

## **One New World, Two New Spheres?**

### **Differences in Missionary Efforts among Spanish and Indigenous Peoples of Colonial Peru**

The first piece of advice from my advisor, historian Sabine MacCormack, as I developed my plans for a month in Lima's archives was straightforward. Arrive at an archive immediately when it opens, work diligently with minimal breaks, and leave only when they close. At first, I closely followed these guidelines because I wanted to appear a "serious researcher" in the eyes of the research librarians—whose helpfulness, suggestions, and attention would determine my ability to find and access relevant historical documents. By the end of my trip I was arriving early, skipping lunch entirely, and staying until the last minute of their operating hours because I had learned that in addition to making a good impression, these acts were critical to combat a combination of the time-consuming nature of the work and the incredible amount of it.

My proposed research question—to explore the difference between missionary efforts to Indigenous and Spanish Peruvians as the missionaries understood it—did not implicitly provide a narrow range of dates, places, or religious groups. Fortunately, thanks to my previous trip to Peru, I knew where to find parts of an extensive Jesuit *History of the Province of Peru* by Diego Francisco Altamirano. The 17<sup>th</sup> century events he describes form a narrative of how the Jesuit missionary project developed throughout the province—by the start of the next century, when the old man was writing, the shape of the establishment and the work to come were relatively clear.

Historians' narratives have been criticized because an inherent part of writing them implicates the writer's own bias: he must cover in various gaps with his own interpretation and also select what particular information to prioritize or ignore. However, this reality turns in my

favor here—as I believe that a deep study of how Altamirano constructed his *History* will say a lot about his perception of this formative period, and how he evaluated the trajectory of the Jesuit's work in Peru as he neared the end of his life.

Professor MacCormack suggested that I begin with this history and look for leads related to the people and places it covered. However, I ran into one roadblock as soon as I arrived—the national festivals in July meant there was only one archive open, and only for one day, during that entire week. However, the following week I hit the ground running in the archives, and learned exactly how challenging it is to follow leads, find connections, and imagine possible compelling arguments to tie documents together. The lack of computerized catalogs in most of Lima's archives dictated that I spend a huge amount of time as a human search engine, compiling lists of possible matches to information I already had, or sequences of documents that might be useful when read together. After I had settled on what documents to request, I had to decide whether I was capable of reading them and whether they merited spending money to photograph them or spending time deciphering them for transcription or note-taking.

While I admit I felt somewhat overwhelmed by the possibilities at first, I began to narrow in on what sources might interact with Altamirano's history as well as the places he had been and what role he played in the Jesuit Province. My most important find was a 1891 publication from Bolivia which included his biography and another section of his *History*—as the original dozens of books of his history were destroyed in an archive fire not long after its publication. I also discovered a longer text in his hand with suggestions for a novitiate in Cuzco, various economic decisions he approved as provincial, and pastoral visits to schools in which he was involved.

These sorts of visits took place all over Peru—from Lima to the farthest reaches of Spanish civilization. They often involved a procession and sung Mass, which were meticulously

recorded by the “*visitador*.” This figure usually conducted private interviews to verify the adequacy of the local priest (whether diocesan or religious) or in the case of a school or novitiate gave suggestions as to its operation. The records of this quality control process illustrate church leaders’ expectations for the priests with regards to both the indigenous and Spanish souls entrusted to their care—most explicitly in their long lists of questions. Bishops wanted to make sure the priests was getting along with the neighbors, instructing the indigenous regularly, and diligently providing the sacraments—especially to the dying. Some priests appear to receive complaints that they have neglected their native charges, while others filed complaints that other parishes and priests were infringing on their jurisdiction over their natives. While these documents are fraught with implications for the relationships between the central Church hierarchy in Lima and priests whether in town or far away, diocesan, or religious, I realized I needed a narrower focus. I looked for a *visitas* to specific places Altamirano discusses in detail and came up short—however those I did review gave me a compelling picture of how priests were expected to do their jobs, and how this may have evolved over time. Particularly useful are a series of annual *visitas* to the same congregation over four years. Because Altamirano was involved in this regulation process as a *visitador* himself, they should also inform my understanding of his role and the perspective from which he wrote his extensive *History*.

Some of his writing and that of constitutions for schools, novitiates, and seminaries that I found provide a window into the daily operation of these centers for religious instruction and training. As I have discussed with my advisor, the schedules and mundane details seem hardly meaningful at first, but the shape of the day they describe, the distribution of authority, and the differences across age group, time, place, and author (including Altamirano) will help me understand what they considered critical to the missionary project.

My initial impression of the way missionaries like Altamirano saw their work came to me at once as scandalizing straightforward and even obvious: they were in the business of saving people's souls from hell. Spaniards could be somewhat expected to meet the necessary obligations like attending Mass, praying, and making confessions. They formed their own religious groups called *cofríadas* to promote feast days and devotions to particular saints or holy images, made their offerings to the church, and of course, some of them chose to seek their own salvation through missionary efforts to the indigenous. This last point becomes clear in Altamirano's writing—not only are indigenous souls of concern, but the holiness and personal salvation achieved by the Jesuits who attend to them was also a goal and cause for celebration. Indigenous, while some did participate in their own *cofríadas* in the cities (and it seems debatable whether they or Spaniards were the driving force behind this happening), needed adequate preaching in their native languages, the sacraments of initiation, and constant support in the combat between the devil and Christ's Church. The last of these is also strongly present in both Altamirano's account and documented trials of indigenous witchcraft. The missionaries lived in what I might call a world of magic realism in which the devil literally spoke to sinners and holy images cured the sick—and these events were just as real in their experience as the collection of alms, the lighting of the correct number of candles, and the diverse geographies which they also recorded.

In conclusion, the organization and regulation of physical space, objects, time and schedules, were part of coordinated and critically important efforts to conquer the messy spiritual world they had encountered (and shaped through their own contributions). While I have worried my documents may be more broad than pointed, Altamirano's narrative can anchor my thesis as one ideologically charged (and necessarily so) account with which my other sources can interact.

Questions with which I plan to confront these sources through close readings include “What counted as success and how was it evaluated?” “What do regulations show as priorities and expectations for missionary activity?” “What do the specifics in their efforts to properly order physical space and time reveal how they saw the people under their watch?” and ultimately, “How did these Jesuit missionaries of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century understand their project— What made them get up every morning despite the bugs, the climate, the dangers and the strangeness of it all, to go boldly about their work in the way they did?”