Gregory J. Shepherd

José de Acosta's De procuranda Indorum salute. A Call for Evangelical Reforms in Colonial Peru. Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures, volume 231. New York: Peter Lang, 2014. Pp. 110. Hb, \$72.95.

The Society of Jesus, its members, and the works they composed in different parts of the world are an ongoing source of inspiration for scholars, even for those outside the field of Jesuit studies. Gregory J. Shepherd's *José de Acosta's De procuranda Indorum salute. A Call for Evangelical Reforms in Colonial Peru* is a case in point: Shepherd takes as the subject of his brief book *De procuranda Indorum salute* (1588), by the Jesuit José de Acosta (1540–1600), here defined as a missionary manual.

In the introduction, Shepherd proposes analyzing *De procuranda* from a literary perspective, by examining what he considers its three main components: the subtext, the prologues, and the intertext. At the same time, he also acknowledges the importance of examining *De procuranda* in a multi-faceted context, including the influences of Renaissance Spain, early colonial Latin America, and the Peruvian viceroyalty, to assess Acosta's reforms to evangelization in colonial Peru.

In the first chapter, which briefly analyzes six books that inform *De procuranda*, the author presents the conflictive Andean context for Acosta's aim to change "the different segments of colonial society that had been hindering the evangelical process" (26). The parish priests' lack of preparation—unable to proselytize the Amerindians because of unfamiliarity with local languages—their exploitation of the local populations, the *mita* (the colonial policy of forced labor), and the *encomienda* system (grants of indigenous towns to the first conquistadors, who exacted taxes and labor from the Indians in return for military protection and religious instruction) were all obstacles to peaceful evangelization.

In a sub-section entitled "Toledo's Parroquia system vs. Acosta's Missions" (38–40), Shepherd also refers to the uncompromising attitude of Viceroy Toledo regarding missionary methods during Acosta's sojourn in Peru, a topic he returns to in the last pages (81–82). Here we encounter terminological and conceptual imprecisions, which give a mistaken view of Acosta's—and the Society's—choices of missionary methods. The term *doctrinas de indios* is used by Acosta and the Jesuits in Peru in their correspondence, among other sources, to refer to a pre-existing evangelization method imposed on them by Toledo. It became controversial because it represented an assault on the Jesuits' mobility, in its requirement of that the Jesuits stay in the *doctrinas* for considerable periods. Although in *De procuranda* Acosta mainly uses

the term *parroquias de indios*—parishes, a less conflictive mode of organization for the indoctrination of the Indians by secular clergy—he still acknowledges that they belong to “the type of *doctrinas*, as they call it” (v, 575). He then expresses a preference for the method of the more itinerant missions (*misiones*), which he promoted, as Shepherd states. Despite this, in *De procuranda* Acosta makes it clear that he is willing to compromise on the *doctrinas de indios*; in 1576, as provincial in Peru he accepted the *doctrina* in Juli, which continued to divide the Jesuits in Peru. Yet Shepherd confusingly states, “the best example of Acosta’s mission system in action was the parish of Juli” (39–40).

There are other problems with Shepherd’s analysis of Acosta’s calls for reform in Peru. Surprisingly, when the author details the context of Acosta’s evangelical reforms, one cannot but notice the total absence of an indisputable watershed in the history of early modern Catholicism (and a major influence on *De procuranda*): namely, the Council of Trent and the controversies it engendered. *De procuranda* was an early attempt—the decrees reached Lima in October 1565—to adapt Tridentine Catholicism to Andean soil, after more than four decades of missionary work by other religious orders. For Acosta, Tridentine precepts were essential for the achievement of the overarching goal of the *Indias Occidentales*: the salvation of the native peoples—as the title of Acosta’s first work in Latin, *De procuranda Indorum salute*, indicates. The introduction of the doctrines of the faith, with a particular emphasis on the mystery of Christ himself, and the administration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist—essential for the salvation of the Indians and one of the most important ministries of the Society—were thoroughly dealt with in the last books of *De procuranda*, with Trent cited as the highest authority.

Keen though Shepherd is to analyze the contemporary debates in which Acosta was involved, he misses one of the main contentions of *De procuranda*: the dismissal of previous missionary approaches—encouraged by the First Lima Council (1551–52) and especially by the Dominicans—as insufficiently addressing the conundrum of the salvation of the Amerindians through natural law and implicit faith in Christ. This does not mean, as Shepherd would have it, that Acosta did not recognize the aforementioned obstacles to evangelization, which men like Las Casas had denounced before—yet, these issues, which the Society of Jesus had been purposefully summoned to deal with, seem to be absent from Shepherd’s analysis.

A second chapter is dedicated to the prologues to *De procuranda*, particularly the *Dedicatoria* and the *Proemio*. These are presented as “Renaissance prologues,” which attempt to promote and authorize the texts and their associ-

ated institutions—as can be seen in Acosta’s dedication to Superior General Everard Mercurian, conceived by Shepherd as a prologue that ‘reads’ *De procuranda* for Mercurian. Shepherd claims that the *Dedicatoria* and the *Proemio* are structured according to the four Aristotelian causes, introducing the reader to the “purpose, justification, and substance of the work” (58).

In a third and last chapter, Shepherd provides an intertextual analysis, discourses in *De procuranda*: 1) classical sources; 2) scriptural and patristic sources; 3) preaching and missionary manuals from the early Middle Ages to the Renaissance; 4) treatises by Acosta’s contemporaries, including Juan López de Palacios Rubios, Francisco de Vitoria, Melchior Cano, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda; and 5) writings commissioned by Viceroy Toledo, or related to his policies, such as those of Juan de Matienzo, Sarmiento de Gamboa, and Polo de Ondegardo.

An intertextual approach to *De procuranda*, a complex work by an accomplished theologian, should indeed be celebrated. However, one cannot help but notice the scantness of primary sources and secondary literature to sustain the analysis, resulting in a simplified view of Acosta’s efforts to redefine both the doctrinal contents and means of salvation of the Indians on Andean soil in the Tridentine era. Shepherd concludes that intertextual analysis offers a better understanding of Acosta’s “way of reading the evangelical crisis in Peru and his emerging vision of a better evangelical future,” constructing “an environment where evangelization could be most productive” (85). The major absences and misconceptions in Shepherd’s analysis of *De procuranda*—from doctrinal and theological problems to the solutions proposed for the missionary practices—are not mere subtleties for the specialist. On the contrary, they could help the non-specialist reader understand the originality of *De procuranda*, reflecting the new conundrums that arose after more than four decades of evangelization in Peru. These are essential to the main issue that Shepherd aims to address, as expressed in his title: Acosta’s call for evangelical reforms in colonial Peru.

Ana Carolina Hosne

University of Heidelberg

ana.hosne@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de

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