

**“Indigenous Missionaries: The “Spiritual Conquest” Retold,” paper presented for *Religion, Refuge, and Resistance in Indigenous History*, The Conference on Latin American History, Washington, D.C., USA, January 3, 2014.**

Recent scholarship has rightly exposed the “myths of conquest” by shifting attention away from the Spanish conquistadors to their indigenous allies. In these new histories Indians are presented as conquistadors and important actors in the fall of Amerindian empires. In this paper I apply this same principle to the so-called “spiritual conquest,” arguing that Catholic missions in the Spanish empire were always partnerships between Spanish missionaries and local inhabitants. Indigenous people were intermediaries between Spanish friars and the larger Indian population and some of them were preachers in their own right. Although sacred histories from the colonial era follow a triumphant story of heroic and self-sacrificing priests, an alternative and unintended narrative emerges in these texts as Indians perform roles as martyrs and evangelizers in the Spanish world. Sacred histories—whether sacred biographies, devotional histories, or provincial chronicles—provide a fascinating look at the ways in which indigenous people were promoters of Catholic teachings and hence participants in the construction of new emerging Christianities.