ vision of Amerindian salvation and views on African humanity employs a logic that undermines his prophetic impulse. Ultimately for Las Casas, alphabetic forms of writing based on Latin are the means by which the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere may reach their full potential. The next chapter explores this topic.
Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit.
Grace does not destroy nature, but brings it to perfection.

—Thomas Aquinas

A massive presence, springing from school, the ‘Latin country’ par excellence, from that ‘stronghold of Latin’ the Catholic Church, from the aptly named Respublica litteraria; one might even call it an impregnation given that Latin, present everywhere, has come (despite its otherness) to seem a familiar universe.

—Françoise Waquet

There is no innocent theology!

—Gustavo Gutiérrez

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655 Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum in Thomas Aquinas, Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Doctoris Angelici*, II d. 9 q. 1 a arg. 3.


4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained how scholastic views of nature defined the intellectual and political capacities of indigenous people based on their hemispheric location. We saw how Bartolomé de Las Casas subversively employed medieval cosmology, grounded in Aristotelian physics, to defend territorial sovereignty as a natural right for Amerindian peoples. Nevertheless, during his lifetime, the countries in the North Atlantic region would continue solidifying themselves as the epicenter of power/knowledge. Given the religious dimensions of Spanish imperialism, “we need to explore,” Joerg Rieger suggests, “how the gains of the economic and political powers are related to the gains of the religious (ecclesial) powers.”658 In response to the geopolitical realities that emerged from the transatlantic economy linking Europe, West Africa, and the Americas, Las Casas would articulate a global vision of human perfection that coincides with early capitalism as a world–system.659

In *Columbus and the Propter Nos*, critical theorist Sylvia Wynter explains how in the wake of 1492 the medieval notion of “Man” as the subject “whose non-true self had been encoded by the categories of the *infidels* and the *idolaters*,” evolved into the modern “human.”660 Wynter argues that

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658 Rieger, *Christ and Empire*, 161.

659 “The world in which we are now living, the modern world–system, had its origins in the sixteenth century. This world-system was then located in only a part of the globe, primarily in parts of Europe and the Americas. It expanded over time to cover the whole globe. It is and has always been a *world-economy*. It is and has always been a *capitalist* world-economy.” Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 23.

660 Here, Wynter engages with Michel Foucault’s archaeology. At the end of his book, *The Order of Things*, Foucault points out that the concept of *Man* only emerged as a recent invention ‘of European culture since the sixteenth century.’ Our present contemporary variant of the same *Man*, Foucault points out, only appeared ‘a century and a half ago,’ as an effect of a change in the ‘fundamental arrangement of knowledge. In the same ways, the earlier variant of *man* had led to the earlier system of knowledge that he analyzes as of the Classical episteme.” Wynter, “Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 266. See also Michel Foucault, *The Order
the “culture-relative term man, as the desupernaturalized conception of the human which evolved out of the Judeo-Christian origin narrative and its cosmogonic system had therefore given rise to two variant models” of proper humanity: “the first hybridly religio-secular and specific to ...sixteenth-century Europe” and “the second now purely secular and global in its scope.”

In the aftermath of Columbus’ enterprise, the Valladolid debate of 1550–1551 between Las Casas on the one hand and the royal historian, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, on the other, captures a crucial step in that process. These figures and their interlocutors, as Anthony Pagden notes, “were self-declared Aristotelians and they understood the word ‘barbarian’ to mean what Aristotle and his commentators, in particular Saint Thomas Aquinas, understood it to mean.” Barbarian discourse at Valladolid deserves renewed attention. For it constitutes “one of the foundational moments of the racial classification of the world” by arranging “human beings in a top-down scale assuming the ideals of Western Christians as the [universal] criteria.” This chapter will

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661 “In both cases, the term Man is made isomorphic: as a member of the class of all possible conceptions of the human, with the class itself i.e. the class of the concrete human species, and of all its possible modes of the human.” Wynter, “Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 266.

Mignolo’s theory of Occidentalism builds on Wynter’s account. “Christianity became, with the expulsion of Jews and Moors and the ‘discovery’ of America, the first global design of the modern/colonial world system and, consequently, the anchor of Occidentalism and the coloniality of power drawing the external borders as the colonial difference, which became reconverted and resemantized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the expansion of Britain and France to Asia and Africa.” Walter Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Design: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21.

662 “‘Barbarian’, however, is an unstable term for it was applied to many different groups. The Berbers of North Africa, the Turks, the Scythians, the peoples of ‘Ethiopia’, even the Irish and the Normans were described at one time or another as barbarians...The one thing, however, which all usages had in common was the implication of inferiority.” Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 15.

663 The working concept of race in this chapter approaches racial identity as a natural condition passed on through bloodlines. In this way it differs from Mignolo’s account. “‘Race,’ of course, at this level is not a question of skin color or pure blood but of categorizing individuals according to their level of
therefore analyze the way in which competing discourses on civility operate in that historic debate. Configuring the tropics into barbaric space would justify the global expansion of Western civilization.

Although scholars have critically engaged sixteenth-century debates for decades, many misunderstand, distort, or disregard their theological architecture. The intellectual historian Anthony Pagden believes that Iberian scholastics were primarily concerned with why, since “all men were descended from one of the sons of Noah, and all were equipped with the same basic mental machinery,” Amerindians “had not all learned to follow the same basic rules of behaviour.” Yet Pagden concludes that “fully persuasive answers to such questions were to be found, not in history but in faculty psychology.” Characterizing the main objective as overcoming ‘otherness’ in psycho-cultural terms obscures the way theological and therefore ecclesial interests frame these polemics. Critical theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres observes that “what was in question was less the truth of their religion than their very humanity, and in this context, one did not so much debate with the Indian herself as one enquired and had debates with

similarity/proximity to an assumed model of ideal humanity. ‘Race’ would become interchangeable with ‘ethnicity,’ as race itself refers only to a genealogy of blood, of genotypes, or of skin color, while ‘ethnicity’ includes a language, memories, and shared past and present experiences.” Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 17.

664 Latin American historian Daniel Castro, for instance, lists war, political jurisdiction, natural servitude, and political rivalries as major issues but omits theology and ecclesial concerns from Valladolid altogether. “At stake in Valladolid was much more than the mere permission to print a book. Beneath the surface, numerous philosophical and political issues were in contention...There were also the questions of political and professional rivalries.”


666 Ibid. “Their task, as they saw it, was not to describe a remote ‘otherness,’ but to arrive at an evaluation of Indian behavior which would eliminate that ‘otherness’ and by so doing would bring these disturbing new men within the grasp of an anthropology made authoritative be the fact that its sources ran back to the Greeks.” Ibid., 5.
other Europeans about the Indian’s humanity.” While rightfully criticizing the omission of indigenous perspectives, Maldonado-Torres inadequately evaluates the way natural law defines Amerindian and African deficiency. In part, this oversight follows from a reading that overstates Columbus’ contribution to the “entanglements between the emergence of the anthropological conception of religion and the logic of race in the modern/colonial world.” That tendency also haunts Wynter’s account, which narrates the transition from a “traditionally hegemonic goal of spiritual redemption” to the “this-worldly goal of the civitas saecularis.” By divorcing ‘spiritual redemption’ from ‘worldly goals,’ Wynter minimizes the ways in which Aristotelian Thomism prescribed the earthly horizons for “indios” and “negros.”

On the other hand, theologians and scholars of religion have yet to see the full impact of geography on Valladolid. Previous scholarship has ignored Las Casas’ theological geography and the way it informs his defense of Amerindian rights. And as a result, the ways in which religious discourse about the natural world intersects with the shifts in geographic knowledge remained unaddressed. This chapter attempts to fill gaps across those disciplines by exploring the

668 “Upon having judged the indigenous as subjects ‘without religion,’ Columbus had altered the medieval idea regarding the ‘chain of being’ and had made it possible to think of the ‘condemned’ no longer in exclusively Christian and theological terms, but rather in terms that were modern and anthropological.” Ibid., 651.
669 Ibid., 636.
670 Wynter, “Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 270.
671 Ibid. In addition, Pagden stresses a bifurcation between the earthly and the spiritual. “For only when the spiritual and cultural world of man had, through conversion to Christianity, reached the same degree of perfection and unification as the biological world, would man finally be able to achieve his telos and earn release from his earthly labours.” Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 19.
672 See “Resisting and Reframing the Way of Christ: Christology and Early Colonialism,” in Rieger, Christ and Empire, 159–87; Gutiérrez, Las Casas; Rivera, Violent Evangelism; Lantigua, “Freedom of the Gospel.”
geopolitics of salvation in Las Casas and Sepúlveda’s colonial imagination. A critical analysis may illuminate the ambivalent theological legacy behind the expansion of northern systems of knowledge/power that gave birth to the modern/colonial world.

To this end, Chapter Four maps two dominant modalities of empire under modernity. It traces Sepúlveda’s aggressive imperialism, which anticipates the contemporary form of ‘hard power’ that relies on military force. Sepúlveda advocates for violent conquest as a means of integrating Amerindians, who are natural slaves, into Christian civilization. On the other hand, Las Casas proposes nonviolent evangelism, based on the ‘way of Christ,’ as the only ethical and effective method of attracting barbarians to the faith. Las Casas’ version constitutes a form of ‘soft power’ because it expands Christian civilization through epistemic violence. For Las Casas, “an empire that is benevolent is the most stable.” By emphasizing the fruits of Iberian scholasticism, this altruistic alternative prefigures nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of colonialism that uphold capitalist development as the universal horizon. The paradigm of modernity, however, presupposes that people and places outside of Europe exist outside of history, waiting to be

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673 This study relies primarily on the following two versions of this text. Las Casas, Apología; Las Casas, Defense of the Indians.
676 Rieger, Christ and Empire, 164. “To be sure, these affinities are, for the most part, not at a conscious level...Nevertheless, there is an undercurrent that flows in a different direction and needs to be noted—not for the sake of diminishing Las Casas’s achievements but for the sake of uncovering the reach of empire, which does not stop even at our best intentions to overcome it,” 159.
677 Many Spanish scholastics share this view. Diego Covarrubias, “in his doctoral dissertation at Salamanca in 1539, had even declared that empires are not established and maintained by arms, but by culture. Wisdom and letters are the effective instruments, he held, that truly create and defend the greatness of nations.” See Hanke, All Mankind is One, 62–63.
discovered, saved, and, if possible, civilized. According to this logic, modernity would function “as the final horizon of salvation” that required “the imposition of a specific set of values that relied on the logic of coloniality for their implementation”\(^\text{678}\). In the end, both models deploy Aristotelian Thomism in distinct yet overlapping ways to cast a global vision of human salvation.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which space, race, and language inform barbarity at Valladolid. I analyze how location and locution function as conduits of grace to configure the salvific trajectory for African and Amerindian peoples. I contend that Las Casas imbues Iberian scholasticism with salvific power by rendering literal locution—alphabetic script deriving from Latin—as necessary for barbarians to reach their end: the beatific vision. So, in accordance with Aquinas’ dictum, scholastic civility brings barbarian nature into perfection.\(^\text{679}\) In granting literal locution a perfecting function, Las Casas reinforces the Global North as the epicenter of knowledge/power in a way that parallels Sepúlveda’s project. A scholastic concept of the proper human ultimately enables the Valladolid participants to map tropical inferiority and northern supremacy as a part of the natural order.

Chapter Four develops the argument in three sections. Section I provides brief historical background to the Valladolid debate, explaining its purpose and format as established by the Council of the Indies. Section II turns to examine Sepúlveda’s central thesis. It pays close attention to the way that Sepúlveda uses the scholastic tradition to formulate a geopolitical vision that defines Amerindians as natural slaves and Iberians as natural masters. Lastly, Section III focuses on the salvific role of geographic location and literal locution in Las Casas’ barbarian discourse. It exposes the doctrine of creation and medieval geography that undergirds Las Casas’ imaginary to


show how a scholastic view of language, space, and bodies construes Amerindian and African barbarity. Chapter Four thereby traces the theological architecture of imperialist Christianity and the way in which scholastic masculinity foregrounds the geopolitical configurations of power in the modern/colonial world-system.

4.2 Prelude to the Valladolid Debate

Previous scholars have given substantial attention to the build up to Valladolid and its theoretical content. Here, a brief overview should help illuminate the issues at stake. With the signing of the New Laws of 1542–1543, Las Casas and his allies had struck an agonizing blow to the financial entities ravaging the tropics. By inhibiting the wealth of the encomendero class, they also safeguarded the king’s power. The New Laws established the Viceroy of Peru, Audiencias in Lima, procedures for future discoveries, and regulations on indigenous tribute and African labor. The renowned historian Antonio Muro Orejón notes that because of the New


681 The New Laws were comprised of two Royal Ordinances (Oredenanzas Reales). The first, signed in Barcelona on November 20, 1542 and the second signed in Valladolid July 4, 1543. See Antonio Muro Orejón, *Las Leyes Nuevas de 1542–1543: Ordenanzas para la Gober Nación de las Indias y Buen Tratamiento y Conservación de los Indios*, 2 ed. (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano–Americanos, 1961), 32–33.

682 “De todo lo descubierto escribirá la correspondiente relación o memoria, donde junto a lo geográfico y físico se especificarán lo humano y sociológico.” [Regarding the Discovery of New Lands and Populations, licensed explorers were instructed to “record every account or memory pertaining to all geographic and physical information as well as the ethnographic and sociological matters.”] Ibid., 33–34, 38.
Laws, “indigenous slaves were declared to be free in fact (de hecho) and by right (de derecho).” If enforced, the laws would gradually dissipate the encomienda system and eradicate indigenous slavery within a few generations—but still leave African enslavement intact. Despite the lax enforcement, colonialists who participated in the overthrow of the Aztecs and Incas reinstated their claims of rightful possession. With their assets under threat, encomenderos lobbied the Spanish court to repeal the statute and, to Las Casas’ dismay, their lobbying was successful and in 1545 the king revoked the laws. Calling into question the encomenderos’ claims to perpetuity (perpertuidad) brought the polemics of possession into sharp focus once more.

At the behest of the Council of the Indies, King Charles V temporarily suspended military conquests in April 1550 until the court could properly review the questions of just war and slavery in the Indies. To this end, the Crown convened a council (junta) comprised of fourteen officials—jurists, theologians, and clerics. On this point, Hanke observes that “never before, or

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683 “Al esclavo indígena se le considera de hecho y de derecho liberes.” Ibid., 40.

684 “The veteran conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castilla reported on the determined battle that he and other waged in 1550 before the Council of the Indies to win perpetuity for encomenderos in Mexico and Peru.” Hanke, All Mankind is One, 59; see also Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 346–347.

685 “The question of the true nature of the capacity of the Indians had agitated Spaniards since 1493 (as described in chapter 1), but the argument had become more and more heated after the issuance of the New Laws of 1542, and the revocation in 1545 of the law that would have phased out the encomienda system.” Hanke, All Mankind is One, 60; see also Adorno, Polemics of Possession.

686 See “The Great Debate at Valladolid, 1550–1551: The Application of Aristotle’s Theory of Natural Slavery to the American Indian,” and “The Great Debate at Valladolid, 1550–1551: The Waging of Just War against the American Indian,” in Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians. “Is it lawful for the King of Spain to wage war on the Indians, before preaching the faith to them, in order to subject them to his rule, so that afterward they may be more easily instructed in the faith?” Hanke, All Mankind is One, 67.

687 The theologians Domingo de Soto, Melchor Cano, and Bernardino de Arévalo, as well as Gregorio López, the jurist and author of Siete Partidas, were among the fourteen judges. See ibid., 67–68. “During the reign of Charles V and Philip II the role of the universities in the affairs of state was greatly increased and some of the most gifted of the professors, men like Melchor Cano (1509–60) and Domingo de Soto (1494–1570), were removed from their lecture halls altogether to become councilor and diplomats.
since, has a mighty emperor—and in 1550 Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, was the strongest ruler in Europe...ordered his conquest to cease until it was decided if they were just.” The first confrontation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda began in mid-August and lasted nearly a month. The council had determined that each participant should present separately. Sepúlveda went first, delivering an oration of three hours. Las Casas, on the other hand, delivered a diatribe in Latin that lasted five days. At the conclusion, Domingo de Soto consolidated the main arguments into a summary document. The council then provided Sepúlveda with twelve objections to his arguments and asked him to submit a written response. After Sepúlveda submitted his response, the council called for a recess so that members could review it along with de Soto’s summary. It decided to reconvene the following year for a final vote.

During the second session, which took place from April to May 1551, the council focused on the legitimacy of the Papal Donation. Both discussants presented with this concern in mind. Sepúlveda advanced four main arguments: 1) as barbarians and natural slaves, Amerindians should accept Spain’s authority; 2) “as long as the war is carried out lawfully” (i.e. per the Requirement), violence may be used to abolish idolatry, punish violations against nature, and accumulate land/property; 3) military force is justified in order to protect the innocent, particularly victims of human sacrifice; and 4) Spaniards may use violence and other forms of coercion to compel conversion, as authorized by the Papal Donation. Sepúlveda therefore justifies wars of conquest or, more frequently, members of that elite corps of political-cum-spiritual advisors, the royal confessors.” Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 27.

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688 Hanke, *All Mankind is One*, 67.

689 Sepúlveda appears to have authored “Against Those Who Depreciate or Contradict the Bull...” during the second session. See ibid., 68. Sepúlveda juxtaposes two characters: Democrats, an erudite Aristotelian, who convinces Leopoldo, the second character, a German Lutheran, to recognize his heterodox beliefs. For a comprehensive account of Sepúlveda’s views see Sepúlveda, *Demógrates Segundo*.

on legal and moral grounds. Unbeknownst to him, however, Las Casas used the recess to prepare a scathing refutation.

In turn, Las Casas dismantles Sepúlveda’s arguments one at a time. Las Casas argues that the nonviolent ‘way of Christ’ constitutes the sole ethical and effective strategy for Iberian colonization. As a representative of the School of Salamanca, he contends that only peaceful evangelization can justify Spanish presence in the Indies and condemns Iberian agents—soldiers, government officials, merchants, and even missionaries—who, through conquest and enslavement, destroy property, steal land and, violate Amerindian sovereignty. The stability of the empire, the reputation of Christianity, and the eternal state of the King’s soul were all at stake. In the end, he demanded repentance and restitution from the Pope, the Spanish Crown and the colonialists.691 At Valladolid, however Las Casas’ christology follows an imperialist logic in that it presupposes “positions of self-confidence and power.”692 As the bases for ecclesial authority, Christ justifies the incorporation of the tropics into Spain’s orbit of influence. Ironically, the peaceful conditions created by nonviolent evangelism would facilitate the production and circulation of commodities tied to the accumulation of surplus-value in the north Atlantic.693


692 While Las Casas emphasized “that Christ ‘forced no one’...Christ is seen as a ‘winner,’ someone who is in sync with the flow of things, rather than as one who swims against the current.” Rieger, Christ and Empire, 173.

693 “The axial division of labor of a capitalist world-economy divides production into core-like products and peripheral products. Core-periphery is a relational concept. What we mean by core-periphery is the degree of profitability of the production processes...As a result, there is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like products. This has been called unequal exchange.” Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis, 28.
Given its material implications, Las Casas’ proposal would further the interests of empire in ways that parallel Sepúlveda’s project. To understand these connections requires analyzing the way in which each figure construes barbarity and envisions the redemptive qualities of Iberian scholasticism. To that end, Section II turns to examine Sepúlveda’s scholastic geopolitics.

4.3 The Geopolitics of Juan Gines de Sepúlveda

In the years leading up to Valladolid, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda had successfully proven his value to both Pope and Crown. As a former pupil of Pietro Pomponazzi, a premier Aristotelian scholar, Sepúlveda mastered natural law theory at the University of Bologna. He represented a humanist school of thought associated with Italian Aristotelianism. Aware of his reputation, the Roman Pontiff called upon him to suppress the Bologna students that, in promoting pacifism as the only ethical option for Christians, threatened the crusades against Islam to the East and the Protestant Reformation to the North. Complying with his majesty’s request, Sepúlveda “authored Democrates Primus, in Rome in 1535 and in 1541 a Spanish translation, Diálogo llamado Demócrates, 694 Perreiah contends “that the contributions of these two major traditions have been neither rightly understood nor properly evaluated. Research on humanism has emphasized the new departures made by humanists in the fields of language, literature, history and the arts. Research on late scholasticism has focused on the theories of logic or dialectic in the context of the trivium including the auxiliary disciplines of grammar and rhetoric.” Alan Perreiah, Renaissance Truths: Humanism, Scholasticism and the Search for the Perfect Language (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 9.

694 “Sepúlveda had studied Aristotle intensively in Italy under the direction of Pietro Pomponazzi, the eminent Renaissance authority in the field, was painstakingly translating into Latin the Politics about the time he was writings his treatise Demócrates, and was probably the foremost Aristotelian in Spain.” Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, 58–59; see also Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Epistolario de Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda: Selección, 2 ed. (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica del Centro Iberoamericano de Cooperación, 1979).
appeared in Seville, just at the time when similar problems of the New World empire began to agitate Spanish court circles. In addition, the Council asked him to pen a response to the embroiled controversies regarding the New Laws. Sepúlveda completed his response in 1544, producing a controversial text that became the basis for *Demócrates Alter* and precipitated the junta of Valladolid.

At the behest of Fernando de Valdés, the Archbishop of Seville, Sepúlveda petitioned the Council of the Indies and the Royal Council of Castile for authorization to publish his manuscript. Both councils denied his request based on the recommendation of Salamanca and Alcalá theologians, who condemned the doctrine as unsound. If Sepúlveda had succeeded, Las Casas’ reforms would have been undone. However, the “argument concerning orthodoxy brought up an interesting contradiction,” as Daniel Castro observes. “While Las Casas reiterated his approval of the Inquisition as an agent to enforce the true teachings of the church in the New

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697 See Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda et al., *Demócrates Segundo: Apología en Favor del Libro Sobre las Justas Causas de la Guerra*, Obras Completas (Pozoblanco: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Pozoblanco, 1997); see also Sepúlveda and Las Casas, *Apología [Bilingüe]*.

698 After refusing to publish, the Council of the Indies relayed Sepúlveda’s treatise to the Royal Council of Castile, who in turn, sent it to the University of Salamanca and Alcalá for review. “Various important thinkers in Spanish university circles, such as Bartolomé Carranza, O.P., and Diego Covarrubias, were lecturing and writing during the years immediately preceding the Valladolid conflict and that none of them supported Sepúlveda’s views.” Hanke, *All Mankind is One*, 62. See also J. Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras, “Perfil Americanista de Fray Bartolomé de Carranza, O.P.,” XXXVI Congreso Internacional de Americanistas—España 1964 Sevilla IV (1966); Luciano Perena Vicente, *Misión de España en América, 1540–1560* (Madrid: Instituto Francisco de Vitoria, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956).

699 “If Sepúlveda were allowed to publish his book, his success would have also signified the abrogation of important legal provisions, gained by missionaries like Las Casas and other reformers, guaranteeing the rights of the Indians to be treated as subjects of the Spanish king rather than as slaves.” Castro, *Another Face of Empire*, 127.

700 Ibid., 131.
World, Sepúlveda had been encouraged to pursue the publication of his book by none other than the inquisitor general of Spain, Fernando de Valdés, the man responsible for the ultimate guarantee of orthodoxy in the empire. "701 And so, despite facing opposition from academic circles, Sepúlveda found prominent allies among the church hierarchy. Although Demócrates Alter (in its entirety) remained unpublished during his lifetime, an abridged edition was printed in Rome in 1550.702 Sepúlveda would formulate a geopolitical project that incorporated the tropics into Christian civilization.

Throughout his corpus, Sepúlveda calls upon Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Scripture. Natural Law scholar Jean Porter notes that “by the time the scholastics received it, the natural law tradition was already a Christianized tradition in which Scripture and other sources were inextricably intertwined.”703 Sepúlveda would read accounts of the New World with these authorities as guides. Having never left Europe, he relied on Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1478–1557), the first chronicler of the Indies appointed by the Crown, to learn about the tropics. Oviedo had completed twelve transatlantic voyages and by mid–century authored two treatises based on first–hand knowledge: Sumario de la Historia Natural de las Indias (1525) and Historia Natural de las Indias, islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano (1549).704 These texts substantiate the

701 Ibid. See also “Valdés reinforced with all the weight of his authority Sepúlveda’s thesis, by telling him that it would be better if all those doctors would make sure that his book should be printed in very large letters and its contents preached from their pulpits.” José Luís González Novalín, El Inquisidor General Fernando de Valdés (1483–1568): Su Vida y Su Obra (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1968), 356.

702 “Although he managed to get a résumé and explanation of his main arguments printed in Rome in 1550, the Apologia Pro Libro de Justis Belli Causis, Charles V order the confiscation of all copies that reached Spain.” See Hanke, All Mankind is One, 63.

703 Porter, Nature as Reason, 10.

704 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 11. See entry for “Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzalo Fernández,” in Olson, Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Empire, 461: “[t]his is clear also from the sixth chapter of the third book of
case for conquest, evangelization, enslavement, and dispossession. In time, Las Casas would counter Oviedo’s views by publishing two extensive histories, detailing tropical cultures.

A scholastic use of language foregrounds Sepúlveda’s argument for imperialist expansion. Sepúlveda utilized the Aristotelian concept of civilized man, “as a uniquely city–building, city–dwelling animal,” in contradistinction to indigenous barbarity. He brashly concludes that Amerindians are “barbaric, uninstructed in letters and the art of government, and completely ignorant, unreasoning, and totally incapable of learning anything but the mechanical arts; that they are sunk in vice, are cruel, and are of such character that, as nature teaches, they are to be governed by the will of others.” Notably, their barbarity derives from an ignorance of ‘letters.’ For without script, there can be no laws; and without laws, rational government is impossible. Albertus Magnus (1200–1280), Aquinas’ teacher and Church Father, validated this idea in his commentary on Aristotle’s Politics. In it, Albertus described barbarians as those who do not observe land and participation in the community ordained according to the principles of justice...For although the name barbarus is onomatopoeic, as Strabo says...nevertheless the man who does not observe the laws concerning the ordering of social participation is most certainly a barbarus since by this trait they incur many vices, confusing the interrelations (communicationes) within society and destroying the principles of justice which operate in these interrelations.

[Oviedo’s] General History of the Indies, which was examined and approved by the Supreme Council of the Indies.” See also Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 161–69.

705 Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 15.

706 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 11. “Philosophers, [Sepúlveda] explains, use the term natural slaves to denote person of both inborn rudeness and of inhuman and barbarous customs. Those who suffer from these defects are by their nature slaves.” Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, 44.

707 Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 20–21. “Hoc autem ulterior probalur per eos qui legibus non utuntur et communicationibus secundum legem justitiae ordinatis: et illi sunt qui dicuntur barbari. Licet enim hoc nomen, barbarus, factitium sit, ut dicit Strabo, ab imitatione soni impositum, eo quod sermones litterate et articulate non exprimunt, sed confuse quasi barbaro loquentes: tamen pro certo barbarus est, qui legibus ad ordinem communicationis non utitur: propter quod in multa peccata incidunt, confundentes
Contrary to longstanding assumptions, Alan Perreiah argues that despite their differences, humanists and scholastics in the sixteenth century used complementary methods in the pursuit of a common objective: the search for the ‘perfect language.’ By uniting the scholastic emphasis on truth and the humanist emphasis on translation, they made Latin into the ‘perfect language’ for Western knowledge systems. Thus, without alphabetic script, Amerindians lacked the necessary tools for a civilized existence. Deprived of proper communication, linguistic barbarians are rendered natural slaves.

Applying an Aristotelian-Thomist rubric, Sepúlveda infers a geopolitical hierarchy from the natural order. He observes that “matter yields to form, body to soul, sense to reason, animals to human beings, women to men, children to adults, and finally, the imperfect to the more perfect, the worse to the better, the cheaper to the more precious and excellent, to the advantage of both.” In other words, creation itself reflects a hierarchical distribution of power. This structure


709 “For most Greeks, and for all their cultural beneficiaries, the ability to use language, together with the ability to form civil societies (poleis)—since these were the clearest indications of man’s powers of reason—were also the things that distinguished man from other animals.” Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 16.

710 Hanke refutes the idea that Sepúlveda “did not mean to apply Aristotle’s doctrine of natural slavery at all but intended to recommend a sort of feudal serfdom,” which depends on translating the word *servus* “as ‘serf’ rather than as ‘slave.’” Instead, Sepúlveda “sets forth, with considerable details, the proposition that the Indians were born so inferior—so rude, idolatrous, and ignorant—that they may be properly classified natural slaves in accordance with the theory of the *Politics*.” Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, 58–59.

organizes the physical universe, social relations, and even human nature.\textsuperscript{712} On such grounds, Sepúlveda claims that “for their own welfare,” Amerindians are held by natural law to submit to the control of those who are wiser and superior in virtue and learning, as are the Spaniards, (especially the nobility), the learned, the clergy, the religious, and, finally, all those who have been properly educated and trained.\textsuperscript{713}

He implies that imperial dominion forms part of God’s plan because natural law derives from divine law. To substantiate this image of the natural world, Sepúlveda cites classical, medieval, and biblical authorities. He observes that Aristotle, “the most perceptive commentator on justice and the wisest interpreter of the other moral virtues, as well as of nature and nature’s laws,” condones barbarian subjugation.\textsuperscript{714} Furthermore, Aquinas, who “holds first place among scholastic theologians,” apparently agrees with “Aristotle’s opinion in the explanation of natural laws.”\textsuperscript{715} Yet philosophy and theology alone are insufficient. As Porter notes, “scholastic reflection on the natural law is grounded in, and fundamentally shaped by, a commitment to one particular text as the supremely authoritative source for reflection,” that is, “Scripture.”\textsuperscript{716} Sepúlveda thus employs the Hebrew scriptures. King David, the admired monarch of Israel and author of Proverbs, ostensibly “approves Aristotle’s teaching” by affirming “that the fool ought to be slave


\textsuperscript{713} Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 11.

\textsuperscript{714} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{715} Ibid.; see also Thomas Aquinas, De Regimine Principum (Cologne: Arnold Ther Hoernen, 1475), lib. 2, cap. 10.

\textsuperscript{716} “That text is of course Scripture, and its status in scholastic reflection on the natural law gives that reflection a perspectival character that is not inconsistent with the theoretical view of the natural law held by most of its proponents today.” Porter, Nature as Reason, 10.
to the wise.”717 The Council of the Indies can rest assured that Spain’s wars are “just both by civil and natural law.”718 Thus, colonialists may rule as natural masters without trepidation.

Although often overlooked by Thomists, a scholastic notion of perfection informs Sepúlveda’s geopolitical imagination. This dynamic appears in the way he ascribes colonial authority to the ‘properly educated and trained.’ For scholastic Iberians, an education would require knowledge of Greco-Roman languages and, most importantly, proficiency in Latin. Proper training would entail what Las Casas calls “literal locution,” namely, the ability to read and write alphabetic script.719 Such a skill is necessary to engage in Christian philosophy. Doing so, moreover, makes it possible to communion intellectually with God. It facilitates the beatific vision.

However, the English word ‘properly’ obscures its Thomistic connotation. The phrase “perfecta educación e instrucción” should instead be rendered as perfectly ‘educated and trained.’720 This translation more accurately conveys the teleological implications of the original phrase. In the Summa, Aquinas characterizes human salvation (also referred to eudaimonia, meaning ‘happiness’) as “the ultimate perfection of a rational or intellectual nature; and hence it is something that is naturally desired, since everything naturally desires its own ultimate perfection.”721 If salvation

717 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 12. “Those who trouble their households will inherit wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.” Proverbs 11:29 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.


721 Aquinas, Summa, Ia 62.1. For Aristotle’s teleological notion of happiness (eudaimonia) and its relation to virtue, see “Nicomachean Ethics” and “Politics” in Aristotle, Complete Works, 1095 a 17–22, 142 b 34ff and 260 a 31ff, respectively.
signifies the perfection of human nature, then literal locution exercises a salvific function. On such grounds, those ‘who are wiser and superior in virtue and learning’ embody human perfection; they represent the human ideal. Subjecting barbarians, as Sepúlveda proposes, to those trained in the scholastic tradition—the ‘learned,’ ‘clergy,’ and ‘religious’—enacts a colonial logic of salvation.

Sepúlveda envisions the allocation of power/knowledge deriving from the natural order. According to Sepúlveda, those who have acquired a ‘perfect’ education

must be considered when a judgement is to be made about the morals and character of any people, for in them especially shines forth natural ability, uprightness, training, and the best morals of any nation. Both in Spain and among the Indians, spiritual and temporal government is entrusted to these people.722

The power to judge ‘any people’ revolves around a theological axiom. On one level, the ability appears to derive from creation itself, which explains why it ‘shines forth’ naturally. This analogy, however, intimates a divine source as its primary cause.723 Las Casas, for instance, uses illumination to make a similar point. On several occasions, he mentions that “God’s design has for the most part been ineffective,” if, as Sepúlveda contends, Amerindians are “deprived of the natural light that is common to all peoples.”724 Humanity radiates that which is proper to its nature. So, by making ‘judgement’ a radiant quality, Sepúlveda attributes colonial authority to divine providence. Doing so links the capacity to know things as they truly are (knowledge) to temporal

722 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 11; emphasis added.
723 “[B]rillan de manera especial.” Las Casas, Apología, 57.
724 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 36. In Spanish the text reads “los designios de Dios en su mayor parte se habían frustrado, al quedar privados tantos miles de hombres de la luz natural común a todas las gentes,” 95.
dominion (power) within the “colonialist gaze.” Mapping the nature of the tropics functions as an extension of God’s design.

For Sepúlveda, Amerindian salvation entails a pedagogical hegemony. He observes that throughout the world, “the best kings and rightly organized states appoint the wiser and more excellent men for the administration of the government.” Surprisingly, he acknowledges that Amerindians may possess natural reason. Yet “even if these barbarians (that is, the Indians) do not lack capacity, with still more reason they must obey and heed the commands of those who can teach them to live like human beings and do the things that are beneficial for both their present and future life.” Only those who wield superior ‘virtue and learning,’ however, can determine their ‘spiritual and temporal’ possibilities. Notice Sepúlveda’s pedagogical appeal. It implies that Amerindians must learn to inhabit new modalities of thought and action in order to ‘live like human beings.’ “It is exactly with these conceptual adjustments,” as Jennings explains, that traditioned Christianity “opened up a new performance of the doctrine of creation and paved

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725 Jennings makes a similar observation regarding the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta. “Using this Aristotelian–Thomist sensibility, Acosta establishes a transparency that will be fundamental to the colonialist gaze. This transparency will be an ability to always see through the natives—their words, their logics, their practices, their beliefs—and discern the underlying logic, in this case a religious logic, that attends their actions.” See Jennings, Christian Imagination, 99.


727 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 12. Sepúlveda claims that “universal custom,” which is based on a “law of nature,” flows “from the eternal law.” And earlier he writes: “This is the natural order, which the eternal and divine law commands be observed, according to Augustine,” 12. See also Augustine, De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis: St. Augustine on Free Will, University of Virginia Studies (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1947), lib. 2.

728 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 12. Sepúlveda justifies violent coercion thusly: “Hence Augustine often says that if someone is unwilling to do what is good for himself and he is obliged to act for his own welfare, it is just to force him to do it even though he is unwilling and resists,” 12.

729 “God wanted the greater part of the world to come under their dominion so that it might be ruled more justly under the government of a wise people who cherished justice.” Ibid., 13.
the way for the enfolding of theology inside racialized existence, inside whiteness.” Barbarians must embody scholastic masculinity in order to perfect their rational nature. Exploring the impact of blood purity at Valladolid further reveals how such dynamics informed the nature of empire.

Prior investigations mistakenly disregard the impact of racial discourse on Valladolid. For instance, María Eugenia Chaves argues that “‘blood purity’ criterion seems not have any great importance in either of [Las Casas’ or Sepúlveda’s] discourses.” While limpieza de sangre does not explicitly emerge from their exchange, it is possible to uncover racial dimensions by reflecting on the ways in which knowledge/power operate across the Atlantic world. In the extended passage above, Sepúlveda calibrates authority around the nobility. Previous chapters have shown how late medieval purity discourses reconfigured religious difference into a “natural” and therefore racialized identity transmitted through bloodlines. As a result, the nobility was comprised of “natural” Christians who were considered racially pure. Around 1500, Iberia’s dominant institutions began implementing purity statutes. Universities, ecclesial bodies, and government organizations required candidates to prove their lineage was devoid of Jewish or Moorish “race.” Blood purity also determined the allocation of power in the New World. María Elena

730 Jennings, Christian Imagination, 85.
732 “Although it may be true that neither the Castilian cortes (parliament) nor the crown ever issued a national blood law, the statutes cannot be reduced, as [Henry Kamen] implies, to mere admission requirements by a few organizations in certain parts of Castile. They were in fact publically legitimated by the royal, ecclesiastical, and legislative support that they eventually received...In Spanish America, where the crown was freer to issue laws for the entire region, official endorsement of the principle of purity of blood was to be even more explicit.” Martínez, Genealogical Fictions, 45; see “Limpieza and the Ghost of America Castro: Racism as a Tool of Literary Analysis,” Hispanic Review 64, no. 1 (1996). Kamen, Spanish Inquisition, 230–54.
733 See David Nirenberg, “Was there Race before Modernity? The Example of ‘Jewish’ Blood in Late Medieval Spain” and “The Peopling of the New World: Ethnos, Race and Empire in the Early–Modern
Martínez indicates that “not only was Old Christian ancestry made a precondition for going to Spanish America, but any administrator who was assigned there had to provide genealogical information and proof of his status.”734 Racial ideology thereby shaped social hierarchies on both sides of the Atlantic.735 Read in this light, Sepúlveda racializes colonial authority by insisting that, according to natural law, barbarians should submit to ‘the learned, the clergy, the religious,’ those who exhibit pure blood. In this way, racial discourse helps solidify scholastic supremacy and barbarian inferiority within the natural order.

Section II traced the way Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda’s aggressive form of imperialism employed a view of the natural world. It showed how Sepúlveda solidified northern systems of knowledge/power by making scholastic erudition a precondition for colonial authority and representative of human perfection. Lastly, this section shed light on the racial dimensions of Valladolid by exploring the impact of purity of blood on Sepúlveda’s project. Conversely, Las Casas would refute the legal and moral basis for conquest, slavery, and dispossession. Las Casas’ barbarian discourse, however, would undermine his imperial critique. To trace the parallels between the participants’ views, Section III will consider the following questions: How does the geography of the Ebstorf mappamundi intersect Las Casas’ imagination (see Figure 4.1)?

734 Martínez, Genealogical Fictions, 46.

735 “The organization of Spain’s American colonies thus served as one of the motors that kept the statutes and issue of limpieza de sangre alive in the Iberian Peninsula.” Ibid.

736 Figure 4.1 Gervase of Tilbury (1150–1220), Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte (c. 1250). Kloster Ebstorf, Deutschland. A digital interactive version is accessible at: 2.leuphana.de/ebskart/
do scholastic ideas about space and language shape his discourse on natural slavery? And finally, what if any are the implications of Valladolid on the modern idea of the proper human?
Figure 4.1 Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte [Ebstorf Mappamundi], Gervase of Tilbury, c. 1250 © Kloster Ebstorf, Deutschland
4.4 Location and Locution in Las Casas’ Barbarian Discourse

In recent years, scholars have made progress in dispelling the shadow of the Black Legend by highlighting the Iberian contributions to early modern science. The studies have shown how Spain and Portugal, from the start of the sixteenth century, commissioned several scientific projects throughout the Atlantic world. In fact, by the mid-1550s, Phillip II created a permanent position for a Royal Cosmographer in the House of Trade. These appointed officials, formed in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition, oversaw the development of navigational guides for pilots sailing to and from the Indies. By using Ptolemaic geometry, natural philosophy, and empirical methods, royal cosmographers and their associates produced maps, sea charts, and stellar calculations that made transatlantic commerce possible. Integrating new epistemologies into the scholastic tradition allowed them to determine the size, value, and nature of the tropics. For this reason, Maria Portuondo calls Iberian cartography a “state secret” that galvanized early modern


739 “Spanish cosmographers brought to their discipline alternative epistemologies and new methodologies that eventually changed how Europeans understood the natural world. They resorted to voyages of scientific exploration, descriptive geographies, new cartographic methods, new navigation technologies, and an unrelenting questioning of those living in the new lands and those arriving from beyond the ‘Ocean Sea’ to formulate an accurate and useful description of the world. By the reign of Phillip II (r. 1556–98), these efforts had been institutionalized and functioned under the direction of the king’s cosmographers.” Portuondo, Secret Science, 1–2.
science. Possessing classified information about southern latitudes equipped Iberian rulers to control access to the Indies and to regulate ownership over its resources. Mapping las indias occidentales made it possible to subjugate the Global South. Assessed within its intellectual milieu, Valladolid forms part of the historical shift in knowledge about the natural world. It provides a glimpse into the ways science and theology intersect at the dawn of modernity.

In addition to generating scientific interest, Atlantic exploration altered the trajectory of Western theology. The Indies’ geographic location posed fundamental challenges to Christian theology. Amerindians lacked access to baptism and the Eucharist because of the tropics were disconnected from the Old World. Merely as a result of their hemispheric location, indigenous people were deprived of the official means of grace. They appeared to exist in a state of perdition. Seen from this perspective, the Indies precipitated the controversy invigorated by Martin Luther and John Calvin and debated at the Council of Trent (1545–1547), namely, whether salvation was possible outside the Catholic Church (extra ecclesiam nulla salus). Christendom’s expansion into southern latitudes would reconfigure human salvation on a global scale.

As the seasoned Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas returned permanently to Spain in 1547 at the mature age of sixty-three. Although Sepúlveda had written Demócrates Alter about

740 “Within the early modern conception of the state, the concept of a state secret was defined by the potential of certain kinds of knowledge to harm to the monarchy. The Spanish monarchy took the defensive posture of censoring and prohibiting the circulation of maps, geographic descriptions, and historical accounts about the Indies for strategic military and political reasons.” Ibid., 6–7.

741 “[O]utside the Church there is no salvation; a dogmatic axiom, first formulated by Origin in the third century, that holds that the existence of, and either explicit or implicit membership in, the Catholic Church are necessary for salvation.” See entry for Extra Ecclesiam, Nulla Sals in Stelten, Ecclesiastical Latin, 306.

742 See Palacios Rubios and Paz, Islas del Mar Océano, 240–43.

743 See Hanke, All Mankind is One, 57.
a decade before their historic dispute, Las Casas laments not owning a copy of the text. However, Las Casas was neither ill-informed nor ill-prepared. In anticipation of Valladolid, he reviewed a conciliar summary detailing his opponent’s position. After the debate, Las Casas also contributed to the editorial process. As an official member of the Council, he helped redact the final manuscript. For these reasons, it is reasonable to conclude that the document, bearing the Spanish title *Apología*, adequately reflects both authors’ positions. Section III analyzes Las Casas’ refutation, focusing on the ways in which geographic location (space) and literal locution (alphabetic script) operate in his barbarian discourse.

Las Casas opens discussions at Valladolid by undercutting Sepúlveda’s application of natural slavery. Adapting an earlier criticism of the Burgos Laws directed at Bernaldo de Mesa, Las Casas denounces Sepúlveda for relying on “histories that are nothing but sheer fables” that misrepresent native people to justify conquest. To counter the denigrating accounts frequently summoned by Iberian authors, Las Casas would author two extensive histories detailing indigenous societies. *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, in fact, was meant to be read in conjunction with the *Apología*. At Valladolid, he draws directly and indirectly from *De Único Modo*, which provides a clear and concise synopsis of his doctrine of salvation (soteriology). In it, Las Casas declares that God has “chosen” to save people from every “race,” “tribe,” “language,” and “corner of the world”

744 See Stafford Poole’s “Preface” in Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, xxi.

745 It is unclear whether Las Casas eventually obtained a copy of Sepúlveda’s Latin manuscript. See Ibid., xx–xxvi.


so that no part of the “globe would be left totally untouched by the free gift of divine grace.”748 In other words, salvation must encompass the tropics because God desires all of humanity to be saved. This conviction undergirds Las Casas’ overarching paradigm.

A Thomist view of creation foregrounds Las Casas’ concept of human salvation. “God’s principal intention in the act of creation,” Las Casas explains, is “the perfection of the universe.”749 This teleological architecture stems from Aquinas, who defines “the ultimate perfection of a rational or intellectual nature” as “something that is naturally desired, since everything naturally desires its own ultimate perfection.”750 Las Casas notes how God created “every man” with a “natural light that has been imparted to our minds.”751 Human beings possess a rational nature that, “after the angelic, is nobler and more perfect than all other created things...to the extent that it has a greater resemblance to God.”752 In other words, being human entails possessing rational faculties. For this reason, Las Casas insists that Amerindians possess a “quick, alive, capable, [and] clear” mind that “comes to them primarily from the will of God who wished to make them so.”753 Rationality is not only a universal human quality; it defines what it means to be created in God’s image.

748 Las Casas, The Only Way, 63
749 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 38.
750 Aquinas, Summa, Ia 62.1.
751 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 27.
752 Ibid., 37.
753 Las Casas, The Only Way, 63.
Las Casas’ voice reverberates throughout the Atlantic, finding its way into the Vatican. In fact, De Único Modo provided the foundation for Pope Paul III’s text concerning indigenous slavery and religious freedom. In Sublimus Deus, Pope Paul III declares:

The sublime God so loved the human race that He created man in such wisdom that he might participate, not only in the good that other creatures enjoy, but endowed him with capacity to attain to the inaccessible and invisible Supreme Good and behold it face to face; and since man, according to the testimony of the sacred scriptures, has been created to enjoy eternal life and happiness, which none may obtain save through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, it is necessary that he should possess the nature and faculties enabling him to receive that faith.\(^{754}\)

In accordance with God’s design, human nature is oriented towards a final end (telos), which is perfection.\(^ {755}\) Salvation is therefore the perfection of rational nature. For Thomists, this process begins on earth. It starts with baptism, continues through participation in the sacramental life of the church, and culminates in heaven with the beatific vision, when we behold God ‘face to face.’\(^ {756}\) Yet we must ask, what are the implications of this paradigm in the colonial context? What types of people embody that ideal? Phrased differently, who approximates that state of perfection? Section III responds by showing how Valladolid presupposed Iberian scholastics as the universal ideal. Even for Las Casas, a scholastic idea of the proper human would define the salvific potential

\(^{754}\) Hanke, All Mankind is One, 21. Also see Pope Paul III, Sublimus Dei (Rome, May 29, 1537). Accessible at: papalencyclicals.net/Paul03/p3subli.htm

\(^{755}\) Aquinas not only distinguishes between “perfect” and “imperfect” happiness, but also “identifies more than one kind of imperfect happiness, and correlatively, he understands ‘imperfect’ in this context in more than one way.” See Porter, Nature as Reason, 157.

\(^{756}\) Aquinas, Summa, Ia 62.1. Aquinas describes the beatific vision as contemplation of the “best intelligible object; and that is God.” Jean Porter contends that Aquinas upholds the beatific vision as “completely satisfying, because it reflects the fullest possible development, that is to say, perfection, of our capacities for knowing and desiring; it is comprehensive and complete; and it can be enjoyed with perfect security, since it endures eternally and can in no way be lost (3.8; 5.3, 4; cf. 2.4; 3.2 ad 4).” See Porter, Nature as Reason, 156. See also “Ethics,” in Aristotle, Complete Works, x.
of Iberian civilization. As a theological framework, Aristotelian Thomism established the earthly and eternal horizon for the barbarians in the southern hemisphere. In the end, mapping barbarity in the Atlantic inscribed a geographic hierarchy within the natural order.

Type I: Brutish Barbarity

In accordance with the scholastic tradition, Las Casas affirms the existence of four barbarian types.\textsuperscript{757} “To be sure,” Benjamin Keen remarks, “Las Casas had an immense fund of classical and medieval learning and was a master of the Scholastic method of disputation.”\textsuperscript{758} Las Casas summons figures ranging from Aristotle and Boethius to Isidore and Aquinas to inform these four types or categories.\textsuperscript{759} The first barbarian type is understood in the broadest sense. This creature is a “cruel, inhuman, wild, and merciless man acting against human reason out of anger” or lack of moderation.\textsuperscript{760} It exhibits extreme greed, violence, rage, and ruthless behavior. Although brutish barbarians can exist among every nation, even among Greeks and Romans, Las Casas refrains from characterizing Amerindians as such.\textsuperscript{761} On the contrary, since “the first class can

\textsuperscript{757} “As a sort of assault on the first argument for Sepúlveda’s position, we should recognize that there are four kinds of barbarians, according to the Philosopher in Books 1 and 3 of the Politics and in Book 7 of the Ethics, and according to Saint Thomas and other doctors in various places.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 28.

\textsuperscript{758} Keen, Intellectual History of Colonial Latin America, 58. At one point, Sepúlveda characterizes Las Casas as one who is “most subtle, most vigilant, and most fluent, compared with whom the Ulysses of Homer was inert and stuttering.” See Antonio de León Pinelo, Tratado de Confirmaciones Reales, 1630, vol. 1, Biblioteca Argentina de Libros Raros Americanos (Buenos Aires: Casa Jacobs Peuser, 1922), 222.

\textsuperscript{759} See Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 29.

\textsuperscript{760} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{761} “Both the Greeks and the Latins, and any other who live in even the most highly developed states, can be called barbarians if, by the savagery of their behavior, they are anything like the Scythians, whose country was regarded as singularly barbaric, as Isidore notes, because of the savage and inhuman practices of this race.” Ibid.
include even Christian men,” Las Casas places conquistadores in this camp because of their gruesome violence and greed. Yet, in line with Aristotelian theory, he links nature to culture by associating bodily composition with moral corruption. Las Casas cites the Philosopher, who claims that “brutish qualities are also produced by disease or deformity.” In other words, physical abnormalities, as natural factors, are the cause of barbarity. As addressed further on, the correlation between physical deformation and geographic location plays a crucial role in Las Casas’ discussion of natural slavery.

Type II: Linguistic Barbarity

In Las Casas’ schema, Amerindians fall into the second category due to their linguistic ignorance. In contradistinction to Iberians scholastics, linguistic barbarians are people “uncultured and ignorant of letters and learning” that lack meaningful systems of communication. This category, Las Casas says, applies to “those who do not have a written language that corresponds to the spoken one [materno idiomati], as the Latin language does with ours, and therefore they do not know how to express in it what they mean.” Alphabetic script is essential for salvation because it enables intellectual communion with God. Mignolo argues that on “the basis of such principles, Spaniards would be able to assert, for instance, that the

762 Ibid., 53.
763 If considered in its entirety, this reference seems to construe brutish barbarian as an external threat, primarily applicable to foreigners. “[S]o too the brutish type is rarely found among men, it is found chiefly among foreigners, but some brutish qualities are also produced by disease or deformity.” “Ethics” in Aristotle, Complete Works, VII, 11145a 29–30.
764 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 30.
765 Ibid; “Secuna barbarorum species est illorum qui litterali sermone carent suo materno idiomati respondenti, sicut nostro, lingua latina, et sic nesciunt aestiantur rudes et expertes.” For the Latin text, see Las Casas, Apologia, 86.
indigenous people of the New World ‘lacked’ the proper words to name God, an entity that was properly and truly named only in and through the Latin language.”

Without a form of writing that corresponds to speech—what Las Casas calls “literal locution”—true knowledge of God is impossible.

In the case of Amerindian people, the beatific vision, as Thomists conceive it, requires linguistic assimilation.

Las Casas employs theological geography to discusses the second barbarian type. Las Casas states that linguistic barbarity is “circumstantial” rather than “absolute.” In other words, this condition is contingent rather than fixed, and therefore, can be overcome. Apparently, Saint Paul considers persons who fail to understand another tongue to be barbarians, acknowledging that on such grounds even he may fall into this category.

Etymologically, the word “circumstantial” carries a spatial connotation. It comes from the Latin term ex accidenti, meaning “out of” or “come to pass,” which signifies movement. The way in which Las Casas uses biblical and Patristic sources further connects movement to literal locution. Las Casas attributes linguistic barbarity to geographic isolation, as in distance from the region where a certain language is spoken. Las Casas’ engagement with the fourth-century Church Father Saint Chrysostom (349–407) illuminates the spatial dimensions. In his homily on Matthew,


768 “Barbarians of this kind are not called barbarians in the absolute but in a restricted sense; that is, they are not barbarians literally but by circumstance.” Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 31.

769 See I Corinthians 14:11 in *Oxford Bible: NRSV*

770 “Hoc est, non sunt proprie barbari sed ex accidenti.” Las Casas, *Apologia*, 86.

771 The Latin definitions are: “accidio – ere – cidi: (3) happen, take place, occur, come to pass, arrive, fall down upon” and “Ex: prep. w. abla.; out of, from.” See Stelten, *Ecclesiastical Latin*, 4 and 90.
Chrysostom paraphrases the birth narrative in which wise men travel from the Orient to Bethlehem to honor the infant Jesus. Although these “barbarous men” are ignorant of Latin, Las Casas explains, due to their outstanding “dignity of wisdom” they are not natural slaves. It would be remiss to ignore the role of cosmology in this account. According to Matthew’s gospel, the Magi undertake this journey “because a star called the wise men from the east.” The motion of the heavenly spheres, therefore, leads Shem’s descendants out of the East, a space of linguistic deprivation, and into the West, a space with literal locution. Ultimately, God, as the First Mover, leads ‘circumstantial’ barbarians to the knowledge of Christ. Through a continental relocation they encounter Truth incarnate.

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772 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 31; see also “Homilia 7a Matthaenum,” in John Chrysostom, Homiliae Super Mattheum (Strassburg: Johann Mentelin, 1466), cap. 2um. For a contemporary English edition see John Chrysostom, The Preaching of Chrysostom: Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” Matthew 2:1–12 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.


774 Ibid.
The Ebstorf Mappamundi reveals how scholastic notions of territory and language operate in Las Casas’ theological imagination. As with other mappamundi, the East is located in the upper section (see Figure 4.1). This section displays a *cynocephalus*, a creature with a dog head and human body (see Figure 4.2). Medieval Christians had long pondered the nature of creatures outside of the *oikumene* and reflected on their theological significance. Such creatures apparently inhabit India, the precise region Columbus believed to have discovered (see Figure 4.3). Art historian Debra Strickland indicates that throughout the Middle Ages, cynocephali represented a monstrous race, “said to communicate by barking, which...is significant vis-à-vis the problem of barbarity manifested as lack of intelligible speech.” For this reason, by depicting a form of barbaric illiteracy, the map posits a theological problem. An analysis of the imagery bolsters this interpretation. Notice how the cynocephali, while pointing a bow and arrow towards one side, turns to face the opposite direction. It fixes its attention on a fully clothed man who signifies civility. Sitting in front of a European castle, this man gestures to the heavens, apparently speaking

775 For a revisionist assessment of the Ebstorf, see Armin Wolf, “The Ebstorf Mappamundi and Gervase of Tilbury: The Controversy Revisited,” *Imago Mundi* 64, no. 1 (2012); “A unique feature of this map, is the inscription of Jesus’ head, hands, and feet at the four cardinal points. The symbolism is clear: the world is Christ’s crucified body, Jerusalem his navel, and the limits of the world are bounded and defined by his read,” Zamora, *Reading Columbus*, 105.

776 “On the contrary, exotic peoples were often seen as degenerate or fallen from an earlier state of grace in the Judeo-Christian tradition; even their humanity was questioned. Curious customs and appearance suggested to the medieval mind an equally curious spiritual condition. The peoples discussed in this book posed a number of knotty problems for Christians. Did the monstrous races, for example, have souls? Were they rational? Were they descended from the line of Adam as were all other members of the human family, or did they have another and separate lineage? How had they survived the Flood? Could they be converted to Christianity? Was their existence a portent of God’s intentions toward mankind? If so—and this was the question toward which most medieval thinkers automatically gravitated—what was their significance in the Christian world scheme?” See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2.

777 The region is identified by the label “India,” located to the left of the cynocephus.

of spiritual things. The problem arises from the fact that cynocephali cannot understand his speech because, as Strickland notes, without proper language the “Word of God can be neither communicated nor disseminated.” Through juxtaposing barbarity with civility the map visually configures illiteracy as an impediment to Christian conversion. This spatial schematic, therefore, signifies the way literal locution, as a means of grace, can offer salvation.

Figure 4.2 Detail of Cynocephalus on Ebstorf

Figure 4.3 Detail of India, Earthly Paradise, and Christ on Ebstorf

Las Casas’ discourse on indigenous conversion reveals the mimetic implications of language. Like the cynocephali, Amerindians are illiterate. Yet Las Casas assures his audience that they exhibit “such gentleness and decency that they are, more than other nations of the entire world, supremely fitted and prepared to abandon the worship of idols and to accept...the word of God and the preaching of the truth.” Conversion entails more than a mere profession of faith, however. It requires assimilation, something akin to what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha calls “colonial mimicry.” As Bhabha explains, it “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” According to Las Casas, reports of Amerindian “aptitude and capacity for grasping the liberal arts” are such that even the Vatican attests to the “progress they have made in religion and morality.” Widespread conversion is imminent because, in the “liberal arts that they have been taught up to now, such as grammar and logic, they are remarkably adept.” Grammar and logic will open up barbarian minds to the ‘mysteries of Christian philosophy.’ European language systems serve as a gateway to the beatific vision. And in this way, literal locution becomes necessary for Amerindian salvation.

Throughout the debate, Las Casas conceptualizes Amerindian humanity through a similar logic. In contradistinction to his opponent, Las Casas describes Aztecs as sophisticated people.

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780 Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 28; emphasis added.

781 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 122–123. “Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers,” 122–23.


To substantiate his position, he cites Paolo Giovio the Bishop of Nocer who, aware of Aztec “character and industry,” glorifies “the city of Tenochtitlán” for being “wonderful like the city of Venice in its building and the size of its population.” Yet Las Casas lauds Aztec culture not on its own merits but precisely because it approximates European civility; Tenochtitlán receives praise only in so far as it mimics Venetian space. This paradigm configures nearly every aspect of indigenous life in Las Casas’ colonial imagination.

Figure 4.4 Codex Borbonicus, c. 1475. Aztec Annals folio 14 ©Bibliothèque de l’Assemblée Nationale, France, Paris

784 See Paolo Giovio, Novocomensis: Historiarvm Svi Temporis Tomus Primus, 2 vols. (Florentiae: In officina Laurentii Torrentini dvcalis typographi, 1550), lib. 34.

785 “As you see, [Giovio] declares that the Indian city is worthy of admiration because of its buildings, which are like those of Venice.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 45.

786 Las Casas, Apologia, 23.
Furthermore, Las Casas betrays a peaceful commitment by promoting a mode of salvation
predicated on colonial violence. He extols the opportunity to reconfigure indigenous traditions in
the wake of conquest, and describes the salvific role of language by citing an extended passage
from Bishop Giovio, who declares:

Thus it was not altogether difficult for Cortés to lead a gifted and teachable people,

once they had abandoned their superstitious idolatry, to the worship of Christ. For
they learn our writing with pleasure and with admiration, now that they have given up
the hieroglyphics by which they used to record their annals.\(^{787}\)

To properly worship Christ, Amerindians must replace their hieroglyphics with ‘our writing,’
namely, Spanish or Latin. Pictographic writing would obstruct knowledge of God (see Figure
4.4).\(^{788}\) Immediately after quoting this passage, Las Casas denounces Sepúlveda saying, “this is
what you...should have done in ascertaining the truth.”\(^{789}\) In this regard, Las Casas emulates his
close colleague Julián Garcés, Bishop of Tlaxcala. In a 1533 letter, Bishop Garcés explained to Pope
Paul III: “Since I had pronounced that they were utterly illiterate, I must now perform a
recantation: they used to paint instead of write. That is to say, they used pictures instead of letters
if ever they wanted to signify anything to those who are not present whether in another time or
location.”\(^{790}\) Tragically, however, Las Casas disregards the way in which the invasion of

\(^{787}\) Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 45; see also Giovio, Novocomensis, lib. 34.

\(^{788}\) Figure 4.4 Codex Borbonicus (c. 1475), MS Y 120. La Bibliothèque Et Ses Chefs–D’œuvre Le
nationale.fr/histoire/7gf–borbonicus.asp

\(^{789}\) “Hernán Cortés, hurrying overland to the kingdoms of Mexico after defeating the Indians,
occupied the city of Tenochtitlán, after he had conquered in many battles...” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians,
45.

30, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance
Studies/Brepols, 2010), 173: “Et quoniam eos penitus litteras non didicisse praedixerim, palinodiam cano;
pigneant enim, non scribant, id est, non litteris sed imaginibus utebantur, si quid absentibus seu
tempore seu loco memorabile vellent significare.” Julián Garcés, Fray Julián Garcés: Su Alegato en Pro de los
Tenochtitlán foregrounds the spread of literal locution. Death and destruction make Latinization possible. Furthermore, demonizing Nahuatl justifies the expurgation of native writing systems. Notice how Las Casas associates ‘hieroglyphics’ with ‘superstitious idolatry.’ As Mignolo contends, through “a process of analogy, a fight in the name of God against the devil, differences across cultures in writing practices, the storage and transmission of information, and the construction of knowledge were erased.” The Codex Borbonicus below illustrates the Latinization of Aztec writing systems. Although never fully realized, Western paradigms were intended to subsume indigenous cosmologies, producing “coloniality of power.” By endowing

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791 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 75; “The game of the word became, thus, a conceptual game that impinged on understanding across cultures (what is ‘behind’ words such as *amoxlti*, *vuh*, and *book*?), on the exercise of power (who is in a position to decide whose knowledge is truth, what container and sign is preferred and should be trusted?) and the colonization of language,” 75.


Latinists tend to diminish the power dynamics surrounding the politics of language in colonial Mexico. “The rapidity with which indigenous Mexicans learned to read and write in Latin shows that the conventional oppositions between colonizer and colonized, between observer and subject, and between missionary and convert could sometimes be destabilized.” Andrew Laird, “Latin in Cuauhtémoc’s Shadow: Humanism and the Politics of Language in Mexico after the Conquest,” in *Latinity and Alterity*, 170.

793 See Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 49–90. “Coloniality of power shall be distinguished from the colonial period, in Latin America extending itself from the early sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, when most of the Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil gained independence from Spain and Portugal and began to be constituted as new nation states. Colonialism, as Quijano observes, did not end with independence because coloniality of power and knowledge changed hands, so to speak, and became subordinated to the new and emerging epistemological hegemony: no longer the Renaissance but the Enlightenment,” 87–88.
alphabetic script with perfecting qualities, Las Casas takes coloniality for granted. Salvation for the tropics, in the end, depends upon physical and epistemic violence.

Type III: Proper Barbarity – Slaves by Nature

Las Casas dedicates considerable attention to discussing the third type of barbarians who, in the ‘absolute’ and ‘proper’ sense, are slaves by nature. The significance of this type cannot be understated. As Lewis Hanke comments:

Of all the ideas churned up during the early tumultuous years of American history, none had a more dramatic application than the attempts made to apply to the natives there the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery: that one part of [human]kind is set aside by nature to be slaves in the service of masters born for a life virtually free of manual labour.  

History reveals how transforming Amerindians and Africans into natural slaves would serve to legitimize European mastery over the Global South. In proper scholastic form, Las Casas begins by summarizing Aristotle’s theory, detailed in book 3 of Politics. According to the Philosopher, natural slaves exhibit barbarity in every aspect of social life, lacking “friendships,” “marriage,” “state or politically organized community,” “civilized commerce,” and “contracts regulated by the law of nations.”  

Las Casas, however, considers such creatures to be aberrations, describing them


795 “Barbarians in the strict sense of the term, however, are those about whom we spoke in the third class, that is, those who are sunk in insensitivity of mind, ignorant, irrational, lacking ability, inhuman, fierce, corrupted by foul morals and unsettled by nature or by reason of their depraved habits of sin.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 53. Further, “It is, for instance, crucial for an understanding of the end to which the highly contentious theory of natural slavery was employed to know that this theory was based upon a widely accepted principle of faculty psychology and was expounded in a text—Aristotle’s Politics—which, in Victoria’s day, was required reading on a course in moral philosophy which all theology students were expected to take.” Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 7.

796 “The Philosopher discusses these barbarians and calls them slaves by nature since they have no natural government, no political institutions (for there is no order among them), and they are not subject to anyone, nor do they have a ruler.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 32–33.
as “freaks,” “imperfect,” and “mistakes of nature.” Unfortunately, a deficient rationality leaves them unable to conceive of, or unwilling to submit to, the rule of law. Paradoxically, Iberians widely rejected natural slavery for being “internally incoherent,” while maintaining that Amerindians, as “natural men,” were fundamentally “something less than human.”

Rather than deny the existence of natural slaves altogether, Las Casas narrowly applies Aristotle’s theory. He declares that:

since a rational nature is provided for and guided by divine providence for its own sake in a way superior to that of other creatures, not only in what concerns the species but also each individual, it evidently follows that it would be impossible to find in a rational nature such a freak or mistake of nature, that is, one that does not fit the common notion of man, except very rarely and in far fewer instances than in other creatures.

This passage captures the scholastic architecture undergirding Las Casas’ ‘common notion of man.’ His view of human nature derives from a Thomist account of Creation. Las Casas asserts: “Hence it necessarily follows that a rational nature, receiving its power from the Creator alone, should include men who, as a rule, are endowed with the best gifts of their nature.”

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797 Ibid., 34–35.
798 Pagden, however, is acutely aware of the scholastic nature of these debates. “For the men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with whom I am concerned, the image of the ‘natural man’ was somewhat different. Far from being the enlightened and enlightening child of nature he was merely someone who was compelled to live outside the human community. And all such society-less creatures, unless they were saints, were something less than human, for they had cut themselves off from the means which God had granted to every man that he might achieve his end, his telos.” Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 9.
799 “Barbarians of this kind (or better, wild men) are rarely found in any part of the world and are few in number when compared with the rest of mankind, as Aristotle notes.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 34.
800 Ibid., 35; emphasis added.
801 Las Casas claims that “for the most part, nature brings forth and produces what is best and perfect” because rarely “do natural causes fail to produce the effects which follow from their natures.” Ibid., 34.
802 Ibid., 35.
humans beings possess reason in accordance with God's design, it is impossible for an entire “race, nation, region, or country” to lack the natural capacity for autocratic rule. On such grounds, Las Casas rejects that Amerindians as a whole are natural slaves. Affirming the opposite would fundamentally call into question divine omnipotence or divine goodness. Doing so—the argument runs—would undermine the Christian doctrine of God.

Las Casas uses the *imago dei* doctrine to soften a radical form of Aristotelianism. He reminds his audience that all people, including Amerindians, are made in the image of God. He tells the council, “even though these people may be completely barbaric, they are nevertheless created in God’s image” and should be treated as “our brothers...no less than the wisest and most learned men in the whole world.” The singularity of the human race can have egalitarian implications. “To defend this ontological unity inherent to human beings,” Lantigua as explains, “he once again appealed to the Aristotelian-Thomistic account. Beyond strictly legal discourse, he defined freedom according to a metaphysical vocabulary whereby the end of a rational creature can never be subordinate to another person.” In other words, the singularity of human nature precludes

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803 Ibid., 38. “Rather [Las Casas] tries to confine his application to the smallest area possible. He not only denies vigorously that the Indies fall into the category of natural salves, but his argument tend to lead inevitably to the conclusion that no nation—or people—should be condemned as a whole to such an inferior position.” See Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, 58.

804 Las Casas engages Averroes’ commentary on De Causis and Aquinas’ commentary on *Librum Secundum Sententiarum* by writing “[t]he only reason for this, of course, is that the works of nature are the works of the Supreme Intellect who is God...it is in accord with divine providence and goodness that nature should always or for the most part produce the best and the perfect, rarely and exceptionally the imperfect and the very bad.” Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 34.

805 “They are not so forsaken by divine providence that they are incapable of attaining Christ’s kingdom.” Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 39.

806 Lantigua, “Freedom of the Gospel,” 334 footnote 104; Elsewhere, Las Casas writes: “rational nature is absolutely not ordained to another, such as another man, as to its end.” Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Creation: Writings on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Book 2, Distinction I, Question I*, ed. William E. Carroll, trans. Steven E. Baldner, vol. 33, Mediaeval Sources in Translation (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval
humans from being subordinate to one another; they can only be subordinate to God. That theological principle leads to the assertion: “Good-bye Aristotle! From Christ, the eternal truth, we have the command ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’” Because human beings are created in God’s image, every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

Adherence to Aristotle, however, leads Las Casas to undermine his egalitarian theological paradigm. His barbarian discourse ultimately advances a hierarchical relation that bestows a global mission upon scholastic elites. Las Casas, for instance, contends:

To those who are barbarians in this absolute, strict, and proper sense we should apply what the Philosopher says...they ought to be ruled by others so that they can be taught to live in a civilized and human way.

‘We,’ in other words, have the responsibility to serve as their natural masters. Las Casas therefore maintains that “monarchs and the rulers of states” may lawfully “force barbarians to live in a civilized and human way.” Peaceful co-existence is possible, he suggests, if slaves were regarded with kindness instead of being hunted or overworked like wild beasts. On this point, Hanke

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Studies, 1997), dist. 44, q.1, a.3. For Aquinas’ commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics see Summa, Ila–IIa 58.9 ad 3: “the good of one individual is not the end of another individual.”

807Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 40. See also Matthew 22:40 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.

808 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 38; emphasis added.

809 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 38–39. Further, “why does [Las Casas] continue to talk about our Indians? The term, even if it were meant in an endearing sense, needs to be read on the colonial background, which transcends personal relationships and points to a relationship that signifies ownership.” Rieger, Christ and Empire, 166.

810 “The conquistadores were simply to treat the indigenous with benevolence and promote the gospel peacefully. To be fair, Las Casas’ proposal did require the conquistadores to relinquish their presumed right to encomiendas. This was no easy feat because it had serious economic consequences for the encomenderos, which in turn, would create political tension for the King. Also, his project would entail a shift in thinking (humanity as one) and ultimately action for the missionaries...One aspect is clear, however—there are vast financial gains at stake in the debate about the humanity and rights of the Amerindian people.” Diego von Vacano, The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.
mentions how Las Casas “stressed that the arrangements he proposed would not only redound to the benefit of the Indians and to the increase of Christianity but also to the ‘incomparable temporal interests’ of the king.”811 If implemented in accordance with natural law, imperial rule would benefit rulers and barbarians alike.812 Colonization, in other words, provides the proper conditions for every strata of society to exercise its natural (i.e. God-given) potential. Notably, it is the body that signifies a slave’s subordinate position. As Las Casas explains, “because [natural slaves] are generally strong, they should perform services for their masters. Thus both master and slave benefit.”813 Nature demarcates enslaveable flesh. It seems, therefore, that once “a society had come into being which included both natural slaves and natural masters, the slave had to begin to fulfil his function as a slave.”814 Accordingly, this hierarchical relationship not only serves the common good, but allows both masters and slaves as creatures made in the imago dei, to reach their final end. These dynamics raise the question: how else does the barbarian discourse at Valladolid coincide with Spain’s imperial project?

Iberia’s seminal role in the African slave trade illuminates the implications of Las Casas’ discourse and how it intersects with imperial designs.815 Even though Las Casas narrowly applies

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811 Hanke, All Mankind is One, 66.
812 See Rieger, Christ and Empire, 161; “Reversing the trajectory of the conquest, Las Casas put his emphasis on religious powers first, arguing that economic and political success would come as a result of religious work. Thus, he argues for a different road map for empire without necessarily rejecting the idea of empire altogether,” 161.
813 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 38.
814 Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 55. “In this own world, then, the Indian was a free and independent being; but he lost his authority over his own affairs, and in some sense his humanity too, once he had been brought into contact with civilized men,” 55.
815 See António de Aleida Mendes, “The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in David Eltis and David
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Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery, he maintains that Africa may produce natural slaves. Las Casas states that “barbarians, in the absolute and strict sense of the word...were perhaps living in the country that has been named Barbary.” The term ‘Barbary’ is a geographical reference to the north African coast, current day Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. By the mid-1550s, this region had been associated with piracy and slavery for generations. Historian Martin Murphy proclaims that following the 1492 siege of Al-Andalus, King Fernando had the Muslim “inhabitants condemned to slavery and disbursed” throughout that region. Through such policies, Spain “proceeded to establish a series of strategic footholds along the North African coast” such that “by the end of the fifteenth century a great, new, self-consciously Christian power in the West confronted a new power in the East that saw itself as Islam’s protector.” Iberian incursions into sub-Saharan Africa, in conjunction with Caribbean exploitation, would soon thereafter galvanize the transatlantic slave trade.


Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 33.

It is important to note that the natural right of reprisal under the Greeks, and under the Romans prior to the imperium, mutated in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean world into a positive license granted to pirates by rulers to conduct raids, amounting almost to warfare, in accordance with rules well understood by all parties. The character of these licenses would again mutate as the practice later spread to the Atlantic, where, from the seventeenth century onward, it was known as privateering.” Martin Murphy, “The Barbary Pirates,” Mediterranean Quarterly 24, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 22; See also Martin Murphy, “Counter-Piracy in Historical Context: Paradox, Policy, and Rhetoric,” Journal of Conflict and Terrorism 35, no. 7–8 (2012).


Furthermore, the city of Sevilla, Las Casas’ place of birth, functioned as the first epicenter of transatlantic commerce. Studies of House of Trade records suggest that nearly fifty percent of Spanish ships that landed in the Americas during the mid-1500s engaged in chattel slavery.\textsuperscript{820} Iberia held uncontested control of the trade between 1501 and 1555, precisely during the time when the Valladolid debate was taking place.\textsuperscript{821} Atlantic historians David Eltis and David Richardson, who have created an extensive database on the transatlantic slave trade, point out that

Lisbon and Seville were the organizational centers of the Old World slave trade (see map 3), and their role continued when the transatlantic traffic began. Between 1580 and 1640, Portugal and Spain had the same monarch, and in the records, it is often unclear whether a slave ship was sailing under the Spanish or the Portuguese flag. The Spanish Crown used the expertise of Portuguese captains and slave merchants to supply its American colonies with slaves; Portuguese vessels had full access to Spanish America.\textsuperscript{822}

By providing the technological means and legal infrastructure for transatlantic trade, Spain and Portugal would, in effect, lay the foundation for early modern capitalism.\textsuperscript{823} Confining natural

\textsuperscript{820} “En 1589, un informe de la Casa de Contratación de Sevilla señalaba a los esclavos negros como la mercancía más importante de exportación a las Indias y en 1594 el 47.9 por ciento de los barcos que arribaron a América se dedicaban a la trata negra.” See Luis N. Rivera Pagán, Ensayos Teológicos desde el Caribe, Colección-En Fuga (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2013), 91; see also Carlos Esteban Deive, La Esclavitud del Negro en Santo Domingo, 1492–1844, 1 ed., vol. 14, Serie Investigaciones Antropológicas (Santo Domingo: Museo del Hombre Dominicano, 1980), 377 and 86.

\textsuperscript{821} See “Table Displaying Total Number of Slave Ships Per Country That Embarked/Disembarked between 1501–1650,” Emory University. Accessible at: slavevoyages.org/estimates/hAxqexdN


\textsuperscript{823} “Mientras la esclavitud clásica mantenía en funcionamiento un modo de producción tradicional, la negra americana sienta las bases de acumulación necesarias para una nuevo, montado sobre una relación distinta de trabajo: el capitalismo.” Rivera Pagán, Ensayos Teológicos, 92. [While classical slavery maintained a traditional mode of production, African slavery in the Americas laid the basis of accumulation for a new type, dependent on a distinct system of labor: capitalism]; see Deive, Esclavitud En Santo Domingo, 14, 18–20.
slaves to the African continent, as Las Casas does, would substantiate the commodification of black bodies. Reading Valladolid in light of this historical background illuminates the problematic implications behind turning Africa into barbaric space.

The historiography regarding Las Casas’ views on African slavery divides into two camps. Scholars tend to employ an ‘abolitionist’ or ‘humanist’ approach. Literary scholar For a foundational text on this subject, see Eric Eustace Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

824 For a critical overview of the debate, see Adorno, Polemics of Possession, 64–69; see also Clayton, Las Casas: A Biography, 428; Edya M. Merediz and Verónica Salles-Reese, “Addressing the Atlantic Slave Trade: Las Casas and the Legend of the Blacks,” in Approaches to Teaching the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas, ed. Santa Arias and Eyda M. Merediz, Approaches to Teaching World Literature (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008), 177–186.

825 While a full account of Las Casas’ views on slavery exceeds the scope of this study, it is worth noting the two dominant approaches to this issue. The first ‘abolitionist’ approach emerged out of the anti-slavery movements during the mid-eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. Based primarily on Antonia de Herrera y Tordesilla’s Décadas (1601–1615), this camp considers Las Casas to be one of its main architects for proposing a ‘remedy,’ namely, that Spain replace Amerindian with African labor. The weakness of this approach, however, stems from its limited engagement with Las Casas’ corpus. Only seven Lascasian texts were published prior to the mid-nineteenth century, leaving the majority of his works undiscovered, and thus unpublished, until the twentieth century.

The nineteenth-century African American abolitionist David Walker was perhaps the most prominent English-speaking author that saw Las Casas as orchestrating the African slave trade. “It is well known to the Christian world, that Bartholomew Las Casas, that very notoriously avaricious Catholic priest or preacher, and adventurer with Columbus in his second voyage, proposed to his countrymen, the Spaniards in Hispaniola to import the Africans from the Portuguese settlement in Africa, to dig up gold and silver, and work their plantations for them, to effect which, he made a voyage thence to Spain, and opened the subject to his master, Ferdinand then in declining health, who listened to the plan: but who died soon after, and left it in the hand of his successor, Charles V. This wretch, (‘Las Casas, the Preacher’) succeeded so well in his plans of oppression, that in 1503, the first blacks had been imported into the new world. Elated with this success, and stimulated by sordid avarice only, he importuned Charles V.” David Walker, Walker’s Appeal, in four articles: together with a preamble, to the coloured citizens of the world, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America, written in Boston, state of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829 (Boston: D. Walker, 1830), 40. For a modern edition of this classic text, see David Walker, David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). For a contemporary iteration of this view, see David Brion Davis, Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): “As early as 1516 two of the most humane and sensitive witnesses to the horrors of the New World, Licenciado Zuazo and Bartolomé de Las Casas, ‘protectors of the Indians,’ called for the sparing of Indian lives, especially in the minds, by importing many more African
Rubén Sánchez Godoy has recently published a monograph that shows how Las Casas’ thought, which evolved throughout the course of his life, goes from expressing a limited endorsement to opposing the institution of slavery together.\textsuperscript{826} Although historians disagree about the precise origin of the trade, they widely concur that Africans were forcibly brought to the Indies from the early sixteenth century on.\textsuperscript{827} Arguably, the earliest official proclamation dates to 1501. In it, the Catholic Kings instructed Nicolás de Ovando to exclusively import “black slaves or other slaves, our \textit{natural subjects}, that had been born under Christian dominion.”\textsuperscript{828} The decree’s emphasis on cultural or legal factors, rather than physiological or geographic criteria, casts doubt on its impact. Textual accounts of African exploitation date back to 1503, when colonialists first complained that blacks (\textit{negros}) regularly escaped from bondage and threatened to rebel against their slaves. For twenty-five years Las Casas saw the importation of black slaves as the solution for the Spaniards’ oppression of Indians,\textsuperscript{98}

The second ‘humanist’ approach, maintains that Las Casas, ignorant of the trade’s brutality, proposed limited enslavement of Africans as a temporary solution. It emphasizes Las Casas’ eventual repentance for proposing such a ‘remedy,’ and holds his dedication to human freedom on a universal scale. For instance, historian of Latin American Christianity, Luis Rivera-Pagán advances eight points in Las Casas’ defense: 1) advocating the importation of African labor (as minor sections of \textit{Historia de las Indias} state), Las Casas reiterates an idea that had been introduced by other missionaries in the New World; 2) Las Casas considers certain types of slavery, specifically \textit{ius gentium}, to be valid yet not applicable to Amerindiands; 3) he did not restrict slavery to blacks or Africans; 4) his proposal entailed a limited number of African slaves (a few thousand) rather than mass enslavement; 5) he did not believe slavery should function as the primary source of labor and proposed a shared distribution of work; 6) upon learning that Africans were neither moors nor Saracens, he condemned their enslavement as unjust; 7) made a distinction between Turks/Saracens, who were justly enslaved, and other Africans, who were wrongly enslaved; and lastly, 8) he eventually rejects the idea that possessing greater physical strength made Africans better suited for colonial labor. See Rivera Pagán, \textit{Ensayos Teológicos}, 93–104.

\textsuperscript{826} Sánchez Godoy, \textit{El Peor de los Remedios}, 14–17.

\textsuperscript{827} See Rivera Pagán, \textit{Ensayos Teológicos}, 85–92; see also Deive, \textit{Esclavitud en Santo Domingo}, 14, 35.

masters. These records indicate that African slavery was underway for at least a decade by the time Las Casas began engaging the topic. Las Casas’ problematic ‘remedy’ notwithstanding, it would be misleading to accuse him for orchestrating the African slave trade. To understand Las Casas’ imagination fully, we must explore the geographic dimensions of barbarity and how it intersects with scholastic World Maps.

Both Las Casas and mappaemundi correlate barbarity with location through a theological geography. Recall that for Las Casas, the third barbarian type is ‘rare’ because it violates God’s natural order. Accordingly, “the plan of God, who wills the universe to be as beautiful and perfect as possible, would be in great part frustrated,” if humanity exhibited physical or intellectual abnormalities on a vast scale. Yet Las Casas concedes that such irregularities are found along the African tropics: “Seldom is a man born lame, crippled, blind, or one eyed, or with the soles on top of the feet, as some were in Africa, according to the testimony of Augustine and others.”

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829 See Juan Bosch, *De Cristóbal Colón a Fidel Castro: El Caribe, Frontera Imperial* (Santo Domingo: Alfa y Omega, 1986), 138 and 143.


831 Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 34. Las Casas cites Augustine’s, *City of God*, book 15, chapter 8. See “Notas al Texto Castellano: Capítulo 2” in Las Casas, *Apología*, 671. Yet it is unclear how Augustine addresses physical abnormalities in this passage: “God’s purpose was to direct and distinguish, from the start, those two societies in their difference lines of descent. And so on the one side the generations of men, that is of those who live by human standards, and on the other side the generations of the sons of God, that is, of those who live by God’s standards, were interwoven down to the Flood, where the discrimination and the combination of the two societies is described. The discrimination is described in that the genealogies of the two societies are recorded separately, one deriving from Cain the fratricide, the other from the brother called Seth (for he was another son of Adam, taking place of the one murdered by his brother). At the same time, their combination is described in that as the good deteriorated, they all became bad enough to be wiped out by the Flood, except for the righteous man named Noah.” Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Scowcroft Bettenson, Pelican Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 607–608; see also “The History of the Two Cities: Books 15–18” in Gerald O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) “[a]t all events, the mastery of sin is also symbolically alluded to in a neighbouring Genesis text (3:16) where there is talk of Adam (-reason) having mastery over Eve (-flesh). Cain’s implicit rejection of divine admonition is a terrible
explicit reference to Africa deserves attention because it engages an ancient debate regarding the geopolitics of place. Las Casas draws on medieval climate theory to conceptualize the nature of African bodies. He echoes Isidore of Seville (560–636), who maintains that people’s “faces and coloring, the size of their bodies, and their various temperaments correspond to various climates.”

832 Wey Gómez sheds light on this theory by writing:

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\text{evidence that the lower latitudes of the globe were largely hot, infertile, and uninhabitable rested with the exotic physiologies and customs of its black inhabitants, who flourished only where geographical accidents counteredacted the sun’s lethal heat—whose bodies and lives were non-natural or beyond nature.}
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And so, Las Casas envisions the African tropics as naturally barbaric due to the extreme temperature along the equator. The Ebstorf applies a similar logic. In fact, the map displays human aberrations along the northern African coast, correlating physical deformity with geographic location.

834 Amorphous, deformed, and hybrid creatures, exhibiting unnatural behavior, only inhabit the African continent (see Figure 4.8).

835 While Ebstorf and Las Casas allow for barbarians warning to those who do not admit their sin. Their faults increase, and in Cain’s case lead to murder (15.7),” 164.

832 Isidore and Stephen A. Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198, book IX.ii.105. “Hence we find that the Romans are serious, the Greeks easy-going, the Africans changeable, and the Gauls fierce in nature and rather sharp in wit, because the character of the climate makes them so,” 198, book IX.ii.105.

833 Wey Gómez, *Tropics of Empire*, 85. “Indeed, even if one were to have admitted that there was such a thing as nature in extreme places, tropical nature itself could have been nothing short of a tyrannical mother whose sporadic bouts of benevolence spawned every sort of physical and moral aberration in her children,” 85–86.

834 If considered in its entirety, this reference seems to construe brutish barbarity as an external condition, primarily applicable to foreigners: “[S]o too the brutish type is rarely found among men, it is found chiefly among foreigners, but some brutish qualities are also produced by disease or deformity.” “Ethics” in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, VII, 11145a 29–30; For a classic text on representations of human abnormality in the Middle Ages see “The Plinian Races” and “Exotic Peoples in Manuscript Illustration” in Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art*, 5–25, 131–62.

835 Note the region circled in blue on the right side (southern) section of the map.
to exist in other regions, both concentrate ‘freaks of nature’, who they consider to be natural slaves, almost exclusively along the African tropics.836

Las Casas and the Ebstorf assume a geographic hierarchy as part of the natural order. Christian authorities dating back to Augustine upheld a genealogical difference between the inhabitants of Asia, Europe, and Africa.837 Perhaps more than any other writer in the West, Isidore of Seville is responsible for promulgating a tripartite image of the world among scholastic elites.838 His canonical text *Etymologies* (c. 625) contains what became known as the ‘T–O map,’ representing a triadic continental division (see Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6).839 Isidorean maps visually represent the aftermath of Noah’s Ark—the Genesis story in which God spared from a fatal flood Noah and his family, along with all the fauna on the ark, due to their righteousness.

836 The Ebstorf map displays one act of savagery in the Far East, which constitutes the most egregious form barbarity—cannibalism. It shows a naked person without hands and feet, lying on the ground, bleeding from every extremity. Two other persons, who are also naked, devour the severed limbs.


839 Figure 4.5 Isidore Bishop of Seville, Diagrammatic World Map (c. 1075). British Library, Royal MS. 6 C.I, f. 108v. Accessible at: bl.uk/collection-items/diagrammatic-world-map

Figure 4.6 Isidore Bishop of Seville, *Etymologiae* (*Etymologies*). Augsburg: Guntherus Ziner, 1472. Vollbehr Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division 138.00.00. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Accessible at: loc.gov/exhibits/exploringtheearlyamericas/AftermathoftheEncounter/DocumentingNewKnowledge/MappingtheWorld/Assets/object138_725.Jpeg
Figure 4.5 T–O Map, Etymologies, c. 1000
©British Library, London

Figure 4.6 T–O Map, Augsburg, c. 1472
©Library of Congress, Washington, D.C

Figure 4.7 Detail of Ebstorf’s T–O map (right)

Figure 4.8 Annotated Ebstorf Mappamundi
According to the narrative, God sent a massive flood to punish humanity, which annihilated every earthly creature.\textsuperscript{840} After forty days the rain subsided. God then instructed Noah’s sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—to be “fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”\textsuperscript{841} The three siblings, along with their wives, disperse and settle in different regions. Noah’s sons eventually repopulate the landmasses that comprise the oikumene: Asia (Shem), Africa (Ham), and Europe (Japheth).\textsuperscript{842} Yet before departing, God curses Ham for looking upon his father’s nudity. As a result, Noah condemns Canaan (who represents Ham’s descendants) to a perpetual state of servitude. Noah declares:

‘Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.’\textsuperscript{843}

This exchange, known as the Curse of Ham, gave credence to the idea that Africans, as an entire race, were inferior to Europeans and Asians, namely, the inhabitants of the Global North.\textsuperscript{844} In fact, by the end of the sixteenth century, various Western powers would cite the Curse of Ham as

\textsuperscript{840} See Genesis 6–11 in \textit{Oxford Bible: NRSV}.

\textsuperscript{841} Genesis 9:1 in \textit{Oxford Bible: NRSV}.

\textsuperscript{842} See Genesis 10:32 in \textit{Oxford Bible: NRSV}.


\textsuperscript{844} “The most prevalent explanation for the presumed inferiority of blacks came from the Old Testament. The story of Ham has functioned to justify the subjection and degradation of blacks for over a thousand years. Interpretations of the curse of Ham can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish oral traditions that first appeared in the fifth century. Despite the absence of any characterization of Canaan’s children according to color, race, or ethnicity in the biblical version, in Genesis Rabbah the ethnic identification of the Sons of Ham had begun to shift toward the peoples of African descent. Noah says to Ham: ‘You prevented me from doing that which is done in the dark [i.e., coitus]; accordingly, your seed will be ugly and black.’” Sweet, “Iberian Roots,” 148.
biblical justification for the transatlantic slave trade. For in the end, God through Noah had authorized African subordination. And so the continental division based on Noahic genealogies inscribes a racial hierarchy on the natural order. This configuration, which provides medieval mapmakers with a theological architecture, explicitly registers on the Ebstorf (see Figure 4.8). A miniature Isidorean map, located in the upper right section, reflects that structure (see Figure 4.7).

Type IV: Religious Barbarity

Las Casas’ discussion of non-Christians imparts salvific power to literal locution. According to Las Casas, the fourth type of barbarian

includes all those who do not acknowledge Christ. For no matter how well governed a people may be or how philosophical a man, they are subject to complete barbarism, specifically, the barbarism of vice, if, they are not imbued with the mysteries of Christian philosophy.

Regardless of their intellectual sophistication, non-Christians will inevitably succumb to ‘complete barbarism.’ Only exposure to ‘Christian philosophy’ can eradicate their vice. Sanctification entails cultural assimilation because without the acquisition of Latin, the ‘mysteries’ of God, as revealed in scripture and worship, would remain inaccessible. “The interpretive key for Spanish Dominican arguments against religious coercion and in support of Amerindian spiritual and political freedom,” Lantigua maintains, “followed from the dictum that

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846 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 49; emphasis added.
‘grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.’ In this way, Las Casas’ theory of salvation (i.e. the beatific vision) renders literal locution into a means of grace. While giving a more positive account than Sepúlveda, Las Casas portrays Amerindians as passive subjects with a child-like rationality. He assures his audience that Amerindians are “completely innocent, meek, harmless, temperate, and quite ready and willing to receive and embrace the word of God.”

Indigenous people appear to be empty vessels, a tabula rasa primed for indoctrination. Why else would they be so easily persuaded to relinquish their long-held beliefs and practices? Indigenous systems of thought—what Las Casas calls ‘philosophies of man’—collapse in the face of scholastic prowess.

Applying a similar analysis to religious barbarity in the Old World, Las Casas derides Islamic civilization as inferior by construing Muslims as sexual deviants. Without “Christian law” and the “sacraments,” Las Casas insists, unbelievers practice “foul and corrupt ways of life,” behaving “like animals.” Apparently members of the Council of the Indies had praised “Turks and the Arabs” for their efficiency in “political affairs,” to which Las Casas asks: “But how can they be honored with this reputation for uprightness when they are an effeminate and luxury-loving

847 Lantigua, “Freedom of the Gospel,” 325 footnote 61; see also Aquinas, Summa, I. 1.8 ad 2. To bolster this view, Lantigua cites Roger Ruston, Human Rights and the Image of God (London: SCM Press, 2004), 53: “[t]his Thomist principle is the bottom line of all this debate about evangelization: supernatural ends cannot be achieved with methods that do violence to natural ones.”

848 In the subsequent paragraph, Las Casas describes them as a “timid race.” This approach also informs his Christology. See Rieger, Christ and Empire, 180: “[i]n Las Casas’ reflections it appears as if the Amerindians relate to the imposed and (seemingly passive) sufferings of Christ, while the Spanish missionaries relate to Christ’s active work.”

849 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 28.


851 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 51.
people, given to every sort of sexual immorality?"852 This criticism borrows criteria from the first barbarian category; it shows how gender and sexuality inform Las Casas’ imaginary. Las Casas echoes Aristotle, who contrasts the vice of “incontinence and softness (effeminacy)” with the virtue of “continence and endurance,” to decry Islamic society.853 Moreover, Las Casas draws on Aquinas and Scripture (Romans 1) to inform what he describes as “detestable acts practiced by unbelievers” (abominationes infidelium).854 Such a rendition, however, does not adequately convey the sexual connotation. In Romans, the apostle Paul condemned the fact that men “committed shameless acts with men” by “giving up natural intercourse with women, [and] were consumed with passion for one another.”855 This exposition of gender and sexuality illuminates the close

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852 Ibid.
853 See “Ethics” in Aristotle, Complete Works, VII, 11145 a35.
854 “Since, therefore, through their foul and corrupt way of life and the other detestable acts practiced by unbelievers (which arise especially from and follow on superstitious opinions about divine matters) they became like animals...as Saint Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, chap. 1.” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 51. See also, Las Casas, Apologia, cap. 5, 120. “Cum ergo per foedos et corruptos mores et caeteras abominationes infidelium que ex superstitionis opinionibus de rebus divinis oriuntur et consequuntur illa, reddantur similes animantibus, auctore Beato Paulo (ad Romanos, 1˚); see also Aquinas, Summa, II–II, q. 94, a. 3, ad. 3um.
855 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless,
correlation between effeminacy and sodomy in Las Casas’ thought, which explains why he regards Turks, Arabs, and Moors as the embodiment of ‘true’ barbarity. Transgressing heteronormative sexuality signifies a level of depravity that nullifies any political accomplishment.

In what appears to be a subversive gesture, Las Casas deploys Sepúlveda’s argument against the Greco-Roman pillars of European civilization. Beginning with Columbus, many colonial writers had used negative tropes, based on medieval gender norms, to depict Amerindian men as feminine and Amerindian women as masculine subjects. Similarly, Las Casas berates Greeks and Romans for their legacy of domination, sexual vices, heinous games, and pagan sacrifices. Yet Las Casas’ critique of Greece and Rome serves as a testament to Christianity’s civilizing power over time. Because “neither prudence nor justice can be found” among any nation lacking knowledge of the true and living God, their corruption eventually dissipates with the spread of the gospel. The classical tradition represents what (European) humanity used to be; Iberian scholastics, as heirs of that tradition, represent what (universal) humanity can become. Muslims and Aztecs, therefore, have yet to overcome the immorality that hinders their political development. In sum, religious barbarians lack the necessary means of grace (Christian law and the sacraments) to produce a rightly ordered civilization, and more importantly, to behold the beatific vision.

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ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” Romans 1:18–32 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.

856 See Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 50–51; see also Las Casas, The Only Way, 65–66.

857 “But even if the Greeks and Romans did refrain from these horrible crimes and foul vices, where is the credit due if not to the splendor of the gospel, which, once it had spread throughout all the nations of the world, came to the notice even of that ambitious nation?” Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 50–51.
Las Casas expands this vision by granting theological instruction a civilizing role in the New World. Las Casas recognizes that Amerindian “society is the equal of that of many nations in the world” given their natural reason. Nevertheless, he delineates the benefits of indoctrination on indigenous ways of life. He explains:

Since all these Indian peoples, excepting none in the vast world of that hemisphere, universally have good and natural intelligence, have ready wills, they thus can be drawn to and taught a complete and sound morality, and more so to our Christian belief, even though some peoples in some places have not yet developed political maturity, an ordered body politic, the kind we said many possessed.

Evangelization goes beyond establishing ‘complete and sound morality’ among the natives; ‘our Christian belief,’ rather, transforms even the most underdeveloped tribes into proper societies. This theory of culture presupposes a Thomist idea of the proper Man. “The theory viewed all peoples as being in different stages of development, ranging from the stage of very primitive beginnings to the highest state attained by fully civilized nations illuminated by the Evangelical Law.” Iberian scholastics represents the pinnacle of human development. On such grounds, Las Casas claims, any “corrupt customs” that remain are “curable finally with human effort, and more so, better so, with the preaching of the gospel.” The disciplinary effects of religious education cannot be understated. Because in the wake of conquest, “the sedentary peoples by and large took

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858 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 65.
859 Ibid., 66; emphasis added. See also Las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, cap. 263, par. 2–4, Appendix B.
860 Keen, *Intellectual History of Colonial Latin America*, 60–61. Keen, however, sees no problem with Las Casas’ theory. “Progress from the first save state common to all nations to a higher stage was made through the agency of great teachers who emerged within a group, or come from other lands, and taught men the utility of living in houses, social intercourse, the utility of law and government, and other civilized ways. Las Casas’s theory of cultural evolution enabled him to examine the customs and beliefs of an Indian people dispassionately and within the framework of that people’s own culture,” 60–61.
861 Las Casas, *The Only Way*, 66; emphasis added.
conversion for granted. The question was one of learning just what a converted person should do and how much of the old could be retained. Thus, the emphasis was on instruction rather than conversion, on teaching Christian duties, beliefs, and sacraments.  

The indoctrination of the tropics would not only engender civility; it would, at the proper time, guide Amerindians towards their ultimate end: seeing God with the mind’s eye.

Las Casas and Sepúlveda conceptualize imperial power through different notions of the church. Both concur that after the resurrection, God the Father granted Christ dominion over the earth. In turn, Christ through the Spirit bestows it upon the pope, who serves as the head of his body, the church. Sepúlveda interprets this precept in a way that fuses divine power with papal authority. He declares:

Therefore, just as no one can deny that wars undertaken by God’s command are just, no one will deny that a war is just that God’s Vicar, after mature deliberation and in the exercise of his pontifical authority, declares to be justified.

For this reason, he draws on the papal bull Inter Caetera. Sepúlveda claims that Alexander VI “declared armed expeditions against the Indians to be just, that he allowed the Kings of Castile the right to conquer them and add them to their empire.” While Christ initially advocated for peaceful evangelization, that teaching changed once “the Church grew in power and numbers” because “Christ wanted men to be compelled, even when unwilling, to accept the Christian

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863 Jesus tells his disciples: “[a]ll authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18–20 in *Oxford Bible: NRSV*.


865 Ibid.; Las Casas criticizes the application of this Papal bull in chapters 59–62.
Moreover, Sepúlveda interprets “compel” as forceful coercion or violence based on a reading of scripture. He cites the parable of the Great Banquet, in which a wedding host instructs his servants to “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.” Ostensibly the Church Fathers bolster this position. Sepúlveda contends that “[v]iolence was restored in order to bring them to the banquet because, as Augustine says,” the prophesy about Christ’s universal dominion “had not yet been fulfilled.” If Augustine and Ambrose lauded Constantine’s persecution of pagans, infidels, and heretics, they would surely approve the destruction of Amerindian idolatry. In sum, the ends justify the means. Calling into question the Spanish conquest, therefore, would verge on heresy because it undermines the legitimacy of Christ’s dominion.

Las Casas, on the other hand, restricts imperial dominion by elaborating the implications of divine action and human freedom. Las Casas divides humanity into two categories: believers (i.e. actual Christians) and unbelievers (i.e. potential Christians). Christ’s dominion, he claims, exists only ‘in potential’ and it becomes ‘actualized’ (or activated) when a person converts and undergoes baptism. Believers, as those “regenerated through baptism,” thus “return to charity through grace” and are “actually and effectively” under the authority of Christ.

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866 Ibid., 14.

867 Ibid.; emphasis added. For the parable of the Great Banquet, see Luke 14:12–24; Matthew 22:1–10; and Mark 14:23 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.


869 Ibid. Sepúlveda claims, “violent measures and whatever is probably helpful should be tried, so that heretics and pagans may acknowledge their error, come to their senses, and thus ask for baptism of their own accord, as many of these Indians did when moved by violence and force of war.” Ibid.

870 Ibid., 56.
grounds, only believers are accountable to natural and canon law, which renders heretics (errant Christians) liable to Inquisitorial prosecution. Conversely, unbelievers “who have never accepted the faith of Christ are not actually subject to Christ and therefore not to the Church or its authority.” This means that Christian rulers cannot punish unbelievers for sins against nature, regardless of whether they reside in Christian territories. More importantly Las Casas insists that God does not coerce anyone into submission because doing so would violate their free will.

So, if God rejects the use of violence, then why should the Catholic Kings and their colonial agents do otherwise? Since Papal authority foregrounds ecclesial and by extension imperial dominion, nonviolence should function as a model for Spain’s colonial project.

In the final assessment, however, Las Casas’ defense of freedom disregards the power dynamics that impact Amerindian conversion. Engaging the doctrine of Original Sin, Las Casas alludes to Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden as the root cause of humanity’s

871 Ibid., 55.
872 Las Casas apparently modifies Cayetano’s three-part classification, claiming that Christians hold dominion over infidels in one of the following ways: (1) Turks/Saracens (by right, not in fact); (2) Jews (by right and in fact); (3) others (neither by right nor in fact). See Rivera Pagán, *Ensayos Teológicos*, 101–102.

873 Although Christ “gently moves and directs all created things, especially rational creatures, in their acts, he does not want anyone to be forced to give the service that is due, but he wants it left to each one’s free will.” Las Casas, *Defense of the Indians*, 56. See Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, 55; see also “Politics” in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, 1244 a 35 “Barbarians, Aristotle had said, could only be noble and be free in their own lands where barbarism was the norm, ‘thus implying that there are two sorts of nobility and freedom, the one absolute and the other relative.’”

sinful condition. He explains that “since man has brought about his destruction by his own will, it is appropriate that he win his salvation by his own will as aided by divine grace.” Since creaturely destruction was introduced through willful defiance, salvation must likewise be secured through willful obedience. This choice, however, must occur freely, that is, without coercion. However, Las Casas’ nonviolent proposal minimizes the way in which material conditions defined the contours of indigenous freedom. During Las Casas’ lifetime, subjugated groups in Mexico used religion to obtain legal protection and social benefits. Historian Herman Bennett details how “Africans, black creoles, and mulattos asserted claims as Christians, first as husbands and wives and later as individuals with freewill,” and thus “steadily enhanced their personal liberty, which became the vehicle for pressing for freedom.” Las Casas himself underscores the material implications of conversion. In the prelude to Valladolid, he claims that baptism transforms new Christians into “a feudal subject and vassal” of the Crown. Any

875 “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.” See Genesis 3:1–7 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.

876 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 56.

877 Herman L. Bennett, Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 6. “In the Spanish Indies the institution of slavery—a juridical category that defined enslaved Africans as property—had to contend with the competing institutional mechanisms that accorded slaves rights as Christian beings (persons), a process that precipitated the growth of a population of free blacks and coloreds,” 6.

878 See Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 5. Other sixteenth-century theologians, like the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina, defended African enslavement by emphasizing the material benefits of Christization. “Pues opinan que de esta manera, entre nosotros se les convierte al cristianismo y se les proporciona también una vida material mucho mejor que la que antes llevaban entre los suyos, donde andaban desnudos
attempt to divorce the ‘religious’ from the ‘political’ would therefore be untenable. From the vantage point of the tropics, the dispossessions of land, derision of indigenous traditions, and enslavement of black and brown bodies would shape colonialists and subjects alike. By manipulating fears and desires of all peoples, colonial power dynamics would compel religious barbarians either to accept or to reject the faith. Insisting it was possible for Amerindians to accept Christ’s lordship freely conceals the violent architecture of colonial Christianity. It circumvents the weight of history. To what extent can freedom—spiritual and political—truly exist under imperial domination?

4.5 Conclusion

Chapter Four traced the way scholastic civility defined barbarian salvation. Section I showed how the transatlantic economy served as background for the Valladolid debate. The revocation of the New Laws in 1545 pressed Las Casas and Sepúlveda to engage the question of perpetuity once more. Section II examined the scholastic foundations of Sepúlveda’s geopolitical vision. It exposed the way a Thomist–Aristotelian view of nature helped establish the global epicenter in the northern hemisphere. For Sepúlveda, literal locution and blood purity would not only configure knowledge/power throughout the Atlantic world; these dual qualities would also define human perfection.

The third and last section turned to analyze Las Casas’ response. Section III examined the way Bartolomé categorizes human beings based on scholastic notions of barbarity and civility. His application of Aristotle would construe Amerindians and Africans as barbaric due to their linguistic and religious depravity. In accordance with medieval geography, as reflected by the Ebstorf mappamundi, he maps the tropics as barbaric space. As the embodiment of perfection, scholastic civility is therefore necessary for human salvation. Section III shows how a scholastic vision of the natural world foregrounds the colonial imagination.

In a letter addressed to Charles V and the Council of the Indies, the Dominican Bartolomé de la Vega exalts the Valladolid debate to monumental heights. The written account of this confrontation, he says, will lead readers from ignorance to knowledge and ideally from complacency to action. Vega declares that through it, “darkness is driven from Spain, the fog is raised, men are aroused from their slumber, the misguided come back to a truer judgment, those who were wise in their own eye are put to doubt. At last there is enlightenment for all of Spain [about] the Indies.” Its significance rests not in its erudition but its subject. Vega reminds his audience, both past and present, that Valladolid concerns “nothing less than the salvation or loss of both the bodies and souls of all the inhabitants of that recently discovered world,” which makes it “vitally necessary for the whole world.” As exposed in this chapter, these issues continue to play a crucial role in our global imagination. In unexpected ways, Valladolid’s legacy lays the precedent for two dominant ways of conceptualizing imperial power in the modern/colonial

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879 Las Casas, Defense of the Indians, 5.
880 Ibid.
world. In the end, the supremacy of the Global North and its representatives appears to be part of
the natural order.
CONCLUSION:

A DECOLONIAL OPTION FOR THE TROPICS
Viewed from the perspective of the excluded and discriminated against, the historical record of global capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy is full of institutionalized, harmful lies. It is a record of social regulation in the name of social emancipation, appropriation in the name of liberation, violence in the name of peace, the destruction of life in the name of the sanctity of life, violation of human rights in the name of human rights, societal fascism in the name of political democracy, illegal plundering in the name of the rule of law, assimilation in the name of diversity...compulsive consumption in the name of happiness, and hypocrisy in proclaiming principles (St. Thomas’s *habitus principiorum*) in order to cover up for the most hideous negations of *recta vita*.

—Boaventura de Sousa Santos

If one takes the ‘map’ in its current geographical form, we can see that in the course of the period marked by the birth of modern scientific discourse (i.e., from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century) the map has slowly disengaged itself from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility.

—Michel de Certeau

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This dissertation set out to map the nature of empire by exploring the legacy of theological geography in the early Iberian Atlantic. I tried to trace the colonial origins of the modern world we have come to inhabit. I exposed the contingency of geopolitical hierarchies to dissipate the notion that systemic inequalities should be taken for granted. Despite what global elites and their allies may profess, the disparity of knowledge/power that structures our world is engineered. There is nothing natural about neoliberal capitalism. Neither massive concentrations of wealth nor widespread poverty stem from a cosmic order created by God. Instead they depend on communal ways of thinking about, and relating to, the world and its many life-forms. While social inequalities permeate human history, my investigation unearthed the geographic imaginary that undergirds our global condition.

As I outlined in the Introduction, my scholarship stems from concerns about the perpetual inequalities created by neoliberal capitalism. In this descriptive account, I tried to analyze the way in which race and space overlap in the logic of economic displacement. To illustrate its implications, I framed my project around the calculated fatalities of undocumented migrants along the U.S./Mexico border. I used ‘a racial state of expendability’ to conceptualize something that juridical and financial systems take for granted: certain bodies—black and brown bodies, in particular—are fundamentally disposable. As Mignolo asks: “What is the problem of the nation-state? That the nation-state cares (in practice but not in theory) for nationals and not for human beings. Non-nationals are lesser human beings; they are foreigners, immigrants, refugees, and for colonial settlers, indigenous from the land they settled in are second class nationals.”

883 Walter Mignolo, “Coloniality Is Far From Over,” Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry 43, no. 1 (2017): 39–40. “Who decides that the indigenous are somehow [part] of the ‘national’—which is who actually counts, since Western Europeans and their Southern counterparts (in Italy, Spain and Portugal, with modern Greece falling almost out of the South of Europe) have defined themselves as ‘nationals’?
this guise, raciality functions as a precondition for state-sanctioned violence and economic exploitation experienced by undocumented immigrants. Their bodies are sacrificed on the altar of state sovereignty.

C.1 Sighting ‘Spaces of Death’

I began by posing a question: how does a theological conception of nature undergird or undermine colonial configurations of knowledge and power? I argued that Iberian empires conceptualized geographic dominion and racialized religious identity by leveraging a scholastic vision of nature. During the course of the ‘long sixteenth century,’ Iberian scholastics would ground spatial and racial hierarchies within the natural order created by God. By tracing how Aristotelian Thomism provided the conceptual framework for imperial expansion, I showed how a “traditioned Christian intellectual posture [was] made to function wholly within a colonialist logic.”

I also explored the subversive potential of Christian theology by analyzing Bartolomé de Las Casas’ geographic imagination. I showed how Las Casas formulates a subversive theological geography that bases Amerindian sovereignty on their place ‘under the sun.’

With the emergence of the idea of the nation-state and the definition of the ‘Rights of Man and of the Citizen’, doors were closed for lesser-Man and non-citizens, that is, ‘nonnationals’. Then came the significant problem of the modern, secular and bourgeois European nation-state that propagated all over the world,” 39–40.

884 Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 83. “The colonial moment changed the trajectory of the teleological framework of Christianity. This new trajectory established a strange kind of insularity and circularity for Christian traditions of inquire. The telos of Christian faith and life was yet in place, but faith’s intellectual way of proceeding was now unclear and trouble in relation to the earth, the ground, new spaces, and landscapes,” 83.
Chapter One examined the order of nature in late medieval cosmology by probing Fra Mauro’s Mappamundi (c. 1450). I focused on Mauro’s planisphere because, as a project commissioned by the Portuguese crown that illustrated the created order, it exemplifies how Iberian empires began to imagine the world and their central place in it. I used this chapter to explain how Aristotelian Thomism shaped dominant conceptions about the physical world during the latter half of the fifteenth century. The first section historicized the mappamundi tradition within the scholastic-humanist milieu of the Venetian Renaissance. I also situated Fra Mauro, as a theological mapmaker, within the broader geopolitical context in which Portugal began emerging as a global power.

Chapter One dispelled the shadow of the Black Legend. I accomplished this task by critically engaging mappamundi scholars—Angelo Catteneo, Piero Falchetta, and Susy Marcon—who tend to disregard or misrepresent the contributions of medieval theology. In general, these scholars employ a secularist reading that renders theology epistemically meaningless. By approaching the map as an exclusively ‘scientific’ document, they obscure the ways in which Mauro invokes Christian theology. Contrary to what the Black Legend may suggest, I showed how Fra Mauro integrates empirical evidence, derived from Atlantic exploration, into a Christian cosmology. And so, Mauro writes, “I say that in my own day I have been careful to verify the texts by practical experience, investigating for many years and frequenting persons worthy of faith, who have seen with their own eyes what I faithfully report above.”

Cattaneo, *Mauro’s Mappa Mundi*, 701–702, 2834: 40 S 5. The original text, written in Venetian dialect, reads: “Pero tanto dico che io nel tempo mio ho solitato verificare la scriptura cum la experientia, investigando per molti anni e praticando con persone degne de fede, le qual hano veduto ad ochio quello che qui siso fedelmente demostro.”
To elucidate the map’s theological structure, I dedicated a section to each of the four legends and their corresponding texts. Rather than dismissing them because of their marginal location, I chose to focus on the corner images because of their theological and theoretical content. They depict the structure of solar and lunar effects, the cosmic order, climate theory, and earthly paradise. I essentially used the legends to guide my interpretation of the central map, which is, after all, what legends are meant to do.

Through a close analysis of the legends, I outlined Mauro’s vision of the natural order. I showed how the hierarchical order of the elements (fire > air > water > earth) was of primary importance. This theory posed a scientific problem because the earth, as the lowest element, should be entirely covered by water. While Mauro upholds a natural hierarchy, he maintains that God makes parts of the earth porous so that humans may inhabit dry land. In other words, he attributes the habitability of Africa, Asia, and Europe to divine providence. This theological geography allows Mauro to explain why Portuguese sailors could circumnavigate Africa, as he depicts in the central planisphere.

Moreover, I detailed how Fra Mauro cited Church Fathers to theorize the movement of the nine spheres that structure the cosmos. I explain how Mauro attributes hierarchy and motion to God’s design. For Mauro, the highest sphere—empyrean—exhibits by nature what humans may exhibit through grace: an incorruptible, immutable, and luminous body. I explain how Mauro incorporates scientific and theological knowledge in the legend on Earthly Paradise. Augustine’s reading of Genesis enables Fra Mauro to explain how major bodies of water, separated by vast distances, can come from Earth Paradise. The rivers depicted on the map, Mauro concludes, originate from the same source because they are connected underground.

I explored the impact of late medieval cosmology by comparing Fra Mauro’s Mappamundi to the World Map and Ocean Chart (c. 1488) attributed to Christopher Columbus. By doing so, I
showed how both images of the world share a Christian cosmology. In both maps, God, ‘the ‘maker of heaven and earth,’ designed the world with a hierarchical order. This chapter uncovered the ways in which Aristotelian Thomism provides the conceptual framework for Spain and Portugal’s global designs. A vision of the natural world, rooted in the scholastic tradition, would ultimately inspire Columbus’ journey to the tropics.

Chapter Two examined the way in which Iberian empires mapped racial and spatial hierarchies across the Atlantic. In this lengthy chapter, I traced the continuity between two foundational moments the modern/colonial world. I started with Iberian fixations on blood purity (limpieza de sangre) that culminated in the Reconquista of Al-Andalus and then turned to Columbus’ enterprise, which galvanized the invasion and invention of the Americas.

In the first section, I took on Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ argument regarding blood purity. According to Maldonado-Torres, the Spanish “Inquisition established the eastern limit of the modern/colonial global imaginary. But this fixation on genealogy and the ‘purity of the blood’ still did not constitute a properly racist mentality, since the humanity of the subjects in question was taken for granted, and all that was in doubt was their political and religious loyalty. The lack of such cleanliness of blood reveals one as a potential traitor or enemy, but not as a member of another species or as a formal exception from the human.”

Through a critical reading of primary sources, I showed how Maldonado-Torres overlooks the racial dimensions of blood purity discourse by misinterpreting its theological underpinnings. I argued that limpieza de sangre racialized religious identity by making Muslim and Jewish heresy, and Old Christian status, a natural consequence of human reproduction.

To accomplish this task, I relied on the archival research of David Nirenberg and María Elena Martínez, two formidable historians of Spain and Spanish America, respectively. Building on their scholarship, I analyzed a wide range of historical documents that illuminate how limpieza de sangre racialized religious difference. I began by outlining the historical context that led to official and popular persecutions of religious minorities in Iberia during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. My analysis emphasized the way negation of Jewishness—what Willie Jennings calls ‘Israelite supersessionism’—comes to define dominant notions of Iberian Christianity. In order to mediate God’s relationship with the world, Western Christendom attempted (with varying degrees of success) to expunge the Jewish trace from its social body.

I probed the Decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to identify the theological antecedents for Iberian blood purity discourse. I showed how Lateran IV articulates a form of bio-power by regulating sexual and economic relations between Christians and non-Christians. I then probed various Toledan texts from the mid-1400s that employed Aristotelian notions of race (raza) to render behavior natural. My study of the Toledo Decree (1449) showed how members of the Castilian ruling class instituted purity statues to exclude conversos and moriscos from assuming influential positions. Purity statues, in sum, racialized religion by making it an immutable condition transmitted through blood. The invention of Natural/Old Christians (cristianos de natura) would make birth, rather than baptism, the basis for true Christian status. I analyzed the way in which Thomism in the Council of Basel (1431–1445) reified social hierarchies based on religious difference. By promoting policies of exclusion and segregation, the council undermines the incorporation of distinct populations (and by extension different bloodlines) into one spiritual body through baptism.
I explained how the Spanish crown founded the Inquisition with the aim of eradicating crypto-Judaism (the ‘Jewish trace’) from its borders. After conducting genealogical investigations, the Inquisitors would issue documents called *probanzas de fe*, which ostensibly verified purity of blood. I then examined Isabel and Fernando’s purification campaign, which culminated in 1492 with the Reconquista of Al-Andalus and the deportation or massacre of Jews and Muslims. By analyzing the Surrender Treaty (1491) and the Decree of Expulsion (1492), I showed how what Grosfoguel calls ‘genocide/epistemicide’ set the groundwork for the conquest and colonization of *las Indias Occidentales*. The Reconquista would in effect weave Islamophobia into the fabric of Western Civilization. We see this dynamic materialize in Samuel Huntington’s anxiety about “Islamic Resurgence” in the current World Order. By conducting this investigation, I demonstrated how blood purity was not about “degrees of truth or falsity,” as Maldonado-Torres contends, but rather about which bodies could be considered to be bona fide Christian subjects. By informing modern conceptions of what it means to be a proper citizen, *limpieza de sangre* undergirds Western global designs.

In the second section, I turned to examine the theological geography at work in the dispossession of the tropics. I demonstrated how a racial imagination emerged from geography that evolved, rather than diminished, during the sixteenth century. I began by analyzing the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1480) to show how Spain and Portugal established terms for imperial dominion over the islands and mainlands of western Africa. By analyzing Alcáçovas along with the Cantino Map (1502), I traced the way in which Iberian empires jointly configured their mastery over space and bodies. Then I turned to examine the Capitulaciones de Santa Fe (1492)

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887 Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 109–120.  
to delineate the basis for Columbus’ enterprise. I identified how the geopolitical conflict with Islam served as the precondition and goal for Columbus’ enterprise. The wealth generated from the Indies would provide Spain with the requisite capital to retake Jerusalem from Muslim control. I showed how Fernando and Isabel commissioned Columbus to map (in both the literal and figurative sense) the political, geographic, and religious landscapes from the start. Columbus, in fact, planned to use a Ptolemaic grid system to provide an accurate geography for the Spanish monarchs.

I show how Maldonado-Torres overstates Columbus’ denial of Amerindian religiosity. As I demonstrate, hemispheric location would play a much more important role in justifying indigenous subjugation than the concept of people ‘without religion.’ To accomplish this task, I demonstrated how Columbus employs latitude and climate in his journal entries on the first voyage (1492), and in his correspondence with Santángel (1493) and with the Spanish royals (1493). My reading drew from literary scholar Margarita Zamora, who exposes the ways in which Columbus wields a patriarchal discourse of desire to dispossess the Indies. I showed how, in addition to a discourse of desire, a scholastic cosmology also guides Columbus’ racial imagination.

In the final part of Chapter Two, I examined the ways which Iberian empires mapped their geographic boundaries. I carefully looked at Inter Caetera I and II (1493) and the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) in conjunction with Juan de la Cosa’s Carta Universal (1500) and Pedro de Lemos’ Planisphere (1590). By analyzing Alexander VI’s Papal Donation, I exposed the theological architecture undergirding the Lines of Demarcation that would divide the globe among competing Iberian empires. Ultimately, this chapter traced the subjugation of the Global South by showing how agents of empire, acting on a boundary-less or unbounded desire, spurred scientific cartography and gave rise to early modern capitalism.
Chapter Three centered on the colonial legacy of theological geography. This chapter contributes to a debate in theological studies regarding the impact of Aristotelian Thomism in the New World.889 I argued that Bartolomé de Las Casas attempted to eradicate violent evangelism and to curtail economic exploitation by developing a theological geography that foregrounds Amerindian sovereignty on environmental factors—climate and latitude. Despite Las Casas’ efforts, Spain solidified its global dominion by deploying a scholastic notion of ecclesial authority (plenitudo potestati), which reveals how Aristotelian Thomism configured relations of knowledge/power.

In this chapter I engaged two theologians: David Lantigua and Willie Jennings. I extended Jennings’ critique of Aristotelian Thomism by exploring Las Casas’ theological geography. I also showed how Lantigua’s defense of Iberian scholasticism fails to address how Dominican scholastics furthered colonialist projects and how Aristotelian Thomism undergirds the Laws of Burgos (1512) and the Requirement (1513).

Chapter Three began by situating Bartolomé de Las Casas within the transatlantic context. I explained how the Dominican friars’ solidarity with the natives sparked Las Casas’ critical consciousness. I outlined the establishment of Spain’s colonial order, detailing how the encomienda and repartimiento racialized bodies and reconfigured space through a logic of commodification. Through a close reading, I showed how the Burgos Laws espouse a colonial hierarchy as the proper order of things. My analysis exposed how influential Dominicans like Matías de Paz and Bernaldo de Mesa link religious conversion to forced labor within

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889 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 26. “The position of the church in relation to the nations echoes the original constituting relation, that between Israel and the world. Here Israel has been superseded and framework reconstituted through the Vicar of Christ so that the whole world is viewed through boundless desire,” 26.
modern/colonial structures of time and space. I showed the role of theological geography by demonstrating how Mesa attributes indigenous servitude to the ‘nature of the country,’ specifically to the ‘aspect of the heavens.’ The transatlantic networks of production and consumption, which subsumed the tropics, depended on the disposability of indigenous bodies.

Lantigua rightly notes how the prophetic witness of the Dominicans inspired Las Casas’ opposition to warfare policy and to forced labor. Las Casas explored the political implications of discipleship as a theologian. Las Casas decided to followed Christ—the embodiment of God—by using his influence and education to shape ecclesial and royal policy on behalf of the oppressed. As I showed, Las Casas developed a subversive theological geography that based the natural sovereignty of Amerindians on climate and latitude.

I examined the ways in which the Requirement (1513) inscribes ecclesial authority. I showed how Palacio Rubios, the author of this missionary warfare policy, embeds imperial dominion within a doctrine of creation. Palacios Rubios notes that humanity is one, because God, who creates all things, is one. And as Victor of Christ, the Pope (by virtue of plenitudo potestatis) wields authority over the entire human race. This allocation of power, which produces the Papal Donation, gives Iberian empires the justification for global expansion. Indeed, representatives of the School of Salamanca, including Las Casas, turned to Aquinas to critique colonial violence. Nevertheless, as my analysis showed, the boundary-less desire of empire would inundate their efforts. In the end, Iberian empires leveraged Aristotelian Thomism to reconfigure the world in their own image. The tropics would in fact be transformed according to the demands of a global market.

The fourth and final chapter examined the way in which Iberian scholasticism assumed a civilizing role in the modern/colonial world. I returned to the historic Valladolid debate of 1550–1551. I focused on the barbarian discourse at Valladolid between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan
Ginés de Sepúlveda because it constitutes the first racial classification on a global scale. This chapter examined the ways in which Las Casas and Sepúlveda formulated the nature of and possibilities for tropical humanity. By exploring theological geography in this confrontation, I tried to illuminate how the barbarian, as a deficient creature, was configured around her place of origin. Colonial subjectivity, in other words, depends in large part on location.

I analyzed how location and locution function as conduits of grace to configure the salvific trajectory for African and Amerindian peoples. I studied Las Casas’ discourse in conjunction with the Ebstorf mappamundi (c. 1250) to expose the geographic implication of his thought. I paid particular attention to the way in which the map and Las Casas depict linguistic barbarians. Ultimately, I demonstrated how Las Casas imbues scholasticism with salvific power by configuring literal locution—alphabetic script deriving from Latin—as the means by which barbarians may reach their God-given end: the beatific vision. In accordance with Aquinas’ paradigm (‘grace perfects nature’), literal locution, as a conduit of grace, perfects barbaric nature. Granting Latin this role ultimately positions scholastic civilization as a global paradigm. A scholastic conception of the proper human empowers both men to globalize Western Civilization.

C.2 A Decolonial Option for the Tropics

By the end of the sixteenth century, the power of Iberian empires permeated every region of the globe. In the age of discovery, European empires carried out most exploration,
evangelization, and accumulation along the equator. Though it may seem obvious, this geographic factor is worth noting. Even though European colonies have obtained independence, the people of the tropics continue to occupy a subordinate geopolitical and epistemic position within the current world order. Independence did not yield decolonization because the ‘colonial matrix of power’ integrated hegemonic relations into the modern world system.

With this investigation, I tried to offer a compelling case for another way of envisioning the world, for a ‘decolonial way of thinking.’ I have tried to provide the justification for *a decolonial option for the tropics*. This analytic approach entails three features. First, the term *decolonial* gestures to a critical stance regarding Western modernity. While critical scholars have criticized the northern epistemology undergirding this global project, theologians tend to ignore the ways in which a Christian imagination undergirds such paradigms. Even theologians who may oppose Western hegemony, or express an aversion to the very notion of modernity, bypass the historical implications of theology in the production of *Occidentalism*. As Walter Mignolo notes, the Mexican philosopher Edmundo O’Gorman identifies “the invention of America” — what Iberians originally named *las Indias Occidentales*— as not only based on “an imperial interpretation but also that America as the extreme West is rooted in Christian cosmology in which the destiny of Japheth, [Noah’s] son located in the West, was to expand.” That is to say, Western modernity—historically and conceptually—rests on a theological architecture. By enacting the first stage of

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890 See Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*.


modernity, Iberian scholasticism provided the template for subsequent forms of empire. In fact, Mignolo notes two consequences:

First, it served to locate the geohistorical space of Western culture. But less, obviously, it also fixed the privileged locus of enunciation. It is from the West that the rest of the world is described, conceptualized, and ranked: that is, modernity is the self-description of Europe’s role in history rather than an ontological historical process. Without a locus of enunciation self-conceived as Occidental, the Oriental could not have been thought out.  

As such, Orientalism, which characterizes the nineteenth-century French and British forms of empire, is predicated on Spanish colonialism. This dynamic also operates at an epistemic level. Geopolitical relations of power are predicated on the canons of Western knowledge. Catherine Walsh describes the challenges with shifting the geopolitics of knowledge “in the ways that critical thought in Latin America tends to reproduce the meta–narratives of the West while discounting or overlooking the critical thinking produced by indigenous, Afro, and mestizos whose thinking finds its roots in other logics, concerns, and realities that depart not from modernity alone but also from the long horizon of coloniality.” This leads us to another feature.

Mapping the intersection of space and race is not only crucial in understanding the ‘imperial difference,’ that is, the geo-historical shift of power from southern Europe to northern Europe. That dynamic also effects this side of the Atlantic. A hierarchy between north and south, which revolves around U.S. hegemony, relegates Latin America to a subordinate position. The

893 Mignolo, Idea of Latin America, 35.
894 See Said, Orientalism, 1978; Said, Culture and Imperialism, 1993. “In the eighteenth century, the notion of the Occident...combines with Hellenicity...and Europe-as-center, with its peripheral colonies. Hegel expresses most articulately this philosophical-theological ideology, and for the first time the concept to Occidental Europe appears.” Dussel, Invention of the Americas, 134.
imperial difference, in other words, produced the colonial difference. Mignolo explain how it bears on our present situation by declaring:

> Five hundred years after the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and five hundred years after the invasion and invention of America, Samuel Huntington identified the Moors as enemies of Western civilization and Hispanics (that is Latinos and Latinas) as a challenge to Anglo identity in the United States. Racism dies hard, and the specter of the Black Legend is still alive and well, contributing to diminishing Spaniards in Europe, marginalizing ‘Latins’ in South America, and criminalizing Latinos and Latinas in the United States. If Indians were the victims of Spaniards that the Black Legend denounced, black slaves were the victims of England that the Black Legend hid under the cloak of Spanish barbarism.\(^\text{896}\)

The global designs furthered by northern European powers depended on the Black Legend. Today, we are witnessing the resurgence of White Nationalism in the United States and Western Europe. Brexit in the United Kingdom and the Trump administration in the United States are just two examples. Indeed, the resurgence of these political paradigms demands closer consideration of their imperial histories.

I provided a narrative that detailed how the geographic expansion of Iberian empires laid the foundation for Western modernity. To do so, I relied on decolonial theory. However, I have also pointed out its weakness. I have shown the limits of decolonial theorists—Walter Mignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres—to account for the theological dimensions of ‘nature’ that provide the bases for the purity of blood discourse in late medieval Spain. And as a result, they overlook how the racialization of religious identity informed the genocide/epistemicide of the Reconquista, which in turn, galvanized Columbus’ enterprise. By focusing on theological discourse, my investigation effectively broadened the study of race in the modern world. Moreover, I demonstrated how geography plays a much more important role in the classification of African and Amerindian peoples than Columbus’ notion of people ‘without

\(^{896}\) Mignolo, “What Does the Black Legend Have to do With Race?,” *Rereading the Black Legend*, 324.
religion.’ By amplifying Columbus’ phrase, Maldonado-Torres overlooks how race and space are configured in the modern/colonial world.

By examining the legacy of theological geography in this process I tried to shed light on decolonial options before us. The phrase option for derives from what I understand to be the central contribution of Latin American Liberation Theology, namely, ‘the Preferential Option for the Poor.’

897 Gustavo Gutierrez, and other Liberation Theologians from the Global South, promulgated this concept in the 1970s out of grassroots and ecclesial struggles against economic exploitation and state-sanctioned violence. They maintained that the margins, rather than the centers of power, function as proper sites for theological reflection (orthodoxy) and political action (orthopraxis). In a way, this proposal parallels the ‘decolonial turn,’ which, as Ramón Grosfoguel explains, entails taking “seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers from the Global South thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies.”

898 I focused on developing a critique of the dominant structures of knowledge in order to arrive at a different destination.

Yet, for Liberation Theology this insight rests on a foundational Christian doctrine: the Incarnation. The confession that God, in Christ, “became flesh and lived among us,” means that God was embodied in a first-century Galilean, born into imperial occupation, and ultimately suffered execution by the Roman empire.

899 If this is so, then God is most clearly revealed in the margins. As Gutierrez averred, Israel’s liberation from Egyptian slavery bears witness to God’s longstanding solidarity with the oppressed. If in our current situation, as Joerg Rieger suggests,

897 See Gutiérrez, La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres; Rieger, Opting for the Margins.
898 Grosfoguel, “Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 212.
899 See John 1:14 in Oxford Bible: NRSV.
“empire is primarily an economic reality, tied to the growth of global capitalism,” then liberation for those who have been and continue to be excluded, executed, and exploited, can benefit from a theologically informed account of early modern capitalism.\textsuperscript{900} This dissertation takes steps toward that end.

C.3 Charting a Way Forward

I recognize that my account omits indigenous sources. Felipe Guáman Poma de Ayala, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, and other seminal figures that articulate indigenous perspectives on colonialism do not receive my consideration.\textsuperscript{901} Those who read my narrative closely would likely have identified the absence of these voices in my narrative. This presents a problem because, as Jaime Lara suggests, “from the pictographic or written texts created by native people in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, it appears that they rarely if ever thought of themselves in terms of ‘vanquished’ or ‘conquered.’”\textsuperscript{902} Where are the examples from the underside of history? Where is the African and Amerindian resistance, accommodation, or mimicry that emerged in the face of empire? In sum, where are the marginalized ‘subaltern’ voices? To these valid questions I offer a three-fold response:

First, their seeming omission should not be read as a dismissal, or worse, suggest a Eurocentric orientation. Indeed, these voices have played an indirect yet vital role in my

\textsuperscript{900} Rieger, \textit{Christ and Empire}, 3.

\textsuperscript{901} See Adorno, \textit{The Polemics of Possession}.

investigation as they have helped to orient my intellectual journey and guide my concerns. While I engage European sources almost exclusively, my account develops out of the ‘colonial wound.’ In essence, this project responds to those who, while inhabiting ‘spaces of death,’ raise sobering questions about the colonial violence inflicted in the name of a crucified God. I have tried to honor their memory by offering a critical response to coloniality.

Second, when I originally conceptualized this dissertation, I planned to conclude with two chapters on Mesoamerican cartography. I was convinced then, and am even more so now, that the legacy of theological geography would be incomplete without including the contributions of indigenous mapmakers. “Among their many accomplishments,” as art historian Barbara Mundy explains,

cultures of Mesoamerica took the production and use of maps to a level unparalleled elsewhere in the New World. Mesoamerican cartography was a wholly American feat, evolving independently of European, Asian, and African traditions. We can see its uniqueness and its sophistication through surviving artifacts (see appendix 5.1). These maps—those graphic images representing space that involved symbolic transformation—show us the singular perceptions and presentations of space that Mesoamericans created and developed. At the time of the Spanish conquest, cartography was particularly vibrant in northern Mesoamerica above the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Here peoples made records using ‘hieroglyphics, pictorial images and abstract signs.’ With this writing, Mesoamericans expressed concepts and events without depending on an alphabetic or exclusively phonetic script, and instead of strictly ordered blocks of words, this ‘picture writing’ could be arranged more loosely across the surface of the medium. Such writing, given its pictorial character, nimbly lent itself to mapmaking.903

Incorporating these pictographic sources would have balanced my account. As Mundy’s analysis of the relaciones geográficas has shown, Mesoamerican mapmakers contributed to geographic knowledge produced in New Spain.904 As ‘graphic images representing space that involved

904 See Mundy, Mapping of New Spain.
symbolic transformation, those sources would illuminate the knowledge systems and histories of indigenous peoples dating back to the pre-Hispanic period. I was interested in exploring the ways in which Mesoamerican mapmakers engaged and subverted the dispossession of native land. In particular, I planned to focus on the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán/Mexico City during the second half of the sixteenth century. By analyzing pictographic documents like the Reese Codex (c. 1565), also known as the Beinecke Map of Mexico City, I planned to show how Nahua mapmakers reconfigured Christian conceptions of space within indigenous cosmologies to uphold their possession of Tenochtitlán (see Figure 5.1). 905

905 Figure 4.1 Codex Reese c. 1565. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. WA MSS S–2533. Accessible at: hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/6814212

For a thorough study of this cartographic text, see Mary Ellen Miller, Barbara E. Mundy, and Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Painting a Map of Sixteenth-Century Mexico City: Land, Writing, and Native Rule (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
Third, a thorough analysis of Aztec cartography would entail training in Nahuatl, the native Aztec language. I learned too late that acquiring this knowledge base would require a considerable amount of time and energy beyond my resources. Moreover, including two additional chapters to this dissertation would make its scope virtually untenable. And so, for all these reasons, I decided to postpone this research for a future project.
APPENDIX A

Text Corresponding to the Four Legends in Fra Mauro’s Mappamundi\textsuperscript{906}
Translations by Jeremy Scott

A.1 Legend on Solar and Lunar Effects

\textit{Paragraph 1 located to the left of the image}

Amongst all the things that we observe, one that appears of no small account is the fact that in twenty-four hours the waters of the sea rise and fall twice, over the same interval of time. And though many claim it is the movements of the moon that cause such changes in the waters, one cannot understand the specific reason for such variations. Thus, on the basis of certain special knowledge, I will say that the Sun, which has the property of absorbing, consuming and dispersing humidity, draws many vapours out of the waters — that is, transforms them in part and dissolves them as vapours. The vapours are not generated only from the visible surface of the water but also from the depths. And if the waters in the depths of which these vapours are generated are subtle, then these vapours are not held back by such subtlety and emerge a little at a time, as they are generated. Hence in such emergence there is no movement in the water. But where the waters are dense and heavy — and above all, when they are deep — the vapours generated within those depths in the way we have said cannot emerge without some clear help, because they are resisted by the depth, heaviness, thickness and quantity of the waters.

Given that the moon has the property of attracting all humidity, it consequently attracts to itself also the vapours that are generated from that humidity, above all if they are impure (as is stated in the first book of the Tetrabiblos). Thus when the moon’s rays exercise their power on

these dense and deep waters, the heavy vapours rise to the surface. And this movement upwards causes an ebullition in the water — just as when you put a pot on the fire, the water boils due to the vapours which are moved at the bottom of the pot by the fire. And here, too, the waters boil because of the effect of these vapours underneath. However, in this boiling, the waters that rise from the centre of the ebullition move towards the outside — that is, towards the coasts. And the water along the coasts will increase according to the duration of the ebullition; and thus it is during this period of time that the waters near the coast rise. This ebullition lasts as long as the moon exercises its attraction upon the vapours — that is, from the moment it arises until when it reaches the meridian circle. Thereafter, the ebullition ceases because all the vapours have been extracted and the moon's rays become weaker as it gradually sinks and finally sets. Then, the waters that are near the coast return to the centre and hold back those vapours that have been generated in the meantime. Thus, in moving away from the coast, the waters subside. When the moon declines to the western horizon at any specific point, it then begins to exercise at that western point the same properties it had when it stood above the hemisphere, because its rays exercise on this western part the same direct attraction that they had exercised before from above.

The vapours which have been generated in the time during which the moon passes from the meridian circle to the western horizon are now helped by the force of the moon’s rays and begin to rise. Thus they provoke the second ebullition and the second tide; this will last from the time the moon sets [in the first hemisphere] to when it reaches the meridian circle in the opposite hemisphere: and thus over this period of time, the waters rise for the reason already given. Thereafter, when the moon returns to the East — that is, when the vapours have already been extracted from the waters and the attractive force of the moon’s rays begins to decrease — the waters subside in the same manner as happens when the moon falls from the meridian circle to the western horizon, because the rays in these two positions are aligned in the same position. Though things happen in the way I have described, it can be the case that the waters rise and subside more at one time than another, and this for a variety of reasons and causes. The first such cause is that when the moon is closer to the zenith of the waters — that is, to the pole of the horizon — it has more strength than when it does not come so close. For example, in our part of the globe, when the moon is in Cancer it is closer to our zenith, and thus closer to our waters, than when it is in Leo. And when it is in Leo, it is closer than when it is in Virgo. This means that the waters rise most when the moon is in Cancer.
The second cause is the closeness of the moon to the waters — that is, when the moon is in the lower part of its epicycle. This proximity means that it exerts more attraction over the waters. Thirdly: when the period of time in which the moon travels from the eastern horizon to the meridian line is greater than that it takes to pass from the meridian line to the western horizon, the waters rise more because before they can subside entirely from the coast, they already begin to rise again at that coast. The fourth cause is the wind, which can blow the waters towards the coast. What is more, the rising of the waters can also be helped by the sun. This happens when the moon is in conjunction with the sun — that is, when it is full or in its fifteenth day. Due to the power that the moon receives from the sun in these two situations, it has more power to attract the vapours. And thus it is more powerful than at other times. In this period, the tides are always at their highest; sometimes more so than others because of the presence of one or more other cause that can help or hinder the tide. And in the time when the moon is only half illuminated by the sun, it does not have the full vigour necessary to attract the vapours from the depths. Hence, at this time, the waters do not rise much or subside much; unless, that is, one or more of the above-mentioned causes assists them in rising or subsiding. And given that the waters of our seas are very dense — because many substances are dissolved in them — and also deep, then we see tides within them. On the contrary, the waters of rivers, which are not deep (and, even when they are deep, are subtle) cannot hold back many vapours, so that the rise of these latter does not cause ebullition. In fact, as soon as the vapours are generated, they emerge from the waters, which thus neither rise nor subside like the waters of the sea. The above rubric describes how waters rise and subside due to the attractive properties of the moon.

Paragraph 2 located below the image

How by Divine Providence the earth is raised above the water. As the earth is the place which generates animal life and all the things necessary to human life — such as trees, plants and herbs — this earth has to be of diversified parts. That is, in some places the earth must be less dense; it must be light and of clear porosity and concavity — for example, as one sees in the mines of metals and of precious and non–precious stones. So that, if one weighs two parts of earth that were equal in quantity or measure but different in density and compactness, the non–porous part will weigh more. If, therefore, such differences appear manifest and visible in some parts of the earth — and the part that is not submerged by water is the place that generates animals and other
things — without any doubt, this part is less dense and more porous than that which is covered by water, which does not need such qualities. Natural reason concludes, therefore, that if by hypothesis one divided the earth into two parts of equal measure and quantity, so that one half comprised the earth not covered by the waters, which is where we are and which is less dense, and the other half comprised that covered by the waters, which is more dense, then the first, less dense, half would weigh less than the dense. From this derives the fact that the denser part is more depressed in location — that is, it is lower and closer to the centre of the world. In fact, if the two halves of the earth were of equal measure and weight, the centre of the [element] earth would coincide with the centre of the world.

But as the heavier things tend naturally towards the centre of the world, and this with violence, and drive from that centre the less heavy things, therefore it cannot but be the case that this heavier half of the earth is closer to the centre, I mean the centre of the world. Thence follows that there is greater distance from the centre of the world to the surface on which we live than from the same centre to the surface of the opposite part. These things has been predisposed by God with wonderful providence. If all the surfaces of the earth were an equal distance from the centre of the world, then water would enclose and cover all parts of the earth being an element of less density. And if the earth was all of equal weight and thus of equal distance from the centre [of the world], that would mean that, in covering one part of it, water would cover all of it — to the great detriment of the life of terrestrial animals. In fact, these cannot live on water, because of their weight, and they cannot live below water, because then they could not breath — something which is necessary to animal life for it to nourish and purify the heart. But as the earth is higher in one part than in another, water — which by its natural inclination surrounds the world all around its centre — covers the earth in that part which is lower and closer to the centre of the world. But the water cannot cover the whole earth — that is, the higher part, which by divine will has been disposed in the way I have said for the conservation of the life of animals.

One fact that the human mind marvels at is the difficulty of understanding what support holds up the elements — and, in particular, how the earth is situated in the middle of these elements. From everything we can observe it seems that no thing can be without support; and that when that support is removed, the thing supported falls. This marvelling, however, disappears as soon as one considers and proves that this effect is in conformity with those caused by the natural inclination of things. So, for example, the intellective knowledge in man is proper
to his nature and is not a thing that we should marvel at, whereas it would be a cause of wonder if it was encountered in a stone or some other thing. Thus, by its own nature the earth is inclined to be in the middle of the world, and that inclination would still be its own even if no other material substance existed. The earth thus has no need for any support to stay in place; in fact, only those things which can be in different states and positions and can, of themselves, change state and position need a support to maintain them in a specific position. For example, if we want a stone to stay in a high place from which, by itself, it would fall, we need to give it some support so that it does not fall. But if that stone remained of itself in the place where we wanted to put it, then it would not need any support. So, given that the natural inclination of gravity — and consequently, of the earth, which is the heaviest of all bodies — is to sink downwards — that is, go towards the centre of the world — whilst it is contrary to its nature to ascend — that is, go towards the heavens — if, as is true, the earth is in the middle of the world, it cannot of itself have a different position. In fact, if it moved away from the centre, it would go towards the heavens — that is, it would ascend, against its own natural inclination. The earth, therefore, has no need for any support. All it requires is its natural inclination, which results from the order of proportion and relation that God has instilled in the elements, as Boethius claims in his book De consolatione philosophiae.

A.2 Legend on the Cosmic Order

On the Distance of the Heavens. Rubric. From the centre of the world to the surface of the earth there are 3,245 and 5/11 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heavens of the moon there are 107,936 and 20/33 miles. The moon is of diameter 1,896 and 26/33. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of Mercury there are 209,198 and 26/33 miles. Mercury is of diameter 230 and 26/33 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of Venus there are 579,320 and 560/660 miles. Venus is of diameter 2,884 and 560/660 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of the Sun there are 3,892,866 and 560/660 miles. The Sun is of diameter 35,700 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of Mars there are 4,268,629 miles. Mars is of diameter 7,572 and 480/660 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of Jupiter
there are 323,520 and 420/660 miles. Jupiter is of diameter 29,641 and 540/660 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the heaven of Saturn there are 52,544,702 and 280/660 miles. Saturn is of diameter 29,202 miles. From the centre of the world to the lower surface of the eighth sphere — that is, the heavens of the fixed stars — there are 73,387,747 and 180/660 miles. Each of these miles measures 400 cubits. It is not possible in any way to deduce the depth of the eighth sphere in which there are the fixed stars, because these move around the center of the world in a different manner to the seven planets. In fact, those latter move around other centres, so it is possible to calculate the depth of their circles on the basis of the distance of these centres from the centre of the world. For this reason, the depth of the ninth sphere and also of the crystalline heavens is unknown to us.

*Paragraph 2 located below the image*

Empyrean heaven, Ninth Sphere, Fixed Stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Fire, Air, Water. The authority of the holy theologians as to the number of the heavens. With regard to the number of the heavens there is some difference between the holy doctors, above all between Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, who himself says the heavens are one and single. Although the Scriptures write coeli coelorum, this is because of the characteristics of the Hebrew language, which refers to the heavens and sky in the plural: just as there are a number of words in Latin that do not have a singular. Basil and John Damascene, who follows him, claim that there are many heavens. However, this difference is more a question of words than substance — that is, more of language than of meaning. John Chrysostom does say that the heavens are one and single, but he uses this name for everything above the earth and water, for the same reason that the birds [of the sky] are said to be the birds of the heavens. However, as the heavens are divided into many parts, Basil claims that there are many heavens.

If one wants to understand this subdivision of the heavens, one has to know that the Scriptures refer to the heavens in three ways. Sometimes, these were understood in a natural sense, and thus some defined the heavens as a sublime body that is luminous in act — that is, through its own power — and incorruptible by nature. According to this conception, there are three heavens. The first shines with its own light and is called the empyrean, or luminous heavens: this is characterised by a state of perennial glory and is destined for contemplation. However, this is so not because of some implicit necessity but by reason of congruity — that is, so that the visible
light is in accord with the interior. Hence Basil claims that the spirit in which divine grace manifests itself cannot possibly be in the shadows but must be in light and joy. This heaven had to be created with its own light and characterised by a state of glory for another reason as well: future recompense envisages two kinds of glory, the spiritual and the corporeal, and this involves not only the glorification of human bodies but also the renewal of the whole world. At the beginning of the world, spiritual glory was the beatitude of the angels, and the saints have been promised that same beatitude. Therefore, it was necessary that, from the very beginning, corporeal glory should have its seat in some body that was incorruptible, immutable and luminous with its own light — as will be the case with each corporeal creature after the resurrection of the flesh. Therefore, that heaven was called the empyrean — that is, the enflamed — but not because it burns but because it shines. The second of the heavens is totally transparent and is called the aqueous or crystalline heavens. The third of the heavens is in part transparent, in part luminous; it is called the sidereal or starry heavens, and here are the fixed stars.

This third was divided into eight spheres — that is, the spheres of the fixed stars and the seven spheres of the planets. Thus, there are eight heavens within it. In the second manner, the heavens were defined as having in themselves the property of a celestial body – that is, of being sublime and luminous through act and potential. Thus Damascene includes within one single heaven all the space that extends from the surface of the waters to the circle of the moon, and calls it the aerial heavens. For him there are three heavens: the aerial, the sidereal and the third heaven beyond; to this latter he refers when he says that Paul the Apostle was carried up to the third heaven. But as this space contains two elements — that is, fire and air — and each of these belongs to a distinct region (the upper and the lower), Rabanus Maurus divides the heavens into four: the highest is the region of fire, which he calls the igneous heavens; beneath that is the olympian heavens, which is luminous with its own light; the upper part of the heavens of the air he calls the ethereal heavens, due to its splendour; and the lower part is the aerial heavens. Adding these four heavens to the three upper heavens, Rabanus Maurus counts a total of seven corporeal heavens. The third method considers the heavens in a metaphysical sense — that is, supernatural; just as the Holy Trinity was called Heaven because of its sublime spirituality and light. It is of this heaven that it is written that Lucifer said: “I will rise up to heaven. I will be the equal of God.” And sometimes by ‘heaven’ one means the spiritual benefits that will be the recompense of the saints, which due to their very eminence are called heavens. And some other times, heaven is used to refer
to the three conditions of supernatural vision — that is, the corporeal, the imaginative and the intellectual, which are called the three heavens, as Augustine explains. To conclude, current opinion is that there are ten heavens, from the heaven of the moon to the empyrean, as this present drawing shows.

A.3 Legend on Climate Theory

Of the Elements. That is, how much one element exceeds another in quantity. It is the commonly-held opinion that the quantity of one element is ten times greater than the quantity of the next element beneath it. That is to say, the element of water is ten times greater than that of earth, and similarly, air with respect to water and fire with respect to earth [sic — but should be ‘air’]. This opinion would seem to be agreed with by a comment made by the Philosopher [Aristotle], who in his book On Generation and Corruption says that from a handful of earth ten handfuls of water are generated, multiplying by tens in this way up to fire. But this argument is contradicted by geometrical calculation which defines the proportion between one sphere and another, saying that it is the square of the diameter of one sphere that is in ratio with the square of the diameter of the other sphere. This is clearly demonstrated in the second proposition of Book Twelve of Euclid [The Elements]. On the basis of this rule, if you have four spheres between which there is this tenfold ration — that is, the second sphere, water, is ten times greater than the first, earth, and the third, air, is ten times greater than the second, water, and the fourth, fire, is ten times greater than the third sphere, air, the consequence is that the fourth sphere, fire, is one thousand times greater than the first sphere. This by the sixteenth proposition in Book Five of Euclid [The Elements].

What is more, the result is that the square of the diameter of this fourth sphere, fire, is one thousand times greater than the square of the diameter of the earth, which we have placed as the first sphere. Such a sequence contradicts the measurement of the earth and of the heavenly spheres using instruments and geometry, which prove that the square of the entire diameter of the element Fire — that is to say, the concave circle under the heaven of the moon, which coincides with the upper convex circle of fire — this square, I was saying, is 1107 times greater than the square of the whole diameter of earth. It is, therefore, not possible that the element of fire is one thousand times
greater than the element of earth, because the proportion of the spheres just given would presuppose that under the fourth sphere there was nothing other than fire. So, if from the heaven of the moon downwards there was nothing other than fire, that fire would be 1107 times greater than earth. But this is not the case; indeed, under the circumference of the circle of fire there is that of air, which the above-mentioned common opinion says is one hundred times greater than earth. So fire would be 1107 times greater than earth if between air and the centre [of the world] there was no water and no air.

But, as we have already seen, water is ten times greater than earth. Therefore, calculating [the diameter] of earth one would have to subtract 11 from the number 1107, and thus fire would be only 996 times greater than earth. And even if Euclid’s twelfth proposition refers to circles, it is also valid for spherical bodies. And again: the measure of the earth — that is, of the lower surface — was not established by cosmographers or measurers measuring the whole earth from one part to the next. Indeed, they measured the part of the earth where we live and established how much expanse of earth corresponds to one degree. Multiplying then by 360 — the number of degrees in heaven — they established the circumference or surface of the earth. From this it is clear that such measurements presuppose that the entire terrestrial circumference is of equal distance from the centre of the world as the part where we live. However, given that this part is more elevated than the surface of the water, it results that the said measurement of the earth is greater or at least equal to that of the circumference of the water. And, coming to the ultimate conclusions, it follows that the element of fire would be only one hundred times greater than that of earth, which thing is in clear contradiction with the geometrical rule above described and the commonly-held opinion.

Paragraph 2 located to the left of the image

How the earth which is below the Equator and the torrid zone may be habitable. Rubric. The earth below the Equator is habitable; in that part, in fact, there is no heat such as would prevent human settlement. This can be deduced and proved by simple reasoning. First of all, the philosophers have divided the habitable earth known to us into seven climates, the first of which is in the torrid zone — that is, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator. Given that in that area of the torrid zone there is greater heat than there is below the equator, it necessarily follows that if the first climate — which is in the torrid zone — is habitable, and it is not so hot as to
prevent people living there, then below the Equator, where it is less hot, it is also possible for people to live. The fact that below the Equator it is less hot than in the first climate is proved by an examination of the causes for the excess of heat in the air and on the earth.

First of all, when the sun passes over a place in such a way that its rays are perpendicular — so, as a result, the reflected rays are added to the direct rays — then in that place the rays of the sun cause more heat because their power is greater if they are combined rather than when they are dispersed. The second cause is the duration of the day. In fact, the longer the day lasts, the more the sun is above the earth, and hence the more heat there is. The third is the length of summer in relation to the length of winter — that is, if summer lasts longer than winter. The fourth is the continuity of the warm season — that is, if the hot weather is not interrupted by cold weather. All of these causes are to be seen in the first climate, whilst below the Equator there are not so many. The sun passes perpendicularly over the earth of the first climate twice a year, and the same is true of the earth below the Equator; so, as regards the first cause, these two places are equal. However, under the Equator, daylight does not last more than 12 hours, either in summer or in winter, and thus for the duration of the heating during the day corresponds an equal period of cooling during the night. In the first climate, however, the days in summer are longer than the nights, and thus the nocturnal cooling is not enough to attenuate the heat produced by the sun during the day. What is more, even though the duration of heat during two summers in the first climate is equal to that of two summers below the Equator, in the first climate that period is continuous and not interrupted by any cold season, because the two summers follow on from each other. However, below the Equator, the period of two summers is interrupted by two winters. For example, in the first climate, there is a three-month summer which starts, like ours, in the middle of the sign of Taurus and ends in the middle of the period of Leo; then, when the sun passes once more perpendicularly over that place, a second summer begins, which continues the first.

Below the Equator, summer begins when the sun enters Aries and ends when it is in Cancer, three months later. The second summer, however, starts when the sun enters Libra and ends after three months, when the sun enters Capricorn. Thus between the first and second summer there are three months of winter — that is to say, of less hot weather. And, similarly, between the second summer and the next, there are another three months of winter and of less hot weather. All of this agrees with what Aristotle says in various places, but above all in his De proprietatibus elementorum; what Albertus Magnus says in his book on the same subject [De
causis proprietatum elementorum]; what Averro(es says in his commentary on [Aristotle's] De Caelo; what Avicenna says in his Canon medicinae. It is true that some, such as the author of The Sphere [Johannes de Sacrobosco, Tractatus de sphaera] are of the opposite opinion, as was Socrates and other writers. They believed that where the sun passes perpendicularly overhead people cannot live because of the excessive heat. It is true that where the sun passes perpendicular there is great heat, but it is not so great as to prevent human life. In fact, in the first climate, the sun passes perpendicular, but does not produce so great a heat that people cannot live there. If, therefore, in the first climate the passage of the sun in the perpendicular does not prevent people living there because of the great heat, this will not occur either below the Equator, above all because the length of the day in the hottest period in the first climate is longer than that of the same period below the Equator. And also because the sun stays in the zenith longer in the first climate than it does in the regions below the Equator.

For these reasons, when the sun passes perpendicularly over the head of those who inhabit the regions of the Equator, it does not create as much heat as when it passes over the head of those who live in the first climate. If, therefore, with all of this it is still possible to live in the first climate, as all philosophers agree, one can also live below the Equator, because there is no impediment due to excessive heat. One can, therefore, conclude that all climates are inhabitable. In fact, we know that the northern climate is inhabited like ours, which is situated between the Tropic of Cancer and the northern parallel. And the same is true of the hot zone, as we have just seen above. And as the southern zone, which lies between the Tropic of Capricorn and the austral parallel, and the zones that lie below that parallel, correspond to the northern zones that are inhabited, it follows that the southern zones are inhabited too. This is affirmed by Ptolemy in his Geography and Albertus Magnus in his De natura loci. And in his commentary to De caelo, Averro(es writes that this was Aristotle's firm opinion. NORTH, ARCTIC POLE, EAST, ANTARCTIC POLE, SOUTH, WEST.

A.4 Legend on Earthly Paradise

The location of the Earthly Paradise. Rubric. The Paradise of Delights does not only have a spiritual meaning; it is also a real place on the earth, as St. Augustine says in his De Genesi and
in his book De Civitate Dei. This place is very far from all human settlements and knowledge; and according to the teachings of the holy doctor Bede, whose authority is also followed by the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard], it is to be found in the East. In his book De natura loci, Albertus Magnus also puts it in the East, beyond the circle of the equinox. In this Paradise was placed our first parent, Adam, in a state of innocence. And in the middle of Paradise there was a spring that waters it, and from which arise the four main great rivers. And God had planted it with two trees, one of which was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, bearing the fruit which God had ordered Adam not to eat. However, straying from that commandment, Adam did not obey and he ate the fruit. Hence, as well as the Good which he had already seen before, he also felt Evil, and he fell into the defects that are implicit in sin. And from this fact that tree has been called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The other tree is the Tree of Life, eating from which man could have nourished himself for a long time. In fact, if this had been his constant nourishment, man would have lived forever, as St. Augustine says in the book De civitate Dei and also De diversis quaestionibus.

It is believed that Enoch was placed in this Paradise and transported to heaven, and one can read of his ascent in the fourth chapter of Genesis and also in Ecclesiastes. Similarly, it is believed this happened to the prophet Elijah after he was carried up to heaven, and this is recorded in the fourth book of Kings. It is also believed that here the souls of the Holy Fathers were visited by the Redeemer on Good Friday after his death; and that, with them, the soul of our Redeemer, united with God, descended into Limbo until the day of his Resurrection; and that the Fathers were freed from the bonds of Original Sin and placed in this Paradise until the day of the Ascension, as St. Augustine says in his sermon De passione Domini. This was so that Christ be the first to enter into the heavens and paradise of the blessed. And on the day of his Ascension, he showed men the way to get there, as had been predicted by the prophet Micaiah. Through his death, our Redeemer earned for men entrance into the paradise of the blessed. But for the souls of the Fathers, He also wanted to obtain possession of the place of beatitude, which he had opened to men by means of his Passion.

It is believed that the holy souls of the Fathers visibly ascended into the heavens, following Christ on the day of his Ascension from the Mount of Olives (on the slopes of which there was the castle or villa of Betania, as the holy doctor Bede tells us). As the Holy Scriptures speak of the spring in Paradise and the four rivers that arise from it, this drawing depicts that. As there are still
many who wonder how it is possible that these four rivers, arising from that most remote place, should yet have sources that are very far from one another, I will answer with the words of St. Augustine’s De Genesi: these rivers, whose sources are known to us, are linked by underground routes, running through many regions and then coming to the surface in different places. One—that is, the Ganges—arises in India; the Tigris in Armenia, at Mount Charabach; the Euphrates also in Armenia, near the city of Erzurum; and the Ghion—or Nile—in Ethiopia, in the province of Meroe in Abassia.


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