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Joseph de Acosta

Excerpt

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A Prologue to the Bookes following.

Having intreated of the Natural History of the Indies, I will hereafter discourse of the Morall History, that is to say of the deeds and customes of the Indians. For after the heaven, the temperature, the scituation, and the qualities of the new world; after the elements and mixtures—I mean mettals, plants, and beasts, whereof we have spoken in the former Bookes, as occasion did serve; both Order and Reason doth invite vs to continue and vndertake the discourse of those men which inhabite the new world. And therefore I pretend in the following bookes to speake what I thinke worthie of this subiect. And for that the intention of this Historie is not onely to give knowledge of what hath passed at the Indies, but also to continue this knowledge, to the fruite we may gather by it, which is to helpe this people for their soules health, and to glorifie the Creator and Redeemer, who hath drawne them from the obscure darkenes of their infidelitie, and imparted vnto them the admirable light of his Gospel. And therefore I will first speake in these bookes following what concernes their religion or superstition, their customes, their idolatries, and their sacrifices; and after, what concernes their policie

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and government, their lawes, customes, and their deedes. And for that the memorie is preserved amongst the Mexicaine Nation, of their beginnings, successions, warres, and other things worthie the relation; besides that which shall be handled in the sixt booke, I will make a peculiar Discourse in the seventh, shewing the disposition and forewarnings this Nation had of the new Kingdome of Christ our Lord, which should be extended in these Countries, and should conquer them to himselfe, as he hath done in all the rest of the world. The which in truth is a thing worthie of great consideration, to see how the divine providence hath appointed that the light of his word should finde a passage in the furthest boundes of the world. It is not my proiect at this time to write what the Spaniardes have done in those partes, for there are bookes enow written vpon this subiect, nor yet how the Lordes servants have laboured and profited, for that requires a new labour. I will onely content my selfe to plant this Historie and relation at the doores of the Gospel, seeing it is already entered, and to make knowne the Naturall and Morall things of the Indies, to the end that Christianitie may be planted and augmented, as it is expounded at large in the bookes we have written, *De procuranda Indiorum salute*. And if any one wonder at some fashions and customes of the Indies, and wil scorne them as fooles, or abhorre them as divelish and inhumane people, let him remember that the same things, yea, worse, have beene seene amongst the Greekes and Romans, who have commanded the whole world, as we may easily vnder-

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stand, not onely of our Authors, as Eusebius of Cesarea, Clement of Alexandria, and others, but also of their owne, as Plinie, Dionysius of Halicarnaus, and Plutarke: for the Prince of darkness being the head of all Infidelitie, it is no new thing to finde among Infidells, cruelties, filthines, and follies fit for such a master. And although the ancient Gentiles have farre surpassed these of the new world in valour and naturall knowledge, yet may wee observe many things in them woorthie the remembrance. But to conclude, they shew to be barbarous people, who being deprived of the supernaturall light, want likewise philosophie and natural knowledge.

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THE FIFT BOOKE

Of the Naturall and Morall Historie of the Indies.

CHAP. I.—*That the Pride and Malice of the Divell hath
bene the cause of Idolatrie.*

LIB. v. THE Pride and Presumption of the Divell is so great and obstinate that alwaies hee seekes and strives to be honoured as God, and doth arrogate to himselfe all hee can, whatsoever doth appertaine to the most high God, hee ceaseth not to abuse the blinde Nations of the world vpon whom the cleere light of the holy Gospel hath not yet shone.

Job xli. Wee read in Job of this prouwd tyrant, who setteth his eyes aloft, and amongst all the sons of pride, he is the King. The holy Scripture instructes vs plainely of his vile intentions, and his overweening treason, whereby he hath pretended to make his Throne equall vnto Gods, saying in

Isaiah xiv. Isaiah, “Thou diddest say within thy selfe, I will mount vp to heaven and set my chaire vpon all the starres of heaven, and I will sit vpon the toppe of the Firmament, and in the sides of the North, I will ascend above the height of the cloudes, and will be like to the most high.” And in

Ezek. xxviii. Ezekiel, “Thy heart was lifted up, and thou hast said, I am God, and have set in the chaire of God in the midst of the sea.” Thus doth Satan continually persist in this wicked desire to make himselfe God. And although the iust and severe chastisement of the most high hath spoiled him of all his pompe and beautie, which made him grow prouwd, being intreated as his felonie and indiscretion had

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deserved, as it is written by the same Prophets; yet hath LIB. v.
 he left nothing of his wickedness and perverse practises, the which he hath made manifest by all meanes possible, like a mad dogge that bites the sword wherewith he is strucken. For as it is written, the pride of such as hate God doth alwaies increase. Hence comes the continuall and strange care which this enemie of God hath alwaies had to make him to be worshipt of men, inventing so many kinds of Idolatries, whereby he hath so long held the grettest part of the world in subiection, so as there scarce remains any one corner for God and his people of Israel. And since Mart. xii.
 the power of the Gospel hath vanquished and disarmed him, and that by the force of the Crosse, hee hath broken and ruined the most important and puissant places of his kingdome with the like tyrannie, hee hath begunne to assaile the barbarous people and nations farthest off, striving to maintaine amongst them his false and lying divinitie, the which the Sonne of God had taken from him in his Church, tying him with chaines as in a cage or prison, like a furious beast, to his great confusion, and reiocyng of the servants of God, as he doth signify in Iob.

But in the end, although idolatrie had beene rooted out of the best and most notable partes of the worlde, yet he hath retired himself into the most remote parts, and hath ruled in that other part of the worlde which, although it be much inferiour in nobilitie, yet is it not of less compasse. There are two causes and chiefe motives for the which the divell hath so much laboured to plant idolatry and all infidelity, so as you shall hardly finde any Nation where there is not some markes thereof. The one is this great presumption and pride, which is such, that whoso would consider how hee durst affront the very Sonne of God, and true God, in saying impudently, that he should fall downe and worship him; the which he did, although he knew not certainly that this was the very God, yet had he some Mat. iv.

LIB. v. opinion that it was the Sonne of God. A most cruell and horrible pride to dare thus impudently affront his God. Truly wee shall not finde it very strange that hee makes himselfe to be worshipped as God by ignorant Nations, seeing hee would seeke to be worshipped by God himselfe, calling himselfe God, being an abhominable and detestable creature. The other cause and motive of idolatrie is the mortall hatred he hath conceived for ever against mankinde. For as our Saviour saith, hee hath beene a murderer from the beginning, and holdes it as a condition and inseparable qualitie of his wickednesse. And for that hee knowes the greatest misery of man is to worship the creature for God; for this reason hee never leaves to invent all sortes of Idolatries to destroy man and make him ennemy to God. There are two mischiefes which the divell causeth in idolatry: the one, that hee denies his God, according to Deut. xxxii. the text, "Thou hast left thy God who created thee"; the other is, that hee doth subiect himselfe to a thing baser than himselfe; for that all creatures are inferior to the reasonable, and the divell, although hee be superior to man in nature, yet in estate he is much inferior, seeing that man in this life is capable of Divinitie and Eternitie. By this meanes God is dishonoured, and man lost in all parts by idolatry, wherewith the divell in his pride is well content.

CHAP. II.—*Of many kindes of idolatry the Indians have used.*

Sap. xiv. Idolatry, saith the Holy-Ghost by the Wise man, is the cause, beginning, and end of all miseries; for this cause the enemy of mankinde hath multiplied so many sortes and diversities of idolatry, as it were an infinite matter to specifie them all. Yet we may reduce idolatry to two heades, the one grounded vpon naturall things, the other vpon

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things imagined and made by mans invention. The first is divided into two; for eyther the thing they worship is generall, as the Sunne, Moone, Fire, Earth, and Elements, or else it is particular, as some certayne river, fountaine, tree, or forrest, when these things are not generally worshipped in their kindes, but onely in particular. In this first kind of idolatry they have exceeded in Peru, and they properly call it Huaca. The second kinde of idolatry, which depends on mans inventions and fictions, may likewise be divided into two sortes, one which regards onely the pure arte and invention of man, as to adore the images or statues of gold, wood, or stone, of Mercury or Pallas, which neyther are, nor ever were any thing else but the bare pictures; and the other that concernes that which really hath beene, and is in trueth the same thing, but not such as idolatry faines, as the dead, or some things proper vnto them, which men worshippe through vanitie and flatterie, so as we reduce all to foure kindes of idolatry, which the infidells vse; of all which it behooveth us to speake something.

LIB. V.

CHAP. III.—*That the Indians have some knowledge of God.*

First, although the darknesse of infidelitie holdeth these Nations in blindenesse, yet in many thinges the light of truth and reason works somewhat in them. And they commonly acknowledge a supream Lord and Author of all things, which they of Peru called Viracocha,¹ and gave him names of great excellence, as Pachacamac, or Pachayachachic,² which is the Creator of heaven and earth: and Vsapu,³

¹ See *G. de la Vega* (ii, p. 66) for the meaning of the word *Viracocha*, properly, *Uira-ccocho*.

² *Pachacamac*, Creator of the World. *Pachayachachic*, Teacher of the World.

³ *Sapay*, Only.

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Acts xvii.

which is admirable, and other like names. Him they did worship, as the chiefest of all, whom they did honour in beholding the heaven. The like wee see amongst them of Mexico and China, and all other infidelles. Which accordeth well with that which is saide of Saint Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, where hee did see the Inscription of an Altare, *Ignoto Deo*—To the vnknown God. Wherevpon the Apostle tooke occasion to preach unto them, saying, “He whome you worship without knowing, him doe I preach vnto you”. In like sort, those which at this day do preach the Gospel to the Indians find no great difficultie to perswade them that there is a high God and Lord over all, and that this is the Christians God and the true God. And yet it hath caused great admiration in me, that although they had this knowledge, yet had they no proper name for God. If wee shall seeke into the Indian tongue for a word to answer to this name of God, as in Latin, *Deus*, in Greeke, *Theos*, in Hebrew, *El*, in Arabike, *Alla*; but wee shall not finde any in the Cuscan or Mexicaine tongues. So as such as preach or write to the Indians vse our Spanish name *Dios*, fitting it to the accent or pronounciation of the Indian tongues, the which differ much, whereby appeares the small knowledge they had of God, seeing they cannot so much as name him, if it be not by our very name: yet in trueth they had some little knowledge, and therefore in Peru they made him a rich temple, which they called Pachacamac, which was the principall Sanctuarie of the realme. And as it hath been saide, this word of Pachacamac is, as much to say, as the Creator, yet in this temple they vsed their idolatries, worshipping the divell and figures. They likewise made sacrifices and offerings to Viracocha, which held the chiefe place amongst the worships which the Kings Yncas made. Heereof they called the Spaniards Virocochas, for that they holde opinion they are the sonnes of heaven, and divine; even as others did attribute a deitie to Paul and Barnabas,

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calling the one Iupiter, and the other Mercurie, so woulde they offer sacrifices vnto them, as vnto gods: and as the Barbarians of Melita (which is Malta), seeing that the viper did not hurt the Apostle, they called him God. Lib. v. Acts xviii.

As it is therefore a trueth, conformable to reason, that there is a soveraigne Lorde and King of heaven, whome the Gentiles, with all their infidelities and idolatries, have not denied, as wee see in the Philosophy of Timæus in Plato, in the Metaphisickes of Aristotle, and in the Asclepio of Tresmigister, as also in the Poesies of Homer and Virgil. Therefore the Preachers of the Gospel have no great difficultie to plant and perswade this truth of a supreame God, be the Nations of whome they preach never so barbarous and brutish. But it is hard to roote out of their mindes that there is no other God, nor any other deitie then one; and that all other things of themselves have no power, being not workeing proper to themselves, but what the great and onely God and Lord doth give and impart vnto them. To conclude, it is necessarie to perswade them by all meanes in reprovng their errors, as well in that wherein they generally fail in worshipping more then one God, as in particular (which is much more), to hold for Gods, and to demand favour and helpe of those things which are not Gods, nor have any power, but what the true God their Lord and Creator hath given them. Pla. in Tim. Arist., c. vti. 12. metaph. Tresmest. in Pimandro. and Asclepio.

CHAP. IV.—*Of the first kinde of Idolatrie, vpon naturall and universall things.*

Next to Viracocha, or their supreme God, that which most commonly they have and do adore amongst the Infidells is the Sunne; and, after, those things which are most remarkable in the celestiall or elementarie nature, as the

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moone, starres, sea, and land. The Huacas, or Oratories, which the Yncas Lords of Peru had in greatest reverence next to Viracocha and the sunne, was the thunder, which they called by three divers names, Chuquilla, Catuilla, and Intiillapa,¹ supposing it to bee a man in heaven, with a sling and a mace, and that it is in his power to cause raine, haile, thunder, and all the rest that appertaines to the region of the aire, where the cloudes engender. It was a Huaca (for so they called the Oratories) generall to all the Indians of Peru, offering vnto him many sacrifices; and in Cuzco, which is the Court and Metropolitane Cittie, they did sacrifice children vnto him, as to the Sunne. They did worship these three, Viracocha, the Sunne, and Thunder, after another maner than all the rest, as Polo² writes, who had made triall thereof, they did put as it were a gauntlet or glove vpon their hands when they did lift them vp to worshippe them. They did worshippe the earth, which they called Pachamama, as the Ancients did the goddesse Tellus; and the sea likewise, which they call Mamacocha, as the Ancients worshipped Thetis or Neptune. Moreover, they did worship the rainebow, which were the armes and blazons of the Ynca, with two snakes stretched out on either side. Amongst the starres they all did commonly worship that which they called Colca, and we heere the little goats.³ They did attribute divers offices to divers starres, and those which had neede of their favour did worship them, as the shepheard did sacrifice to a star which they called vrcuchillay, which they holde to be a sheepe of divers colours, having the care to preserve their cattell. It is understood to be that which the Astronomers call Lyra. These shepherds worshippe two other starres, which walke neere vnto them, they call them Catuchillay

Yllapa is thunder in Quichua. *Chuqui-ylla* was the name of the God of Thunder. *Inti-yllapa*, the Sun's thunder.

² Polo de Ondegardo.

³ The Plaiades.