

THE POPOL VUH AND THE
DOMINICAN RELIGIOUS EXTIRPATION
IN HIGHLAND GUATEMALA:
*Prologues and Annotations of
Fr. Francisco Ximénez*

In 2006, the Newberry Library in Chicago announced its digitization of the ancient Maya-K'iche' myth, the Popol Vuh.¹ While digitization ensures the preservation of the document and easier access for researchers, it is also significant in that it marks a new stage in the long historical trajectory of the manuscript itself. The Popol Vuh, or "Maya Bible," is the most studied indigenous document of Mesoamerica. Contemporary scholarship has considered it, among all the early colonial documents, to best reflect a pre-Hispanic native voice. It provides a breadth and depth of detail concerning Maya religion, cosmology, and society, and its contents have been generalized to apply to virtually all of the ancient Maya religions.² Additionally, the text has been used as a source for numerous ethnohistorical studies,³ and its mythological context has profoundly influenced most Guatemalan literature from the early nineteenth century to the present. More important, the Popol Vuh has become a symbol of Guatemalan national "indigenosity" and was officially declared Guatemala's national book in 1971.⁴

I wish to acknowledge the valuable advice, support, and encouragement of Dr. Susan D. Gillespie as she intuitively pointed me towards study of the Popol Vuh during my doctoral program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This study is in part a result of her teaching and emphasis on alternative approaches to this text. Special thanks to Dr. Ruth E. Quiroa-Crowell for the time invested in reading and editing this article throughout its different stages. Finally, I would like to express appreciation to the reviewers and editors of *The Americas* for feedback that greatly broadened my knowledge on this topic, as well as contributed to the final, polished version.

1. Here and throughout this document the name "Popol Vuh" refers to Fr. Francisco Ximénez's eighteenth-century transcription and Spanish translation of the Maya-K'iche' mythic-historical narrative.

2. Dennis Tedlock, *The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings* (New York, London, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 1985). See also Michael Coe, *The Maya* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

3. Robert M. Carmack, *The Quiche Mayas of Utatlán: Evolution of a Highland Guatemala Kingdom* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981) and *The Título de Totonicapán* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1973).

4. This paper was read as part of a panel titled "Text and Context in Colonial Latin America: Power, Politics, and Religiosity" during the Fiftieth Latin American Studies Association meeting, held in Miami in May 2000.

Most Popol Vuh scholarship has conceived the text primarily in precolonial terms with emphasis on its native facets, but in doing so it has disregarded the colonial context and the historical circumstances within which the text was produced. Specifically omitted are the facts that the Guatemalan highlands were being proselytized by Dominican missionaries at the time the text was composed and that the transcriber and translator of the Popol Vuh, the Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez, undertook his work explicitly to refute Maya-K'iche' religious idolatry. Recontextualizing the Popol Vuh, as this paper will do, can widen the scope of its interpretation, thus allowing a deeper understanding of the Maya-K'iche' religious conversion process, the methodology used by missionary friars to achieve conversion, and the spiritual situation of colonial Guatemala in general. Most important, placing the Popol Vuh within its historical context offers new insights into the fundamental question of what it is that the Maya-K'iche' have presented to us—and what it has become.

STORY TOLD BY THE POPUL VUH

The text is a mytho-historical narrative that recounts the creation of the universe, followed by the creation of the K'iche' people of highland Guatemala and the legendary history of the K'iche' dynasties up to the arrival of the Spanish in 1524. The Popol Vuh is typically presented as a freestanding text in two sections, with the first section containing the epic myth that in a series of complex episodes recounts the creation of the universe, as well as of the K'iche' people. The account begins with the primordial creation of Earth, when the gods of the sea joined with the gods of the sky to create the world and form human beings. However, three attempts to create humans resulted in disappointment—the creatures all fell short of the gods' requirements for reproduction and veneration. The first beings became the predecessors of forest animals, the second beings (or mud people) dispersed into dust, and the wooden people of the third attempt became the predecessors of the monkeys.

The creation narrative is then interrupted to recount the heroic deeds of Junajpu and Ixb'alanq'e, or the hero twins, as they have been named by contemporary scholars. In fact, most of the mythological account in the Popol Vuh is composed of their deeds and triumphs, which ensured the ultimate fulfillment of the gods' creation plan. First, they defeated Wuqub' Kiaqix (Seven Macaw) and his two sons Zipacna and Kab'raqan, whose arrogance and uncontrolled power disrupted the gods' creation. The narrative reveals the origin of the hero twins by recounting the lives of their father, Jun Junajpu, and uncle, Wuqub' Junajpu, who were sacrificed by the lords of the underworld in Xib'alb'a. Like their father, the hero twins were summoned to play ball in Xib'alb'a, but

ingeniously defeated the underworld lords Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame through magic tricks. Junajpu and Ixb'alanq'e then ascended to the sky to occupy their places in the cosmos, where they became the sun and moon respectively. Thus concludes the epic myth part of the Popol Vuh.

The historical section begins with the K'iche' gods' fourth and final creation of human beings. In this successful attempt, they found the required elements for creating perfect human beings: yellow and white corn. The first four K'iche' men were formed and named B'alam K'itze' (Jaguar Quitze), B'alam Aq'aab' (Jaguar Night), Majukotaj (Not Right Now), and Iki B'alam (Dark Jaguar). These men were given wives and became the founders of the four K'iche' lineages. The historical narrative concludes with a detailed description of the progeny of the four K'iche' men, up to the time of the kings who were in power when Spanish conqueror Pedro de Alvarado and his military forces penetrated Guatemala in 1524.

At first glance, the mytho-historical narrative of the second section appears to be independent of the first. At least, that is the impression that both the numerous editions of the Popol Vuh and scholarly research have projected.⁵ However, a look into the historical trajectory of the text reveals how this perception, which is based on a narrative taken out of context, came to define—and to limit—what we know as the Popol Vuh.

ORIGINS OF THE POPOL VUH

Although there is no firm consensus about the authors or the time period of its original composition, it is believed that the Popol Vuh was written by one or more Maya-K'iche' authors during the middle of the sixteenth century, a time when the highland Mayas were undergoing colonization and religious conversion.⁶ The stories were then copied and translated into Spanish by the Dominican missionary friar Francisco Ximénez during 1701 and 1702.⁷ Ximénez claimed to have based his text on the many native documents in the

5. Most transcriptions and translations of the K'iche' mythic-historical narrative do not discuss the physical context or acknowledge Ximénez's religious objectives; they give readers the idea that there is in fact a stand-alone Popol Vuh precolonial manuscript. This approach has been consistent in the most popular transcriptions and translations including those of Adrián Recinos, *Popol Vuh: Las antiguas historias del Quiché* (Guatemala: Piedra Santa, 1947); Adrián Recinos, Delia Goetz, and Sylvanus G. Morley, *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950); Munro Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala*, Middle American Research Institute (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1971); and Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), among others.

6. Jack Himelblau in his book *Quiche Worlds in Creation: The Popol Vuh as a Narrative Work of Art* (California: Labyrinthos, 1989) offers a complete exposition of the author, the time frame of composition, and various conflicting theories regarding Ximénez's manuscript.

7. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*, p. 28.

possession of the K'iche' people during the time he worked as a parish priest in the town of Santo Tomás Chichicastenango.⁸ However, Ximénez explicitly denied the existence of a single precolonial Popol Vuh, contradicting some scholars and stating, “such native book never appeared nor was ever seen “lo cierto es, que tal libro no apareció nunca, ni se ha visto.”⁹ In other words, Ximénez's eighteenth-century copy and translation of the K'iche' stories remains the only source for scholarly studies, even today.

Francisco Ximénez arrived in Guatemala in 1688 and was ordained a year later in the province of San Vicente de Chiapas. He held various positions within the Dominican order, including master of novices, vicar of the convent of Guatemala, general procurator of the Dominican order, and parish priest for several indigenous towns between 1701 and 1721, including Chichicastenango, Rabinal, Santo Domingo de Xenacoc, and Sacapulas San Raimundo in the western highlands of Guatemala. During this period, Ximénez came in close contact with the native population, learned several Mayan languages including K'iche' and Kaqchikel, and acquired deep knowledge of the culture, traditions, and religious beliefs of the region.

Ximénez also had a prolific intellectual life. Some of his major works include *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala de la Orden de Predicadores* (1715), *Historia natural* (1722), and a linguistic study of the K'iche', Zutujil, and Kaqchikel languages titled *El tesoro de las tres lenguas* (1701–1704). His most important contribution to the study of the Maya-K'iche' mythological world was his transcription and translation into Spanish of the K'iche' stories today known as the Popol Vuh. However, as will be demonstrated in this analysis, Francisco Ximénez composed all of his works as a contribution to his order's objective: to convert the native population to Christianity. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Ximénez placed his “ethnographic” work on the Maya-K'iche' religion within an ecclesiastic treatise, nor is it an accident that scholars have chosen to examine his text as if it existed apart from this religious context. Scholars of precolonial Maya culture have preferred to study sources free from the influence of Spanish missionaries, and the Popol Vuh has given such an impression. It should be noted that Ximénez also made a second paraphrastic Spanish version of this K'iche' narrative; it became part of book one of his *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala*.

8. Francisco Ximénez, *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala* [Biblioteca Goathemala de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia] [1721] (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1929) p. 5.

9. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres lenguas* (The Newberry Library 1700–1703), escolios, MS 1515, p. 94r. Throughout this paper Ximénez's entire text will be cited as MS 1515, with reference to particular appended sections of the manuscript noted.

HISTORY OF THE XIMÉNEZ MANUSCRIPT

Ximénez's transcription and translation of the Maya-K'iche' stories became part of the Dominican monastery archives, to which only members of the order were allowed access. Thus, the re-emergence of the Popol Vuh as a narrative can be traced back only to the middle of the nineteenth century, when European scholars rediscovered Ximénez's manuscripts. By this time his text, together with other Dominican archives, had been confiscated and relocated to the library at the National University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. This early wave of explorer-scholars came to Latin America, and especially to Mesoamerica, pushed by their own desire for scientific knowledge, and their scientific orientation led them to debunk any religious explanations regarding the existence of the native cultures that preceded them. In tracing the development of Mesoamerican studies, anthropologist Robert Carmack states: "Objective thinkers . . . were the exceptions until the nineteenth century, when more 'Positivist' scholars gradually began to push aside the highly fanciful and religious interpretations of Mesoamerica. . . . In growing numbers, the Scientific Precursors began to argue that the Mesoamerican Peoples had developed their civilization independently from the peoples of the Old World or Lost Continents."¹⁰

The Guatemalan highlands and its dense native population became a point of attraction for much of this scientific quest. Most scholars became interested in studying indigenous manuscripts in their native languages, searching for evidence to support their theories. Texts with mythological content such as the Popol Vuh were especially sought after by investigators who visited native communities. European scholars did manage to collect most of these indigenous texts directly from the indigenous people themselves, but for the Popol Vuh they had to go to Ximénez's religious writings, held at the library of the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City.¹¹

The Austrian and French scholars Carl Scherzer and Abbé Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg were the first Europeans to rediscover Ximénez's text in 1857 and 1861, respectively. Scherzer reported the existence of several of Ximénez's manuscripts, including a single-bound volume of religious treatises that also contained the stories of the K'iche' origin. He obtained a copy of the narrative and later published a Spanish edition titled *Las historias del origen de*

10. Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary Gossen, *The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and Culture of a Native American Civilization*, Exploring Cultures series, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007), p. 27.

11. In 1830, the Ximénez manuscripts were transported from the Dominican monastery in Antigua to the University of San Carlos Library in Guatemala City as part of a governmental confiscation of all ecclesiastic property. See Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*, p. 30.

los indios (1857). Unlike subsequent editions of the K'iche' stories, Scherzer's edition clearly demonstrated a concern to represent the text faithfully; it included Ximénez's prologue and part of the annotations attached to the narrative.¹² Although Scherzer recognized the original context of the narrative, he did not inquire into its relationship to the rest of Ximénez's manuscript.

Brasseur de Bourbourg obtained Ximénez's bound manuscript in 1861 during a visit to the University of San Carlos and published the indigenous stories with the title *Popol Vuh: Le livre sacré et les mythes de l'antiquité américaine, Avec les livres héroïques et historiques des K'iche's*. This title indicates that his main interest was in the myth itself, confirmed by the fact that his document did not include the prologues and appendices of Ximénez's manuscript. In appropriating and renaming the manuscript, Brasseur de Bourbourg emphasized the mythological narrative in a way that suggests an interest in the precolonial context of ancient Maya civilization, thus evading the fundamental fact that the Popol Vuh narrative is, after all, the product of a colonial encounter between Maya and European civilization. In fact, Brasseur de Bourbourg's name "Popol Vuh" became the official title for subsequent editions of the K'iche' narrative and established the direction of subsequent studies.¹³

Ximénez's text remained in Brasseur de Bourbourg's personal collection until his death in 1874 when it became part of the collection of native manuscripts at the National Library of Paris.¹⁴ Brasseur de Bourbourg's "acquisition" and appropriation is significant in the trajectory of the K'iche' narrative, because there was little scholarly access to it during the fifteen years the manuscript was in his possession. In fact, the text remained in obscurity until the middle of the twentieth century when it was discovered again by another wave of scholars. Book dealer Alphonse Pinart obtained Ximénez's text from the National Library of Paris and subsequently sold it to the American collector Edward E. Ayer. In 1911, the same manuscript was donated to the special collection of indigenous manuscripts at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where it was catalogued as *Arte de las tres lenguas*, a title coinciding with that of the first treatise of the manuscript and with the title on the spine of the document. Later, the text received the numerical classification MS 1515,¹⁵ which caused further

12. Karl Scherzer, *Las historias del origen de los indios* (Viena: Casa de Carlos Gerold e Hijo, 1857), p. xii. This edition was strongly criticized by scholars for its many spelling errors. However, his version is the only one that acknowledged and included Ximénez's prologue and annotations. In 1967, the Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala published a special edition of his translation of Ximénez's escolios.

13. Brasseur de Bourbourg, Charles Etienne 1861, *Popol Vuh, Le livre sacré et les lythes de l'antiquité américaine* (Arthur Bertand éditeur, Paris).

14. Adrian Recinos, *Popol Vuh: Las antiguas historias del K'iche'* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), p. 43.

15. In like manner, Ximénez's entire manuscript is referred to as MS 1515 in this paper.

confusion for scholars arriving at the Newberry Library to seek a single, independent Popol Vuh.

THE POPOL VUH: A COLONIAL SOURCE

In *The Slippery Earth* (1988), her study of Nahuatl texts of the early colonial period, Louise Burkhart presents a useful point of departure for contextualizing the complexities of a text such as the *Popol Vuh*. She notes that most early colonial manuscripts originated from the cultural contact between friars and indigenous groups.¹⁶ The texts were the result of collaborations between mendicant friars and native informants with differing objectives, and thus must be approached as sources for studying cultural contact.¹⁷ In the case of Mexico, Burkhart states that colonial manuscripts of the central valley (Mexico City and the surrounding regions) are “best suited to the study of colonial Nahuas.”¹⁸

The same approach can be applied to the *Popol Vuh*, which has been traditionally contextualized to study precolonial Maya culture alone. According to Burkhart, colonial texts have also been analyzed primarily as ethnographic sources, thus ignoring their ecclesiastic components. This tendency is especially evident in the study of other highland Guatemala indigenous texts, where *títulos* (deeds), annals, and narratives have been analyzed solely to provide dates, names, and facts on which to reconstruct the history and ethnology of the Maya-K'iche'.¹⁹ For the most part, the result has been to create the illusion that these are one-dimensional indigenous texts, a fallacy that Burkhart attributes to the traditional enmity between modern anthropologists and missionaries of the sixteenth century.²⁰ Burkhart's study stresses the need to bring into account the ecclesiastic aspect of what she calls the “colonial dialogue” in order to understand the native cultures and the friars' impact on them.²¹ It is precisely this dialogue that becomes evident through a recontextualization of the Popol Vuh.

16. By “early colonial texts,” I refer to manuscripts written in the middle of the sixteenth century. In the case of highland Guatemala, many *títulos* and other narratives, including the native-authored “original” Popol Vuh, are dated as early as 1554. Louise Burkhart focuses on the ethnographic treatises written by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún between the years of 1558 and 1560.

17. Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), p. 5.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

19. See Carmack, *The Quiché Mayas of Utatlán*; Carmack, “El Popol Vuh como etnografía del Quiché,” in *Nuevas perspectivas sobre el Popol Vuh*, eds. Robert Carmack and Francisco Morales Santos (Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa, 1983); Ruud van Akkeren, *La visión indígena de la conquista* (Guatemala: Serviprensa, 2007); and Munro Edmonson, “Historia de las tierras altas Mayas, según los documentos indígenas,” in *Desarrollo cultural de los Mayas*, eds. Evon Z. Vogt and Alberto Ruíz (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1964).

20. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, p. 9.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

It would be inaccurate to underplay the ethnographic contribution that Ximénez's transcription and translation of the Maya-K'iche' text offers to the study of Maya culture, and more so to deny the crucial insights it provides to contemporary understanding of Maya-K'iche' myth. However, as is the case for other colonial sources compiled by mendicant friars, Ximénez's work contains inherent "assertive and interpretative values"²² that must be recognized. As researcher Thomas Bremer states, even the most innovative and unique ethnographic work conducted by mendicant friars in Spanish America presents intrinsic limitations, as friars were not able to set aside what he calls, "the monological premises of the missionary enterprise."²³ Thus, ethnographic work authored by mendicant friars should be scrutinized for its premises, not just taken at face value or as simple description. As Bremer's analysis points out, these sources require careful, well-informed reading with inquiries into both the intricacies of the texts and the purposes and intentions of all subjects involved in their production.²⁴

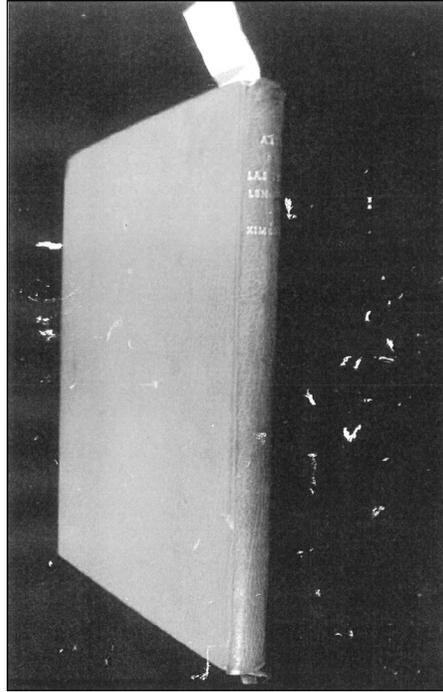
The Popol Vuh is an example of the dual nature of colonial texts and the perils of single-sided scholarly analysis. The religious context in which Ximénez compiled and situated the native stories has traditionally been overlooked, and that tendency has been perpetuated through the numerous translations and editions of the text, including Dennis Tedlock's 1994 definitive edition and Sam Polop's 2008 poetic translation. These editions have focused on transcribing and translating the K'iche' mytho-historical narrative, theorizing the pre-existence of a hieroglyphic Popol Vuh. However, they have not considered a possible relation between the Maya-K'iche' narrative and Ximénez's own additional sections, namely the prologues and the annotations. Approaching the Maya-K'iche' narrative within its larger context reinforces its ecclesiastic nature and thus highlights and restores the text's embedded "colonial dialogue." It is within the prologue and annotations to MS 1515 that Ximénez's voice emerges, providing direct access to his religious objectives and his perception of the K'iche' peoples and religion.

22. Rolena Adorno, "Reconsidering Colonial Discourse for Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spanish America," *Latin American Research Review* 28:3 (1993), pp. 138–39. As cited by Thomas S. Bremer, "Reading the Sahagún Dialogues," in *Sahagún at 500: Essays on the Quincentenary of the Birth of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún*, ed. John Frederick Schwaller (Berkeley: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2003), p. 13.

23. Bremer analyzes the work of the sixteenth-century Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún among the Nahautl speaking people of the central valley of Mexico. Scholars consider Sahagún to be the "father of modern anthropology." Nevertheless, Bremer points out the importance of considering the historical, social and cultural contexts in which Sahagún lived and worked, especially his Franciscan missionary concern with the evangelization of the people of New Spain. He defines Sahagún's *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* as a "monologue pretending to be a dialogue," which he attributes to Sahagún's inability to stray from the missiological imperative of expanding the Christian empire.

24. It should be noted that although the comparison between Fr. Sahagún and Fr. Ximénez is apt, their work among the native cultures differed chronologically, as well as in the methodology by which they conducted their ethnographic work.

FIGURE 1. Ximénez's treatise MS 1515.



Source: Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

A physical description of the treatise Ximénez composed in the eighteenth century helps to illustrate this point.

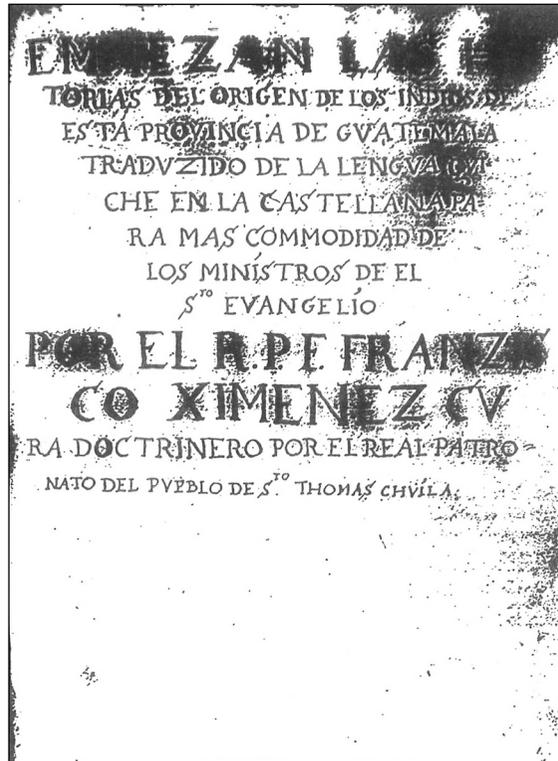
STRUCTURE OF THE POPOL VUH MANUSCRIPT

It should be noted that the structure of the MS 1515 at the Newberry's Ayer Collection coincides with the description given by Karl Scherzer during his visit to the archives at the University of San Carlos in 1856. The MS 1515 is composed of three religious treatises, each in its own section and bound into a single volume. The K'iche' stories constitute one section, rather than a free-standing book as has been generally assumed (Figure 1).

The first treatise is a lengthy study of grammar titled "Arte de las lenguas Chachiquel, K'iche' y Zutuhil,"²⁵ and is paginated from 1 to 94 recto. The

25. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are those of the author.

FIGURE 3. Ximénez treatise MS 1515: First page of third section.



Source: Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

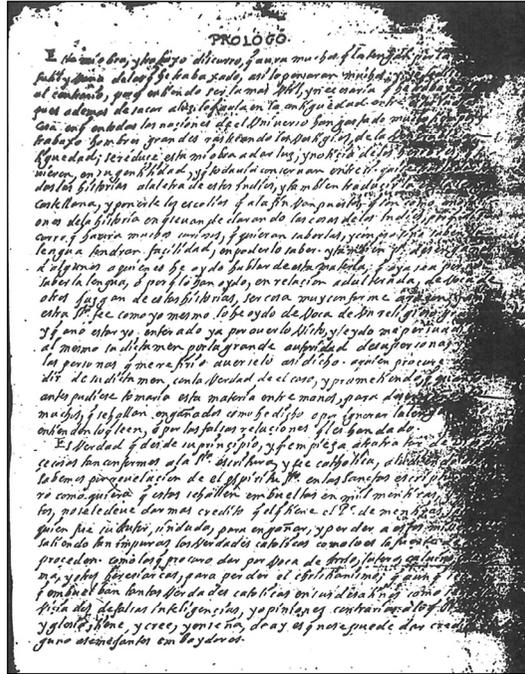
A set of annotations or *escolios* is also attached at the end of the stories; in these, Ximénez attempted to clarify questions regarding the K'iche' religious concepts included in the third treatise (Figure 4).²⁶

Several pages in this last treatise are not numbered, namely the title page, the prologue, the three additional salutation pages, and the annotations to the "Empiezan las historias de los indios."²⁷ It is these prologues and annotations to the indigenous stories that deserve special attention, because they further demonstrate that Ximénez intended the Maya-K'iche' stories to be read within this religious context so as to refute and ultimately extirpate them from Maya-K'iche' spiritual life.

26. It should be noted that Ximénez's paraphrased version in his *Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala* also included an introductory chapter and a more elaborated set of annotations that further explicated his view of the indigenous religion. This version is also used in the analysis of this paper.

27. For the purpose of this study, I have paginated this section 1 to 4 recto.

FIGURE 5. Ximénez treatise MS 1515: Prologue to the mytho-historical narrative.



Source: Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

Here can be seen the various errors with which Satan attempts to wage war on these miserable Indians.³⁰

Two points can be drawn from this statement. First, all the sections of MS 1515 were originally interconnected, and what is commonly perceived as an independent text (Popol Vuh) is actually the product of the narrow nineteenth-century European scientific interest. Second, the K'iche' stories were an integral part of Ximénez's ecclesiastic material, with which he intended ultimately to convert the indigenous population to the Christian faith. In other words, Fr. Francisco Ximénez's treatise is an expression of the Dominican evangelization campaign at the beginning of the eighteenth century—a tool intended to destroy native religion in order to replace it with European Christianity. A brief overview of the evangelization process in Latin America provides a basis for situating Ximénez's missionary work in highland Guatemala and for understanding the nature of his writings about Maya history, culture and religion.

30. Ximénez, prologue to *Tratado segundo*, MS 1515, p. 94v.

EVANGELIZATION OF THE NATIVE POPULATION

The evangelization of Latin American indigenous groups by the mendicant orders occurred in many phases across the Americas, and it was carried out differently from order to order and from region to region. However, the objective was always the same: to convert the native population to Christianity.³¹ Pedro Borges in his study of Christianization methods in the Americas during the sixteenth century noted three distinct phases: physical destruction, extirpation of latent idolatry, and theoretical extirpation of native beliefs.³²

The physical phase of evangelization in the Americas, or the “extirpation of public idolatry,” was focused on destroying any visual manifestation of idolatry. The emphasis on the destruction of idols or any graven images can be traced to the theological formation that friars received and the narrow definition of idolatry they brought to the Indian world. They were taught to recognize and give importance to the idols, rather than to less obvious religious phenomena, such as animism, that occurred in native communities.³³

In the sixteenth century, idolatry was generally defined as the worship of idols, and thus the most blasphemous sin against Christianity; it “encapsulates in itself, all the evil that could exist in the world, in matters of religion and culture.”³⁴ It should be noted that this narrow definition obscured a more complex reality once it was transported to the Americas, because idolatry as a practice was not viewed or confronted in the same way throughout colonial America. In colonial Yucatán, a good case in point, the concept of idolatry evolved over a period of several hundred years, starting from the worship of craven images and coming eventually to include whatever the Catholic clergy considered convenient to suppress in Maya religion and culture.³⁵ At any rate, the physical destruction phase was accomplished rather quickly, but it neither

31. For instance, in his study of the conversion of New Spain, John F. Schwaller defines three major phases; conversion through example, conversion through intellectual and cultural engagement, and conversion through extirpation of idolatries. “Conversion, Engagement, and Extirpation: Three Phases of the Evangelization of New Spain, 1524–1650,” in *Conversion to Christianity: From Late Antiquity to the Modern Age: Considering the Process in Europe, Asia, and the Americas*, eds. Calvin Kendall, Oliver Nicholson, William D. Phillips, Jr., and Marguerite Ragnow (Minneapolis: Center for Early Modern History, University of Minnesota, 2009), pp. 259–92.

32. Pedro Borges O.F.M., *Métodos misionales en la cristianización de América siglo XVI* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. Departamento de Misionología Española, Raycar, S.A, 1960).

33. Amos Megged, “‘Right from the Heart’: Indians’ Idolatry in Mendicant Preaching in Sixteenth-Century Mesoamerica,” *History of Religions* 35:1 (August 1995), pp. 61–82.

34. Antonio de Remesal, *Historia general de las indias occidentales y particular de la gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala* [1619] (Guatemala: Editorial José de Pineda Ibarra, 1966), p. 750.

35. John Chuchiak, “Toward a Regional Definition of Idolatry: Reexamining Idolatry Trials in the ‘Relaciones de méritos’ and Their Role in Defining the Concept of ‘Idolatría’ in Colonial Yucatán, 1570–1780,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 6:2 (2002), p. 167.

deterred the natives from traditional ritual practice nor effectively undermined the spiritual authority and significance of native religions.

Faced with the friars' assault, the native population reacted by concealing religious practices in remote places, away from the friars' vigilance. However, once church officials came to the hard realization that native communities were far from embracing orthodox Catholicism and that they continued to worship their gods, they unleashed complex religious and judicial—inquisitorial—investigations and mounted trials in the native communities. This effort was known as the “extirpation of latent idolatry.”³⁶ The objective of these investigations was to find and severely punish “individuals who held heretical views and people who showed lack of respect for religious principles.”³⁷ Thus, the main objective of this second phase of evangelization was to destroy all remains of indigenous beliefs and rituals.³⁸

Richard Greenleaf has classified the extirpation trials and investigations in colonial Mexico between 1522 and 1819 into four types: 1) monastic trials by mendicants with specially delegated faculties (1522–1534 in central Mexico, and during the 1560s in Yucatán and Oaxaca); 2) an episcopal inquisition where bishops acted as ecclesiastical judges ordinary (1535–1571); 3) a formal Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition (1571–1820); and 4) a provisorate or vicar general's judiciary that specifically tried Indian cases after the Tribunal compiled the evidence (1571–1819).³⁹

Responsibility for maintaining control over Indian orthodoxy fell primarily on the bishop or archbishop's office and was placed in the hands of the provisor or vicar general.⁴⁰ However, much of the day-to-day responsibility was carried out by mendicant friars, who were permitted to perform the duties reserved to secular clergy, except for ordination. Extraordinary powers were granted to all mendicant orders by virtue of the 1522 papal bull *Exponi nobis*, known in New Spain as *Omnimoda*,⁴¹ which bestowed on the friars inquisitorial functions in

36. For further analysis of the term “extirpation,” consult Pierre Duviols, *La destrucción de las religiones andinas (durante la conquista y la colonia)* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977); Nicolás Griffiths, *The Cross and the Serpent: Repression and Resurgence in Colonial Peru* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); and Kenneth Mills, *Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

37. Richard E. Greenleaf, “Persistence of Native Values: The Inquisition and the Indians of Colonial Mexico,” *The Americas* 50:3 (January 1994), pp. 351–76.

38. Borges, “La extirpación de la idolatría en Indias como método misional (siglo XVI),” *Misionalia hispánica* 41 (1960), p. 195.

39. Greenleaf, “The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain: A Study in Jurisdictional Confusion,” *The Americas* 22: 2 (October 1965), pp. 138–66.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

areas where a bishop was not on site.⁴² Even after 1571 when the Mexican Tribunal of the Holy Office was officially instituted, Indians were excluded from its jurisdiction and remained under the ordinary jurisdiction of the bishopric.⁴³ The tribunal limited its function to acting mainly as a fact-finding agency to uncover and discipline the Indians' transgressions and heterodoxies.⁴⁴

Despite a legal-ecclesiastic inquisitorial machine that intruded itself into the cultural and religious life of the native population, the second phase of evangelization was never completed. Indeed, the imperfect process attested to the Spanish Church's failure to acculturate the native population.⁴⁵ The extirpation of idolatry campaigns disrupted the life and dynamics of native communities, inflicting great sorrow and unjust suffering, as in the case of the violent extirpation campaign of the Franciscan friar Diego de Landa in the city of Maní in Yucatán.⁴⁶

In 1562, Landa discovered to his dismay an underground network of indigenous religious practices. Outraged, he launched a three-month punitive episcopal inquisition against indigenous communities, in what amounted to an auto-da-fé. Landa's excessive religious zeal in stamping out idolatry was documented in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (Accounts of the affairs in Yucatan), composed in 1566. Over a period of three months, natives were coerced to confess idolatry, turn over their idols, and receive physical punishment for their transgressions. According to some official reports, Landa's actions at Maní resulted in the torture of 4,500 Indians and 157 deaths during or as a result of the interrogations. Thirteen people were reported to have committed suicide and eighteen others disappeared, while many more were left crippled and or paralyzed.⁴⁷ Landa was accused of exceeding his inquisitorial power and returned to Spain to defend his case. However, he was absolved of

42. David E. Timmer, in his study "Providence and Perdition: Fray Diego de Landa Justifies His Inquisition Against the Yucatecan Maya," *Church History* 66: 3 (September 1997), pp. 477–88, offers an illustrative case of how Diego de Landa fully utilized the inquisitorial rights provided by the papal bull.

43. This exclusion of the Indians from the jurisdiction of the Holy Office was presaged by the violent action against the native population three decades before, including the idolatry trials of Fray Diego de Landa in the 1560s in Yucatán, as well as the burning of Don Carlos of Texcoco under Bishop Juan de Zumárraga in 1539. See Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain," p. 140; John F. Schwaller, "Conversion, Engagement, and Extirpation: Three Phases of the Evangelization of New Spain, 1524–1650," in *Conversion to Christianity: From Late Antiquity to the Modern Age: Considering the Process in Europe, Asia, and the Americas*, eds. Calvin Kendall, Oliver Nicholson, William D. Phillips Jr., and Marguerite Ragnow (Minneapolis: Center for Early Modern History, University of Minnesota, 2009).

44. Greenleaf, "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain," p. 138.

45. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian," *The Americas* 34: 3 (January 1978), pp. 315–44.

46. Inga Clendinnen, "Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Sixteenth-Century Yucatan," *Past and Present* 94 (February 1982), pp. 27–38.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

all charges and returned to Yucatán in 1572 to replace Francisco Torral as the Bishop of Yucatán, where he served until his death in 1579.⁴⁸

While the physical destruction and the extirpation trials of native idolatry such as Diego de Landa's have received extensive scholarly attention, the third phase of the native evangelization process—the theoretical refutation of idolatry—has not been analyzed in any depth. According to Pedro Borges, the theoretical refutation of native beliefs was a fundamental principle that grounded the missionaries' extirpation work. Basically, it was thought that if the extirpation of the native religion were to be successful, missionaries must subvert the core of the native belief system and convince the natives intellectually that their religion was false and erratic.⁴⁹ For most, the theoretical refutation of idolatry was channeled through intensive catechizing, teaching, and preaching campaigns aimed at delivering three important arguments to the neophytes. First, the natives, like their ancestors, lived in perpetual error as the result of Satan's deceiving intervention. Second, the native idols were not gods, nor did they possess any power over their lives. Third, the animism assigned to natural phenomena such as the moon, stars, and water was erroneous, given that these were only a part of God's creation as described in the Book of Genesis.⁵⁰

Methodologically, theoretical refutation was to take place as a missionary friar presented the biblical message to neophytes during catechizing sessions. The first missionaries understood theoretical refutation as primarily non-confrontational, since a direct challenge of the native beliefs at early evangelization stages could have been detrimental. They were initially convinced that presenting the Christian message was sufficient, as the neophytes would come to realize the intrinsic truth and goodness of the Christian faith. For these reasons, they focused on preaching the positive nature of Christianity and only indirectly condemned native religion.⁵¹

However, the Dominican order in the province of San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala went further, advocating for a more rigorous study of native beliefs and arguing that comprehensive knowledge of native gods and ritual practices

48. For a discussion of Fr. Landa's motives and actions in Yucatán, refer to David E. Timmer, "Providence and Perdition," p. 481. Timmer demonstrates how Landa's outrage and actions are better understood in the context of Franciscan "millenarism," through which Landa interpreted Maya apostasy as a threat of perdition and the inevitable destruction of the Christian faith. On the other hand, Inga Clendinnen interprets Fr. Landa's brutal methods of discipline as a shift of Franciscan ideology in the New World, legitimized through a "father-child," relationship with the natives.

49. Borges, "La extirpación," p. 195

50. Ibid., p. 222.

51. Ibid., p. 198. Pedro Borges cites Pedro de Córdoba's 1544 *Doctrina cristiana para la instrucción e información de los indios* as an example of a non-confrontational approach in early to native religion.

would give friars the upper hand as they attempted to instill biblical principles in their neophytes.⁵² Friars were instructed “to be knowledgeable about the idols and sacrifices the natives practice since their ancient times of infidelity, in order to deceive them from the error of superstition and vanity and to teach them the rectitude of our faith.”⁵³ The emphasis on recording native beliefs in order to confront them became an intrinsic component of the ecclesiastic effort and took the form of sermons, *artes* (grammatical studies), and dictionaries in native languages, compiled during the 1560s and 1570s.⁵⁴ Religious treatises such as Ximénez’s should be added to this list, since the ultimate objective of the texts was also to eradicate native religion.

EVANGELIZATION OF HIGHLAND GUATEMALA: *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent*

Historically, the Dominican order believed in the conversion of indigenous peoples through peaceful persuasion, as exemplified by the early missionary projects of Fr. Francisco de Córdoba in the coastal region of Paria, Venezuela, in 1513, and Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas in the northern region of Guatemala in 1537. While Córdoba’s project did not succeed, De las Casas’s nonviolent incursion contributed to the conquering and evangelization of the region of Tezulutlán, where his method turned this region, known as the “land of war,” into the land of “true peace,” or Verapaz, a name that is retained in modern Guatemala. For the most part, the Dominican order did not pursue violent destruction of idols in the Guatemalan highlands. Rather, they were committed to honoring the core tenets of their order, called the “order of preachers,” and to converting the natives through preaching or “holy exhortations” and persuasion of their “inner understanding.”⁵⁵ This distinctive approach to evangelization and social experiments during the early stages of the evangelization period governed in many ways the direction of the Dominican order in colonial Guatemala.

Fr. Antonio de Remesal, the official chronicler of the Dominican order at the time, offered a realistic assessment of the spiritual situation of highland Guatemala from approximately 1526 through 1619. In his *Historia general de*

52. A geographical area founded by the Dominican order in 1551 for the purpose of evangelization. It included the territory of what is today Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Chiapas up to the Tehuantepec isthmus in the Gulf of Mexico.

53. Megged, “Right from the Heart,” p. 69. In 1558, this mandate became official for the Dominican order. In 1573, the Spanish Crown adopted it mandate as a royal decree.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

55. Sabine MacCormack, “The Heart Has Its Reasons: Predicament of Missionary Christianity in Early Colonial Peru,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 65:3 (August 1985), pp. 443–46

las Indias Occidentales y particular de la gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala (1615), Remesal reported that the Maya were reluctant to adhere to a genuine conversion. He found that many of the neophytes who were initially proselytized and had apparently accepted Christianity continued to rely on the oral stories and ritual performances of their cultural traditions for spiritual nurture. This native response to conversion can be explained in terms of what Steve Stern defines as “paradigms of conquest.”⁵⁶ For Stern, the missionaries and the Church in general failed to understand the task before them, naively envisioning the indigenous population as a spiritual tabula rasa for whom conversion to Catholicism would mean simply replacing indigenous religion, without resistance. However, as Stern demonstrated, missionaries were soon confronted with “an array of Indian initiatives and responses,” producing unexpected outcomes.⁵⁷ Remesal’s account revealed that in the case of the Guatemalan highlands, the Maya-K’iche’ had not committed to Christianity wholeheartedly, but rather had embraced the new teachings on their own terms. Remesal’s assessments raise questions as to the effectiveness of the evangelization campaign.

In the sixth book of his *Historia*, Remesal described the spiritual condition of the Maya people as “deteriorated.” He indicated that the idolatry of the infidels was as public as it had been before the arrival of the missionaries.⁵⁸ For example, public animal sacrifice to idols was a common practice. Baptism, symbolic of acceptance of the Christian teachings, was one of Remesal’s primary concerns. He stated that individuals who had received baptism still participated in offerings, celebrations, and sacrifices to ancient gods in secluded parts of the jungle. He believed that the natives were intentionally manipulating and desecrating this Christian sacrament, accepting baptism only to be absolved from mistreatment before the Spanish authorities. He stated that the natives justified theft, lying, murder, and marital infidelity, and that they justified their actions as being emulations of the Spaniards’ Christian-like living.⁵⁹

According to Remesal, the Dominicans eventually realized that their Christianization methods, as applied in Yucatán and elsewhere up to the mid-sixteenth century, were not sufficient to attain the spiritual conversion and orthodoxy initially envisioned. This concern for what seemed to be a deteriorated spiritual situation in Guatemala was at the core of the two Dominican chapters (formal assemblies) celebrated in the city of Cobán in 1558 and 1578. For instance,

56. Steve Stern, “Paradigms of Conquest: History, Historiography, Politics,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Quincentenary Supplement, 24 (1992), pp. 1-34.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

58. Remesal, *Historia*, p. 752.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 753.

friars were instructed in 1558 that all convents, “own a book containing the name of the idols, their drawings, and the name and number of people that worship them. Such book must kept secured”⁶⁰ In 1578, however, this mandate was given new force when friars were specifically ordered to “deal with and to be curious about their ancient things, in order to undeceive them. *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent.*”⁶¹ It is important to highlight that with the axiom “to uproot beforehand, thereafter to plant,” the Dominican order affirmed its full commitment to the theoretical refutation of native religion. In other words, so that the neophytes could reach a fruitful commitment to Christianity, friars must first persuade them to detest their ancestral religion.

Under this Dominican metaphor, indigenous people were considered the “fertile soil” in which “trees of virtue” were to be planted. However, a fruitful outcome essentially depended on successfully uprooting the “trees of vices”—the indigenous stories, both oral and written. The indigenous stories were “the weed of superstition that must be de-rooted from the indigenous hearts.”⁶² Remesal further explained that the desire to eradicate the indigenous religious practices was the main reason that “friars who dealt with the idolatrous Indians were especially interested in knowing their superstitious stories, the origin of their gods, the beginning of their idolatrous rituals and of their abominable sacrifices.”⁶³ Thus, the main assumption under *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent* was that the act of recording the native stories would uncover their latent “erratic nature,” very much the same process as digging up roots from a tilled plot.

Three-quarters of a century later, the Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez echoed Remesal’s concerns about the spiritual condition of the people of the Guatemalan highlands. Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ximénez provided his assessment of the Maya spiritual situation and of the status of the Dominican mission in Guatemala. As a parish priest and *doctrinero* (an ordained friar charged with teaching the Christian doctrine to the natives) in many highland Guatemala towns and villages, he had witnessed the Maya-K’iche’ people’s attachment to their religious beliefs, which led him to conclude that evangelization in the region had made little progress, due to the persistence of the Maya religion. He warned his audience not to be deceived, “given as it is certain that today they [the Indians] remain in the same errors and foolishness, and even though it [idolatry] may appear as only a spark among them, it is in fact a burning fire.”⁶⁴

60. Ibid., p. 749.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres*, prologue to the escolios, MS 1515, p. 2v.

Ximénez's spark-fire analogy indicated the influence that the Maya religion continued to have, despite the Dominicans' evangelizing efforts. Ximénez was convinced that despite his twenty-four years of missionary work in Guatemala, the attempts to convert the Maya people had been ineffective, primarily because friars had neglected the importance that native stories had for indigenous spiritual life. More specifically, Ximénez blamed this lack of progress on the deficient training that missionary friars had received in identifying how native religion and rituals played out in the quotidian life of indigenous communities. He stated that the missionaries, rather than serving as "caretakers of a vine, have been content only with pulling out what they see, but they are unaware that it [evil] spreads underground."⁶⁵

Ximénez's words demonstrate that the emphasis of the extirpation process to that time had been on the visible manifestation of Maya-K'iche' religious practices and had disregarded the relevance that the indigenous stories represented for the survival of native spirituality. At the same time, his criticism is perhaps aimed also at legitimizing the Dominican order's mission in highland Guatemala.⁶⁶ His assessment pointed first toward the fragility and spiritual immaturity of native converts, and then to the faults of secular priests. According to the mendicant orders, such priests were unsuited to convert the Maya-K'iche', due to their lack of knowledge of native religion, culture, and languages.⁶⁷ It is within this context that Ximénez prepared his multi-section religious treatise (MS 1515 at the Newberry Library), in which he presented a model for recording (uncovering) and then refuting (uprooting) the Maya-K'iche' creation stories. Consequently, his work should be seen as a continuation of his predecessor's ideology of *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent*.

XIMÉNEZ'S TREATISE PUT INTO PRACTICE

The historical data on Ximénez's missionary activity in Guatemala is scant, and there is no evidence that he ever served as an ecclesiastic judge for the Inquisition or conducted extirpation duties during his time as a parish priest or as a

65. Ibid., p. 2r.

66. Adriaan Van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala 1524–1821* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). This seminal study of the history of the parish in colonial Guatemala, offers an analysis of the struggle between the mendicant orders and the secular Church over the control of parishes in highland Guatemala. Through a process known as "secularization," or the reassignment of secular priests to parishes, the Catholic Church desired to bring the mendicant orders under episcopal authority. Despite many attempts starting from the early colonial period, the secularization of parishes did not begin until 1754.

67. Van Oss demonstrates how mendicant friars used their competency in native languages to resist secularization. Because the secular friars worked primarily with Spanish-speaking communities, they usually did not learn native languages.

doctrinero. However, the structure of his treatise and the information he provided in the prologues and annotations point to the fact that his participation in the extirpation of the Maya-K'iche' religion was limited to the Dominican monastery where he provided training to missionary friars. For instance, his treatise offered linguistic training for several K'iche' languages, as well as a catechism, sermons, and other religious material to convert the Maya population. The treatise also included a detailed description of the Maya-K'iche' creation stories to prepare friars to recognize the worship of native deities and strategies for nullifying intellectually the spiritual significance that native converts still found in their rituals. A close analysis of the last two sections of Ximénez's treatise illustrates this theoretical extirpation process.

The Maya-K'iche' creation narrative, found in the section titled "Empiezan las historias del origen de los indios" (Figure 2), strategically begins with a prologue (Figure 5) in which Ximénez defined the essence of the K'iche' stories as errors, lies, and the work of Satan.

It is true that from its beginning, where it deals with the concept of God, they say things in accordance with the Holy Bible and the Catholic faith, alluding to what we all know to be a revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Bible. But regardless of how they (the Holy teachings) are wrapped in many lies and tales, they cannot be given more credit than that given to Satan, the father of lies, who was their tutor without a doubt, to deceive and cause the ruin of these miserable [Indians].⁶⁸

This rather harsh statement had two purposes. First, it discredited any conceivable biblical parallelism between Christianity and the Maya religion, as had sometimes been suggested during early evangelization campaigns. It also served to warn the audience that the native stories should be deemed as simply impure [*impuras*] and false [*falsas*], and even as corrupted [*viciadas*] Catholic truths.⁶⁹ This evil nature bestowed upon the Maya-K'iche' creation stories is repeatedly stated throughout Ximénez's escolios.

In the same prologue, Ximénez clarifies the central objective of this section of his treatise: "to bring to light and to inform of the errors that they [the Indians] had in their time of heathendom, and that they still retain among them, . . . my desire was to transcribe all of the stories into the indigenous writing, to translate them into the Spanish language, and to add the escolios, which are attached at the end."⁷⁰

68. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres*, prologue to K'iche' stories, MS 1515.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

With this statement Ximénez placed his work right at the center of the *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent*; he would attempt to unearth and “bring to light” the essence of the native stories, to eventually deracinate them. Following this preface is Ximénez’s transcription and translation into Spanish of the Maya-K’iche’ creation stories, intended to provide his readers with a lesson on the fundamentals of Maya thought and religion (Figure 2).

Following the transcriptions-translations, Ximénez attached *escolios* or commentaries (Figure 4), which refuted the sacred native stories exposed in the previous section. These commentaries have their own prologue, which delineates his plan of action.

Of this and many other things that have come to my knowledge, I intend to compose these *escolios* to their stories, pointing out what is ancient history, and citing from the preceding stories. I will also make note of what is pertinent to our Holy Catholic faith, for the convenience of those who wish to take full advantage of my work . . . warning and stating as an indisputable fact, that even today, the indigenes still live according to these errors and foolishness.⁷¹

This statement from the prologue is critical to understanding the importance of reading Ximénez’s treatise as an unabridged text. At one level, the prologue provides a compelling piece of evidence that all the sections in the treatise were intended to be interconnected, but more important, it instructs as to how the Maya-K’iche’ stories and Ximénez’s commentaries were to be read jointly. The prologue statement also indicates that Ximénez’s refutation of the native stories first involved setting apart the fundamental differences between Maya-K’iche’ religious beliefs and Christian tenets (God, the Holy Trinity, and the creation of humanity), followed by the presentation of empirical evidence to demonstrate that native religious concepts in no way be interpreted as Christian truths.

The first segment of the commentaries, titled “Of the Nature of God” (*Del ser de Dios*), struck at the center of the indigenous religion. Here, Ximénez attempted to clarify for his audience the Maya-K’iche’ concept of the god Tz’aqol-B’itol.⁷² He approached this topic by reiterating his conviction that all the natives’ knowledge about God had been implanted by Satan in order to “damage them [the Indians] and to take revenge upon God.”⁷³ This statement makes clear to his audience that his purpose in explaining the nature of the Maya-K’iche’ supreme creator was to uproot the idea that, for purposes of con-

71. Ibid.

72. For this section, I follow Ximénez’s spelling for the K’iche’ names of deities.

73. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres*, *escolios*, MS 1515, p. 4r.

version, Tz'aqol-B'itol could be equated with the Judeo-Christian concept of God, an approach tried by some Dominican missionaries who came earlier to the region.

In his 1553 catechism *Theologia Indorum*, the Dominican friar Domingo de Vico stated that Tz'aqol-B'itol was fundamentally the same as the Judeo-Christian creator God.⁷⁴ The introduction to chapter 25 of the *Theologia* reads as follows: "And now I will enlighten and declare the truth, in order to awaken your hearts and to open your eyes to the certainty that there is only one God. Tz'aqol-B'itol is his name in your language."⁷⁵ Ximénez sharply rejected such comparisons, discouraging the use of this method and advising his audience differently.

Tzacol-bitol, meaning he who makes or fabricates something, expresses its *posita materia* [substance], because it is still the most adequate name utilized to explain our God. It is possible to deduce that his name was given by Satan in order to convey that he [God] is not the Creator. These names of Tzacol-bitol should be explained to the Indians and the intelligence that was assigned by Satan to this god must be detested.⁷⁶

The mythological creation account of Jun Junajpu and his sons, the legendary hero twins Junajpu and Ixb'alanq'e, was the next target in Ximénez's refutation process. He rejected these Maya representations of God, arguing that they symbolized another dangerous distortion of Christian teachings. According to the K'iche' creation narrative, the story of Jun Junajpu and the miraculous conception of the twins by the maiden Xkik' in the underworld of Xib'alb'a preceded the creation of humanity.⁷⁷ This Maya mythological account had been associated by some missionary friars with the Judeo-Christian Trinity. For instance, in his 1550 *Apologética historia sumaria* Bartolomé de las Casas commented that missionary friars in the field reported that the Maya-K'iche' of the highland regions considered Jun Junajpu to be God the Father, and Junajpu a personification of Christ, born from Xkik's divine conception.⁷⁸ Ximénez rejected this

74. Fr. de Vico's "syncretic" idea was not unanimously embraced by the sixteenth-century religious community. The concern was that such an approach would further encourage idolatry since the natives were not able to discriminate between the two systems.

75. René Acuña "La Theología Indorum de Fray Domingo de Vico," *Tlalocán: Revista de fuentes para el conocimiento de las culturas indígenas de México* 10 (1985), pp. 281–305.

76. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres*, escolios, MS 1515, p. 4r.

77. As recounted in the Maya myth, Jun Junajpu (One Hunahpu) and his brother Wuqub Junajpu (Seven Hunahpu) were sacrificed by the lords of the underworld in Xib'alb'a. Jun Junajpu's head was then placed in a calabash tree, to which the maiden Xkik was attracted by its sweet fruit. She became impregnated when she received Jun Junajpu's spit on her hand. Later she was accused of fornication and escaped into the human world where she gave birth to the hero twins.

78. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria* [1550], in *Obras completas*, eds. Vidal Abril Castelló; Jesús A. Barreda; Berta Ares Queija, and Miguel J. Abril Stoffels (Madrid: Editorial Alianza, 1992), p. 882.

association on the basis that the idea was theologically wrong, noting that the nature of the Christian God was a divine tripartite, composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and not the dual father-son deity relationship of Jun Junajpu and Junajpu. Ximénez exhorted his audience to detest such concepts and to explain the true nature of the Holy Trinity to the natives.

It is true that these are modes of explaining the being and power of God; but in regards to what is de facto conveyed by Satan to them [the Indians], that Hun-hunahpú, who they had for God, with saliva conceived Hun-ahpu, a blowgunner, in the virgin Xquic (blood), daughter of Cuchumaquic (gathered blood), and that God per generationem had sons, must be detested and explained. This god given by Satan is a duality because it is only named as two persons.⁷⁹

The mythical creation of the first K'iche' people was another religious concept Ximénez deemed necessary to refute. According to the K'iche' creation account, B'alam K'itze', B'alam Aq'aab', Majukotaj, and Iki B'alam were the first human beings created by a grandmother goddess, Ixmukane, out of a mixture of water and ground white and yellow corn. These four beings became the leaders of the Maya-K'iche' people and the founders of the different K'iche' lineages and sub-lineages.⁸⁰ Ximénez rejected this account, arguing that it was another fabrication of Satan to keep the natives living in perpetual error. He advised his audience: "even though they (the Indians) had Balanquitzé and the other three for the first humans since creation, such an account is pure nonsense with which Satan or his satraps deceived them; . . . and we all know by faith, as the Holy Scriptures teach, that the first human being was one person, and his name was Adam."⁸¹

Furthermore, Ximénez added that the Maya-K'iche' account did not refer to the origin of humanity itself, but only to the origin of Maya kinship.⁸² He pointed out that the K'iche' narrative simply described how B'alam K'itze' became a powerful king of the K'iche' Kaweqs. Ximénez also reminded his audience that the biblical story of Adam in the Book of Genesis was the only legitimate creation of humanity.

Refutations of the K'iche' creation stories appeared repeatedly throughout Ximénez's annotations and included a range of themes such as the K'iche' kingdom, religious practices, and customs. At the end of his escolios, Ximénez concluded his theoretical refutation. First, he instilled in his audience the idea

79. Ximénez, *Arte de las tres*, escolios, MS 1515, p. 4r.

80. Carmack, *The K'iche' Mayas of Utatlán*, p. 62.

81. Ximénez, *Historia*, p. 71.

82. *Ibid.*

that the Maya-K'iche' religion was in essence an evil religion, and as such must be rejected so as to spiritually free the native population. Second, Ximénez demonstrated that there was an essential distinction between Christianity and the Maya-K'iche' religion, revealing with empirical proofs how each story of the mythological account was a distortion of the biblical truth, inspired by Satan to keep the natives in captivity. By the end of this treatise, Ximénez had fulfilled the *Ut prius evellant de inde plantent* mandate—he had removed the spiritual significance of the Maya-K'iche' myth and simultaneously implanted Judeo-Christian beliefs as the supreme authority.⁸³

Ximénez closed these sections of his manuscript by urging future Dominican missionaries to remain vigilant, to preach the Bible as undisputable truth, and to avoid being “deceived” by the shrewdness of Satan, the enemy of the faith. It is in this context that the relationship of the K'iche' stories of the Popol Vuh to Ximénez's prologues and escolios becomes clear. Whereas the stories present a detailed description of the K'iche' spiritual world, the annotations refute them and prescribe the way in which Christianity must be presented to the K'iche' neophytes. In a larger context, Ximénez's treatise exemplifies the conversion-directed ecclesiastic material that constituted the *modus operandi* for the theoretical refutation of Maya-K'iche' religion.

CONCLUSION

As the K'iche' narrative or Popol Vuh enters its new digital age, the text will continue to generate scientific, ethnographic and anthropological interest. It will remain one of the best sources for inquiry into Maya culture prior to the European encounter. Unfortunately, it is also likely that researchers, students, and scholars will continue to ignore its broader context, especially the colonial religious context provided by the full text of Fr. Francisco Ximénez's treatise. At this writing, the MS 1515 manuscript is undergoing a preservation process that includes mending tears and other losses in its paper. However, this process will result in the extrication of the mytho-historical section from the manuscript; it will be bound separately, as an independent text. Although the Newberry Library maintains that such a division of MS 1515 “allows the text to flex and open more freely without putting stress on the manuscript,”⁸⁴ the separation will continue to promote readings that are out of context, ignoring the interconnections that Ximénez intended.

83. It is worth noting that during the early stages of evangelization, a group of Dominican missionary friars had come to identify these Christian tenants closely with the essentials of Maya religious concepts, a concept that proved to be short-lived.

84. Personal communication via e-mail with Giselle Simon of the Newberry Library staff.

The re-contextualization of Ximénez's eighteenth-century manuscript within the context of colonial religious conversion, as presented in this study, becomes even more crucial. It reveals that the *Popol Vuh* is not an independent, isolated text, as the plethora of modern translations and editions have presented it. Rather, the mytho-historical Maya-K'iche' narrative is an integral part of a multi-section religious treatise compiled by Ximénez in order to extirpate the Maya-K'iche' religion.

Reading Ximénez's text as a religious treatise is an invitation to delve into the cultural contact that generated his manuscript and to decipher how the colonial encounter intrinsic to the text can inform current scholarship. In other words, the text that Ximénez composed in the beginning of the eighteenth century is as much about the impact that the Maya-K'iche' religion had on the evangelization process and on the Dominican order's conversion methods as it is about the Maya-K'iche' creation myth itself.

Ximénez's treatise exemplifies the antagonistic relationship between missionary work and the "accidental" ethnography that is inherent in colonial texts. An analysis of Ximénez's treatise that includes all its sections and addenda could help to illuminate this intrinsic tension, particularly since the appended sections give agency to Ximénez's voice regarding his work among the Maya-K'iche'. His prologues and escolios clearly indicate that his fervent religious convictions impelled him to disseminate Christianity. When Ximénez composed MS 1515, he did not view his inclusion of the Maya-K'iche' mytho-historical narrative as an ethnographic project, nor did he intend to preserve the native religion and culture. Consequently, his transcriptions and translations of the Maya-K'iche' creation myth become an ethnographic endeavor the moment they are taken out of their colonial context. Under such circumstances, contemporary readers and analysts of the *Popol Vuh* narrative are left with the necessity to ponder the extent to which Ximénez's desire to unearth evil and implant Christian virtues might have permeated his final work. They are also left to conduct studies of the basic question that spawned this one: What is the *Popol Vuh*?

Francisco Ximénez, like many other colonial ecclesiastic writers, had an overt religious purpose for his work as evidenced in the prologue to each section of his writings. His treatise, MS 1515, is not an exception: He revealed not only the failure of the church to conduct an effective evangelization of Maya-K'iche' people, but more important, the persistent nature of the native religion. Throughout his treatise, Ximénez demonstrated that despite the relentless religious coercion exercised by missionary friars, the indigenous population in highland Guatemala refused to collapse spiritually and that they

used the new Christian teachings simply to channel their own native beliefs. It is obvious that much of Ximénez's religious treatise responded to what was considered a spiritual crisis and that it did not accomplish its ultimate extirpation aims. However, in an ironic historical twist, his treatise inadvertently preserved one of the most complete and detailed precolonial Maya-K'iche' mytho-historical accounts for posterity. Indeed, Fr. Francisco Ximénez's metaphorical description of native religious beliefs as a strong, spreading underground root encapsulated the spiritual reality of the Maya-K'iche' in colonial highland Guatemala. It is a reality that continues today.

Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois

NÉSTOR QUIROA