

'Mission' in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed by Karla Pollman, Arnoud Vissier, Peter Liebrechts et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.1407-1412.

### *Mission*

Mission, as we understand the term today, did not really begin in a systematic way until the sixteenth century. With the so-called discovery of the 'New World' by Christopher Columbus and its subsequent partitioning between Spain and Portugal by Pope Alexander VI's *Bull of Donation* in 1493, followed shortly after by the 'discoveries' and conquests of Mexico (1519-21) and Peru (1529-36), the idea of M. as laid down by scripture (Matt. 28:19) took on a new and urgent significance. With the discovery of the Mesoamerican mainland and its densely populated and advanced civilisations, any notion that the Gospel had already been preached to the world by the apostles was increasingly and convincingly called into question. To counter this, theories that the disciple St Thomas had reached the Americas and that his teachings had been largely forgotten were developed during the sixteenth century and linked to appropriate indigenous myths (such as the legend of Quetzalcoatl in Mesoamerica, and Tunupa in the Andes), but these hypotheses were discarded by the most influential missionary writers of the period (amongst whom the Jesuit José de Acosta (1540-1600) must be named). Instead, the realisation that the Gospel had not yet been carried to the entire world and still had to be preached before the Second Coming quickly predominated.

During the first half of the sixteenth century, a fervent mendicant millenarianism informed the M.s in the Americas and, while methodological disputes between Religious Orders were not uncommon, especially between Franciscans and Dominicans, the largely Augustinian-inspired belief that God's grace would work through the sacrament of baptism to bring about the proper conversion of indigenous peoples led to mass baptisms in which thousands were purportedly baptised in a single ceremony. According to Fray Toribio de Benavente in his *Historia de los Indios de Nueva España*, the Franciscan friars Juan de Perpiñán and Francisco de Valencia each baptised more than a hundred thousand (Benavente 160). A similar enthusiasm can be seen in hagiographical accounts of the M.s to India and China carried out by the Jesuit Francisco Xavier (d.1552, canonised in 1622 and dubbed 'the apostle to the East'). For example, in his approval of Andrés Serrano's *Los siete principes de los ángeles*, Francisco Lelio Levanto described Francis Xavier as a heavenly pirate who robbed hell of no less than a million idolaters through his missionary efforts (Serrano, 'Aprobación del Señor, D. Francisco Lelio Levanto'). From the founding of the → Society of Jesus by the Basque →

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Ignatius of Loyola and its confirmation by Pope Paul III in 1540, to the granting of the feudal Japanese province of Nagasaki to the Jesuits in 1580, the Society had expanded to fifteen missionary provinces in Europe, the Americas and Asia, and from their central provinces of New Spain and Peru in Spanish America, they moved into New Granada (present-day Colombia and Venezuela), Paraguay, and Chile at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The writings of Aug., meanwhile, whether directly studied or received through the writings of medieval scholars, theologians and prophets (such as the medieval Cistercian mystic → Joachim de Fiore, d. 1202) were fundamental to the establishment of missionary practices in the Early Modern period.

### *Utopia in America*

From the very beginning, the missionary enterprise, if it can be called such, was intertwined with the Iberian (and, in particular, the Hispanic) colonial projects; the terms of Alexander VI's *Bull of Donation* explicitly required the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile to 'reduce' the people of the lands they discovered to Christianity. It was not long, however, before the legitimacy of the bull was questioned by Spanish theologians such as Francisco de Vitoria (d.1546), and missionary and ecclesiastical rhetoric armed itself to defend the humanity of indigenous peoples and their political and social rights, while still insisting on the duty to Christianise (the most famous champion of this ecclesiastical struggle was the Dominican missionary friar → Bartolomé de las Casas). Such polemics centred on maintaining the Christian duty to evangelise whilst preserving indigenous Americans from corruption by contact with lay Spaniards whose violence and greed, they argued, was ravaging indigenous society. These arguments gave rise to various missionary projects during the colonial period, including one set up by the Bishop of Michoacán, Vasco de Quiroga (d.1565). In the text *La Utopia en America*, Quiroga outlined an alternative method of Christianisation to that of conquest and subjugation, one based instead on peaceful education in faith and good customs, and his writings included a detailed collection of instructions on how indigenous communities should be organised and how lives should be lived. His utopian thesis drew from various scriptural, ecclesiastical and juridical sources and, not surprisingly, he cites → Thomas More, the writer of *Utopia*, and also → Jean Gerson, author of *De potestate ecclesiastica et origine juris*. If direct citations of Aug. are few and far between in Quiroga's text, Aug.'s influence on the sources that Quiroga was drawing from is noticeably implicit—especially through works such as *civ.*—and, at times, even explicit, as for example

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when he cited St Antonine, Archbishop of Florence, who interpreted Aug.'s writings to argue that where authority exists, it must be used to prevent the wicked from doing harm (Quiroga, 103). Quiroga used this reception of Aug. together with a citation from St Paul's 2 Cor 10:8 to suggest that force could be used against indigenous peoples but only if it were in their interests, to 'put an end to their barbarisms', make them peaceful subjects and to bring them into the Christian community (Quiroga, 102). He continued the theme referencing Aug. directly (*en. Ps 2.9*) to argue that even though indigenous lords might be legitimate kings and princes in their own lands in accordance with natural law, to subject them to the Christian rule of the Emperor Charles V would in fact liberate them and give proper order to what was otherwise a disordered society.

#### *Sahagún and the Psalmodia Christiana*

If Aug.'s reception formed part of the Church's justification for M. (and even conquest) during the mid-sixteenth century in New Spain, attempts were also made to ensure that Aug. (and to a lesser extent, his writings) was received by indigenous peoples of New Spain. Together with a team of highly educated Nahua neophytes, the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún compiled an extensive ethnographic study of Aztec society for consumption by a European readership in which he explained indigenous concepts, narratives and material objects in European terms. At the same time, however, this project involved a concerted effort to explain European concepts (or, more to the point, Christianity) in indigenous terms so that Christianity could more easily displace the pagan Nahua rites and beliefs. One of the principal results of these efforts was the *Psalmodia Christiana*, a collection of Psalms celebrating the Christian Liturgical calendar written in Nahuatl and, most importantly, using metaphors that were both considered understandable in a Nahua context and were also judged acceptable at the time to the Catholic tradition. These Psalms were to be sung while liturgical dances based on traditional pre-Colombian dances were performed.

As one of the Fathers of the Church and, as such, one of the most important Saints in the Catholic Calendar, it should come as no surprise that a series of Psalms were composed for Aug.'s own feast day. These Psalms described his life in simple terms and highlighted the importance of his correspondence and writings. The eighth Psalm, for example, recounts how Saint Gregory rebuffed requests for his own writings with a statement that one should instead reflect on the writings of Aug., while the seventh Psalm, drawn from *Letter 172* 'From Jerome

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to Aug.', describes the esteem in which Saint Jerome held Aug (Sahagún 1993, 271). These Psalms were not merely prosaic illustrations of Aug.'s life. Rather, they were written using an allegorical style familiar to the Nahua neophytes and using metaphorical symbols that took on new meanings within the Nahua worldview. Psalm 7 comments that Jerome described Aug. as a godly eagle that flies higher than the mountains (Sahagún, 271). But this metaphor did not only praise the excellence of his writings; in pre-Colombian Aztec society, the Order of the Eagle was one of the highest-ranking warrior Orders, whose role was to guard the temple of the sun. Therefore the metaphor of Aug. as an eagle—placed as it was immediately after a description of Aug., beloved of God, who waged war on heretics with his letters—would certainly have taken on militaristic significance to many of the Nahua neophytes singing the Psalms, performing the dances and watching the liturgical display. This reception of Aug. as a powerful warrior figure was reinforced by an account of how heretics feared him and 'found his discourses painful' as if they were being defeated in a physical rather than an intellectual battle (Sahagún, 269).

#### *The Metaphorical Augustine: Sahagún to Calancha*

One particularly significant metaphor in Sahagún's Psalms is that of water. After providing a comparative metaphorical example of Moses bringing forth water for the Israelites in the desert, the Psalms continue by describing how, once baptised, the Word of God poured from Aug.'s lips like water (Sahagún, 265). Psalms 4 and 5 take the metaphor further, recounting how, once struck by the Word of God, 'many kinds of water' issued forth (Sahagún, 267): the first kind was tears, a reference to *conf.* 4.5.10 and 4.7.12, the second was the water of baptism, the third—an ocean of water—was his preaching (*Sermons*), and the fourth, the most precious water, was his explanation of God's Word, the 'Holy Gospel, the Epistles of Saint Paul and the Psalms of David' (Sahagún, 269). Such emphasis on watery metaphors, mentioned in six out of the ten psalms (the first five and the concluding psalm) had a definite purpose. Aug. himself used such metaphors; for example, in *conf.* 6.1.1. he writes of the prayerful tears of his mother as she prayed for his conversion and 'the fountain of water that springs into everlasting life'. This and others like them are metaphors for spiritual fertility, for the eternal life granted to humankind by God's grace, conferred by faith and baptism. Yet at the same time, Sahagún and his team of interpreters cannot have missed their potential equation with tearful Aztec ritual laments to Tlaloc the rain god, to persuade him to bring forth water for the crops, and the ritual washing of new born children (described by Sahagún

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as baptism) that linked the children with the earth goddess Chalchiuitlicue, a goddess of life and fertility (Sahagún 2001, I, 448-53, 572-7); Sahagún and his team documented these indigenous prayers and rites in the very same process of this ethnographic and missionary project.

While these comparisons cannot have been lost on Sahagún, the *Psalmodia*'s association of Aug. with water harkens back to received medieval European traditions surrounding the cult of St Aug. *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine describes a dream by → St Bernard (of Clairvaux) after he fell asleep in matins during the reading of a treatise by Aug. In the dream he saw a young man whom he took to be Aug. out of whose mouth gushed a torrent of water that filled the church. The water he interpreted as the 'fountain of his teaching' (Voragine, II, 129—Voragine's account also describes the abovementioned comments by Jerome, attributing the eagle metaphor to a book entitled *Of the Twelve Doctors*. Aug. does feature in Gennadius' addition to Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus* (ch.39) but the eagle metaphor is not mentioned).

This 'fountain' seen by the St Bernard of the *Golden Legend* appeared in the tenth and final Psalm as the source of what might be termed an 'entire irrigation system' of Augustinian missionaries who 'have come to shower his holy water, his teachings over us' (Sahagún 1993, 273—the tenth Psalm appears to have been carefully phrased to prevent confusion among the indigenous neophytes as to the arrival of missionaries from different religious Orders: 'all', it reads, 'are emissaries of our Lord Jesus Christ'). The notion that Aug. was the fountain of divine wisdom at which the missionary friars of his Order drank and shared with the rest of the world was similarly taken up by the Augustinian friar Antonio de la Calancha who in 1638 published an account of his Order's missions in Peru. In it he wrote that Aug. shared out the water of wisdom to his sons so they could 'preach the faith, amend the world, convert the pagans and populate the heavens' (Calancha, 22). He even links the metaphor with a medieval legend about the founding of the Order that recounts how a fountain of water sprang from Aug.'s tomb from which the first Augustinian friars drank. According to Calancha, the fact that God caused a spring to flow from his tomb meant that 'he was the fountain of water from which his sons drank and with which they irrigated the world'. In order to demonstrate the Order's fulfilment of this role Calancha continued by saying that Augustinian missionaries had spread and had been martyred across the globe. In Peru, he wrote that they had converted

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'thousands upon thousands of idolatrous slaves of the devil, blind in their infidelity and obstinate in their customs' (ibid.).

### *José de Acosta and Late-Sixteenth-Century Missionary Concerns*

The persistence of indigenous rites and traditions as the sixteenth century progressed began to concern missionaries and clergy more and more. Even Sahagún, whose *Psalmody* was replete with indigenous metaphors, became increasingly preoccupied with the mixture of indigenous and Catholic rites leading to unorthodox practices. The 1560s appeared to be somewhat of a watershed-decade with the discovery of sacrificial rites and their brutal repression in the Yucatán by Franciscan friars under Diego de Landa, the apparent (but now contested) resurgence of Andean religious practices defined in opposition to Christianity, and finally, the arrival of the Jesuits and what might be termed a Tridentine spirit concerned with orthodoxy and uniformity. This coincided with an increasing shift in theological emphasis from the Seven Deadly Sins to the Decalogue, which, in turn, placed prime importance on the sin of idolatry and its extirpation (Cervantes, 24). What had previously been encouraged by missionaries as legitimate expressions of indigenous faith were now reinterpreted and condemned as unorthodox, corrupted and even idolatrous (Estensorro Fuchs, 146-50, 169-72, 192).

The Jesuit José de Acosta was at the forefront of this reinterpretation and reorganisation and, after publishing a systematic guide to evangelisation entitled *De Procuranda*, he became an influential guiding hand behind the Third Council of Lima (1583) and its subsequent publication of a trilingual catechism and sermons in Spanish and the indigenous Andean languages Quechua and Aymara (1584). *De Proc.* was used as a model for missions by Jesuits across the Hispanic world, including the Mezzogiorno of Italy (Selwyn, 118) and this work was followed by his *Historia Natural*—a survey of the Americas and its peoples which drew from earlier accounts but which was organised to reflect this new thought. Both texts (in revised and censored forms) were widely circulated, and the *Hist. Nat.*—intended as it was for a less ecclesiastical readership—contains fewer references to Aug. than *De Proc.* But it is in dealing with Aug. in the *Hist Nat.* that we see in Acosta a willingness to question the accuracy of authoritative sources, even those written by the Church Fathers. For example, in his discussion of the shape of the earth, the existence of the Antipodes, and the origin of man in the Americas, Acosta is pragmatic in his use of observation and reason to highlight Aug.'s

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doubts and even mistakes (Acosta, *Historia*, 15-30: Aug. *Gn. Litt.* 2.9-10; *en. Ps.* 135; *civ.* 16.9). It was important to understand the nature of the Americas in order to correctly evangelise and establish M's. Such an approach created a bridge between modern and pre-modern epistemology as it allowed works by the Church Fathers to be interpreted and recognised as sources whose authority could indeed be questioned on matters temporal. That said, Acosta still made efforts to interpret Aug. sympathetically, even when Aug. was observably incorrect. With regard to the roundness of the earth, Acosta guardedly states that some used Aug.'s authority to allege that the earth was not round, as God stretched out 'the heavens like a skin', but the Jesuit is quick to point out that this statement is to be understood metaphorically and that it simply demonstrates the greatness of God in creating such an immense sky (Acosta, *Hist. Nat.*, 24: *en. Ps.* 103). As another example, he dedicates a chapter to placing Aug.'s denial of the Antipodes in its proper historical context, arguing that in the theological context of his time, such a denial was philosophically quite sound: 'in accordance with the teachings of Divine Scripture [which states] that all men descended from Adam, it seemed impossible and a pure mistake to say that men could have crossed that seemingly infinite expanse of ocean to the New World' (Acosta, *Hist. Nat.*, 33-4).

In matters theological, however, there was no suggestion of questioning Aug.'s authority, and he is even used to demonstrate divine providence in an unusual juxtaposition of M. and avarice. Aug.'s *cons. Ev.* 1.31 argued—based on the prophecies of Isaiah—that Christ's Church would be extended throughout the world. According to Acosta, this should be understood as meaning that the Church would spread to the West as well as the East (Acosta, *Historia Natural*, 196), and it would occur not only through those who preached the Gospel sincerely and with charity, but also through temporal means (by 'temporal means', he meant those who travelled to the Americas in search of mineral wealth). God, he said, had taken advantage of Spanish pretensions and greed and had caused those lands that had the richest mines to be the most widely 'cultivated in the Christian Religion in the present day'—a sure sign of Divine Providence (*ibid.*). A similar passage, in which Aug. refers to the prophecies of Isaiah, was again cited with regard to Divine Providence causing the conditions by which M.s could be established, but this time in reference to the speed and success of the Spanish Conquest (Acosta, *Hist Nat*, 531). Here Acosta scoffed at those who attributed these conquests to Spanish prowess in battle or to superiority of arms, contrasting these conquests with the Spanish inability to conquer the Chilean frontier from the 'barbarians', and instead

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highlighted the fact that the Spanish could never have conquered the Mesoamerica had they not been helped by the Tlaxcaltecs, mortal enemies of the Aztecs. By the same token, the Inca empire fell only because Pizarro was able to take advantage of the bitter civil strife between two brother Incas. In both cases this was Divine Providence working through historical events to permit the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the God's Church would spread from East to West (here Acosta cites Aug., *cons. Ev.* 2.36: the prophecy referred to by Aug. and Matthew 12:17-21 in fact makes no mention of 'East to West' but talks of the servant who shall give hope to the Gentiles).

On idolatry, Aug. proved more directly useful as Acosta drew direct comparisons between Aug.'s account of the cults of the dead of the ancient world and the cult of the dead in the Andes (Acosta cited *ep.* 64 but the citation probably refers instead to *retr.* 2.64, 'On the Care of the Dead', at the point where Aug. mentions the Book of Maccabees' description of sacrifices offered for the dead). As we might expect, Acosta also addressed the issue of idolatry and idols in his book *De Proc.* with again Aug. as a key referent. Acosta emphasized that people must not be forcibly converted and he cited Aug. *s.* 112 to say that idols must be removed first from the hearts of the pagans before they can be removed from their altars. Oddly enough, this particular sermon, a commentary on Luke 14:16, seems to be suggesting the opposite, as it ends with a rhetorical plea by the 'heretics' who wish to 'come in of their own free will'. Aug. refutes that this is what God wants and reiterates the Divine order to 'compel them' to 'come in'. By contrast, however, Acosta also referenced *Jo. ev. tr.* 26.6 which talks of those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' and who cannot come to Jesus unless God draws them in (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 261).

Thus, despite his initial insistence that indigenous peoples should not be forced to convert, Acosta's reception of Aug. produced an ambivalent argument that required greater qualification. By way of explanation, he continued that missionaries must distinguish between two different cases. On the one hand, if pagans continued to observe their rites and customs without causing 'scandal' and offence to the faithful and allowed all to live according to their laws, then they must be left in their wilful darkness until God chose to 'illuminate' them. On the other hand, if pagans were subject to Christian princes and caused unrest (termed as 'scandal')—presumably by encouraging neophytes to revert to traditional indigenous religious practices—then they were not to be shown any tolerance whatsoever (Acosta, *De Proc.* 273-5). To give weight to this argument, again he cited Aug., referring to his praise of



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the laws of Constantine the Great who ordered the temples shut and the idols thrown down (*ep.* 93.4.14—in this case Aug. in fact talks about Constantine's decree confiscating the property of those convicted of being causing schism; *ep.* 185.3—this passage does indeed talk about imperial decrees delivering the people from the diabolical threat of idolatry; *ep.* 138, in which Aug. defends Christian emperors from causing the downfall of the Empire). The same must be done, argued Acosta, with indigenous pagans who are subject to Christian kings, especially when their 'idolatry was seen to harm the faithful' by causing new Christians to lapse back into their old pre-Christian traditions.

While using his writings to address the conceptual rights and wrongs of missionary methodology in the battle against idolatry, Acosta also referred to Aug. when he outlined the basic requirements for M. Not surprisingly, *cat. rud.* ('On the Catechesis of the Unlettered') is frequently and extensively cited, especially with regard to how missionaries should approach the task of catechesis of rural indigenous peoples who were illiterate and were thought to have little capacity for understanding complex theological notions. The same text was cited to offer ways of dealing with the tiredness and sense of disillusionment that could often result from missionary activity itself and 'the indigenous temperament'. Acosta stated that Aug. knew the remedy better than anyone and at this point cited ch. 12 of *cat. rud.* in its entirety (Acosta *De Proc.*, 159). The principal method, he continued, was to imitate Christ's humility and to expect no material recompense: consolation would come instead from Christ (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 169; *cat. rud.* 11.6). The whole purpose of missionary catechesis, according to Acosta's reception of Aug., was 'to know and love Christ' (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 177; *cat. rud.* 4.8). By the same token, the proclamation of the Word of God was to be considered the highest level of charity; one should always prefer to receive the God's Word which instructs the mind (and, we can infer, soul), to a piece of bread which would only fill the stomach (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 135; *cat. rud.* 14.22).

Aug. was also called upon by Acosta to attack earlier mendicant positions that were now considered to be unorthodox and even heretical. Perhaps the most controversial of these was the notion that for indigenous peoples—who, due to their perceived 'barbarism', could not be expected to fully understand the precepts of Catholicism—it was enough to have 'implicit faith' in order to achieve salvation. Acosta vigorously opposed this line and, in fact, while preparing *De Proc.*, he acted as theological advisor to the Inquisitors who presided over the trial and condemnation of the Dominican friar Francisco de la Cruz in the early 1570s for this

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and other heretical propositions. In *De Proc.*, Acosta cited *civ.* 18.47 to refute the argument that those who did not know of Christ might still be saved, and in this matter he accuses the theologians Andrés Vega and Domingo de Soto of leaving aside the established tradition of the Church to follow personal intuition (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 199). He continued by arguing that Aug.'s work *gr. et pecc. or.* 2.24-26.28-31 supported this line. Furthermore, he argued, Aug. had been misrepresented by wayward missionaries and theologians in that neither first justification nor definitive salvation could be achieved without knowledge of the Gospels (*praed. sanct.* 12). Acosta centred his argument on Aug.'s presentation of the case of Cornelius the Jew (Acts 10) which suggested that Cornelius' virtue allowed him to be saved even before Peter preached to him of Christ. Acosta insisted that while it was possible for virtuous Jews to be saved prior to Christ's coming simply by believing in one divine mediator, this was clearly no longer the case. The coming of Christ, he argued, had not only rendered the Jewish sacraments dead, but had in fact made them deadly. Moreover, in Cornelius' time, by the very admission of St Peter, the Gospel had not been sufficiently preached to the gentiles, whereas now the same could not be argued (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 201). It was absolutely vital that the Gospel be preached and preached effectively, just as it was crucial for catechumens (indigenous neophytes) to know and understand the rudiments of the faith prior to Baptism. It was not enough merely to have them recognise that Christ was the Son of God (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 223-5; Aug., *f. et op.* 9.14). In the same way, it was wrong not to properly teach the mystery of the Trinity as some catechists had apparently been omitting to do. Illiterate indigenous peoples were capable of learning about the Trinity, he argued, because the key to understanding was not through books and intellectual treatises but was instead through 'a simple and sincere faith' (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 231; Aug., *Trin.* 14.1-19). Ultimately, argued Acosta, it was of fundamental importance to teach the indigenous peoples that the Church was a community that professed to believe in Christ and his doctrine. It was not merely one specific group limited by number or nation: there was no division between Spaniards and Indians, rather the Church encompassed 'the confines of the world and all the avatars of time'. Again, Acosta cited Aug., arguing that 'we are all sons and parts of the Church, but altogether, we are the Mother Church' (Acosta, *De Proc.*, 239; Aug., *qu. eu.* 1.18). At the head of this Church was the Pope, the successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ who exercised all His power on earth and who all other Christians, even kings and princes obeyed. To believe this, he stated, was to believe in the Catholic and Universal Church.

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Acosta's work became the principal text for missionary practice in the Hispanic World by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it was clear to leading Hispanic missionaries—who directly or indirectly based their assessments and methodology on the writings of Aug.—that a correct, systematic and universal approach to M. was both urgent and necessary.

Andrew Redden.

→ Joachim de Fiore → Ignatius of Loyola → Society of Jesus → Bartolomé de las Casas  
cites → Thomas More → Jean Gerson → Bernard of Clairvaux

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