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Beyond Borders

A Global Perspective of Jesuit Mission History

Eds. Shinzo Kawamura

and **Cyril Veliath** A Global Perspective of Jesuit Mission History **Eds. Shinzo Kawamura** and Cyril Veliath

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Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective

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Edited by SHINZO KAWAMURA CYRIL VELIATH

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A Controversial History of the Guaraní Catechism of Mid-Seventeenth Century Paraguay

Kazuhisa TAKEDA Japan Society for the Promotion of Science

Introduction

The catechism was indeed a reliable tool for missionaries engaged in evangelical works all over the world. It was a manual for missionaries to instruct young converts with regard to moral and ethical norms based on the Christian doctrine, and it was usually in the form of questions and answers. The fact that a number of catechisms were issued even after the Discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492, shows that this useful guide for religious instruction played a leading role in expanding Christianity on a global scale.

The missionary policy established at the twenty-fourth session of the Council of Trent held on November 11, 1563 stating that all churchmen instruct young converts in the principles of the Christian religion by means of the vernacular, urged the missionaries to select a dominant language in a region and translate the contents of the Tridentine catechism into that native language.¹ In Spanish America for example, the Nahuatl in Mexico, Quechua in Peru, and Guaraní in Paraguay were chosen by missionaries to introduce the Gospel to the Native Americans. Speaking of Paraguay, a number of experts on the Guaraní language under the direction of the Franciscan Luis de Bolaños formed a translation group in Asunción to complete the vernacular version catechism, during the period 1585-86. The two ecclesiastical councils held in early seventeenth century Paraguay approved the Guaraní catechism, and gave the missionaries permission to use it.²

The Guaraní catechism completed by Bolaños became popular in Paraguay within a few decades. The different copies of the catechism written by hand however gave rise to confusion in that region.³ Such a state of disorder made missionaries think seriously about the publication of the Guaraní catechism in order to standardize its contents. In 1637, Diego de Boroa the Jesuit Provincial of Paraguay, dispatched his subordinate Antonio Ruiz de Montoya to Madrid, to get the necessary authorization to publish from the king of Spain.⁴ From 1639 to 40, Ruiz de Montoya completed and published the following three books in Guaraní, including the catechism: *Tesoro de la lengua guaraní* (Ma-

drid, 1639), *Arte y bocaburario de la lengua guarani* (Madrid, 1640), and *Catecismo de la lengua Guarani* (Madrid, 1640). When he wrote the Guarani catechism, he followed the religious terminology used in a translation introduced by Bolaños.⁵

In 1647 however, when Bernardino de Cárdenas, a Franciscan and former bishop of Asunción raised questions with reference to the meaning of specific words in the Guaraní catechism written by Ruiz de Montoya, a heated controversy broke out between the Jesuits and Cárdenas.⁶ As I shall mention elsewhere, the issue developed owing to the personal hatred of Cárdenas for the Jesuits. What lay at the bottom of the dispute however was the divergence of views relating to not only traditional values in medieval Europe, but also the characteristics of the Guaraní language, such as its equivocality and connotation.

This article describes how the controversy over specific terms in the Guaraní catechism arose between Cárdenas and the Jesuits, and discusses the diverse viewpoints of the missionaries with reference to the language used in their evangelical work among the different cultures.

The Origin and Details of the Controversy

As I said before, the reason why Cárdenas took up the issue regarding specific terms in the Guaraní catechism was due to his confrontation with the Jesuits. Bernardino de Cárdenas who was born in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1579, was involved in missionary work for many years in his native land. In May 1640 however, when he was nominated bishop of Asunción, a difference of view regarding the manner of ordination arose between him and the Jesuits, and this caused their relationship to deteriorate. Although Cárdenas became bishop of Asunción in May 1642, the confrontation between the two parties was not resolved. In 1644, the governor of Paraguay Gregorio de Hinestrosa who was a great supporter of the Jesuits, exiled Cárdenas from Asunción by force, and consequently the rivalry between Cárdenas and the Jesuits was further intensified by this act of the governor. After his expulsion Cárdenas went to live in Corrientes, a small city in northeast Argentina, for a few years. He began to write a number of defamatory reports criticizing all the political, economic, social and missionary activities in which the Jesuits were involved. On the other hand, the Jesuits too fought back desperately against this fierce criticism of Cárdenas.7

The hostility between Cárdenas and the Jesuits continued even after he returned to Bolivia in 1651. In particular, the question of the terms used in the Guaraní catechism was not yet solved. On June 1, 1654, the king of Spain Philip IV issued an imperial ordinance to Juan Alonso Ocón the Archbishop of Charcas,⁸ ordering a detailed official inquiry into the matter, and on May 9 of the following year Ocón asked Cárdenas to present a report, explaining the

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points wherein he found the terms used in the catechism questionable.9

On May 14, 1655, Archbishop Ocón received a letter from Cárdenas. The letter showed that Cárdenas considered the following four terms in the Guaraní catechism controversial: Tupã, Tuba, Membyrã, and Ta'ýra.¹⁰ In the catechism, these words signify Dios (God), Dios Padre (God the Father), Hijo de Nuestra Señora la Virgen María (the Son of Our Lady, or the Son of the Virgin Mary) and Dios Hijo (the Son of God). Cárdenas insisted that the first two words, namely Tupã and Tuba, were the names of demons. With reference to Membyrã and Ta'ýra too he criticized those words saying that they signified the son born by fornication or by sexual intercourse between blood relatives, and nocturnal pollution or the sperm of a male. Hence in accordance with the argument of Cárdenas, it was doubtful if those words were suitable for use in the catechism. Above all, the translation of Dios as Tupã was something that Cárdenas simply could not accept. He took the stand that only the Spanish word 'Dios' could be used to express the concept of God in Christianity.¹¹

The argument of Cárdenas rested on the historical resolution and traditional values of medieval Europe. According to his argument, the ecclesiastical council held by Pope Zacharias in Rome in 745 declared that the two words Tupã and Tuba referred to demons.¹² Also, the pleasure of sexual intercourse and body fluids such as blood, semen, and urine were considered as impure in European tradition.¹³ In short, if the two words Membyrã, and Ta'ýra had sexual implications as Cárdenas indicated, it would constitute a serious problem contrary to the traditional values of Europe.

Convening the Special Committee and Its Resolution

After receiving the report of Cárdenas Archbishop Ocón established a special committee (junta in Spanish), whose members were born in Asunción and were experts in the Guaraní language. Although an intermittent plague prevailing in Asunción postponed the opening ceremony of the committee,¹⁴ the assumption of Juan Blázquez de Valverde as the governor of Paraguay in September 21, 1656, led to its convocation. On October 23 of the same year, before starting the discussions, the governor Blázquez de Valverde sent a letter to the Jesuit Provincial Francisco Vázquez de la Mota, in order to get some information concerning the general consensus of the members of the Society with regard to the criticism of Cárdenas. Two days later, Vázquez de la Mota sent a reply to the governor.

First, Vázquez de la Mota explained the meaning of the terms Tupã and Tuba, and denied the charges of Cárdenas by quoting from a passage of the resolution. He insisted that the names of the demons discussed in the Roman ecclesiastical council of 745 were not Tupã and Tuba, but Tubuel and Tubas. Second, with reference to the other two words, namely Membyrã and Ta'ýra, Vázquez de la Mota declared that those words had different implications and connotations, and he denied the fact that they signified semen or the son born of adultery.¹⁵ He

added that this was something that had already been proved true several years earlier, as stated in the report of the Jesuit Francisco Díaz Taño.¹⁶

On October 31, 1656, after both Cárdenas and Vázquez de la Mota had presented their reports, the governor of Paraguay held a special meeting in his house, where the members of the committee rejected the criticism of Cárdenas and supported the stand of Vázquez de la Mota. The members declared first of all that the Roman council of 745 did not take up the names Tupã and Tuba as topics of discussion. The words discussed were Tubuel and Tubas. With regard to Membyrã and Ta'ýra on the other hand, the committee passed an interesting resolution. They stated that when those two words were used with affixes, such as a prefix, a suffix or an infix, the sexual implication would come out. However, such cases were not in evidence in the Guaraní catechism and hence Membyrã and Ta'ýra were acceptable words.¹⁷ This resolution was not overturned at a later stage, and on October 20, 1668, Cárdenas ended his eighty-nine years of life in Cochabamba, Bolivia.¹⁸

Validity of the Criticism

This was the contentious issue of the Guaraní catechism between Cárdenas and the Jesuits. As I mentioned earlier, the origin of the conflict was rooted in the dispute between the parties over the manner of ordination. The resolution adopted by the special committee showed that the arguments advanced by Cárdenas with regard to the decisions of the Roman council of 745 were flawed. However, on the basis of the following two points, we cannot simply disregard his views concerning the four Guaraní words of the catechism.

First, the fact that Cárdenas adhered to the Spanish word Dios to teach the concept of the divine in Christianity to the Guaraní Indians, is extremely important. According to a historical document written in Brazil in the middle of the sixteenth century, the Tupinamba Indians whose language and culture were rather similar to that of the Guaraní Indians, referred to thunder as Tupana. It gave them a feeling of something divine.¹⁹ The missionaries realized this quite early, and when they taught the concept of the Christian God to the Guaraní Indians, they used the word Tupã instead of Dios. The reason why the Franciscan Luis de Bolaños adopted Tupã as an equivalent for Dios in late sixteenth century Asunción, was to follow the precedent set by the missionaries in Brazil. There is no doubt however that the original meaning of Tupã was thunder. Hence, regardless of how much the missionaries explained to the Guaraní Indians that the word Tupã meant the God of Christianity, we have no guarantee that whenever the Guaraní Indians heard the word Tupã, they recalled only the concept of the Christian God and not that of thunder. The Jesuit Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, the above-mentioned author of the Guaraní grammar and catechism, referred to equivocality as a typical characteristic of the Guaraní language, in his manuscript completed in Lima in 1651.²⁰ This equivocality, which signifies that a word or phrase could be open to many possible meanings and

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interpretations contains a risky possibility, namely the possibility that the word Tupã would not be interpreted as the God of Christianity, but as thunder or something different. On this point, the insistence of Cárdenas that the word Tupã be replaced by Dios, does indeed have validity.

With reference to the terms Membyrã and Ta'ýra too we cannot dismiss the criticism of Cárdenas as something trivial. Certainly, the members of the special committee concluded that those two words were not used in the catechism with a sexual connotation. Yet, we should not overlook the fact that Membyrã and Ta'ýra had sexual implications when used with specific affixes.²¹ The Guaraní Indians used their own language in their daily life. Hence, even if the two words do not appear with sexual nuances in the catechism, the Guaraní Indians would use the same words with specific affixes to refer to some sexual subject. In the preface to the Tesoro de la lengua guaraní (Madrid, 1639), the Jesuit Ruiz de Montoya introduced the usage of affixes as a noticeable characteristic of the Guaraní language. He also pointed out that there was no negative allegorical meaning in that usage.²² However, when missionaries asked the Guarani Indians questions with reference to the terms Membyra and Ta'ýra in their catechism, we cannot affirm with certainty that when they replied to the questions, their minds were devoid of sexual thoughts. In short, it would be difficult to assert that the criticism of Cárdenas with reference to the terms Membyrã and Ta'ýra was wholly without foundation.

Conclusion

So far, many historians have considered the controversy over the meaning of certain terms in the Guaraní catechism as something trivial, frivolous, or meaningless. Certainly there is some truth in what they say. The motive of Cárdenas in taking up the issue of the catechism was linked to his personal hatred of the Jesuits. Taking into account the special characteristics of the Guaraní language such as its equivocality and use of affixes however, we may point out the possibility of the Guaraní Indians mixing the concepts of Christianity with something irrelevant, and arriving at varied interpretations. Therefore, we cannot simply ignore the questions of Cárdenas.

When we consider the implications and connotations of the Guaraní language, the argument of Cárdenas does deserve recognition. Certainly, in the context of the catechism, the words Tupã, Tuba, Membyrã, and Ta'ýra would have been understood by the Guaraní Indians in the manner in which the Jesuits intended them to be understood. The Guaraní Indians used their language in their daily life, and they used those four words in different contexts. Therefore, as long as the catechism was taught in the Guaraní language, the concepts of Christianity would have been conveyed to the Guaraní Indians with implications and connotations different from what was intended. In other words, the outcome could possibly have been something that the Jesuits never anticipated. Nevertheless however, this is not to say that the evangelical work of the Jesuits was a failure. The introduction of the vernacular in teaching catechism in accordance with the decree of the Council of Trent, offered the Guaraní a chance to interpret an unknown religion from Europe in their unique way. There is reliable evidence that Christianity did spread among the Guaraní Indians, although the manner in which they understood and interpreted Christianity was different from what the Jesuits had intended.

NOTES

- H.J. Schroeder (ed.) Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation (London: Herder Book, 1950), pp. 197-198.
- 2. José Luis Salas, La evangelización franciscana de los guaraníes: su apóstol Fray Luis Bolaños (Asunción: Ediciones y Arte, 2000), p. 301; Margarita Durán Estragó, Aporte franciscano a la primera evangelización del Paraguay y Río de la Plata (Asunción: Don Bosco, 1992) p. 23; Bartomeu Meliá (ed.) El primer sínodo del Paraguay y Río de la Plata en Asunción en el año de 1603 (Asunción: CEPAG, et al., 2003), pp. 69-70; "Sínodo de la Asunción de 1631," Revista de la Biblioteca Pública, No. 4, 1882, p. 16.
- 3. Guillermo Furlong (ed.) Antonio Ruiz de Montoya y su carta a Comental (1645) (Buenos Aires: Theoria, 1964), p. 82.
- 4. "Poder otorgado por el P. Provincial Diego de Boroa al P. Ruiz de Montoya, enviado a Europa como procurador de la provincia jesuitica denominado del Paraguay, en 7 de abril de 1637," *Revista del Archivo General de Buenos Aires*, Vol. 4, 1872, p. 95.
- "Al Lector," Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Catecismo de la lengua guarani* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1876 [1640]).
- For a brief outline of the controversy, see Bartomeu Melià, La lengua guaraní en el Paraguay colonial (Asunción: CEPAG, 2003), pp. 209-260.
- Charles E. O'Neill y Joaquín María Domínguez (eds.), Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jésus: biográfico-temático, Vol. 1 (Rome y Madrid, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu y Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), pp. 653-654.
- Charcas is the present Sucre, Bolivia. During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries Charcas was also called Chuquisaca or La Plata.
- 9. "Documentos relativos a la junta convocada para examinar la doctrina contenida en el catecismo guaraní," Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Historia del Paraguay*, Vol. 3 (Madrid: Victoriano Suárez, 1913 [1756]), pp. 301-303. The same documents are in the following archives: New York Public Library (NYPL), Obadiah Rich Collection (Microfilm), No. 6, ff, 268r-287r; Archivum Romanum Sotietatis Iesu (ARSI), Paraq. 11, ff. 347r-360v. The NYPL has also the same documents in his Rare Book Collection. Presumably it was published in Lima, 1661: *Congregacion y ivnta de personas doctas, y peritas en la lengua guarani de los indios de las provincias del Paraguay. Qve por orden del rey Nuestro Señor (Dios le guarde) mandó hazer el Ilustrissimo, Reverendissimo señor Doctor Don Juan Alonso Ocon, Arçobispo de los Charcas en el Peru. Para averiguar las calumnias que en aquellas Prouincias se auian inuentado contra los Religiosos de la Compañia de Iesus. Sobre las oraciones, catecismo, y doctrina Christiana que enseñauan a los*

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Indios recien conuertidos (Lima?: n.s., 1661).

- 10. During the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries in Spanish America, the orthography of the Guaraní language was not developed. Hence the Spaniards spelled the words differently. With regard to the spelling of the Guarani language, this article uses the following dictionary: Natalia Krivoshein de Canese y Feliciano Acosta Alcaraz, *Ñe'êryru: avañe'ê karaiñe'ê, karaiñe'ê (Diccionario, guaraní-español, español-guaraní)*, 2 ed. (Asunción: Instituto Superior de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional de Asunción, 2002).
- 11. "Documentos," pp. 307-308. The following collection of historical documents contains the same letter of Cárdenas, but the date of issue is noted as 1656, not 1655. Colección general de documentos tocantes a la persecución, que los regulares de la Compañía suscitaron y siguieron tenazmente por medio de sus jueces conservadores, y ganando algunos ministros seculares desde 1644 hasta 1660, contra el Il.mo rR.mo Sr. Fr. D. Bernardino de Cárdenas, religioso antes del orden de S. Francisco, obispo del Paraguay, expeliendole tres veces de su obispado a fuerza de armas, y de manejos de dichos regulares de la Compañía, por evitar que este prelado entrase ni visitase sus Misiones del Paraná, Uruguay, é Itatí. Van añadidos en esta edicion muchos documentos inéditos, y un prologo que sirve de introduccion, Vol. 2 (Madrid: Imprenta Real de la Gaceta, 1768), pp. 82-84.
- 12. "Documentos," pp. 303-308.
- Ludo J.R. Milis (ed.), *The Pagan Middle Ages* (Woodbridge and Rochester: Boydell Press, 1998).
- Margarita Durán Estragó, "La colonización," Óscar del Carmen Quevedo (ed.) Crónica histórica ilustrada del Paraguay, Vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Distribuidora Quevedo de Ediciones, 1998), pp. 197-198.
- 15. "Documentos," p. 321.
- 16. Ibid., p. 322. The document written by Díaz Taño is: Francisco Díaz Taño, "Demostración clara y edivente respuesta, a las calumnias falsas nuevamente intentados contra los religiosos de la Compañía de Jesús de las Provincias del Paraguay, sobre el catecismo, oraciones y doctrina cristiana en la lengua guaraní, que se publicaron en la ciudad de las Corrientes en seis cuadernos sin nombre de autor, escritos de letra y mano de Agustín de Carmona, familiar y criado del Señor Obispo Don Fray Bernardino de Cárdenas, con título y en nombre de un humilde hijo de la Iglesia y en servicio de la dignidad episcopal," *Revista de la Biblioteca Pública de Buenos Aires*, Vol. 4, 1882, pp. 17-80.
- 17. "Documentos," pp. 325-349.
- 18. O'Neill et al, Diccionario histórico, Vol. 1, pp. 653-654.
- "Serafim Leite, *Cartas dos primeiros jesuitas do Brasil*, Vol. 1 (São Paulo: Comissão do IV Centenario, 1954) 128," citation from Rubén Bareiro Saguier y Hélène Clastres, "Aculturación y mestizaje en las Misiones Jesuíticas del Paraguay," *Aportes*, No. 14, 1969, p. 20. In contemporary Guaraní language, however, thunder is equivalent to sununu or arasunu, not Tupã. Krivoshein de Canese, et al., *Ñe 'ĕryru*. p. 279.
- Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Apología en defensa de la doctrina cristiana escrita en lengua guaraní (Lima: CAAAP, 1996 [1651]), p. 63.
- 21. "Documentos," pp. 331-332.
- 22. "A los padres religiosos y clerigos, curas y predicadores del evangelio a los indios de la

Provincia del Paraguay y Paraná, &c. Salud en el Señor," Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Tesoro de la lengua guaraní* (Madrid: Juan Sanchez, 1639).

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Paraq. 11, ff. 347r-360v.

New York Public Library (NYPL)

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2. Printed Documents

- Colección general de documentos tocantes a la persecución, que los regulares de la Compañía suscitaron y siguieron tenazmente por medio de sus jueces conservadores, y ganando algunos ministros seculares desde 1644 hasta 1660, contra el Il.^{mo} rR.^{mo} Sr. Fr. D. Bernardino de Cárdenas, religioso antes del orden de S. Francisco, obispo del Paraguay, expeliendole tres veces de su obispado a fuerza de armas, y de manejos de dichos regulares de la Compañía, por evitar que este prelado entrase ni visitase sus Misiones del Paraná, Uruguay, é Itatí. Van añadidos en esta edicion muchos documentos inéditos, y un prologo que sirve de introduccion. Vols. 1-2, Madrid: Imprenta Real de la Gaceta, 1768.
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Chapter Five

Language Policy Perspective

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