Earth Religions and Book Religions: Baroque Catholicism as Openness to Earth Religions

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EARTH RELIGIONS AND BOOK RELIGIONS:  
BAROQUE CATHOLICISM AS OPENNESS TO EARTH RELIGIONS  
PART II TO: EARTH RELIGIONS AND BOOK RELIGIONS:  
THE RELIGIOUS DOOR TO CIVILIZATIONAL ENCOUNTER

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The Catholic Baroque as Mentalité

Baroque Catholicism was a unique theological period in the history of Christianity because of its openness to newly encountered earth religions in Asia and the Americas. The Catholic Baroque begins during the reign of Felipe II and ends with the reforms of the Spanish Empire by the House of Bourbon after 1750. As in all periodization, there is not a complete convergence of political, religious, and cultural movements, so that it is more accurate to speak of a "Catholic Baroque mentalité" than to pretend that everyone thinks and acts alike during any period of human history (Maravall, 1975/1986; Schrumm, 1998). Nonetheless, the Catholic Baroque, particularly when focused by examining the Mediterranean and Iberian-American polity created by Spanish Catholic hegemony throughout most of the 17th century. With that focus, the Catholic baroque mentalité approximates what Berry called in one place a "mystique" and in another a "spirituality" and which civilizationists call "Weltanschauung."

Certainly these aspects of religion have always been important to civilizational analysis. However, as was explained in the preceding Part I of this exploration of earth religion, the ongoing nature of religious change has not always been incorporated into the study of the civilizational process. I hope to show that although Baroque Catholicism was directly connected to the Christianity of previous epochs, it demonstrated enough differences to be reconsidered. It is in this sense that the Protestant Reformation which splintered the unity of Christendom created new variations (denominations) such as Lutheranism and Calvinism. But at the same time, the loss of Christian unity also greatly affected that segment of the Christian religion that conceived of itself as the inheritor and guarantor of Medieval Christendom. Thus, the Catholic Christianity that appears after Luther's break with the papacy generates a different mentalité from the Christianity, also Catholic, that preceded the Reformation. Catholic reformers, who had a high moment in the decrees of the Council of Trent, defined the traditional Christian
beliefs against the background of a polemic with Protestants. While their effort to refute Protestants emphasized the Catholic continuity with the past, all these formulations and decrees placed new emphasis upon the beliefs that had been assailed. Thus, while Christendom had always recognized that St. Peter had a successor called the pope and that the Blessed Virgin Mary had been honored, the new formulations made Marian devotionalism and loyalty to the papacy hallmarks of a Christian practice that was different from Protestant Christianity. I call this the "Invention of Roman Catholicism" and I argue that with the affirmation of this new form of belief, civilizational analysis needs to revisit the adaptations this new form of religion produced in 16th century Latin America.

It is important to distinguish the Baroque from the Renaissance which proceeded it, although it is unsatisfying to classify the Baroque as "the darker side of the Renaissance" (Mignolo, 1995). The discovery and initial colonization of the Americas by Iberians occurred before the onset of the Baroque and were marked by different attitudes towards earth religion, social organization and the methods for evangelization (Stevens-Arroyo, 1989; 1993). Thus, the "extirpation of idolatries" found in the efforts of evangelization took on different meanings as theology was confronted with new circumstances. The Baroque coincided with the formation of a national awareness within criollo society that they were different from Europeans, displacing in part a previous concern of how to treat indigenous peoples.

The contours of the baroque mentalité have been extensively studied in literary and cultural scholarship during the past three decades (see Maravall, 1975/1986). In terms of religion, several traits merit attention. The Baroque revivified medieval piety (Moser, 1998: 73ff.) and challenged the Reformation by rekindling past devotions, expunging accretions of magic, denouncing a corrupting commercialism (Echevarría, 1998). Thus reconstructed, the traditions of medieval Christendom were held up as proof that Protestant rejection of past piety was erroneous. The shadow of the Reformation loomed large over the Catholic mentalité, so much so that the period is sometimes characterized as "the Counter-Reformation," suggesting that Catholic initiatives were present only as a response to a rising Protestantism. But even if one agrees that this view is exaggerated (Delumeau, 1971/1977), the emergence of Protestantism created a need for an apologetic that spun out a form of Catholic providentialism.

In the tangle that identified Catholicism with Spain and Spain with
Catholicism, the colonization of the Americas became a sign of God’s favor on the Spanish Empire because it also permitted the evangelization of tens of millions of New World peoples who would take the places in heaven of the Europeans who had become Protestants (Wright, 1991). The encounter world-wide with religious systems among the peoples of the Americas and of Asia who had been included in the Spanish Empire by the exploits of the *conquistadores* required a theological and canonically legal justification for incorporating remote lands and peoples into the Iberian polity.

**Dialogical Nationhood In the Spanish Empire During the Baroque**

The juxtaposition of religion and law was as frequent in the political documents of the Baroque as the pairing of religion with art and literature. The civilizational encounter with the indigenous religions of the Americas fell under a theological mantle that had both to legitimate contact, regulate interaction and determine legitimacy. In large measure, the promoters and defenders of the civilizational encounter of Iberia and America were the Jesuits. Not incidentally, the Society of Jesus became a paragon of baroque thinking, their churches examples of baroque art and architecture, their schools incubators of baroque piety (Echevarría, 1998).

The theological explanation of international rights in *De Legibus* by the 17th century Jesuit theologian, Francisco Suárez, can be cited as the most elaborate of the Jesuit baroque theologies addressing the encounter with the Americas. Suárez expanded the existing norm of *lex gentium* — modified from Roman law — into a theory of international rights. The repository of social and cultural rights was the nation, understood by Suárez not as a political entity such as a state, but rather as a collective that shared common values, language and traditions. Many nations existed within a single political entity such as the Spanish Empire, but did not lose their special social and cultural distinctiveness on that account. Moreover, argued Suárez, it was a violation of international rights for one nation to try to extinguish or to subvert the values, language and traditions of another nation. Rebutting the notion of a divine right of kings to rule, Suárez placed himself in the opinion of the Schoolmen that social and political power flowed from the people and should be revoked if a ruler became a tyrant. The legitimacy of armed violence to overthrow a tyrant was described as a measure of self-defense of the life of the nation and could escalate in proportion to the violent repression directed against the national will (Stevens-Arroyo, 1996).
This perspective on the sovereignty of the nation is directly tied to the issue of syncretism through the prominence given in the Suarezian thought to tradition. Because it is the living law of a nation and reservoir of their collective identity, tradition takes precedence over positive law. Suárez stated that a ruler could not abolish any tradition of a nation under his jurisdiction by decree. Even if the traditions were unwritten, they had precedence over laws imposed from a legitimate authority. Along with the Salamanca school of the early baroque period, Suárez taught that traditional laws about authority, punishment, inheritance, property and other issues such as marriage were parts of national traditions and—as long as they did not contradict the teachings of the Gospel—should be preserved by the nation even under Christian rule. Thus, it is possible to revisit the stereotyped depictions of conversion during the Baroque and insist that the concept of nationhood made such exchanges dialogical rather than monological (Bakhtin, 1986).

Bartolomé de las Casas had argued earlier that although such native traditions were perceived as non-Christian religions, conversion to the Gospel did not replace the legitimacy of such national traditions. And as las Casas had presented the American caciques as “natural lords” and advocated “Indian Republics” independent of European rule (Saranyana, et al., 1999:65-70 et passim), Suárez elaborated the premises for this sovereignty within the Ibero-American polity (Stevens-Arroyo, 1996).

It is important to examine the criteria established during the Catholic Baroque to establish the existence of a nation, defined as a commonality of values, language and tradition. It may be suggested that the peculiar structure of the Castilian state made such definitions necessary. Catalonia had been a feifdom of the French king since the time of Charlemagne; Aragon, Castile, and Asturias had been separate kingdoms for the greater part of a millennium. The permanent unification of these kingdoms under one ruler had been accomplished only in the time of Charles V, but he and his successors were not kings of one country, but simultaneous occupants of several kingships. In truth, the Spanish Hapsburgs were rulers of the “Spains”. Moreover, by legal tradition there were certain local requirements for legitimate rule in order for the Hapsburgs to retain their political power in each kingdom (Kammen, 1993). For instance, to rule Catalonia, Phillip II had to pass the vigil and the Feast of Our Lady of Monserrat near the shrine. An even better known example is found in the Castilian law of succession that allowed women rulers but which differed from the tradition of Aragon that
allowed only male monarchs.

The Catholic Baroque bestowed on each of the American and Asian nations the same legal standing within the Empire of the feudal kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula. Nahuatl was the official language of New Spain (MacLachlan and Rodríguez, 1980) and was protected by the same laws of tradition as was Catalán as spoken in the eastern parts of the Iberian peninsula. To attain and then to safeguard this status as a nation, the peoples of the Ibero-America and Ibero-Asia were inclined by the baroque mentalité to claim as many traditions as those found among the nationalities of Europe. By bestowing on their own past histories the accoutrements of biblical and feudal similarities, legal equality with Iberian kingdoms could be achieved. The romanticization of the Inca past by Garcilaso de la Vega is but one of the examples of this genre. In the Baroque, such efforts represented much more than literary composition because they formed the foundation for a social, cultural and political identity of the Iberian polity.

Such devices are categorized by Moser (1998) as “recycling” of past history. But importantly, such recycling — a particular characteristic of the baroque — was also the basis for the subversion of Iberian imperialistic symbols by the American criollos. The process of regionalization became, in the words of Mabel Morana (1988:238), the “seeds of future nationalities.” She explains this process by admitting that use of baroque literary forms reinforced the formal cognitive language of the empire, but the content of these writing subverted the claims of the imperial hegemony over the criollo reality. This subversion was all the more effective because it defined an emergent pluralist acceptance of American culture as equals with European culture as the fruit of a conquest carried on in the name of religion.

On the one hand...the baroque paradigm paid lip service to the social and political rituals of the empire and appropriated to itself the cultural codes of the metropolis as a symbolic form of participation in the humanistic universals of the empire. On the other hand, these intellectuals articulated a tense and pluralistic reality in the colonies through their texts over against what they already perceived and expressed as a differentiated cultural process. They utilized the imperial language not only to speak for themselves but also of themselves, their plans, hopes and frustrations. (Morana, 1988:239)

In sum, the Baroque allowed the Spanish Empire to justify its intrusion into the indigenous societies of the Americas, but it also permitted the resultant criollo colonies to claim equality with European nations.
This is the subtle process underway in the synthesis of the native societies with Spain. When focused unduly on form, some scholars have been too ready to consider that Latin American civilizations were replaced by a European one. Looked at from the perspective of content, however, the *criollos* affirm that their civilization has emerged within baroque Catholicism as a variant expression, equal in importance. Thus, if O’Gorman (1984) is partially correct to claim that Europe “invented” America as a utopic expression of itself, that statement cannot be accepted without simultaneously affirming that by use of baroque devices the Americas subverted the European effort to their own advantages (see Rivera Pagan, 1991/1992: p. 5, p. 274 fn. 9; Zavala, 1992).

The Baroque as an Age of Faith

Baroque Catholicism preferred to “recycle” the Middle Ages rather than present itself as a new era. As a conservative age, the Baroque looked to the past rather than the future for its inspiration. The pre-reformation era of a unified Christendom was viewed as a happier time than a fragmented future with competing Christian religions and warring states. In the conservatism of the period, the idealized picture of the medieval world was an argument that return to the past would undo the evils brought by rationalism, individualism and greed in a post-feudal economy. Cervantes’ gaunt figure of Don Quixote challenges readers to decide who is really mad: those who live by the values of nobility and honor or those who believe such things are only fables.

The Catholic Baroque was an age of faith that took delight in the marvelous. Faced with a Reformation theology that had disparaged clergy, sacraments and devotions to Mary, the Baroque emphasized these by stressing heavenly intervention by miracles. The lives of the saints, exemplified in the *Flos sanctorum*, presented miracles as the proof of sanctity. But whereas the medieval period was usually satisfied with a wondrous healing or other miraculous deliverance (Christian, 1981; 1981a), the Baroque sought psychological reinforcement for the meaning of the marvelous. Thus the lives of the saints include long soliloquies in florid prose delivered by eight and nine year old future saints. Frequently without historical foundation, the age felt free to accommodate the popular culture with dramatic dialogue that both educated and pleased the public.

For those unfamiliar with Calderón de la Barca, Tirso Molina and Lope de la Vega, the liberties that William Shakespeare took with the historical Hamlet, Prince of Denmark and the Plantagenet kings of
England serve to illustrate this phenomenon. And while a more skeptical age (like our own) would likely dismiss such baroque creations as a "constructed reality" intended to extend the hegemony of a dominant class, during the Baroque it was a recognized and accepted style of hagiographical writing. Operating from a teleological premise that only a later generation could fully appreciate the importance of any spiritual event, such achronistic embellishments did not confuse the theological meaning with historical accuracy. Miguel Sánchez, the criollo redactor of the 1630 document that helped establish the cult of the Mexican Our Lady of Guadalupe, uses the scriptural text from the Book of Revelations to describe the apparition to Juan Diego, explaining that the woman revealed to John of Patmos was the same vision later fully manifest on Tepeyac hill in Mexico (Lafaye, 1974/1976:242-251, esp. 250; Poole, 1997:106-07) With a similar license, the 1720 narration of the apparition of Our Lady of Charity at Nipe Bay in Cuba changes the name of one of the boatmen to "Juan Diego," thus underlining his message that Cuba has a Marian patroness equal to the Mexican Guadalupe (Stevens-Arroyo, 2002).

Such theological devices reproduced with a baroque flair the kinds of tropes so well analyzed by William Christian (1981a) for Marian apparitions in Catholic Spain. Narrowing the time span to focus on the Baroque, a similar pattern emerges in the transatlantic devotions. A comparison between the events that produced the devotions to Our Lady of Charity in Cuba and Guadalupe in New Spain demonstrates the centrality of a Baroque "history" of the origins of each cult. In each case, a shrine that had witnessed marvelous cures and favors to suppliants was supplied with an apparition of the Blessed Mother that had taken place in the past. Burkhart (2001) shows how the Baroque style was also found in Nahuatl texts of the period. Those who promoted the devotion also supplied literary accounts of its legendary origins, adding the exact words of the apparition, much in the manner of a theatrical drama. Yet, as shown by Father Stafford Poole (1995) and suggested by Olga Portundo (1995), no accounts of miracles can be found for either Guadalupe or Our of Lady of Charity from the dates in which the apparition was to have taken place. In fact, in the Mexican case, rather than allege an apparition, the Franciscans such as Sahagún actually disparage the devotion as an excess of ignorance (Poole, 1995: 77-81).

Such protests took place before the onset of the Baroque. The Baroque theology allowed an enlargement of the importance of local
devotions even if it meant "creating" legends. This is not to deny there was not a previous devotion or an oral tradition that included the marvelous. Rather, I argue that baroque theology gave license to explain the existing devotional tradition in grandiloquent terms. The theological grounding was necessary in an age of faith such as was the Baroque because without a spiritual origin there could not be an emergent Mexican or Cuban nation (Lefaye, 1974/1976). The apparition of the Virgin Mother of God to a humble native of the place was evidence of the worthiness of the colonies and of the criollos and Aztecs living there. To underline the social location of the national protectress, racial and geophysical elements were highlighted, often including elements of the indigenous earth religion. Thus, for instance, the Mexican image of Guadalupe is adorned with elements derived from Aztec religious symbols, even to the location on Tepeyac hill, a site sacred to Tonantzin, a female mother deity.

To the Mexican and Cuban examples cited above can be added others such as Our Lady of Copacabana at the borders of Peru and Bolivia (Salles-Reese, 1997; MacCormack, 1991), the syncretism of Santiago, Slayer of Moors, with the mock battles of Mexica religion (Harris, 2000) and the fear of devil possession in the 17th century (Cervantes, 1994). In each of these examples, the baroque theology incorporates symbols, places, images and legends from indigenous earth religions in the Americas and gives them a place in Catholicism.

**Devotionalism as Orthodox Theology**

I have argued that these examples point to the Baroque invention of devotionalism (Stevens-Arroyo, 1998a). "Devotionalism" emerges out of the special circumstances of the baroque period. The reforms of the Council of Trent required a reexamination of the accretions to Catholic piety in order to counter the arguments of Protestants, but at the same time the church did not want to concede to the Reformation that all devotions to the saints were in error. By legislating that all (new) devotions be subjected to scrutiny by clerical officials in a process of deposition, evaluation and pronouncement, outlandish popular exaggerations could be separated from legitimate religious experiences. Moreover, only the approved devotions could develop prayers and rituals that brought indulgences such as 30 days exemption from a sentence in Purgatory for the recitation of an approved prayer. The composition of the prayer also required theological orthodoxy, usually by ending with an invocation to the mediation of Jesus as Son of God and equal mem-
ber of the Trinity. The technology of mass printing also aided devotion-
alism because the sacred image with its indulgenced prayer could gain world-wide circulation through the network of church-sponsored sodal-

But although the theology of the Baroque insisted on evidence of apparitions, it was lenient in the way it accepted such proof. Because theology à la Suárez considered oral tradition as more important than the written word, the mere existence of the devotion often confirmed its heavenly origins. This logic was recently applied by Pope John Paul II to canonize the Mexican Juan Diego of the Guadalupe devotion, although there are no certain historical records to indicate that such a person existed. See Burkhart, 2000, page 1, ftn. 2.

Moreover, in the imperative to include non-European Catholics as proof of the church’s superiority to Protestantism, the far-distant manifesta-
tions were afforded much prominence in Catholic Europe. When contrasted with the reluctance of church authorities to accept the appar-
ition at Lourdes in the 19th century, one can see that the same instru-
ments of scrutiny were utilized in a very different way during the Baroque. In essence, the theology of the 17th century was eager to accept such witness of earth religion, whereas the theology of the 19th century was hesitant.

The Baroque Signs of Openness to Syncretism

When theology defines the conditions for an embrace of religious experience that genetically is akin to indigenous religions, it must needs make the definition in terms of its own orthodox positions. Without entering into the validity or accuracy of such a theological process, I wish here to suggest several traits that may then be applied to other examples. I consider two characteristics to be the most salient: earth religious symbols as presage of Christianity; and national legends as salvation history.

1. Earth symbols as presages of Christianity

The Catholic missionaries encountered religions that had no previ-
ous contact with Europe. They were often presented with religious sym-
ols that bore great resemblance to elements already syncretized with Christianity. For instance, in the present-day New Mexico, the Pueblo natives of present day New Mexico utilized the zia as a symbol repre-
senting the sun and the four directions as talisman. The image can cur-
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rently be found on the New Mexico state license plate. But this earth religion symbol assumes the shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. For centuries, Christian writers had elaborated theological explanations of the Holy Cross as compass, anchor, image of the four winds, etc. that resonated with the function of the indigenous image.

Baroque theology inclined the missionaries to view the New Mexico talisman as a presage of the Christian cross. In their Catholic providentialism, the importance of the image to the indigenous people was part of God’s plan to prepare the way for the Gospel. In an age of faith, it is not a mere coincidence that two religions should share the same basic symbol. In my thinking, the cross had been syncretized with the earth religions of Europe and that the continuation of the process in the Americas was possible because the earth religious experience is generic in all peoples. But for the missionaries of the Baroque, primacy was placed on the control of history by God. As stated above in describing a theology of the “Anonymous Christian,” the adherence to any Christian virtue, symbol or belief by a non-Christian believer is a sign that the Christian faith is already operative, even if is unrecognized by the non-Christian.

Such was this eager expectation of Baroque theology that forced Catholicism to encounter itself in the religious experience of Asia and the Americas. Echevarría notes that the Jesuits, paragons of baroque theology, present “perhaps the only model where Europe, the inventor of the modern universality, can offer a genuine disposition of openness, of autocriticism in respect to its own mental structures” (Echevarría, 1998:58).

2. National legends as salvation history

Given the premise that oral tradition during the baroque had greater legal authority than the written word, “legends” of national origins were essential to establishing rights for a nationality under Spanish rule. In such cases, elements of earth religion were elevated in importance and then transcribed into documents. Although these legends were not considered scripture, they became book religious experiences for people living in societies only recently constituted on the foundations of indigenous religions. Because many natural features: water, clouds, rock formations, etc. caused certain sites to be considered sacred in earth religions, the oral traditions that became written legends often depended upon such features in the narrative. Examples of such tropes are the reasons that certain plants have thorns or why certain flowers are
of a specific color.

In order to syncretize such tales into Catholicism, however, it was necessary to coronate the “natural” revelation with a Christian source. In Europe, the various national churches claimed origin from one of the apostles. With the exception of Peter who went to Rome as its first bishop, all the apostles were more or less equal in importance. By claiming apostolic origins, a nation expressed that its Christianity was unique and non-subordinated to other national churches. Marian apparitions, however, took precedence even over the apostles, since in the peculiar matriarchal slant of Catholicism, Mary is considered Queen of the Apostles and the intermediary between humanity and Jesus Christ, her son (Stevens-Arroyo, 1998a).

In the Americas and in Asia, it was hard to establish apostolic preaching as the origin of religion. An apparition of Mary, however, had precedents in European theology and offered the advantage of providing instant superiority to Spain, where legend stated St. James had preached the faith. During the baroque, Marian devotionalism developed as a uniquely Catholic feature and with frequency in the Americas and Philippines. Such Marian devotions, especially when elevated by criollo clerics to the status of devotionalism, became emblematic of each American nationality and proof of heaven’s approval for a unique cultural identity in the colonies.

There is an interesting apostolic connection to the Americas that was elaborated during the baroque. Based on a reference to a sailing trip of St. Thomas beyond the Mediterranean, in Brazil and in Mexico, it was argued that St. Thomas had preached the gospel in apostolic times. None less than Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz cited this legend to extol the virtues of New Spain’s Catholicism. Sor Juana wrote in one of her autos, El Divino Narciso, that the Aztec custom of human sacrifice was a confused vestige of St. Thomas’ preaching on the Eucharist wherein Catholics are urged to eat the body and blood of Christ for salvation. Fray Servando Teresa Mier argued from these baroque legends at the dawn of the 19th century, that not even the Christian faith had been brought to Mexico by Spain and therefore, the Europeans should leave the Mexicans to their independence immediately (Lafaye, 1974/1976:177-87 et passim). The St. Thomas legend was also invoked in India with the encounter there by Catholic missionaries of Christian natives who had a much more historically based claim to have been evangelized before the arrival of the Spanish.

In each of these cases, earth religion elements already present in the
indigenous religious experience were elaborated to justify and even foment syncretism with the pre-existing religious system. Catholic baroque theology considered such incidences as proof of the excellence and universalism of the faith. That such convergence also legitimated the imperial rule of Spain is a fact that should not be ignored. But neither ought we denigrate the influence of theology on the formation of new nationalities. The syncretism that was cultivated for missionary purposes that were linked to political subjugation was often resurrected by criollo elements of another generation that used religious justification for insurrection against imperial rule.

Conclusions

In my judgment Baroque Catholicism needs to be reappraised in civilizational analysis. The destruction of the indigenous civilizations took place principally during the periods of conquest (1493-1535) and imperial consolidation (1535-1580). These were followed by a longer and more far-reaching period lasting until the 18th century in which theology opened the door to syncretism between Iberian Catholicism and aspects of earth religious experience. While the earlier periods witnessed the physical destruction of the native civilizations, the Baroque permitted the reconstruction of a new synthesis that bestowed equality on the conquered peoples, recognizing their legal right as nations to exercise an autonomous culture, speak their native tongue and follow local customs in law. To express this idea with concepts of splitting and lumping civilizations, it might be said that the Baroque split colonial Latin America from its indigenous predecessor and imperial, Catholic Spain from Protestant Europe. The Baroque lumped together the Ibero-Mediterranean polity with colonies in America and Asia, crystalizing a new Weltanschauung recognized as Roman Catholicism, post-Reformation, post-Discovery, and post-Feudalism.

I have confined my examples of this Baroque syncretism and theological openness to Spain and its American colonies. But it would be a fruitful line of inquiry to explore whether this theological drive to expand is also found in other religions. In China, Chu-hung (1535-1615) and Te Ch’ing (1546-1623) expanded the representations of Buddhism to include elements of traditional Chinese religious experience (Fernández Armesto, 1995:297). In Japan during the Baroque, Keichu (1640-1701) undertook a syncretism with Shintoism that had parallels with what took place in the Latin American colonies. The effort by Tibetan missionaries to convert the Mongols roughly coincid-
ed with the Baroque (Fernández Armesto, 1995:306-308). Within Islam, the period of greatest expansion in Africa was noteworthy for the adoption of the faith by Nigerian converts in Hausaland through the formulation of missionary texts at the Koranic School founded in Katsina in 1655 and itinerant African Koranic scholars called Toronkawa became influential in stirring up revivalism and jihad after 1690 (Fernández Armesto, 1995:288). Perhaps these are indications that a sort of “axial age” of religious expansion that joined book religion with earth religion took place during the late 16th and entering into the 17th century. If one views Quigley’s notion of expansion as a quality of civilization, then these theological movements merit attention from civilizationists.

This article has been focused on adducing historical examples that theology can be open to a widening synthesis of book religion with earth religion. To the extent that my effort can be judged favorably, one may return to the wider thesis that a theological understanding of earth religion is a valuable tool in civilizational analysis. Although use of this tool requires some skill in understanding theological vocabulary, it is a worthwhile direction for the comparative study of civilizations.

There is added importance for if one takes seriously the identification of the Baroque mentalité with what contemporary cultural critics call “Postmodernism” (Schrumm, 1998). The technological uniformity of the contemporary global culture has created a seemingly contradictory renaissance of ethnicity. The European Union, which has united the continent in commercial and political terms, has nonetheless witnessed rekindled nationalisms. The Scots and Welsh have their own Parliments; Spain is a multinational federation; the Basques and Bretons celebrate their differences from the rest of France; and within the former Soviet bloc, nationalities long thought eradicated have resurrected. In the United States, the need for unity and claims for ethnic, racial and linguistic autonomy compete in the public forum (Stevens-Arroyo, 1998). Everywhere in the world, the realm of the religious and the spiritual is invoked for a legitimacy that state, culture and ideology can no longer supply. It may be that the genius of syncretism unleashed by the Baroque may revisit history for vindication as the guardian of civilization. Contemporary observers of religion in the United States consider immigration to have stimulated Christianity towards new expression that incorporate many elements derived from different societies bringing both “boundaries and bridges” (Warner, 1997). Another well-known scholar sees syncretism as equivalent to a “religious borderland” (Roof, 1998). These trends support Berry’s opinion that humankind is entering
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into a new religious age, wherein science and religion reunite. They will be mediated by a retelling of the Earth Story, i.e. a reliance on metaphors and analogies derived from nature. Not only are such symbols and images found in all human societies, says Berry, they are now increasingly important to science which has discovered the finiteness of the earth and its resources. Thus, the drama of civilization continues.

Endnotes

This article has been developed a paper with this title first presented Friday, June 1, 2001 at the Annual Meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilization held at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. Previously, theoretic aspects concerning civilizational analysis were presented to the ISCSC at its various conferences. These presentations include:

2. The Latin American Dynamics of Civilization” June 1, 1985 at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.
3. The Saga of the Earth People in America: The Historical Revindication of the Conquered American Peasantry in an International Perspective” June 15, 1986 an Appalachian State University in Boone County, West Virginia.
4. The Aladdin Ruse, New Civilizations from Old: The Eclipse of Central Civilization by Regional Revindication” June 1, 1989 at the University of California, Berkeley.
5. Incorporation into the Word System and into the Otherworldly System: A Comparative Analysis of Conquest and Evangelization in the Canaries and Hispaniola” June 11, 1991 at the Hotel Nacional, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.
6. Devotionalism as Global Outreach: The Civilizational Impact of Baroque Catholicism Throughout the Ibero-Mediterranean Polity” May 9, 1997 at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
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