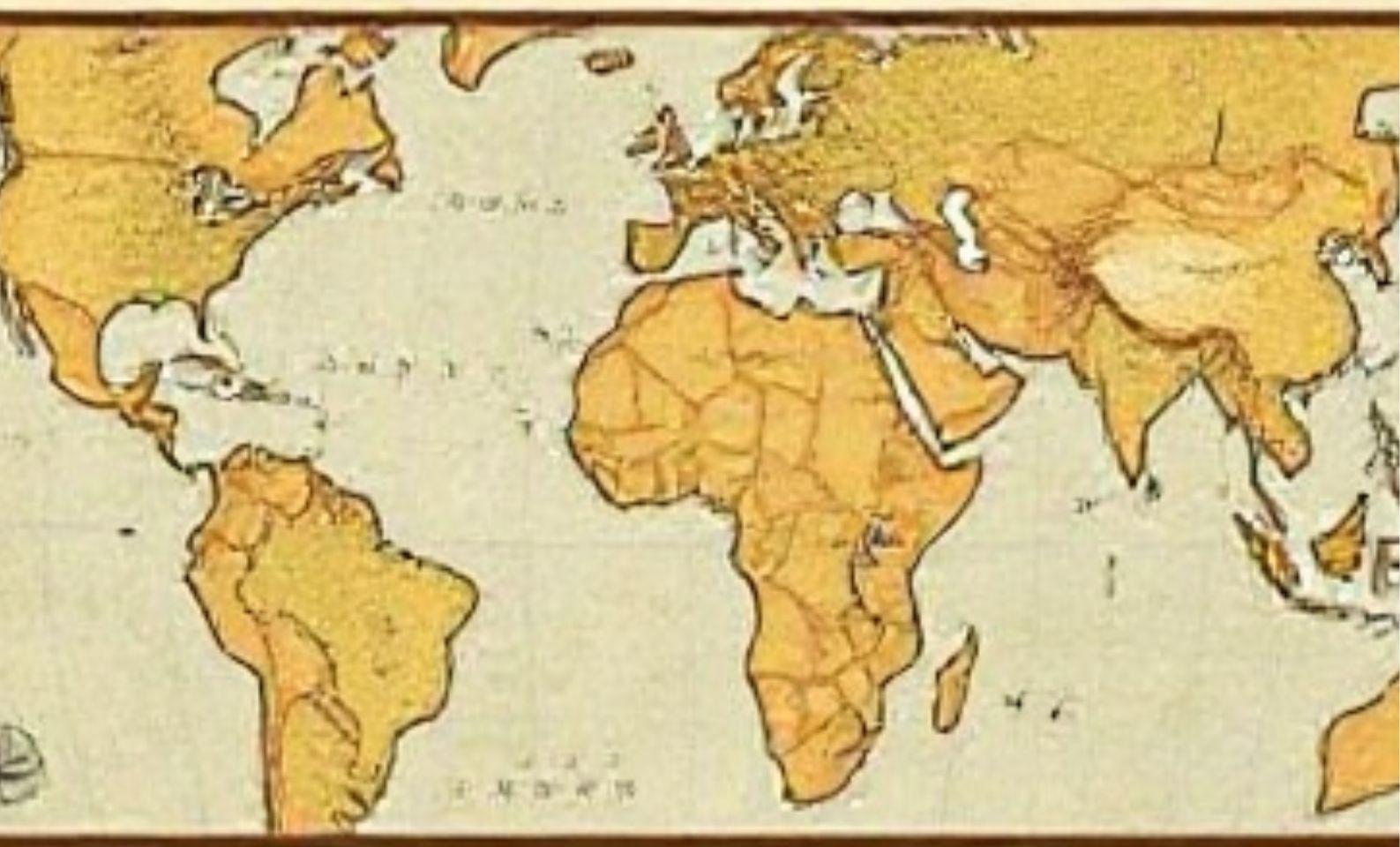


Chronicles of the New World



**A Natural and Moral
Account of the Americas**

The encounter between Europe and the Americas in the 16th century was one of the most transformative moments in world history. It reshaped both the Old World and the New, influencing culture, religion, science, and politics on a global scale. One of the most insightful texts from this period is José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*. Acosta, a Jesuit missionary and naturalist, sought to bridge the gap between Europe and the Americas by offering a comprehensive study of the New World's environment and peoples.

Chapter 1: The Author and His Time

José de Acosta was born in Spain in 1540 and joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1565. The Jesuits, dedicated to both education and missionary work, played a central role in the Christianization of the Americas. Acosta was sent to the New World in 1570, where he spent many years in Peru and Mexico. His experiences in these regions led him to write *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, a book that would become one of the most influential works on the Americas during the early colonial period. Acosta was deeply influenced by the Renaissance's humanist and scientific spirit. He believed that understanding the natural world and the peoples of the Americas was essential for both practical and religious purposes. His work reflects both a curiosity about the new lands and a desire to frame them within the European intellectual and moral tradition.

Chapter 2: Nature in the New World: A Scientific Inquiry

One of the primary concerns of *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* is the description of the natural world in the Americas. Acosta's approach was scientific for his time, aiming to categorize and explain the flora, fauna, geography, and climate of the New World. He observed phenomena such as the altitude of the Andes, volcanic activity, and the distinct seasonal patterns that differed from those in Europe. Acosta's observations of nature often reflected a desire to integrate the Americas into the European scientific worldview. For example, he speculated about the cause of the different climates in the Americas, considering theories that were influenced by classical and medieval knowledge, while still accounting for the new evidence he encountered. His discussion of the Andean mountain ranges, their height, and their effects on human and animal life are particularly notable as early contributions to geographic and environmental sciences.

Chapter 3: The Moral Dimension: Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism

Beyond the study of nature, Acosta's work delves into the "moral" aspects of the Americas—specifically the customs, religions, and governance of the Indigenous peoples. Acosta sought to understand these cultures, not merely to document them, but also to evaluate them from a Christian perspective. His work displays both an appreciation for the complexity of Indigenous societies and a strong belief in the superiority of European civilization and Christianity. One of Acosta's more controversial arguments is his idea of the "natural law" and its implications for Indigenous peoples. He categorized the Indigenous populations into three broad levels of civilization: those with a lack of political and religious structure (hunter-gatherers), those with organized societies but no written laws (such as the Mesoamerican cultures), and those with more sophisticated civilizations (such as the Inca and Aztec). This categorization provided a moral and intellectual justification for colonization, as it suggested that European intervention could "improve" the lives of Indigenous peoples by bringing them into alignment with European religious and cultural norms. Acosta also discussed the methods of evangelization in the Americas, offering a nuanced view of the challenges that missionaries faced. He recognized the deep-rooted belief systems of the Indigenous peoples and their resistance to conversion, which led him to argue for a more patient and respectful approach to spreading Christianity.

Chapter 4: Acosta's Legacy and Influence

The significance of *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* lies in its blend of observation, analysis, and moral reflection. It is a work that bridges the old and the new, Europe and the Americas, faith and reason. Acosta's writing helped shape European perceptions of the New World, influencing later explorers, naturalists, and philosophers. While his work contains many assumptions and biases typical of his time, Acosta's genuine curiosity and attempt to understand the Americas make *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* a remarkable early example of cross-cultural study. His influence can be seen in the development of natural history as a scientific discipline, as well as in the ongoing discussions about the morality of colonialism and cultural encounters.

José de Acosta: A Man of the Age of Exploration: José de Acosta was a Jesuit missionary and scholar whose work significantly impacted European understanding of the Americas. Born in Spain, Acosta entered the Society of Jesus in 1565. His early education and Jesuit training were deeply influenced by the Renaissance's emphasis on learning, science, and exploration. This intellectual climate, characterized by a burgeoning curiosity about the natural world and non-European cultures, framed Acosta's later work in the New World.

The Jesuit Mission and the Age of Discovery: Acosta's journey to the Americas began in 1570, a period of intense exploration and colonization. The Jesuits, known for their commitment to education and missionary work, were at the forefront of the Spanish Empire's efforts to evangelize the indigenous populations of the New World. Acosta's mission was not only to spread Christianity but also to understand and document the lands and peoples he encountered. During this era, Spain was a dominant global power, engaged in extensive colonial ventures.

The Spanish Empire was expanding its reach into the Americas, with territories stretching from the southern tip of South America to present-day southwestern United States. This expansion was driven by a mix of economic interests, religious fervor, and a quest for scientific knowledge. The Spanish Crown and the Church were eager to map and study the new lands, as they held both practical and theological significance.

Intellectual and Cultural Context: The late century was a period of profound transformation in European thought. The Renaissance had sparked a revival of classical learning and inquiry, emphasizing empirical observation and a systematic approach to knowledge. This intellectual climate was further enriched by the Age of Exploration, which opened new horizons and introduced Europeans to previously unknown regions and peoples. In this context, Acosta's work can be seen as a product of Renaissance humanism and scientific curiosity. His approach was influenced by the classical traditions of natural philosophy and the emerging scientific methods of the time. He sought to reconcile these new discoveries with established knowledge, presenting a framework that blended observation with moral and theological reflection.

Acosta's Perspective and Influences: Acosta's perspective was shaped by his Jesuit education and his experiences in the Americas. His work was characterized by a keen observational skill and a systematic approach to documenting the natural world. However, it was also marked by the biases of his time. His views on the Indigenous peoples were influenced by European notions of civilization and religion, which often led to a paternalistic and Eurocentric interpretation of Indigenous cultures. Despite these biases, Acosta's observations were groundbreaking. He documented a wide range of natural phenomena, including the geography, climate, flora, and fauna of the Americas. His descriptions were informed by both classical sources and his firsthand experiences, reflecting a complex interplay between tradition and innovation. Acosta's work was also influenced by earlier explorers and missionaries. His accounts built upon the knowledge of figures like Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, as well as the scientific and philosophical ideas of his contemporaries. His efforts to understand and describe the Americas were part of a broader European endeavor to integrate new knowledge into existing frameworks.

The Impact of Acosta's Work: José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* was published in and quickly gained recognition for its detailed and systematic approach to studying the New World. It was one of the earliest works to attempt a comprehensive description of the Americas from both a scientific and moral perspective. Acosta's contributions were significant for several reasons. First, his work provided valuable insights into the natural world of the Americas, including observations that would later influence scientific thinking. Second, his reflections on the Indigenous peoples offered a European perspective on the complexities of cultural encounters, shaping subsequent colonial policies and missionary strategies. Moreover, Acosta's work had a lasting impact on both European and American intellectual traditions. It influenced later explorers, naturalists, and scholars who sought to build upon his observations and integrate them into broader understandings of the world. His legacy is a testament to the ways in which knowledge, power, and cultural perspectives intersected during a pivotal period in history.

A Systematic Approach to New Discoveries: In *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, José de Acosta undertook a pioneering effort to document and understand the natural environment of the Americas. His observations were not merely descriptive; they were informed by a desire to categorize, analyze, and explain the diverse phenomena he encountered. This scientific approach was reflective of the Renaissance's burgeoning interest in empirical observation and the quest to integrate new knowledge into established frameworks. Acosta's work is notable for its systematic examination of various aspects of the New World's natural environment. He documented the geography, climate, flora, and fauna of the regions he explored, providing detailed descriptions that aimed to bridge the gap between European and American knowledge. His observations were based on both personal experience and the accounts of others, representing a blend of firsthand knowledge and inherited information.

Geographic and Climatic Observations: Acosta's interest in geography and climate was central to his scientific inquiry. He made detailed observations about the physical landscape of the Americas, including the towering Andes mountains, the vast Amazon rainforest, and the arid deserts of the southwestern United States. His descriptions of the Andes are particularly noteworthy; he remarked on the region's extreme altitude and its impact on both human health and agriculture. Acosta also explored the climate of the Americas, noting its variability and the ways it differed from European climates. He discussed phenomena such as the rainy and dry seasons, which were unfamiliar to Europeans. His observations on the relationship between altitude and climate were advanced for his time and demonstrated an early understanding of how geographic features influence weather patterns.

Flora and Fauna: An Early Natural History: Acosta's observations extended to the flora and fauna of the New World. He cataloged a wide range of plants and animals, including some that were entirely unknown to Europeans. His descriptions of tropical plants, such as cacao and tobacco, were among the first detailed accounts in European literature. Acosta noted the medicinal and economic value of these plants, reflecting an early appreciation for their significance. In terms of fauna, Acosta documented animals such as the jaguar, llama, and various species of birds and insects. His accounts were often filled with wonder and curiosity, reflecting his fascination with the diversity of life in the Americas.

However, his descriptions were sometimes limited by the scientific knowledge of the period and the challenges of accurately representing unfamiliar species.

The Andes and Volcanic Activity : One of Acosta's most significant contributions was his study of the Andes mountains and volcanic activity. He was among the first Europeans to provide a detailed account of the region's volcanic phenomena. Acosta observed the frequent eruptions and their impact on the surrounding environment. His descriptions of volcanic eruptions and the resulting changes to the landscape were informed by both observation and classical theories of natural history. Acosta's interest in volcanic activity also led him to speculate about the origins and causes of these phenomena. He debated various theories, including those related to the earth's internal heat and the influence of cosmic events. His speculations, while not always accurate by modern standards, represented an early attempt to understand the complex processes shaping the natural world.

Bridging the Old and New Worlds: Acosta's work reflects an attempt to reconcile new discoveries with established knowledge. He drew on classical sources, such as the works of Pliny the Elder and Aristotle, to frame his observations within a familiar intellectual context. At the same time, he integrated the new information he gathered from his experiences in the Americas. This synthesis of old and new knowledge was a hallmark of Renaissance scholarship. Acosta's efforts to incorporate his observations into existing scientific frameworks helped to shape the early understanding of the New World. His work served as a bridge between the classical traditions of natural history and the emerging empirical approaches of the early modern period.

Legacy and Impact: José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* was a groundbreaking work in the field of natural history. His systematic approach to documenting the Americas' natural environment provided a foundation for future explorers, scientists, and scholars. His observations contributed to a broader understanding of the New World and its place within the European intellectual tradition. Acosta's work influenced subsequent naturalists and geographers who sought to build upon his findings and explore the Americas further. His descriptions of the Andes, volcanic activity, and tropical flora and fauna were among the earliest attempts to systematically document these phenomena, and they laid the groundwork for later scientific inquiries. In revisiting Acosta's contributions, we gain insight into the early efforts to understand and document the natural world. His work reflects the curiosity and ambition of an era marked by exploration and discovery, as well as the challenges of integrating new knowledge into established intellectual frameworks.

Understanding Indigenous Cultures: In *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, José de Acosta presents a complex and multifaceted view of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. His work delves into their customs, beliefs, and social structures, reflecting both a genuine curiosity and the moral and religious biases of his time. Acosta's observations were not merely ethnographic; they were intertwined with his broader goals of evangelization and moral assessment. Acosta's descriptions of Indigenous societies reveal a range of cultural practices and social organizations. He categorized the Indigenous populations into different levels of civilization, from those he considered primitive to those with more advanced political and religious systems. This categorization, while reflecting his attempt to understand and document the diversity of Indigenous cultures, was also influenced by European notions of civilization and progress.

The Concept of "Natural Law": One of the central themes in Acosta's moral evaluation is the concept of "natural law." Acosta believed that all human societies were governed by a set of universal moral principles, which he identified as natural law. According to this view, the Indigenous peoples, despite their varied cultural practices, were still subject to the same moral standards that Acosta and other Europeans believed were inherent in all human beings. Acosta's application of natural law served to justify European intervention in the Americas. He argued that the Indigenous peoples, while possessing certain admirable qualities, were in need of moral and religious improvement. This perspective was part of a broader colonial ideology that framed the European mission as a benevolent effort to uplift and civilize Indigenous populations.

Indigenous Religions and Beliefs: Acosta's work offers detailed accounts of the religious practices and beliefs of various Indigenous cultures. He described the polytheistic religions of the Aztecs and Incas, including their rituals, deities, and sacred ceremonies. Acosta's descriptions were informed by his own Christian perspective, which often led him to interpret Indigenous religions through a lens of moral and theological comparison. For example, Acosta noted the complexity and richness of Indigenous religious practices but also criticized them for their lack of alignment with Christian doctrines. His accounts reflect a combination of admiration and disapproval, as he struggled to reconcile the apparent sophistication of Indigenous religions with his own religious beliefs.

Morality and Missionary Efforts: Acosta's moral evaluation of Indigenous societies was closely tied to his role as a Jesuit missionary. His primary goal was to evangelize and convert the Indigenous populations to Christianity. Acosta believed that the Christian faith would bring spiritual and moral enlightenment to the Indigenous peoples, whom he viewed as being in need of salvation. His writings on missionary efforts reveal the challenges faced by missionaries in their attempts to convert Indigenous populations. Acosta acknowledged the deep-rooted nature of Indigenous beliefs and the resistance encountered by missionaries. He advocated for a more respectful and patient approach to evangelization, recognizing the importance of understanding and engaging with Indigenous cultures rather than simply imposing Christian doctrines.

The Justification of Colonialism: Acosta's work reflects the broader colonial ideology that sought to justify European domination and colonization. By framing Indigenous societies as needing moral and religious improvement, Acosta and other Europeans provided a rationale for their colonial ventures. This justification was rooted in a belief in the superiority of European civilization and a paternalistic view of Indigenous peoples. Acosta's categorization of Indigenous societies into levels of civilization and his emphasis on the need for moral and religious reform were part of this broader colonial narrative. His work contributed to the intellectual framework that supported the Spanish Crown's policies and practices in the Americas.

Legacy and Critique: José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* is a significant work for understanding early European attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. While it provides valuable insights into the diversity of Indigenous cultures and the challenges of missionary work, it also reflects the biases and limitations of its time. Acosta's moral evaluations and justifications for colonialism have been subject to critique by modern scholars. His work is a reminder of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the encounter between European and Indigenous cultures. It highlights the ways in which colonial ideologies were constructed and the impact they had on both the colonizers and the colonized. Revisiting Acosta's work allows us to better understand the historical context of colonialism and its effects on Indigenous peoples. It also prompts reflection on the ways in which cultural encounters and moral judgments have shaped the course of history.

A Groundbreaking Contribution to Natural History: José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* stands as a seminal work in the history of natural science and ethnography. Published in it was one of the first comprehensive attempts to document and analyze the natural world and human cultures of the Americas from a European perspective. Acosta's meticulous observations and systematic approach provided a foundation for future exploration and study. Acosta's detailed descriptions of the Americas' geography, climate, flora, and fauna were groundbreaking. His work influenced subsequent naturalists and geographers by offering one of the earliest systematic accounts of the New World. His observations on the Andes, volcanic activity, and tropical ecosystems were particularly notable and contributed to the development of natural history as a scientific discipline.

Shaping European Understanding of the Americas: Acosta's work played a significant role in shaping European perceptions of the Americas. His detailed accounts of Indigenous cultures, while filtered through a Eurocentric and often paternalistic lens, provided Europeans with some of the earliest comprehensive descriptions of the New World's diverse peoples and customs. Acosta's descriptions of Indigenous religions, social structures, and daily life were among the first to reach a European audience, influencing both scholarly and popular views. His work also helped to frame the intellectual and moral context of European colonialism. By categorizing Indigenous societies and advocating for their moral and religious improvement, Acosta contributed to the broader colonial ideology that justified European domination and evangelization. His perspectives were part of a larger discourse that shaped colonial policies and missionary strategies.

Influence on Subsequent Explorers and Scholars: Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* had a lasting impact on explorers, naturalists, and scholars who followed in his footsteps. His observations provided valuable insights for later European expeditions and studies. Explorers and scientists who ventured into the Americas built upon Acosta's descriptions, using them as a reference for their own observations and inquiries. Notable figures such as the botanist Francisco Hernández and the naturalist and explorer José Celestino Mutis were influenced by Acosta's work. Hernández, who conducted an extensive study of Mexican flora, drew upon Acosta's descriptions of plants and ecosystems. Mutis, known for his work on the flora of New Granada (modern-day Colombia), also acknowledged the contributions of early scholars like Acosta in shaping his own research.

Contributions to Ethnography and Cultural Studies: Acosta's work laid important groundwork for the field of ethnography and cultural studies. His efforts to document and understand Indigenous cultures were among the earliest attempts to systematically study non-European societies. While his work was influenced by his own cultural and religious biases, it represented a significant early effort to engage with and record the complexities of Indigenous life. His observations and categorizations of Indigenous societies contributed to the development of ethnographic methodologies. Although modern ethnography has evolved significantly since Acosta's time, his work remains a foundational text for understanding the early European approach to studying and interpreting Indigenous cultures.

Critiques and Reassessments: In contemporary scholarship, Acosta's work is recognized for both its contributions and its limitations. While his observations were pioneering, they were also shaped by the biases and assumptions of his time. Modern scholars critique Acosta's Eurocentric views and the ways in which his work justified colonialism and missionary efforts. His categorizations of Indigenous societies and his moral evaluations reflect a perspective that often devalued Indigenous cultures and justified European intervention. Reassessing Acosta's legacy involves recognizing the complexities of his contributions while also critically examining the context in which he wrote. His work is a product of its time, reflecting both the intellectual curiosity of the Renaissance and the colonial ideologies of the period. Understanding Acosta's legacy requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges his achievements while also critiquing the ethical and moral implications of his perspectives.

Enduring Impact and Legacy: José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* continues to be a significant text in the study of early modern science, exploration, and colonialism.

Its impact on natural history, ethnography, and European understanding of the Americas highlights the enduring relevance of Acosta's work. By bridging the gap between Europe and the New World, Acosta's contributions have left a lasting mark on both scientific and cultural histories. As scholars revisit Acosta's work, they engage with its historical significance and its role in shaping the intellectual and moral frameworks of the early modern period. His legacy is a testament to the complexities of cultural encounters and the ways in which knowledge, power, and ideology intersected during a pivotal era in global history.

Es la soberbia del demonio tan grande y tan porfiada, que siempre apetece y procura ser tenido y honrado por Dios: y en todo cuanto puede hurtar y apropiar á si lo que solo al altísimo Dios es debido, no cesa de hacerlo en las ciegas naciones del mundo, á quien no ha esclarecido aun la luz y resplandor del santo Evangelio. De este tan soberbio tirano leemos en Job, que pone sus ojos en lo más alto; y que entre todos los hijos de soberbia él es el Rey.

Sus dañados intentos y traicion tan atrevida, con que pretendió igualar su trono con el de Dios, bien claro nos lo refieren las divinas Escrituras, diciéndole en Isaías : Decías entre tí mismo: Subiré hasta el Cielo, pondré mi silla sobre todas las estrellas de Dios, me sentaré en la cumbre del Testamento, en las faldas de Aquilón, pasará la alteza de las nubes, seré semejante al Altísimo. Y en Ezequiel: Elevóse tu corazon, y dijiste: Dios soy yo, y en silla de Dios me he sentado en medio de el mar.

Este tan malvado apetito de hacerse Dios, todavía le dura á Satanás; y aunque el castigo justo y severo de el muy Alto le quitó toda la pompa y lozanía, por donde se engrío tanto, tratándole como merecía su descortesía y locura, como en los mismos Profetas largamente se prosigue; pero no por eso aflojó un punto su perversa intención, la cual muestra por todas las vias que puede, como perro rabioso, mordiendo la misma espada con que le hieren . Porque la soberbia, como está escrito, de los que aborrecen á Dios, porfia siempre.

De aquí procede el perpetuo y extraño cuidado, que este enemigo de Dios ha tenido siempre de hacerse adorar de los hombres, inventando tantos géneros de idolatrías, con que tantos tiempos tuvo sujeta la mayor parte del mundo, que apenas le quedó á Dios un rincón de su pueblo Israél . Y con la misma tiranía, después que el fuerte del Evangelio le venció, y desarmó y entró por la fuerza de la Cruz las mas importantes y poderosas plazas de su Reyno, acometió las gentes más remotas y bárbaras, procurando conservar entre ellas la falsa y mentida divinidad que el Hijo de Dios le había quitado en su Iglesia, encerrándole como á fiera, en jaula, para que fuese para escarnio suyo y regocijo de sus siervos, como lo significa por Job .

Mas en fin, ya que la idolatría fue extirpada de la mejor y mas noble parte del mundo, retiróse á lo mas apartado, y reinó en estotra parte del mundo, que aunque en nobleza muy inferior, en grandeza y anchura no lo es. Las causas porque el demonio tanto ha esforzado la idolatría en toda infidelidad, que apenas se hallan gentes que no sean idólatras, y los motivos para esto, principalmente son dos.

Uno es, el que está tocado de su increíble soberbia, la cual, quien quisiere bien ponderar, considere que al mismo Hijo de Dios y Dios verdadero acometió, con decirle tan desvergonzadamente , que se postrase ante él y le adoráse; y esto le dijo, aunque no sabiendo de cierto que era el mismo Dios; pero teniendo por lo menos grandes barruntos de que fuese Hijo de Dios. ¿A quién no asombrará tan extraño acometimiento? ¿Una tan excesiva y tan crueль soberbia? ¿Qué mucho que se haga adorar de gentes ignorantes por Dios el que al mismo Dios acometió, con hacersele Dios, siendo una tan sucia y abominable criatura?

Otra causa y motivo de idolatría es el odio mortal y enemistad que tiene con los hombres. Porque como dice el Salvador : Desde el principio fué homicida, y eso tiene por condicion y propiedad inseparable de su maldad. Y porque sabe que el mayor daño del hombre es adorar por Dios á la criatura, por eso no cesa de inventar modos de idolatría con que destruir los hombres y hacerlos enemigos de Dios.

Y son dos los males que hace el demonio al idólatra: uno que niega á su Dios, segun aquello : Al Dios que te crió desamparaste: otro que se sujeta á cosa mas baja que él, porque todas las criaturas son inferiores á la racional: y el demonio, aunque en la naturaleza es superior al hombre, pero en el estado es muy inferior, pues el hombre en esta vida es capaz de la vida divina y eterna. Y así por todas partes con la idolatría Dios es deshonrado y el hombre destruído; y por ambas vias el demonio soberbio y envidioso muy contento.

De los géneros de idolatrías que han usado los Indios. La idolatría, dice el Sábio, y por él el Espíritu Santo , que es causa y principio y fin de todos los males; y por eso el enemigo de los hombres ha multiplicado tantos géneros y suertes de idolatría, que pensar de contarlos por menudo, es cosa infinita.

Pero reduciendo la idolatría á cabezas, hay dos linajes de ella: una es cerca de cosas naturales: otra cerca de cosas imaginadas ó fabricadas por invención humana. La primera de estas se parte en dos, porque, ó la cosa que se adora es general, como Sol, Luna, fuego, tierra, elementos: ó es particular, como tal río, fuente, ó árbol ó monte, y cuando no por su especie, sino en particular son adoradas estas cosas: y este género de idolatría se usó en el Perú en grande exceso, y se llama propiamente Guaca.

El segundo género de idolatría, que pertenece á invención ó ficción humana, tiene también otras dos diferencias: una de lo que consiste en pura arte é invención humana, como es adorar ídolos ó estatuas de palo, ó de piedra ó de oro, como de Mercurio ó Palas, que fuera de aquella pintura ó escultura, ni es nada, ni fué nada. Otra diferencia es, de lo que realmente fué y es algo; pero no lo que finge el idólatra que lo adora, como los muertos ó cosas suyas, que por vanidad y lisonja adoran los hombres. De suerte, que por todas contamos cuatro maneras de idolatría que usan los infieles; y de todas convendrá decir algo.

Que en los Indios hay algún conocimiento de Dios. Primeramente, aunque las tinieblas de la infidelidad tienen obscurecido el entendimiento de aquellas naciones, en muchas cosas no deja la luz de la verdad y razón algún tanto de obrar en ellos: y así comúnmente sienten y confiesan un supremo Señor y Hacedor de todo, al cual los del Perú llamaban Viracocha, y le ponían nombre de gran excelencia, como Pachacamac ó Pachayachachic, que es criador del Cielo y tierra, y Usapu, que es admirable, y otros semejantes.

A éste hacían adoración, y era el principal que veneraban mirando al Cielo. Y lo mismo se halla en su modo en los de Méjico, y hoy día en los Chinos y en otros infieles. Que es muy semejante á lo que refiere el libro de los Actos de los Apóstoles, haber hallado San Pablo en Aténas, donde vió un altar intitulado: Ignoto Deo: al Dios no conocido. De donde tomó el Apóstol ocasión de su predicación, diciéndoles: Al que vosotros veneráis sin conocerle, ese es el que yo os predico. Y así al mismo modo, los que hoy día predicán el Evangelio á los Indios no hallan mucha dificultad en persuadirles, que hay un supremo Dios y Señor de todo, y que éste es el Dios de los Cristianos, y el verdadero Dios.

Aunque es cosa que mucho me ha maravillado, que con tener esta noticia que digo, no tuviesen vocablo propio para nombrar á Dios. Porque si queremos en lengua de Indios hallar vocablo que responda á éste, Dios, como en latín responde Deus, y en griego Theos, y en hebreo El, y en arábigo Alá, no se halla en lengua del Cuzco, ni en lengua de Méjico; por donde los que predicán ó escriben para Indios, usan el mismo nuestro Español, Dios, acomodándose en la pronunciación y declaración á la propiedad de las lenguas Indias, que son muy diversas. De donde se ve, cuan corta y flaca noticia tenían de Dios, pues aun nombrarle no saben sino por nuestro vocablo.

Pero en efecto no dejaban de tener alguna tal cual; y así le hicieron un templo riquísimo en el Perú, que llamaban el Pachámac, que era el principal Santuario de aquel Reino. Y como está dicho, es lo mismo Pachacamac, que el Criador: aunque también en este templo ejercitaban sus idolatrías, adorando al Demonio y figuras suyas. Y también hacían al Viracocha sacrificios y ofrendas, y tenía el supremo lugar entre los adoratorios que los Reyes Incas tuvieron. Y el llamar á los Españoles viracochas, fué de aquí, por tenerlos en opinión de hijos del Cielo y como divinos, al modo que los otros atribuyeron deidad á Paulo y á Bernabé, llamando al uno Júpiter, y al otro Mercurio, é intentando de ofrecerles sacrificio como á Dioses.

Y al mismo tono los otros bárbaros de Melite, que es Malta, viendo que la víbora no hacía mal al Apóstol, le llamaban Dios. Pues como sea verdad tan conforme á toda buena razón haber un Soberano Señor y Rey del Cielo, lo cual los Gentiles, con todas sus idolatrías é infidelidad, no negaron, como parece así en la Filosofía del Timéo de Platón, y de la Metafísica de Aristóteles, y Asclepio de Trismegisto, como también en las Poesías de Homero y de Virgilio. De aquí es, que en asentar y persuadir esta verdad de un supremo Dios, no padecen mucha dificultad los predicadores Evangélicos, por bárbaras y bestiales que sean las naciones á quien predicán.

Pero les es dificultosísimo de desarrigar de sus entendimientos, que ninguno otro Dios hay, ni otra deidad hay sino uno; y que todo lo demás no tiene propio poder, ni propio ser, ni propia operación, más de lo que les da, y comunica aquél supremo y solo Dios y Señor. Y esto es sumamente necesario persuadirles por todas vías, reprobando sus errores en universal, de adorar más de un Dios. Y mucho más en particular, de tener por Dioses, y atribuir deidad, y pedir favor á otras cosas que no son Dioses, ni pueden nada, más de lo que el verdadero Dios, Señor y Hacedor suyo les concede.