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# Alfonso de Castro on Vernacular Bible Translation and Christian Education

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**Abstract:** Alfonso de Castro (1495–1558) is known as a staunch opponent of vernacular Bible translation, who intervened on the matter at the Council of Trent. This article offers a fresh appreciation of Castro’s polemics against vernacular bibles, in light of a less well-known treatise in which Castro defends the right of the indigenous Spanish colonial population to be educated in the liberal arts and theology. It is argued that at the root of Castro’s misgivings about Bible translation is a concern for preserving traditional education as a necessary prerequisite for biblical interpretation.

**Keywords:** Alfonso de Castro, Council of Trent, education, vernacular Bible translation

## 1 Introduction

When Pedro Pacheco, Bishop of Jaén (1488–1560), travelled to Trent in the autumn of 1545 in anticipation of the upcoming council, he brought with him Alfonso de Castro (1495–1558), Franciscan theologian, humanist, Catholic apologist and preacher.<sup>1</sup> Friar De Castro taught at the Franciscan studium affiliated with the University of Salamanca, the centre of sixteenth-century scholastic theology.<sup>2</sup> His reputation had been firmly established with the publication of *Adversus omnes haereses*, an encyclopaedia of heresies that would be disseminated widely for years to come. His later works, *De justa haereticorum punitione* and *De potestate legis poenalis*, earned him a reputation as one of the founders of modern-day penal law. Between 1532 and 1535, Castro preached in the Low Countries, parts of Germany and France. In 1553, his oratory and publications

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<sup>1</sup> The biography offered here summarizes the main points of Juan Bautista Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teólogos españoles sobre dar estudios mayores a los indios,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 15 (1958): 113–200 (115–23); Fernando Domínguez, “Castro, Alfonso de,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 2 (1994): 974.

<sup>2</sup> Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teólogos,” 116.

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would secure his appointment as court preacher of the Spanish prince regent and soon-to-be King Philip. When Philip married Mary Tudor, Castro accompanied his sovereign to England, where he stayed from July 1554 to March 1556. His death in Brussels in February 1558 suggests that Castro continued preaching in the Low Countries during the final years of his life.

Castro was present at the first period of the Council of Trent (1545–1547) as a *peritus* or expert theologian in the train of Pedro Pacheco and during the second period (1551–1552), he spoke on behalf of Emperor Charles V. We know that he acquitted himself ably in discussions on the canon of Holy Scripture and on original sin, although no direct record of his contributions on these topics remains. In scholarship on the Council of Trent, however, Castro is mostly remembered as a staunch opponent of vernacular Bible translations.<sup>3</sup> It is not our intention to reconstruct once more the deliberations of March/April 1546, when the Council turned its attention to the issue of vernacular Bible translation. Others have done so most admirably.<sup>4</sup> Suffice to recall briefly the junctures at which Alfonso de Castro's views on the matter came to the fore.

The topic of vernacular Bibles was first raised on March 1, 1546 in a *classis* presided over by cardinal Marcello Cervini, one of the three papal legates directing the Council at that time.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this meeting was to catalogue and discuss abuses of Scripture. The notion that vernacular Bibles constituted

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3 E. g. Vittorio Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire: Victoires et défaites du latin entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 199–201; Ferdinand Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire au concile de Trente (IV<sup>e</sup> session)," in *Mélanges E. Podéchar: Études de sciences religieuses offertes pour son éméritat au doyen honoraire de la Faculté de Théologie de Lyon* (Lyon: Facultés catholiques, 1945), 37–56 (40–41).

4 Notably Els Agten and Wim François, "The Council of Trent and Vernacular Bible Reading: What Happened in the Build-Up to and during the Fourth Session (1546)?" in *The Council of Trent: Reform and Controversy in Europe and Beyond (1545–1700)*, vol. 1, *Between Trent, Rome and Wittenberg*, ed. Wim François and Violet Soen, *Refo500 Academic Studies* 35.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 101–30 (111–26); Wim François, "The Catholic Church and Vernacular Bible Reading, Before and After Trent," *Biblicum Jassyense. Romanian Journal for Biblical Philology and Hermeneutics* 4 (2013): 5–37 (19–24); Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 199–224; Robert E. McNally, "The Council of Trent and Vernacular Bibles," *Theological Studies* 27 (1966): 204–227; Leopold Lentner, *Volkssprache und Sakralsprache: Geschichte einer Lebensfrage bis zum Ende des Konzils von Trient* (Wiener Beiträge zur Theologie 5; Wien: Herder, 1964), 237–64; Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, vol. 2, *Die erste Trienter Tagungsperiode 1545/47* (Freiburg: Herder, 1957), 42–77; Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 37–56; Stephan Ehse, "Das Konzil von Trient und die Übersetzung der Bibel in die Landessprache," in *Fünf Vorträge von der Limburger Generalversammlung* (Köln: Bachem, 1909), 37–50.

5 The reconstruction given here is based on John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 83–87; Jedin, *Geschichte*, 42–49.

such an abuse immediately incited both assent and opposition, suggesting that the question would not be resolved easily.<sup>6</sup> On 5 March the papal legates appointed a commission to prepare a text on the abuses of Scripture, of which Alfonso de Castro was one of eleven members.<sup>7</sup> On 8 and 9 March, the so-called *theologi minores* present at the Council were allowed to express their opinions on the matter – the actual Council Fathers were allowed to witness these deliberations, but not to take the floor. On this occasion, Castro delivered a speech condemning vernacular Bible translations as an abuse of Scripture. His rhetorical skills must have impressed those present, judging from the remarks left by Angelo Massarelli, secretary to cardinal Cervini.<sup>8</sup> The issue of vernacular Bible translations was raised again in a general congregation on 17 March, where the prelates proved equally as divided on the matter as the minor theologians. It did not resurface until 1 April, and was discussed one final time on 3 April. An agreement was not reached. Neither of the decrees officially promulgated on April 8, 1546 mentioned vernacular Bible translation.<sup>9</sup>

Although no transcript of Castro's speech on 8 or March 9, 1546 has been preserved,<sup>10</sup> it is assumed that the views he expressed at the Council must have been similar to his treatment of the same topic in theological works roughly around the same time as the first period of the Council of Trent.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Castro discussed the issue of vernacular Bible translations on three separate occasions in the fourth decade of the sixteenth century: in the first book of his *Adversus omnes haereses*, the second edition of which Castro was preparing in the period

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6 McNally, "The Council of Trent," 208–12.

7 See Cavallera, "La Bible en langue vulgaire," 39.

8 In his diary Massarelli noted: "*quem articulum diffuse fr. Alphonsus de Castro disseruit*"; see *Concilium Tridentinum. Diariorum, actorum, epistularum, tractatum nova collectio* [hereafter *CT*], ed. Görres-Gesellschaft, 13 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1901–2001), 1:510. In the official proceedings he wrote: "*quem articulum disseruit eleganter fr Alphonsus de Castro*" (*CT* 5:28).

9 O'Malley, *Trent*, 97–98.

10 Stephan Ehses, the editor of the proceedings of the first period of the Council, believed he had discovered the text of Castro's speech in ms Ottobonianus lat 620; see *CT* 5:28 (n. 2). The later editor of this text showed that it could not have been Castro's, and attributed it to Nicolas Audet, general of the Carmelite order; see *CT* 12:511. See also Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 39–40 (n. 4). The authorship of Nicolas Audet has been called into question as well, because the text refers to itself as a contribution to a discussion of *periti*, whereas Audet, as the head of the Carmelite order, would not have been allowed to take the floor in such a meeting. The treatise would then have been composed by Battista Castiglioni, one of Alfonso de Castro's fellow Franciscans; see Beniamino Emmi, "Il posto del « De ecclesiasticis scripturis et dogmatibus » nelle discussioni tridentine," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 25 (1949): 589–97 (593–94).

11 François, "The Catholic Church," 19.

immediately preceding the Council; in *Utrum indigenae novi orbis instruendi sint*, a little known advisory statement to the Royal and Supreme Council for the Indies, dated by Castro in January 1543, but apparently never published by him; and in the third book of *De justa haereticorum punitione*, which first appeared in 1547 (it is likely that Castro was working on it during the Council).

Our present aim is a fresh comparative reading of these texts with a view to exploring the arguments deployed by Castro to condemn translations of the Bible into the vernacular languages of Europe. While this has been done before with respect to Castro's better-known works – *Adversus omnes haereses* and *De justa haereticorum punitione* – the more obscure *Utrum indigenae* significantly contributes to understanding exactly what was at stake in Castro's opposition to vernacular Bibles. As it turns out, his views on the matter must have been a bit more nuanced than the outright censure of Biblical translations which is sometimes attributed to him.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 *Adversus omnes haereses*

### 2.1 The editions

The purpose of Castro's *Adversus omnes haereses libri XIII* was to inventorize all manner of heresies from the first centuries CE up until Castro's own day; organising them thematically into several *tituli* and making them accessible through an extensive index. Rather than it being a historical study, *Adversus omnes haereses* was intended for practical use during the religious controversies of early sixteenth-century Europe. While this may not be immediately clear from the first edition, changes introduced in subsequent editions highlight the work's apologetic nature. Its exhaustive and user-friendly style must have secured it a wide readership throughout the sixteenth century, judging from its many reprints.

The first edition of *Adversus omnes haereses* appeared on September 28, 1534 in the Paris printing house of Josse Bade (Jodocus Badius Ascensius, 1462–1535), originally from Asse, near Brussels.<sup>13</sup> In the last years of his life, he regularly cooperated with his son-in-law Jean de Roigny, as is the case with the first

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the discussions in Alain Tallon, "Trente (Concile de)," *Catholicisme: hier – aujourd'hui – demain* 15 (1997): 289–303 (292); Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 199–200.

<sup>13</sup> All biographical information on Josse Bade is based on Philippe Renouard, *Bibliographie des impressions et des oeuvres de Josse Badius Ascensius, imprimeur et humaniste, 1462–1535*, 3 vols. (Paris: Paul & Guillemin, 1908), vol. 1, 1–70.

edition of Castro's treatise. This edition was dedicated to cardinal Juan Pardo de Tavera (1472–1545), Archbishop of Toledo, fellow countryman of Castro, and former rector of the university of Salamanca. This first version of *Adversus omnes haereses* was reprinted in 1539 (Cologne), 1541 (Salamanca, Paris and Lyon), 1543 (Cologne, Paris) and twice in 1546 (Lyon). A noteworthy volume is the 1543 edition by Melchior von Neuss (Melchior Novesianus, 1525–1551). In addition to Castro's *Adversus omnes haereses*, it contains the *Determinatio Facultatis Theologiae in schola Parisiensi*, which condemned Erasmus' statements on vernacular Bible translation, as well as Johannes Cochleius' refutation of 21 propositions of the Münster Anabaptists. This suggests that, less than ten years after its first publication, Castro's treatise had already secured a place in anti-reformation polemics. Both editions by the Frelon brothers (Lyon, 1546) contain the first version of *Adversus omnes haereses*, even though a revised edition was published in the same year.

We know that Castro completed this revised edition before the official opening of the Council of Trent.<sup>14</sup> It was published in Venice *ad signum Spei*, supposedly a book shop near the church of Santa Maria Formosa.<sup>15</sup> This edition of *Adversus omnes haereses* is dedicated to Pedro Pacheco, in whose retinue Castro had travelled to Trent. It contains an extensive *epistola nuncupatoria*, dated November 30, 1545, discussing its differences from the previous edition. This edition was republished in 1549 (Cologne) and 1555 (Lyon and Venice).

In 1556 and 1557, a third version of *Adversus omnes haereses* was published in Antwerp at the printing house of Joannes Steels (Joannes Steelsius), printed by Hans (also: Jan) de Laet (Johannes Latius).<sup>16</sup> For this edition, Philip II, who had recently succeeded to the Spanish throne, had granted a royal privilege to the Antwerp printer and his heirs. The text of this privilege, added after the title page in both Spanish and Latin, reveals that Steels enjoyed exclusive publishing rights to *Adversus omnes haereses* within Philip's lands. It should be remembered that at this time Castro occupied the position of court preacher – thus, the text of the privilege dubs him “*nuestro Predicador*”.

<sup>14</sup> Manuel de Castro, “Fr. Alfonso de Castro, O.F.M. (1495–1559): consejero de Carlos V y de Felipe II,” *Salmanticensis* 5 (1958): 281–322 (302). A search in the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* [last checked: February 21, 2019] also turns up a Venetian edition from 1545, apparently present in only two Italian libraries [*non vidi*].

<sup>15</sup> Its precise location and the identity of the printer have never been fully determined. See Maria C. Napoli, *L'impresa del libro nell'Italia del Seicento: la bottega di Marco Ginammi* (Napels: Guida, 1990), 16–17. The Venetian edition of 1555 also mentions *in vico Sanctae Mariae Formosae* on the title page, which points towards the same publishing house.

<sup>16</sup> In both cases, the title page mentions 1556 as the year of publication, but the 1556 and 1557 editions can be distinguished on the basis of the colophon.

In this edition, Castro had made so many changes that one could consider it an entirely new work; or so the title page claims. The *epistola nuncupatoria* was largely retained from the earlier edition, though was now obviously dedicated to Philip II. A printer's notice lists the most substantial modifications made to the new edition, which include new arguments against Protestant doctrines (both Luther and Calvin are mentioned by name) and the insertion of doctrinal decrees from the Council of Trent. In addition, the book was now more richly supplemented with indices than any earlier edition.<sup>17</sup> These modifications highlight the apologetic purpose of the treatise. Its legacy extended well beyond the sixteenth century, for the collected works of Alfonso de Castro continued to be printed, read and translated up until the eighteenth century. In 1727, Jean Hernant published a French translation of *Adversus omnes haereses*, which greatly altered the structure of the original work. Hernant's version was itself translated into Italian in 1735. The collected works of Castro, including the third and final edition of *Adversus omnes haereses*, were last published in 1773.

## 2.2 The argumentation in *Adversus omnes haereses*

Vernacular Bible translation is discussed in the first book of *Adversus omnes haereses*, where the author discourses on the causes of heresy.<sup>18</sup> After having discussed several internal causes, attributable to the heretics themselves, Castro identifies three external causes of heresy: neglect of bishops and secular rulers, a lack of preaching, and the availability of vernacular Bibles.<sup>19</sup> As there is no lack of summaries of the discussion contained in *Adversus omnes haereses*,<sup>20</sup> we shall limit ourselves to highlighting the salient features of Castro's argumentation. Alfonso de Castro deploys a three-pronged argumentative strategy: (1) *confirmatio* of his thesis that vernacular Bibles give rise to heresy; (2) *refutatio* of Luther's arguments in favour of widespread Bible reading in the vernacular; and (3) *refutatio* of Erasmus' similarly positive judgment on the matter.

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<sup>17</sup> In addition to the detailed index from earlier editions (*index rerum ac sententiarum*), both a thematic index (*index titulorum*) and a Scripture index (*index auctoritatum*) were added.

<sup>18</sup> Our discussion is based on the edition by Melchior Neuss (Köln, 1543). All references are automatically attributed to this edition, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>19</sup> Fol. 24 and following.

<sup>20</sup> Agten and François, "The Council of Trent," 113–15; François, "The Catholic Church," 20–22; Sergio Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición de la Biblia en lengua vulgar: defensores y detractores* (León: Universidad de León, 2003), 249–56; Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 191–95; Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 45–48.

To frame his first argument, Castro combines two propositions: viz. that heresies do not arise from Scripture itself, but from misleading interpretations of it; and that the risk of false interpretation is greater among an uneducated readership. Both of these propositions are substantiated through a combination of biblical and patristic quotations, as well as drawing historical parallels from the recent and distant past. In support of his first proposition, Castro quotes Hilarius of Poitiers, who states in the second book of his *De Trinitate*: “For heresy originates in interpretation, not in Scripture; and the meaning, not the language is turned awry.”<sup>21</sup> To illustrate the second proposition, Castro points out that in Rabbinic Judaism, young and immature persons were forbidden from studying the biblical books of Genesis and Song of Songs; and in ancient Rome, only a dedicated college of priests was allowed to consult and interpret the sacred Sibylline Books. More recently, Castro considers the rise of heterodox Christian groups, such as the Waldensians and Begards, to have been brought about via the availability of inaccurate Bible translations.

In this context, Castro adduces one biblical quote that may be regarded as commonplace in polemics against vernacular Bible translation.<sup>22</sup> Responsible interpretation of Scripture, so Castro states, requires both faith and sufficient knowledge and skill – an idea that he finds reflected in Mt 7:6: “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them underfoot and turn and maul you” (NRSV). To support this interpretation of Mt 7:6, Castro quotes the commentary of Theophylact, the eleventh-century Archbishop of Ohrid:

The dogs are the non-believers, but the swine are those who lead a swine’s life. The mysteries of faith should not therefore be handed over to the unfaithful. For the swine trample what is spoken, but the dogs turn and maul them, as the philosophers did when they heard about Christ crucified. But they maul you by making you doubt, arguing that it is impossible.<sup>23</sup>

Here, Castro is quoting from *In quatuor evangelia enarrationes*, a Latin translation of Theophylact’s commentary by Johannes Oecolampadius, first published

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<sup>21</sup> Hilarius, *De Trinitate* 2, 27, 3; translated from *Sancti Hilarii Pictaviensis episcopi De trinitate*, ed. P. Smulders, CCSL 62, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979–1980).

<sup>22</sup> Wim François, “Petrus Sutor et son plaidoyer contre les traductions de la Bible en langue populaire (1525),” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 82 (2006): 139–63 (144); Wim François, “The Catholic Church and the Vernacular Bible in the Low Countries: A Paradigm Shift in the 1550s?” in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet and Bart Ramakers, *Intersections* 38 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 234–81 (251–52).

<sup>23</sup> Fol. 25 v.

in 1524.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Castro's quotation is incomplete and misrepresents both Theophylact's interpretation and Oecolampadius' rendering of it. In Theophylact, the dogs represent non-believers, who should not be made partial to the mysteries of the faith. The swine, on the other hand, are themselves believers (a distinction already blurred out in Oecolampadius' translation) but lead a morally repugnant life. Such persons, Theophylact argues, should never be allowed to be present at sermons on theological topics. It is understandable that Castro, himself a dedicated and accomplished preacher, would have left out this last injunction: earlier on in his treatise, he had emphasized the need for preaching to improve the moral life of the faithful. Consequently, in Castro's rendition, the distinction between the metaphorical "dogs" and "swine" disappears, and "the unfaithful" (*increduli*) becomes a general label for what were, originally, two distinct types of people. Judging from the rest of Castro's treatise, he seems to have had in mind the mass of uneducated people rather than actual non-believers.

Next, Castro refers to a prohibition of vernacular Bibles issued by the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Fernández López considers it very unlikely that a royal prohibition should ever have existed in the form suggested by Castro.<sup>25</sup> He points out the lack of any archival evidence on this matter, and calls into question the independence of all later testimonies, leaving Alfonso de Castro as the only source of this historical datum.<sup>26</sup> The Catholic Kings did decree on July 8, 1502 that any new publication in Spanish territory, either in Latin or in one of the vernacular languages, would require the approval of the secular authorities – a regulation that would have included any and all Bible translations. This, however, is hardly the blanket prohibition envisaged by Castro.

Fernández López further notes that Bartolomé de Carranza, Archbishop of Toledo (1503–1576), does mention a prohibition of Bible translations in fifteenth-century Spain in connection with the prosecution of Jews during the

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<sup>24</sup> Consulted in the following edition: Theophylactus de Achrida, *In quatuor evangelia enarrationes*, Ioanne Oecolampadio interprete (Basel: Andreas Cratander, 1524). Oecolampadius' original translation is as follows: *Canes sunt infideles, porci autem porcina vitam agentes. Mystera igitur incredulis non sunt prodenda, neque clari et margaritis similes sermones de Theologia immundis communicandi. Porci enim conculcant quae dicuntur, canes autem conversi lacerant vos: quod fecerunt philosophi, quum audirent crucifixum Christum. Dilacerant autem vos ratiotinando impossibile esse cavillantes* (fol. 12v). Migne (PG 123) reproduces a Venetian edition from 1754–1758, itself apparently very close to Oecolampadius' translation. A distinguishing feature is *lutulentam vitam* in the first line of commentary, instead of Oecolampadius' *porcinam vitam*.

<sup>25</sup> See the extensive discussion in Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 96–111.

<sup>26</sup> Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 99 (n. 104).

Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>27</sup> Carranza attributes this prohibition not to the Catholic Kings, but instead to “*los jueces de la religión*”, which Fernández López identifies as representatives of the Inquisition. Hence his conclusion that the prohibition of vernacular Bibles mentioned by Castro would have originated as an inquisitorial measure aimed at *conversos* or crypto-Jews who, after having been forced into conversion, were suspected of continuing their ancestral traditions through judaizing Bible translations. The historical data collected by Fernández López suggest that local inquisitorial initiatives gradually developed into a more coordinated censure, until vernacular Bibles were prohibited in Spain from 1530 onwards.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Castro’s appeal to a formal prohibition by the Catholic Kings, whilst not being historically accurate, should be understood as expressing the “official” standpoint of the Spanish authorities on this matter.

In what follows, Castro discusses two arguments in favour of vernacular Bibles, both ascribed to Martin Luther. Firstly, the idea that Scripture is readily understandable to any reader is challenged mainly from the Bible itself, based on scriptural quotes and the specific literary characteristics of biblical texts. In this context, Castro refers to 2Pet 3:16, another staple of polemics against indiscriminate reading and interpretation of Scripture: “There are some things in them [i. e. the Pauline Epistles] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (NRSV).<sup>29</sup> Castro is rather of the opinion that the interpretation of Scripture is an arduous task, reserved for the happy few who have had a proper education. To support this view, he refers to 1Tim 1:7 and 2Cor 4:3 and discusses at length the figurative language and apparent contradictions found in biblical texts, citing the example of Arius and other ancient heretics who erred in spite of their learning. Secondly, Luther is credited with stating that even the Church Fathers sometimes erred in their interpretation of Scripture. To this, Castro replies that Luther contradicts himself on this point, and that his followers are themselves often divided on the correct interpretation of Scripture.

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<sup>27</sup> The exact date of this alleged prohibition is not clear. One would naturally see a connection with the decree of March 1492 expelling Jews from the Spanish territories. Yet Carranza seems to suggest an even earlier date, by linking the prohibition with Pope Paul II (1464–1471). See Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 138–50; see also Wim François, “Vernacular Bible Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The “Catholic” Position Revisited,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 104 (2018): 23–56 (34–46).

<sup>29</sup> Even the Venerable Bede, in his commentary on 2 Peter (PL 93.84; CCSL 121), had already applied this verse to heretics who misrepresent or even alter the texts of the Old and New Testaments.

Most striking in Castro's discussion at this point is his use of *a fortiori* argumentation to deny the general populace unmediated access to the Bible. For if, as Castro argues, such learned men as Arius could not interpret Scripture correctly, what would one expect from an unschooled, ill-prepared mass of readers? With reference to Luther and his followers, Castro makes his case in even stronger terms:

If there is distrust between those who would seem like leaders of the people, and if each person claims that the next has understood nothing at all of Scripture, it is unthinkable that the people are not mistaken on more things than any one of them. Especially since the public does not content itself with just reading, but disputes on the interpretation as well, so that fools (*nebulones*) are not afraid to challenge the most learned men on the interpretation of Scripture and argue with them. And what is worst of all, this is done not only by men, but even by women.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Castro refutes two arguments with which Erasmus had argued that Scripture should be made available to as wide a readership as possible. In the first place, this concerns a number of historical precedents from the patristic period: both John Chrysostom and Jerome had recommended that lay readers study Scripture, while the latter had supposedly even translated the Bible into his own vernacular, Dalmatian. To counter these arguments, Castro illustrates how the customs of the Church can and have changed over time: not everything that was deemed appropriate in ancient times has endured to the present day. He goes on to discuss the proposition that heresies arise just as easily from philosophical study as from interpretation of Scripture. Here, Castro emphasizes the difference between both activities: the Bible, unlike philosophical works, is of divine origin and of commensurately greater authority. The consequences of erroneous interpretation are, therefore, to be feared even more.

It should be clear that the key issue in Castro's discussion is not vernacular Bible translation itself, but the interpretation of Scripture by those whom Castro deems unfit for that task. The underlying question is: who has the right to authoritatively interpret Scripture? Alfonso de Castro appears to be a proponent of a closed system of interpretation, where authoritative explanation of Scripture is the prerogative of a select group. The distinguishing characteristic of this group is education, which Castro considers to be a necessary condition for responsible exegesis. This is a recurrent theme in his discussion of vernacular Bible translation in *Adversus omnes haereses*: it explains the emphasis on the Bible's literary merits and figurative language that impede interpretation; the repeated contrasts between the learned elite (who are not themselves free from

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<sup>30</sup> Fol. 28v.

error) and the uneducated masses; and the indignation at non-professionals disputing publicly on theological subjects, i. e. intruding upon the terrain of the scholastically educated elite.<sup>31</sup> Alfonso de Castro clearly frames himself as a member of this privileged group, through a constant stream of biblical quotations, excerpts from patristic authors and historical references. Where exactly the limits of this *in*-group lie, is less clear. On the whole, Castro seems to be more preoccupied with the *out*-group: the uneducated populace for whom his favourite sobriquet is “the fools” (*nebulones*).

### 3 *Utrum indigenae novi orbis instruendi sint*

#### 3.1 The manuscript

A manuscript from the archives of the Royal and Supreme Council for the Indies (Sevilla, Spain) contains a text that throws an interesting light on Castro’s arguments against vernacular Bible translation.<sup>32</sup> The manuscript (*Archivo General de Indias. Indiferente General 858*, 12 fol.) contains an untitled treatise on the question as to whether the indigenous population of the Spanish colonies in the New World should be given access to the study of the liberal arts and theology. This treatise, which the editor has entitled *Utrum indigenae novi orbis instruendi sint in mysteriis theologicis et artibus liberalibus*, defends the right of the natives to access all levels of education. The document itself carries the name of Alfonso de Castro and is dated January 1543. Appended to it are the approbations of six leading theologians of the early sixteenth century, among them Francisco de Vitoria and Castro’s fellow Franciscans, Andrés de Vega and Luis de Carvajal. The text and the appended approbations are all written in the same hand, suggesting that the surviving document is a copy of the original. It is therefore unlikely that the accomplished book hand of the document is the actual handwriting of Alfonso de Castro.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The participation of unschooled laymen in public debates frequently came up in theological discussions of the early sixteenth century, e. g. in the Enchiridion of Johannes Eck (1525); see R. Gerald Hobbs, “Translations of the Bible,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillebrand, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), vol. 1, 163–67 (166).

<sup>32</sup> The manuscript has been edited in Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teólogos,” 174–97. A recent English translation may be found in Martin A. Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans: Writings from an Inquisitional Theorist, a Heretic and an Inquisitional Deputy* (Latin American Originals 5; University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 26–50.

<sup>33</sup> There is no particular reason to suspect a forgery; see Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans*, 25–26.

This intriguing document is closely related to the history of the Catholic mission in the Spanish colonies of Central America.<sup>34</sup> Especially the Franciscan order invested in the education of indigenous youths. By the early thirties of the sixteenth century, a Franciscan college had already been established at Santiago de Tlatelolco (now part of Mexico City), where young boys were taught grammar and Latin.<sup>35</sup> Higher education in the liberal arts was added to the college's curriculum only a few years later; a full curriculum in theology was the logical next step. That this educational project would result in a generation of native priests to minister to – and possibly even lead – the local church, was highly controversial.<sup>36</sup> The Franciscan project was particularly criticized by members of the Dominican order. The matter was settled at the First Provincial Council of Mexico (1555), when members of the indigenous population were formally excluded from ordination.<sup>37</sup> This led to the decline and eventual closing of the Franciscan college at Tlatelolco, without a single alumnus ever having been ordained to priesthood.

When Alfonso de Castro wrote down his opinions on the education of natives in the Spanish Colonies, the matter was under discussion but not yet decided either way. The nature and provenance of the manuscript strongly suggest that it originated as an advisory text to the Crown. This would also explain the appended signatures of six other theologians: according to scholastic custom, Alfonso de Castro would have presented his text to fellow theologians for approval. Most of the signees are in fact among the leading Franciscan intellectuals of the era, which suggests that the document should be regarded as a semi-official expression of the Franciscan position in the debate outlined above. The only non-Franciscan to have attached his signature to the document is Francisco de Vitoria of the Dominican Order, whom we know to have held similar views on the education of the indigenous population of the Spanish colonies as those expressed by Alfonso de Castro.<sup>38</sup>

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**34** On this topic, see Aysha Pollnitz, “Old Words and the New World. Liberal Education and the Franciscans in New Spain 1536–1601,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017): 123–52; Martin A. Nesvig, “The “Indian Question” and the Case of Tlatelolco,” in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, ed. Martin A. Nesvig (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 2006), 63–89; Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teólogos,” 129–67.

**35** See Ignacio Osorio Romero, *La enseñanza del latín a los indios*, Bibliotheca humanística mexicana 4 (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990), 22–45.

**36** Osorio Romero, *La enseñanza del latín*, 40–43.

**37** Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 26; Osorio Romero, *La enseñanza del latín*, 43.

**38** Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans*, 24; Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teólogos,” 124–25.

A consideration of the wider debate concerning the question as to whether American natives should receive education reveals the prejudices and fears behind Spanish reluctance in this regard.<sup>39</sup> Even basic literacy was considered a risk, on the grounds that it would facilitate communication and increase the chance of armed resistance against the colonizing power. Knowledge of grammar and Latin was considered dangerous and pointless for the same reason. Theological studies and ordained priesthood were considered inopportune, on account of the inconstancy of the native population, which was an important aspect of colonial imagination. It was generally feared that recently converted *indios* would soon relapse into a pagan lifestyle. It would therefore be better to wait until the pagan ways had died out altogether, before raising members of the indigenous peoples to positions of responsibility within the church.

At first sight, attitudes towards education in the Spanish colonies seem to have little connection to the European debates on vernacular Bible translation. However, the question of education for the *indios* partly touches upon the same central issue, viz. the desirability of unrestricted access to, and interpretation of, Biblical texts.<sup>40</sup> For example, it was thought that certain passages of the Old Testament would be seen as an endorsement of sacrificial cults and polygamy; ancient indigenous practices that were vehemently opposed by missionaries and often forcefully abolished. Here, one recognizes the same fear of unmediated access to the Bible, i. e. of interpretations that elude ecclesiastical control, that one encounters in Castro's objections to the availability of vernacular Bibles. Although *Utrum indigenae* is not directly concerned with vernacular Bible translation, its contents should be viewed against the same backdrop.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2 The argumentation

As we have outlined, in *Utrum indigenae*, Alfonso de Castro argues for the right of the native population in the Spanish colonies to gain access to higher education in the liberal arts and theology. Given the relative obscurity of this text, a more exhaustive discussion of Castro's argumentation seems justified. The general thrust of the argument is clear enough: Castro first attempts to show that there is no reason to deny promising members of the native population

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<sup>39</sup> Olaechea Labayen, "Opinion de los teólogos," 156–65; and especially Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 22–27.

<sup>40</sup> Olaechea Labayen, "Opinion de los teólogos," 163–65.

<sup>41</sup> Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans*, 19–20.

access to theological education; once this point is established, it follows *a fortiori* that the same applies to the propaedeutic study of the liberal arts.

In the first paragraphs of his text, Castro discusses three reasons why the *indios* have so far been denied access to higher education. Firstly, there is the risk of highly educated *indios* abusing their knowledge as a weapon against the Christian faith when they relapse into idolatry – an argument founded on the presumed inconstancy of the natives.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, reference is made to Mt 7:6, the well-known admonition not to put what is holy before the dogs or to throw pearls before the swine. This biblical verse was apparently invoked by some as an argument not to share the secrets of the faith with the “barbarous” natives of the Spanish colonies. Thirdly, reference is made to Num 4:1–33 and its account of the treatment of the sacred cult objects of ancient Israel. According to the book of Numbers, only Aaron and his sons had the privilege of cleaning, covering and storing the accoutrements of Israelite worship. Levites were allowed to carry the objects once properly stored, but could never behold them directly – a prohibition that extended to all Israelites. Similarly, according to some, the reading and interpretation of Scripture should be reserved for members of the ordained priesthood.

It is clear that, at the time when he was writing this treatise, Alfonso de Castro had himself used two of these arguments in *Adversus omnes haereses* to condemn vernacular Bible translation, and would soon restate them in his *De justa haereticorum punitione*. Here, however, he develops an intricate counter-argumentation against these exclusivist interpretations of Mt 7:6 and Num 4:1–33. As we will see, Castro’s own interpretation of these verses in *Utrum indigenae* differs markedly from the views expressed in his other works.

The first part of Castro’s argument is founded on the difference between the elementary and the more esoteric mysteries of the faith, and the differing contexts in which these are communicated. Here we recognize the didactic preoccupations of an experienced preacher and teacher, such as Alfonso de Castro undoubtedly was. He considers elementary knowledge of the principles of the faith to be a necessary condition for baptism, which is also in accordance with the universal apostolic mission of the Church (reference is made to Mk 16:15–16). Yet there are also several deeper mysteries that require no understanding, only faith, from uneducated Christians (e.g. the trinity, the two natures of Christ, transubstantiation). These topics should not be discussed indiscriminately with the uneducated masses. A good preacher – so Castro explains – will adapt his exposition of these deeper mysteries to fit the level of his audience. It is important to note that, in this context, Castro sees no

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<sup>42</sup> Olaechea Labayen, “Opinion de los teologos,” 157–58.

essential distinction between “old” and “new” Christians.<sup>43</sup> He states that recent converts are intrinsically no less capable of perceiving the deeper mysteries than those who grew up in the faith.

Next, Castro points out how preaching to a large crowd differs from a truly educational context. A teacher, having more one-on-one contact with his students than a preacher could ever have with his audience, will be much better qualified to assess his students’ level of achievement; the implicit assumption is that it is more appropriate to discuss theological subjects in an educational context. Castro also points out that students, especially in theological programs, will be better prepared for this than the average preacher’s audience. He thus concludes that the deeper mysteries of the faith should not be shared with the masses of the *indios* through preaching, but should instead be imparted to the most gifted of them in the context of a theological education. Thus, the *indios* should be treated on an equal footing with the European inhabitants of the colonies, at least as far as education is concerned (a conclusion that is also very revealing of Castro’s views on the intellectual capacities of the *indios*).<sup>44</sup>

Castro then deploys a variety of arguments to corroborate this conclusion. Among many scriptural references (a.o. Song 8:9; Mt 9:37–38; Acts 8:26–40; 2Tim 2:2), pride of place is given to 2Pet 3:15–16, which, in both *Adversus omnes haereses* and *De justa haereticorum punitione*, is a firm scriptural foundation for his rejection of widespread access to the Bible. Here, Castro attenuates the force and limits the scope of this quotation by relating it to Gal 1:6,16. From these verses, he deduces that the apostle Paul apparently wrote letters to neophytes, uneducated people and even to those who had abandoned the true gospel – and yet he was not afraid to speak of even the deepest mysteries of the faith. In so doing, Paul set the example for Castro’s own day: the mysteries of the faith should not be denied to “Scyths and Sarmatians,” the proverbial barbarous peoples of classical antiquity and a thinly veiled reference to the original inhabitants of the Spanish colonies; the sole proviso being that only the most gifted among them are to be selected to receive this higher form of initiation into the faith.

At the same time, Castro acknowledges the possibility that the native inhabitants might rise up in rebellion against colonial occupation. Yet he

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<sup>43</sup> Compare Castro’s attitude towards baptized Jews: de Castro, “Fr. Alfonso de Castro,” 300–301.

<sup>44</sup> Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 23–25. It should be noted that, in other respects, Castro’s attitude towards the native population of the Spanish colonies seems to have been harsh. Correspondence between Alfonso de Castro and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda reveals that Castro justified the forced conversion of *indios* and their life-long exploitation by Spanish *encomenderos*; see Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, 118–119.

attaches more value to the necessity for the Christian faith to endure in the colonies, even if they were to shake off the Spanish yoke. In order to guarantee a continued Christian presence in the New World, it is necessary that certain members of the indigenous population should have a more than superficial knowledge of the Catholic principles of faith. In fact, Castro adds, properly schooled theologians would undoubtedly support the divine rule of the Spanish Crown over the colonies, and encourage their fellow citizens to do likewise.

As a historical parallel, Castro first mentions Pantaenus, the teacher of Clement of Alexandria, whose combination of catechetical and philosophical education purportedly was open to all Christians, both old and new. This is followed by a series of quotations from Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus*. The main thrust of Castro's argument in this section is that God's plan with the *indios* is not known to man: who then could prevent them from penetrating deeper into the mysteries of the Christian faith? In connection with this, Castro anecdotally refers to the encounter between Ananias and Paul (Acts 9:10–19) and to Eldad and Meldad (Num 11:24–30); the point being in both cases that it is not for man to pass judgment on God's choice of medium to act out His plans. Thus, the *indios* should not be categorically denied access to the study of theology.

After having established this point, Castro changes the focus of his argument to the liberal arts, which were propaedeutic to the study of theology. For this reason, one would have expected Castro to defend the *indios'* right to this form of higher education before turning to the study of theology. By reversing the expected order, however, Castro has already brought the issue of higher education in general to an unavoidable conclusion. For if, as Castro extensively argued, the native people of the Spanish colonies have a right to theological education, this holds true *a fortiori* for its necessary prerequisite, the study of the liberal arts. Thus, the structure of the text itself is conducive to the development of its argumentative strategy. In the final paragraphs, therefore, Castro limits his discussion to the three counterarguments that were cited in the opening paragraphs – thereby establishing an elegant ring structure in the treatise as a whole.

Castro's reply to these counter-arguments may be summed up as follows: the alleged inconstancy of the natives is partly refuted, partly put into perspective; even if inconstancy were endemic in the *indios* population, firmness of faith and depth of understanding would be the best cure for this. Some would compare sharing the mysteries of the faith with the *indios* to putting pearls before the swine, referring to Mt 7:6. To these, Castro replies that whoever has received baptism, is no longer dog or swine, but child and heir. As for the parallel with the treatment of the sacred cult objects in Num 4:1–33, Castro counters the

applicability of this parallel with two arguments of his own. Firstly, he argues, on the authority of Augustine, that the mystical meaning of a biblical pericope has no evidential value; only the historical (or “literal”) meaning does. Therefore, whatever the deeper significance of Num 4:1–33 may be, it cannot be used as a logically binding argument in the discussions of Castro’s day. Secondly, he posits that what was valid under the First Covenant does not necessarily retain its validity under the New Covenant. Both arguments come together in Castro’s view of the relation between *typus* and *antitypus*, which he likens to the relation between shadow and body, or image and truth. For example, when Israel was wandering through the desert, the sacred manna was locked away in the Ark of the Covenant, out of sight of the people, whereas in Castro’s time the Sacred Host was regularly displayed and worshiped in public.

#### 4 *De justa haereticorum punitione*

When Alfonso de Castro’s *De justa haereticorum punitione libri III* appeared, the first session of the Council of Trent had contributed to a more clearly defined Catholic identity, and the battle of Mühlberg (April 1547) had led to the dissolution of the Schmalkaldic League, so that there appeared to be an opening for restoring ecclesiastical authority. Published in this very specific window of opportunity, Castro’s work reflects these historical developments through a stronger assertion of Catholic orthodoxy and a stricter condemnation of Protestantism. It has even been proposed that Castro intended his work as a guide for inquisitional work suitable for the largely Protestant Low Countries.<sup>45</sup>

The publishing history of Castro’s *De justa haereticorum punitione libri III* is more straightforward than that of *Adversus omnes haereses*.<sup>46</sup> The first edition appeared on October 18, 1547 at the printing house of Juan Giunta (Johannes Giunta) in Salamanca. Two years later a second edition, only slightly revised, appeared in Venice (*ad signum Spei*, 1549). This version was republished in 1556 in Lyon by Sébastien Honorat (Sebastianus Honorati), in cooperation with the heirs of Juan Giunta, from the printing press of Jacques Fauré. The last independent edition of the work was published in 1568 by the widow and heirs of Johannes Steels in Antwerp.

<sup>45</sup> Stefania Pastore, *Il vangelo e la spada: L’inquisizione di Castiglia e i suoi critici (1460–1598)* Temi e testi 46 (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003), 208–13.

<sup>46</sup> Bibliographical information based on the Worldcat catalogue (<https://www.worldcat.org/>) and the *Universal Short Title Catalogue* (<https://www.ustc.ac.uk/>). Our reading of the text is based on the 1556 edition.

The matter of vernacular Bible translation is discussed in the third book, where Castro discusses the causes of heresy. The sixth chapter (fol. 619–34) presents broadly the same arguments that Castro had used earlier in *Adversus omnes haereses*, yet arranged differently and put forward with varying degrees of detail. Again, we shall discuss only the most striking differences; more extensive discussions are available elsewhere.<sup>47</sup>

First of all, Castro repeats several points from *Adversus omnes haereses*: that heresies arise from erroneous interpretation of Scripture; that the risk of this is greater among uneducated readers; and that Luther was wrong to claim that the Bible is readily understandable to all readers. The list of arguments is more elaborate, but does not add anything substantially different in comparison to the earlier work. However, Castro also develops a new line of reasoning, based on the reverence that is due to Holy Scripture. This reverence, Castro argues, is actually well-served by limited accessibility and an aura of mystery (*raritas & occultatio*). In support of this idea, Castro discusses the reverential treatment of cult objects in ancient Israel (Num 4:1–33) and two medieval papal letters that oppose the use of the vernacular language in religious matters.

The reference to Num 4:1–33 (fol. 631) is a new element in Castro's argumentation against vernacular Bibles, contrasting starkly with the interpretation of the same passage given in *Utrum indigenae*. There, Castro had argued strongly against an exclusivist interpretation; here, his interpretation is most certainly exclusivist. If ancient Jewish cultic practice required the mysteries to be secreted away (so Castro argues), how much more should the New Testament be kept hidden from the uneducated populace?

As for the papal letters mentioned by Castro, the first of these is a document in which Gregory VII (1073–1085) had forbidden Vratislaus II, Duke of Bohemia, to allow the liturgy to be celebrated in the Slavonic tongue (*Ep.* 7, 11).<sup>48</sup> From this, Castro seems to have deduced that translations of Scripture into the vernacular must have also been forbidden, although this is not explicitly stated in the letter itself. Gregory VII does state, however, that certain parts of the Bible are hard to understand and might lead to erroneous interpretation by mediocre minds – an idea that resonates with Castro's own views.

In addition, Castro mentions a prohibition on Bible translations into French by Innocent III (1198–1216). This must refer to a well-known pair of letters, one addressed to the bishop and chapter of Metz, the other to all Christians residing

<sup>47</sup> Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 256–65; Cavallera, “La Bible en langue vulgaire,” 48–52 and 54–55.

<sup>48</sup> See also MGH, *Epistulae selectae*, vol. 2.2, 474–75.

in Metz and its environs.<sup>49</sup> The first letter, dated July 12, 1199, reveals that the Bishop of Metz had asked the pope's advice regarding certain private meetings, at which lay men and women apparently read from an unidentified French Bible translation and preached to each other. Given the presence of Waldensian groups in this region around the year 1200, such behaviour obviously raised the suspicions of the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>50</sup> The pope's reply advises caution in pursuing the matter further:

Just as it befits prelates of the Church to strive prudently and diligently to catch the little foxes that try to demolish the Lord's vineyard, even so they should be very careful not to do the weeding before the harvest, so that they should never pull out the wheat together with the weeds. [...] Diligently inquire into the truth. Who was the author of that translation? What was the intention of its maker? What was the faith of those who used it? What was the reason for their preaching? Do they acknowledge the Apostolic See and the Catholic Church? Once we are sufficiently informed by a letter from you on these and other questions, which are necessary to fully investigate the truth of the matter, we shall be better able to understand what needs to be done.

The second letter is undated, but must certainly follow the first. Apparently, the bishop's inquiries had revealed that groups of men and women did indeed meet in private to preach to each other on the basis of French Bible translations, rejecting the authority of parish priests and segregating themselves from their communities. This behaviour is firmly condemned by Innocent III. However, the pope's condemnation actually concerns the practice of preaching in private meetings, whereby lay men and women usurped what Innocent considered to be the magisterial authority of the church. The offending Bible translations are mentioned but never directly condemned:

... a not inconsiderable number of lay men and women, driven by a desire for the Scriptures, have caused the Gospels, the Epistles of Paul, the Psalter, the *Moralia in Job* and several other books to be translated into French. Their enthusiasm for this kind of translation is so great (and would that it had been matched by their prudence!) that lay men and women presume to belch forth such things to each other in private meetings and to preach to each other ...

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49 Othmar Hageneder, Werner Maleczek and Alfred A. Strnad, *Die register Innocenz' III. 2. Pontifikatsjahr, 1199/1200. Texte* (Rome – Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 275–76.

50 Beverly M. Kienzle, "Holiness and Obedience: Denouncement of Twelfth-Century Waldensian Lay Preaching," in *The Devil, Heresy & Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 259–78 (259).

The letters invoked by Castro can hardly be construed as formal condemnations of vernacular Bible translation, even though Innocent III's second letter has for centuries been cast in that role.<sup>51</sup> Each of the papal letters addresses a pastoral question in a specific historic context: the liturgical use of the vernacular, preaching without an ecclesiastical permit and infringing upon the magisterium of the Church. In each case, there is an obvious connection with vernacular Bible translations, but they are not at the heart of the matter. At most, Innocent III's correspondence shows the same distrust of unmediated access to Scripture that one recognizes in Castro's works.

Next, Castro returns once more to the case of Erasmus. In *De justa haereticorum punitione*, the discussion is limited to the condemnation of Erasmus' views on vernacular Bible translation by the theological faculty of Paris (1527; first appearance in print in 1531). There is no trace of the appreciation for Erasmus that had been present in the early editions of *Adversus omnes haereses*.<sup>52</sup>

Castro's focus in *De justa haereticorum punitione* is on the correct interpretation of Scripture rather than on translation as such, as was the case also in *Adversus omnes haereses*. However, unlike the earlier work, *De justa haereticorum punitione* explicitly identifies the correct interpretation of Scripture with the teachings of the Catholic church:

This needs to be asserted above all: the first and most powerful root of all heresies is the perverted interpretation of Holy Scripture. For there are some who are of the opinion that what is contained in the holy books should be understood not according to the Catholic exposition of the faith, but according to an interpretation that is far removed from the Catholic faith. They therefore cling most firmly to their own opinions, as if they were divine oracles, no matter how much they are at odds with the Catholic faith.<sup>53</sup>

After chapter 6, which repeats and expands upon Castro's familiar arguments, there follows an additional chapter in which Castro replies to counterarguments in defence of a wide dissemination of vernacular Bibles (fol. 634–646). The arguments discussed and refuted by Castro may be summarized as follows<sup>54</sup>:

1. The faithful must not be denied the spiritual nourishment of Holy Scripture.
2. The preaching of the faith should be available to everyone, in both written and spoken forms.

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<sup>51</sup> François, "Vernacular Bible Reading," 28–29.

<sup>52</sup> See the discussion in Marcel Bataillon, *Érasme et l'Espagne: recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Droz, 1937), 543–45.

<sup>53</sup> Fol. 619.

<sup>54</sup> See fol. 634–46. A more extensive discussion of these arguments and Castro's treatment of them may be found in Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 260–65; Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 54–55.

3. The faithful must not be deprived of the intrinsic goodness of Scripture.
4. Personal study of the Bible has benefited many in the past.
5. A thorough acquaintance with the contents of the Bible should enable the faithful to recognize and resist heresy when they encounter it.
6. There are historical precedents for vernacular Bible translations; furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments were written in what was then the vernacular tongue.

On the origin of these counter arguments, no further information is given. Since we know that *De justa haereticorum punitione* was published about a year after Castro's contribution at the Council of Trent, it is often assumed that there is a connection with the conciliar discussions on vernacular Bible translation in March–April 1546. The names of Cardinal Madruzzo and the French theologian Gentian Hervet are often cited in this connection.<sup>55</sup> Cardinal Madruzzo presented his views on two separate occasions, in a short speech on 17 March, and again in a longer speech on 1 April.<sup>56</sup> Gentian Hervet would probably have expressed his opinions on 8 or 9 March, on the same occasion as Alfonso de Castro.<sup>57</sup> There are obvious parallels between the six counterarguments discussed by Castro and the arguments presented by Madruzzo and Hervet, but there is no one-on-one correspondence with either of them.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, similar refutations of counterarguments are common in sixteenth-century polemical works against vernacular Bible translation.<sup>59</sup> Castro's discussion should probably be viewed against the backdrop of polemics against vernacular Bibles in general, rather than as a direct reflection of the discussions at the Council of Trent.

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55 So Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 256; de Castro, "Fr. Alfonso de Castro," 309; Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 48.

56 Madruzzo's speech of March 17, 1546 may be found in *CT* 1:37 (English translation in McNally, "The Council of Trent," 214–15). The speech of April 1, 1546 has been edited in *CT* 12:528–30 (French translation in Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 206–210).

57 See Cavallera, "La bible en langue vulgaire," 52–54, who considers Hervet to have had more influence on Castro's treatise than Madruzzo. Hervet's contribution may be found in *CT* 12:530–538.

58 For example, Castro's fifth counterargument – that a thorough acquaintance with the contents of Scripture should enable the faithful to recognize and resist heresy when they encounter it – is absent from both. The sixth counterargument is also discussed in *Adversus omnes haereses*, where it is attributed to Erasmus.

59 See e. g. François, "Petrus Sutor," 139–163; and François, "The Catholic Church and the Vernacular Bible," 234–281. Parallels to Castro's arguments are to be found in both Petrus Sutor, *De tralatione Bibliae* (1525) and Fadrique Furió Ceriol, *Bononia sive de libris sacris in vernaculam linguam convertendis* (1556), which reflects a disputation with the Louvain rector Giovanni a Bononia; but there is no reason to suspect direct influence either way.

The discussion of the counterarguments mentioned above leads Castro to allow for an (albeit limited) openness to vernacular Bibles in *De justa haereticorum punitione*. Castro, himself an accomplished preacher, seems to have been especially susceptible to the first and second argument, which concern the pastoral needs of the faithful. It will not come as a surprise that Castro's answer to this problem is a good catechism in the vernacular, i. e. a mediated, structured and controlled introduction into the faith. Still, he grants that those who have no Latin could be given access to lectionaries in the vernacular.<sup>60</sup> These should be limited to liturgical readings from the Gospels, and subject to strict guidelines. The translations should be reviewed by learned men of good Catholic faith, and should contain paratexts (introductory statements, titles and explanatory notes) to preclude divergent interpretations. Furthermore, large parts of the Bible remain unfit for translation in Castro's view, notably the Pauline letters, Revelation and the entire Old Testament. To sum up his argument, Castro states: "Holy Scripture may be rightfully translated into the vernacular and given to the general populace to read, only insofar as it may be rightfully preached to that same populace."<sup>61</sup>

To the arguments concerning the intrinsic goodness of Scripture and the benefits to be gained from reading it, Castro replies as follows<sup>62</sup>: The punishment of criminals is considered to be a good thing. And yet such punishment cannot be meted out by any private person without the *ius gladii*; and no one would put a sword into the hand of a child or a madman. Therefore, the desirability of punishment depends on the circumstances, and the same applies to translations of Scripture. The analogy implies that Bible translations are not intrinsically evil, but constitute a danger when used by unqualified persons, which is consistent with the views Castro expresses elsewhere.

## 5 Conclusions

Alfonso de Castro certainly considered vernacular Bibles to be a dangerous risk. It is also clear, however, that the translations themselves were not the central issue.<sup>63</sup> For Castro, the real danger lay in what vernacular Bibles made possible: unmediated access to the biblical text, unsupervised reading and interpretation,

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<sup>60</sup> Fol. 636–37.

<sup>61</sup> Fol. 637.

<sup>62</sup> Fol. 638–39.

<sup>63</sup> Fernández López, *Lectura y prohibición*, 250; Coletti, *L'éloquence de la chaire*, 216.

with the concurrent risk of false teachings and heresy. In the end, all of Castro's argumentative strategies boil down to emphasizing the difficulties connected with reading and interpreting the Bible, and the creation of an *in-crowd* that has received the education necessary to deal with those difficulties, and can therefore guarantee a faithful interpretation of Scripture. Thus, Castro's views on vernacular Bible translation should be read in light of what Martin A. Nesvig calls the "hierarchical epistemology"<sup>64</sup> in sixteenth-century Catholic thought on education and the translation and interpretation of Scripture:

It was a long established and accepted bit of epistemological theory in the Catholic world that intelligence and knowledge were selective and needed to be carefully guarded and controlled. The result was in its clearest form the development and preservation of a caste of holders of theological and spiritual knowledge – the priesthood – and the use of a specialized language – Latin.<sup>65</sup>

In Castro's works, these views are evident from the repeated negative stereotyping of uneducated laymen and the repeated emphasis on the need for proper education to interpret Scripture, which we find in both *Adversus omnes haereses* and *De justa haereticorum punitione*. A careful study of Castro's sources reveals that the central question (who is qualified to interpret Scripture?) was hardly a new one. Yet the rise of Protestantism quickly exacerbated sixteenth-century discussions on Christian education, the reading and interpretation of Scripture, and the role assigned in them to vernacular translations. This hardening of attitudes is palpable in later editions of *Adversus omnes haereses*, as well as in *De justa haereticorum punitione*.<sup>66</sup>

The short treatise *Utrum indigenae novi orbis instruendi sint* sheds a new light on Castro's statements. In this text, Castro expounds his views on Christian education and initiation, in a context that is different from (and, in some respects, safer than) the religious conflicts of sixteenth-century Europe. Castro argues that the educated Christian elite – the *in-crowd* that he constructs in his

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<sup>64</sup> Martin A. Nesvig, "The Epistemological Politics of Vernacular Scripture in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," *The Americas* 70 (2013): 165–201 (200).

<sup>65</sup> Nesvig, "The Epistemological Politics," 172.

<sup>66</sup> Castro's treatment of Erasmus in *Adversus omnes haereses* is significant in this respect. In the earliest edition, Castro went to great lengths to confirm Erasmus' position among the well-educated, literary elite of sixteenth-century Europe, as well as his irreproachability in matters of faith and morals. These points of praise quickly fell away in subsequent editions: first the latter, and finally the former. As attitudes in sixteenth-century Europe hardened and the need for a clearly defined Catholic identity increased, opinions on Erasmus inevitably changed for the worse, not only in Alfonso de Castro's work but in the Catholic church at large; see Bataillon, *Érasme et l'Espagne*, 543–45.

other works, to which he himself makes a claim of membership – should not be defined on ethnic terms.<sup>67</sup> What is most remarkable is Castro's use of the same arguments that appear in his polemics against Bible translation, sometimes even arguing the opposite case. Regarding Mt 7:6, for example, the exclusivist interpretation given in *Adversus omnes haereses*, based in fact on a misleading quotation from the commentary of Theophylact, contrasts starkly with the inclusivist language of *Utrum indigenae*. Another clear example is Num 4:1–33, cited in *De justa haereticorum punitione* with the intention of restricting access to the New Testament. In *Utrum indigenae*, Castro explicitly refutes this interpretation.

By way of comparison, one may refer to the *Oratio qua suadet ut libri sacri in linguam vulgarem transferantur*, with which Gentian Hervet, on 8 or March 9, 1546, defended vernacular Bible translations at the Council of Trent. Hervet emphasized the need for Christian education, including the reading of Scripture, from a mindset of humanistic universality:

Timothy receives praise for having studied Holy Scripture even from his childhood days. For that reason he is considered worthy to receive the holy office of bishop, though he is still a young man. Shall we then keep away not only infants and children, but men of any age and class, with only very few exceptions?<sup>68</sup>

In this last remark, one recognizes a critique of the exclusivist point of view voiced by Alfonso de Castro. To Gentian Hervet, scriptural readings are a central and necessary part of Christian education. To Alfonso de Castro, a high level of education is the necessary prerequisite for safe and responsible reading.

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<sup>67</sup> Nesvig, "The Epistemological Politics," 177.

<sup>68</sup> *CT* 12:535.