

IDOL WORSHIP: RELIGIOUS CONTINUITY AMONG AZTEC, INCA, AND  
MAYA CULTURES IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

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by

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## APPROVAL SHEET


This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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## DEDICATION

For my parents

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the religious practices and beliefs of three pre-Columbian Indian societies, how Spanish invaders and missionaries tried to alter or destroy native practices and beliefs, and how these indigenous practices and beliefs survived inquisitorial efforts at extirpation. The thesis concludes that the Aztec, Inca, and Maya cultures' religious behavior exhibited continuity from preconquest times, through the years of conquest, and beyond the introduction of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and similar regional ecclesiastical investigations in colonial Latin America.

The thesis uses the methods of ethnohistory to analyze the treatises, handbooks, and descriptions of Aztec, Inca, and Maya Indians recorded by Spanish churchmen from various religious orders.

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## CHAPTER I

### IDOLS AND INQUISITION

When Spanish explorers first stepped on New World soil, they brought with them faith in a monotheistic, exclusive religion: Roman Catholicism. Yet, the native peoples whom Spaniards subsequently encountered as they further surveyed the vast American lands maintained polytheistic, inclusive religious beliefs. The clash of Spanish and Indian religions was as much a part of the contest of cultures in the New World as that between Spanish steel and Indian wood and European microbes and native cells. While soldiers captured territory and settlers harnessed laborers, friars went about the business of saving souls. The Spaniards had come across an ocean to search for mineral wealth, passages to eastern markets, and souls for conversion. The military conquest colonized land and people; missionization and conversion colonized Indian consciousness. But native religion was idolatrous to Spaniards and therefore a hindrance to Spanish goals. *Conquistadores* considered native "idolatry" a sign of inhumanity and a justification for Spanish military conquest.

Spaniards clearly understood Thomas Aquinas's



superstition, wrote Aquinas, but "the negation of the virtue of religion."<sup>1</sup> Aquinas elaborated on his brief definition: "By nefarious art men constructed images which produced certain strange effects by the power of demons, and for this reason it was thought that something of divinity resided in them, and so they were worshipped as divine."<sup>2</sup>

In syllogistic proofs, Aquinas traced the origins of idolatry from the Bible to Saint Augustine. Aquinas was careful to note changes in idolatry's meaning. He observed that pagans commonly worshipped any kind of creature under the form of images. So creature worship fell beneath the rubric of idolatry whether or not idolaters used images in practice.<sup>3</sup> By examining pagans' common customs, some Churchmen ironically allowed some idolatry to continue. Aquinas wrote: "Others have thought the outward worship of idols to be, if not good and opportune of its nature, at least tolerable, given popular custom."<sup>4</sup> The theologian continued:

This error was followed also by some heretics who claimed there was no harm done if a person [Christian], seized in time of persecution, made show of worshipping idols so long as he kept the faith in his heart. This is manifestly false.

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<sup>1</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, vol. 40 ed. and trans. Thomas Franklin O'Meara O.P. and Michael John Duffy O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 25.

<sup>4</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 27.

Outward worship is a sign of inward worship, and as it is a wicked lie to deny by words one's inward commitment, so also it is if one gives outward worship to anything counter to his convictions.<sup>5</sup>

Aquinas vehemently disavowed a Christian's right to worship idols, even in show or under pain of death.

And yet Catholics possessed and used religious objects in the Mass as well as other ceremonies. Critics of the Catholic Church suggested that these items proved that Catholicism was idolatrous. Aquinas answered these charges of hypocrisy and defended Catholic relics and images. These things, he said, were "signs, with the purpose of impressing on our minds and confirming the belief in the sublimity of angels and saints." But Aquinas did admit that images of Christ were different. To them "latria (worship) is due on account of his divinity."<sup>6</sup> Thus Aquinas recognized a fine line between idols and signs.

That fine line expressed a great deal about believers' religious leanings. For Aquinas, idolatry was a carnal sin having worse consequences than spiritual sin.<sup>7</sup> "Idolatry implies a great blasphemy," contended Aquinas, "because it would deprive God of the singleness of his dominion, and by

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<sup>5</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 27.

<sup>6</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol.40, 27.

<sup>7</sup>Aquinas, Summa Theologia, ed. and trans. John Fearon O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969), vol.25, 73.

its deeds denies faith."<sup>8</sup> If believers worshipped objects, they denied the divinity of the one true God. That, according to Aquinas, was the horrible sin of idolatry.

Aquinas further explained that idolatry had two causes: human and demonic. Through misdirected affection and humankind's "natural delight in representation" and "ignorance of the true God and of his splendor," people adopted idolatrous practices. Equally culpable, the Devil contributed to idolatrous behavior. He preyed on human frailty and duped people into embracing false gods.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it was a responsibility and a moral necessity for the Church to root out idolatry and to replace it with Christianity.

If idolatry was the worship of images as if they were God, or more generally, the worship of anything but the Christian God, there was little that was redeemable about Indians' religions. Indians were idolaters, so the Spanish had to subdue and convert them. Therefore, the Spanish conquest of the New World was justified.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the legitimacy of Spanish wars against Indians did not go unquestioned. In August 1550 the Spanish crown convened a meeting at Valladolid to resolve the debate

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<sup>8</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 31.

<sup>9</sup>Aquinas, Summa, vol. 40, 33.

<sup>10</sup>Roberto Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century" in Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 28.

between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas. The two thinkers disagreed about Indians' capacity to become Christianized and civilized as the Spaniards defined the terms. Sepúlveda maintained that Spanish rule was "lawful and expedient," for Indians were naturally inferior.<sup>11</sup> Idolatry was proof of Indians' inhuman status. According to the humanist and translator Sepúlveda, war and enslavement would break natives of their sinfulness and their barbarity. Las Casas disagreed. The Dominican friar and former *conquistador* argued that Indians were perfectly capable of becoming Christians and peaceful Spanish subjects. Moreover, Las Casas condemned the use of war to subdue Indians for it was "iniquitous and contrary to our Christian religion."<sup>12</sup> The debate failed to reach a resolution, but effectively reinforced Spaniards' notions that idolatry made Indians less than human. Spaniards continued to attack Indian polities and religions with sword, whip, and cross.

Subsequent thinkers continued to consider the problem of Indian religion. Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican professor of theology at the University of Salamanca, wrote

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<sup>11</sup>Lewis V. Hanke, "The Great Debate at Valladolid, 1550-1551," in The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America, ed. Richard E. Greenleaf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), 48 and 50. Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, Colonial Latin America (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 62. Richard E. Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543 (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1962), 27.

<sup>12</sup>Hanke, "Great Debate," 48. Burkholder and Johnson, Colonial Latin America, 62.

that Spain had a responsibility in the New World and could wage a just war to prevent human sacrifice or cannibalism and to stop native priests from forcing converted Indians to return to traditional ways.<sup>13</sup> He also acknowledged Spain's right to establish mandates in natives' interests. The Dominican's position was widely accepted by *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in Spain) and *criollos* (Spaniards born in the New World) alike. By acting in a paternalistic manner toward New World inhabitants, Spain reconfirmed its right to dominate Indian groups and to alter their religious beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

Similar sentiments survived beyond the sixteenth century when Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, an extirpator of idols in Peru, penned an edict against idolatry. He charged fellow extirpators to diligently search for native icons "since [the Indians'] salvation consists in their being in grace and charity and far away from and separated from their sins, and especially those of idolatry by which they deny the worship of the one true God and give it to His creatures."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Greenleaf, Zumárraga, 32.

<sup>14</sup>See Miguel León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, trans. Julie Goodson-Lawes (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 55.

<sup>15</sup>Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru, trans. and ed. L. Clark Keating (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 165.

For all its rigidity, the Catholic Church at times displayed a remarkable ability to strike different cultural stances in various settings. While maintaining an overarching ideology, Catholic missionaries in the New World proved far less socially and culturally monolithic.<sup>16</sup> Local differences among practicing Catholics were perhaps necessary parts of conversion. Rather than a systematic reorganization of personal meanings, conversion was an adjustment in self-identification through the acceptance of religious acts or beliefs considered more useful, appropriate, or correct.<sup>17</sup> Conversion occurred inconsistently. For one person, it was only a nominal approbation of new acts or beliefs; for another, it was a more complete adoption of a new religion. Conversion existed on several levels among New World Indians. Depending on access to religious education, disparities between high dogma and popular belief, and variations in maturity, converts engaged Catholicism in different ways and with diverse levels of intensity.<sup>18</sup>

While in practice conversion to Catholicism may have been flexible, ideologically there could be no dissension

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<sup>16</sup>Robert W. Hefner, "World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," in Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation, Robert W. Hefner, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>17</sup>Hefner, "World Building," 17.

<sup>18</sup>Hefner, "World Building," 17-19.

among adherents. The necessity of preserving a pure and orthodox faith led to the creation of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition against Heretical Perversity and Apostasy in the Old World.<sup>19</sup> The Inquisition's jurisdiction was above that of the bishops but below political sovereigns. Originally, it investigated Christians' rejection of the Catholic faith to embrace another. In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV authorized the formation of a second Inquisition in Spain which existed separately from the Papal tribunal.<sup>20</sup> From the end of the fifteenth to the middle sixteenth century, the Inquisition became more involved in repressing vices and reforming social and religious conduct.

On January 7, 1519, Spain introduced inquisitional jurisdiction in her New World colonies of Puerto Rico and the Jamaican Islands.<sup>21</sup> Two years later, Hernán Cortés and the Franciscan friars accompanying him on his conquest of the Mexican Valley employed the Inquisition's methods to secure control of the region over both Indians and would-be Spanish usurpers.<sup>22</sup> Once Spain more thoroughly undertook

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<sup>19</sup>Moreno de los Arcos, "Inquisition for Indians," 26.

<sup>20</sup>Stanley G. Payne, Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Perspective (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 35.

<sup>21</sup>Moreno de los Arcos, "Inquisition for Indians," 28.

<sup>22</sup>J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "Colonizing Souls: The Failure of the Indian Inquisition and the Rise of Penitential Discipline," in Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in

the conquest of the Americas, bishops and monastic prelates exercised inquisitorial powers among Indian groups. By 1569, the Spanish Crown established tribunals of the Holy Office in Mexico City and Lima. In 1611, Cartagena received the New World's third official tribunal. Each of the three tribunals consisted of a board of inquisitors, theological consultants, attorneys, guardians of confiscated property, jailers, and servants. Working alongside appointed officers, local commissioners investigated cases in rural provinces and notified the tribunal when they had uncovered wrongdoing.<sup>23</sup>

The Inquisition's powers were expansive. The Holy Office possessed jurisdiction in cases of heresy, apostasy, bigamy, blasphemy, sorcery, the practice of superstition, propositions which subverted the faith, lack of respect for ecclesiastics, denial of ecclesiastical authority, solicitation in the confessional, and immoral speech. *Peninsulares, criollos*, Africans, *mestizos, mulattos*, clergy and laity, officers and citizens were subject to the court's rules. Ostensibly, Indians were exempt.<sup>24</sup>

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Spain and the New World, eds. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>23</sup>France V. Scholes, "An Overview of the Colonial Church," in The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America, ed. Richard E. Greenleaf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), 28.

<sup>24</sup>Scholes, "Overview of the Colonial Church," 28.



Initially, however, Indians were subject to the tribunal. All properly baptized people, Indians or not, were Christians and members of the Catholic Church. Therefore, they were under the Inquisition's jurisdiction.<sup>25</sup> In 1538 a decree from Charles V specifically exempted Indians from Inquisitorial investigation. His son and successor, Philip II, reissued the proclamation twice more in 1571 and 1575.<sup>26</sup> But after 1571 the Holy Office continued to investigate and discipline Indian transgressions against the Catholic Church and though actual control over Indians reverted to the bishops and archbishops.<sup>27</sup> Whether standing before an official tribunal or a bishop's council, Indians still felt the wrath of Catholic chastisement.

Spanish concern over Indians' religious beliefs was real and many natives genuinely adopted Catholic doctrine.

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<sup>25</sup>Henry Kamen, Inquisition and Society in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 216.

<sup>26</sup>Edward Peters, Inquisition (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 98. A.S. Turberville, The Spanish Inquisition (United States: Archon Books, 1968), 206. Martin A. Cohen, The Martyr: The Story of A Secret Jew and the Mexcan Inquisition in the Sixteenth Century (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 12.

<sup>27</sup>Richard E. Greenleaf, "Historiography of the Mexican Inquisition," in Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World, eds. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 261. Richard E. Greenleaf, The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 174.

Despite military conquest, missionary conversion, and inquisitional prosecution, however, Indians maintained their own practices. Particularly resilient was native worship of images carved of stone and wood. The Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico, the Incas of Andean Peru, and the Mayas of the Yucatan Peninsula sustained their traditional religious rituals, continued their sacrificial offerings, and persisted in their traditional beliefs. The cultural continuity of these three groups is significant.

## CHAPTER II

### HUITZILOPOCHTLI AND HEARTS

The evening before the Toxcatl fiesta, Aztec believers modeled a statue of their primary deity, Huitzilopochtli. They ground chicalote seeds into a paste which they then molded into a human shape over a stick frame. Once dry, they decorated it with elaborate feathers. They painted crossbars above and beneath its eyes. On its ears they placed turquoise serpents with gold rings dangling from their coils. Through its nose they stuck a gold arrow inlaid with precious stones. Upon its head, they placed a hummingbird feather headdress and around its waist they wrapped a feather belt with a cone at the back. They hung a medallion of yellow parrot feathers fringed with a young boy's hair locks around its neck. They draped a nettle-leaf cape, painted black and accented with five clusters of eagle feathers, over the statue. Celebrants wrapped Huitzilopochtli in a cloak bearing bones and skulls and covered him with a vest painted with disembodied human parts: breasts, ears, feet, hands, hearts, intestines, and torsos. They gave the god a loincloth decorated with severed limbs and painted with bright blue vertical stripes. Upon his shoulder, worshipers attached a red paper flag. On

his head, they put a sacrificial flint knife made of red paper seemingly seeped with blood. They set a bamboo shield marked by four bunches of eagle feathers and a blood-red pendant in one hand. In the other, they positioned four arrows. Finally, the celebrants placed wristbands of coyote skin fringed with paper strips on his arms.

On the morning of the celebration, chosen celebrants uncovered Huitzilopochtli and offered him gifts of food, including seedcakes and pieces of human flesh. After carrying the statue to the temple in a long procession, the music and singing began. The Aztecs danced with all their hearts.<sup>1</sup>

The principal Aztec deity, Huitzilopochtli or "Southern Hummingbird" was the lord of war and the sun. He sat atop the Aztecs' pantheon of gods because it was he who had led the Mexicas, the tribal ancestors of the Aztecs, to central Mexico and to their capital, Tenochtitlán. To ensure their continued dominance over the surrounding Nahua tribes, the Aztecs were careful to earn and keep Huitzilopochtli's favor. They readily paid the price for Huitzilopochtli's blessing: human flesh and blood offered in ritual

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<sup>1</sup>Miguel León-Portilla, The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico, trans. from Nahuatl Angel Maria Garibay K., English trans. Lysander Kemp (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 72-73.

sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> Several festivals marking the seasons of the year, the coronation of a new emperor, the dedication of a new building or feat of engineering, or the commencement of a significant political or military endeavor propitiated the sun god's thirst for human blood.<sup>3</sup>

While Aztec celebrations commemorated events significant to the empire, the sacrificial victims were not always Aztec citizens. Most human offerings were strangers to Tenochtitlán and to the workings of the Aztec religious elite. Warriors taken in battle and captives seized from subordinate or allied groups as human tribute were marched to the Aztec capital as food for the gods.<sup>4</sup> A few sacrifices were, in fact, members of Aztec society. Aztec families offered small children if they were born under particular daysigns, with certain birth defects, or with cowlicks.<sup>5</sup> Aztec priests ostensibly paid mothers for their children. Probably, sales were either non-existent or coerced by the Aztec clergy. Whatever the means of securing

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<sup>2</sup>Inga Clendinnen, Aztecs: An Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 22-23; R.C. Padden The Hummingbird and the Hawk: Conquest and Sovereignty in the Valley of Mexico, 1503-1541 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 2-8; Miguel León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 161-64.

<sup>3</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 73-75, 90-91.

<sup>4</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 90; León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 163-64.

<sup>5</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 98.

sacrifices, the ritualistic killings were vital to the survival of the world.

Human sacrifices were reenactments of the gods' original sacrifice which released and maintained the life force of the universe.<sup>6</sup> The blood spilt by sacrificial victims was food to replenish the gods' vitality. In elaborate ceremonies, Aztec priests led, at times, hundreds of these victims to killing stones at the tops of pyramidal temples. There four priests held the sacrifice's limbs pinned to one of the humped stones, forcing the victim's chest upward. A fifth priest opened the sacrifice's torso with a stone dagger and with his hand ripped the still-beating heart from the body. Raising the heart to the sky, Aztec priests then entered the temple to smear the blood-covered offering upon the mouths of carved images which lined the walls of the sacred chamber. The four other priests pushed the victim's body down the long steps of the temple to assistants below who then prepared its limbs for distribution among Aztec lords. The lords either cooked and consumed these human remains or saved parts of the sacrifice as religious icons for later worship.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 4; León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 44-45; Carlos Fuentes, The Broken Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 94.

<sup>7</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 2, 78, 89-91, 261; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 73; Markman and Markman, Flayed God, 181-82.

Aztec priests endured rigorous training, beginning at age six or seven, to learn the mysteries of their religion. Experienced senior priests subjected young boys to trials of fasting, vigils, self-mortification, and self-mutilation. Within houses constructed for the education of future clergy, young Aztec novices learned the secrets of the holy rituals and mastered the arts of prayer, sacrifice, and divination. Frequently, groups of priests, including even the greenest novice, tested themselves during five days of fasting, exposure, sleep deprivation, and self-mutilation.<sup>8</sup> With this strenuous training, Aztec priests acquired the skills to deftly handle the gory aspects of public ritual and efficiently sacrifice their own blood and the blood of victims to satiate the gods. Their unique preparation placed them among the most revered and feared members of Aztec society.

While priests carried out the actual killings in public ceremonies, the Aztec laity also participated actively in the celebrations. Through private rituals in the home or neighborhood, by witnessing the public portions of the ceremonies, and by aiding the preparation of the sacrifices both before and after their trip to the temple's height, all Aztecs complied with the religious regulations of their society.<sup>9</sup> In the shamanic Aztec world, all phenomena

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<sup>8</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 128-31.

<sup>9</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 2,88-89.

possessed a spiritual essence. Everyone, therefore, had to satisfy the gods in their everyday lives. To correct ills, ensure favors, or affect the outcome of future events, one had to propitiate the spirits.<sup>10</sup> Sacrifices to the spirits guaranteed positive results. Copal (incense), food, drink, or human blood or flesh were common gifts to the gods.<sup>11</sup> Even the simplest household routines had ritualistic significance. Planting, storing, and harvesting foodstuffs, building homes, weaving clothing, marriages, births, and deaths all involved ceremonies designed to win the gods' sanction.<sup>12</sup> To perform their rites, Aztecs fashioned images of their deities which both represented and actually became the gods themselves.

The Aztecs and their Nahua subordinates made stone and paste figurines of all the gods in their pantheons as well as icons bearing the visages of their deceased ancestors. Household god-representations bore both religious, philosophic, and practical import. These images brought good fortune to those who worshiped them with burned copal

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<sup>10</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 53-54; James Lockhart, The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 203-10.

<sup>11</sup>Markman and Markman, Flayed God, 5-6.

<sup>12</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 246-48; Lockhart, Nahuas, 203-10.



and food offerings.<sup>13</sup> The faithful left sacrificial offerings before the god-figures or placed them on the icons' mouths.<sup>14</sup> "Feeding" the images was necessary to maintain universal order, correct wrongs, ensure good fortune, or inflict ill will on enemies.

The Aztecs had clear concepts of how particular gods should look. Tlaloc the rain god was a mass of curved snakes, while Xipe Totec or Flayed God, god of the early spring, was a human form covered in the skin of a sacrificial victim.<sup>15</sup> Aztec priests admonished their sculptors to create accurate images of the gods: "What is carved should be like the original, and have life, for whatever may be the subject which is to be made, the form of it should resemble the original and the life of the original...Take great care to penetrate what the animal you wish to imitate is like, and how its character and appearance can best be shown."<sup>16</sup>

Religious god-images were prized possessions and those who inherited them from their elders bore the responsibility

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<sup>13</sup>C.A. Burland, The Gods of Mexico (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 144-45. See also Markman and Markman The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition and Miguel León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture: A study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

<sup>14</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 73, 172-73.

<sup>15</sup>Clendinnen, Aztecs, 233.

<sup>16</sup>Bernardino de Sahagún, quoted in Inga Clendinnen, Aztecs, 226.

of maintaining them and overseeing their worship. Indians in central Mexico, whether part of the Aztec elite or peasants in a village miles from Tenochtitlán, placated the spirits through offerings to these icons which embodied their gods. At major crossroads, along more secluded trails, among mountainous rocks, in public temples, on private shrines, god-images reminded the Aztec people to accommodate the spiritual in all their endeavors.

Against these religious practices marched Hernán Cortés and over 500 Spanish soldiers. Stepping on Aztec soil in 1519, the Spaniards immediately challenged the primacy of native religion. Cortés claimed that he was sent specifically to "abolish human sacrifice and worship of idols."<sup>17</sup> With him he brought a supply of Catholic icons depicting Mary and the Christ Child. Throughout Cortés's approach to Tenochtitlán, he cleansed native temples of their traditional images and replaced them with crosses and Catholic statuary. Ironically, Father Olmedo, a priest who accompanied the Spanish venture to Mexico, tried to temper Cortés's zeal: "Sir, do not attempt to force this issue; it is not just that they be compelled to accept Christianity, neither should I like to see us do what we did in Cempoalla, that is, destroy their idols until they have some

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<sup>17</sup>Hernán Cortés, quoted in Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 127.

understanding of our Holy Faith."<sup>18</sup> But Cortés continued to topple the native icons as he discovered them.

When the Spanish reached Tenochtitlán, they held the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma, hostage in his own palace. Moctezuma feared the Spaniards largely because he could not explain their origins nor could he decipher their motives. Cortés ordered the Aztec ruler to remove the native images from their temples. Thinking that the Spaniards were emissaries of Huitzilopochtli's enemy Quetzalcoatl, Moctezuma complied.

Hundreds of laborers and priests carefully extracted the gods from their shrines with a system of ropes, rollers, and levers. The carved figures, some life-sized, came down the temple steps on tremendous litters. At the bottom, respectful workers covered the images with reed mats and sped them away under the watchful, and armed, guard of Aztec noblemen.<sup>19</sup> Their destinations were unknown to the Spaniards.

Though the Aztecs begrudgingly removed the god-representations from public display, they never ceased administering to them. Even after Tenochtitlán finally fell to the Spaniards on August 21, 1521, the Aztecs and the other Nahuas formally under their suzerainty continued to

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<sup>18</sup>Bernal Díaz del Castillo, quoted in Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 156.

<sup>19</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 186-87.

worship their own gods in traditional ways. One historian wrote: "For the people of preconquest Mesoamerica, victory was *prima facie* evidence of the strength of the victor's god. One expected a conqueror to impose his god in some fashion, without fully displacing one's own; the new god in any case always proved to be an agglomeration of attributes familiar from the local pantheon and hence easy to assimilate."<sup>20</sup>

While some natives practiced a syncretic religion, a mixture of traditional and Catholic rites, others practiced both indigenous and Catholic religion separately. Publically Indians adhered to Catholic ritual but privately they continued native ceremonies. Other Indians completely accepted Catholic dogma, while still others entirely rejected the Spaniards' religion. For the next three hundred years, Catholic Churchmen used every known means to effect the true conversion of the Aztecs. But even after the introduction of the Mexican Inquisition in 1569 native religious practices persisted.<sup>21</sup>

The missionaries sent to central Mexico from Spain

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<sup>20</sup>Lockhart, Nahuas, 203.

<sup>21</sup>Robert Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 276-82; Lockhart, Nahuas, 251-60; Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian," The Americas, vol.34 (1978):315; Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain: A Study in Jurisdictional Confusion," The Americas, vol.22 (1965):142.

confronted and fought Indian religious belief and its manifestations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Spanish Catholic missionaries established monasteries and schools to combat the Indians' religious behavior they deemed unholy and idolatrous. Representatives from the Order of Friars Minor, the disciples of St. Francis, accompanied Cortés into the conquered Aztec capital to administer to both the conquerors and the conquered. But the small number of Franciscans was quickly overwhelmed by the seemingly endless lines of Indians who desired baptism. With only a few priests and no knowledge of Nahuatl, the natives' language, the Franciscans could not effectively teach the Indians Christianity's tenets. Still the friars willingly uttered words of blessing over the throng, sprinkled holy water on individuals, and announced the wholesale conversion of thousands of Indians in hastily performed ceremonies.<sup>22</sup> Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, Jacobo de Tastera, Martín de Valencia, Francisco Timénez, and Luis de Fuensalida were among the optimistic Franciscan friars who indiscriminately administered the sacrament of baptism to the uninstructed natives.<sup>23</sup>

Another Franciscan who sought to save thousands of Indian souls was Fray Pedro de Gante. He marvelled at the

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<sup>22</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 237-38.

<sup>23</sup>Miguel León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, trans. Julie Goodson-Lawes (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 58-59.

Indians' willingness to embrace Catholicism: "Thanks to the Lord, many have begun to follow the natural order, and having already converted to Christianity, with great longing they seek out baptism and confess their sins." He gleefully continued: "In this province of Mexico I have baptized, with other companions, more than two hundred thousand, indeed so many that I myself do not know the number. Frequently it happens that we baptize fourteen thousand people in a day, sometimes ten, sometimes eight thousand."<sup>24</sup>

Franciscan records show that their order alone had brought more than a million pagans into the Catholic fold by 1524 and that between 1524 and 1536, 5 million Indians received the cleansing waters of baptism.<sup>25</sup> Despite amassing impressive numbers of baptized converts, missionization efforts in the first half of the sixteenth century involved little instruction in the rudiments of faith. Instead of demanding that Indian candidates experience a thorough catechumenate, the Church bestowed baptism on any Indian, regardless of his understanding of the sacrament or of the faith which granted it.

Bernardino de Sahagún, a prominent Franciscan and defender of the Indians, copied the text of some of the first sermons to Aztec priests and chiefs in a series of

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<sup>24</sup>León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 57; Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 91.

<sup>25</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 91.

*coloquios* in 1524.<sup>26</sup> Though the religious leaders of the Indian and European worlds met, no cogent discussion occurred. Aztec priests never directly challenged the Spanish God, but rather argued for the preservation of their own sacred rituals and beliefs. The Franciscans did not engage the Indians in debate, but instead recounted the Biblical stories of creation. There was no substantive exchange.

The missionaries selected the sons of Aztec noblemen to learn the Catholic canon and to be the proselytizers of their fellow Indians. Called *fiscates* or *mandones* in Spanish, *tepizques* or *tequitlatos* in Nahuatl, the native students had the task of assembling groups of Indians, aiding in their instruction about the Mass and the catechism, and spying on the traditional native priests, converted natives, and those who clung to traditional practices.<sup>27</sup> Few if any representatives of the lower echelons of Aztec society were privileged to receive direct instruction from the Franciscan friars.

Many *fiscates* rooted out native icons and participated in their destruction. Friars taught them to zealously condemn traditional Aztec religious practices. A son of a Tlaxcalan cacique, who had reluctantly gone to a mission

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<sup>26</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 85-88; Lockhart, Nahuas, 205.

<sup>27</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 97.

school, returned home, harangued his family on the evils of traditional religion, and broke his family's idols. The cacique was astonished to witness his sons' behavior and decided that the boys' actions were unforgivable. He killed his son for betraying the old ways.<sup>28</sup> Brothers Martín de la Coruña, Pedro de Gante, Martín de Valencia, and others swore that the Aztec idols were being thoroughly destroyed. Where native temples once stood, the Franciscans erected Catholic sanctuaries. They increased the number of Catholic ceremonies and created "edifying plays" to indoctrinate the Aztec population. Worried by any challenges to their claim of Indian souls, the Catholic clergymen expelled the native priests from their shrines and banned them from the cities.<sup>29</sup>

It seemed to the Catholic missionaries that their efforts had firmly captured the religious hearts of the Aztecs. In letters and statements sent to Madrid and Rome, the Franciscans euphorically claimed evangelical success. Fray Jacobo de Tastera and some of his brethren wrote one such testimony to Charles V on May 6, 1533:

What shall we say of the children of the natives of this land? They write, read, sing plain chants, and of the organ and counterpoint, they

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<sup>28</sup>Olive Patricia Dickason, "Campaigns to Capture Young Minds: A Look at Early Attempts in Colonial Mexico and New France to Remold Amerindians," Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers (1987), 59.

<sup>29</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 36-37, 194-206.



write songbooks and teach others the music; they particularly rejoice in ecclesiastic singing; and preach to the people the sermons that we teach them, and they say them with great spirit; the frequency of the confessions with weeping tears, the pure and simple confession, and the accompanying penance, *nos qui contractavimus de verbo vitae* [we who made a pact of the word of salvation] know it, and that sovereign Lord, who works hidden miracles in their hearts, knows it, even in the external acts it will be able to be seen by those who have not been blinded by ignorance or malice.<sup>30</sup>

But the conversion of many Aztecs remained incomplete, as many missionaries discovered. Many Christian sacraments had similar counterparts in Aztec religion. The Aztecs had concepts of the trinity, virgin births, the cross, martyrs and saints, communion, abstinence, baptism, and confession in their ritual ceremonies.<sup>31</sup> With many similarities between the Indian and European faiths, many natives failed to fully comprehend the exclusive nature of Catholicism. Though the friars tried to show the Indians that embracing the Catholic religion necessarily denied the power of their Indian faith, the concept was lost on many "converts." In the 1530s Fray Toribio de Motolinía lamented the persistence of idol worship and the concealment of idols "at the foot of the crosses or beneath the stones of altar-stops, pretending they were venerating the cross, whereas they were actually

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<sup>30</sup>León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 58-59.

<sup>31</sup>Richrd E. Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543 (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1961), 49; Ricard, Spanish Conquest of Mexico, 29-33.

adoring the demon." Motolinía continued:

The idols, of which the Indians had very many, were set up in many places, in the temples of the demons, in the patios, and in conspicuous places, as in groves or on prominent hills and especially on mountain passes and summits; in short, wherever there was a high spot or place inviting to repose by reason of its loveliness. Those who pass by drew blood from their ears or tongue or offered a little of the incense, called *copalli*, which is found in this land; others offered roses which they gathered on the road; and when they had nothing else they offered little green weed or some blades of grass.<sup>32</sup>

The poor friar also noted that the Indians still fashioned idols in the likenesses of men, dogs, jaguars, lions, snakes, and birds and kept them at springs, large trees, and crossroads.<sup>33</sup>

Yet several missionaries maintained a belief in the efficacy of the Indians' conversions and mourned their surprising return to traditional practices. In a letter of November 30, 1537 to the Spanish king, the bishops of Mexico, Oaxaca, and Guatemala begged for authorization to employ rigorous measures against idolatry. The situation had not improved by 1565 when the bishops of New Spain renewed their pleas for the use of a heavy hand against Indian idolaters in an October 11 meeting with Mexico's

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<sup>32</sup>Toribio de Motolinía, quoted in Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 49-50.

<sup>33</sup>See Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Altars (New York: Payson and Clark, 1929) for a discussion of native icon forms and locations *in situ*.

Audiencia.<sup>34</sup>

While some Churchmen complained to the Spanish authorities, others took matters into their own hands. As soon as he arrived in the New World in 1524 as a commissary of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, Martín de Valencia prosecuted recently-baptized Indians who strayed from Catholic rule.<sup>35</sup> Though the authority of the Inquisition was well known in Spain, it was a novel authority in New Spain. Fray Martín exercised inquisitor's powers in the absence of a bishop who normally would have wielded the title.<sup>36</sup> It was not until the first official viceroy's arrival in 1535 that Bishop Juan de Zumárraga organized the first sanctioned, episcopal tribunals against Indian transgressors in the New World.<sup>37</sup>

Bishop Zumárraga arrived in New Spain in 1528 and within two years had dismantled 500 hidden temples, destroyed numerous manuscripts, and smashed over 20,000 idols.<sup>38</sup> But the bishop did not open his first major Indian

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<sup>34</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 269-270.

<sup>35</sup>Klor de Alva, "Colonizing Souls", 10.

<sup>36</sup>Moreno de Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians," 28-29.

<sup>37</sup>See Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian," The Americas vol.34 (1978):322-28 for a summary of Zumárraga's Inquisition.

<sup>38</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 244.

trial until 1536.<sup>39</sup> A Spaniard, Lorenzo de Suárez, denounced two Indian *caciques* (village chiefs) named Tacatetl and Tanixtetl on June 28. After at least six witnesses testified that they had seen the two caciques conduct native ceremonies to Tlaloc, the rain god, train young Aztec boys to perform priestly duties, and sacrifice human hearts to god-images, both were arrested under Church authority. In their sworn statements, Tacatetl and Tanixtetl stated that they had been baptized in the Catholic faith and had taken Christian names. But they also admitted participating in sacrifices to Tlaloc to alleviate the drought from which their region was suffering. Zumárraga was horrified when both men testified that all the chiefs had idols hidden away and that native religious practices continued across central Mexico.<sup>40</sup>

The caciques refused the services of defense attorneys and threw themselves on the court's mercy. But they received none. Both were bound, stripped to the waist, mounted on burros, and taken through the streets of Mexico and Tlatelolco with a crier proclaiming their crimes. Spanish authorities flogged them along the way and in the towns' marketplaces where they also burned their idols in a

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<sup>39</sup>Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians," 29; Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 51.

<sup>40</sup>Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 50-51; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 247-48.

public ceremony. Finally, the Spanish shaved the caciques' heads, forced them to make a public abjuration in the cathedral, and threw them in jail.<sup>41</sup> While this punishment may seem excessive by modern standards, European Christians guilty of similar acts would have been bound over to secular authorities to be burned at the stake.

Five other cases concerning Indian idolatry came before Zumárraga in the next four years. Each case involved caciques and native priests who had inspired resistance to the Catholic Church among their people.<sup>42</sup> To most caciques, conversion was primarily a political act which allowed them to hold positions of power in their communities. But beyond the requirements for office, few caciques faithfully adhered to Christian doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Each of the five cases also revealed the existence of more idols throughout New Spain and each suggested that many of the Indian elite continued to engage in traditional rites.

Zumárraga grew more frustrated with the failure of the Church missions and expressed his concerns in a letter to the Council of the Indies: "Every day I see more clearly that what I have begun to build can never be finished, and that where the wisdom of Paul and the charity of Peter are

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<sup>41</sup>Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 52; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 247-248.

<sup>42</sup>Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 270; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 243.

<sup>43</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 240.

required, I find in myself nothing but imperfections and faults. I...am filled with doubts, [and] facing the great difficulties which are daily offered in this new Church I stand before them naked of all that is necessary for their resolution."<sup>44</sup>

Spanish Churchmen increased their search for idols and their native keepers with each new revelation. Recognizing the potential for apostasy among Indian leaders to spread to lower-status Indians, Zumárraga established twenty missionary centers, each employing Indian constables to root out idolaters.<sup>45</sup> Concerned friars doubled their efforts to ferret out idols when testimonies indicated that the god-images taken away from Tenochtitlán during the conquest were still the focus of widely spread underground cults.<sup>46</sup> The numbers of seized idols mounted with each testimony in every trial.

But no proceso was as infamous as the trial of Don Carlos Mendoza Ometochtzin, cacique of Texcoco. In a sweeping search of the territory, Spanish friars found caches of idols in one of Don Carlos's houses on July 4, 1539. All testimony concurred with the cacique's claim that he had inherited the house from his uncle and that the

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<sup>44</sup>Juan de Zumárraga to Council of Indies, February 8, 1537, quoted in Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 252-53.

<sup>45</sup>Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 243.

<sup>46</sup>Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 59-64; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, chap. 13.

shrine not only predated the Spanish conquest, but had remained closed since his uncle's death. But the discovery of idols throughout the Texcoco region prompted a zealous search for the hidden temples of the native religion. Church investigators recovered hundreds of idols and learned that the cult of Tlaloc was alive and well among the province's citizenry. Without any clear evidence that proved Don Carlos guilty of idolatry, Zumárraga could not punish him for possession of traditional images.

The cacique, however, had popularized a campaign against Christianity. As an influential cacique, Don Carlos pointed out the differences in dress and in teaching among the Catholic missionary orders to his fellow Indians. Though baptized, he was ignorant of any Catholic rules because his father had forbidden him to attend Catholic school or Church. Don Carlos openly stated to any Indian who would listen that the Spaniards were drunkards who disregarded their own priests. He continually made the dangerous suggestion that Indians should be allowed the same freedom the priests afforded the Spaniards.<sup>47</sup>

Zumárraga convicted him on charges of heretical dogmatizing and sentenced him to suffer an *auto de fé* (test of faith) after which he was released to the Spanish secular authorities to be burned at the stake. It was the most

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<sup>47</sup>Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 70-72; Padden, Hummingbird and the Hawk, 259-64; Ricard, Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 272-73.

severe sentence Zumárraga had meted out to an Indian and news of it caused a sensation in Spain. Both Charles V, emperor of Spain, and the Inquisitor General deemed the sentence too harsh and removed the bishop from the position of Inquisitor of New Spain.<sup>48</sup>

Leaders of the Holy Office in Spain admonished Zumárraga and all Churchmen invested with inquisitorial authority in 1540: "Since these people are newly converted...and in such a short time have not been able to learn well the things of our Christian religion, nor to be instructed in them as fitting, and mindful that they are new plants, it is necessary that they should be attracted more with love than with rigor...and that they should not be treated roughly nor should one apply to them the rigor of the law...nor confiscate their property."<sup>49</sup> This new spirit in the Catholic mission, also reflected in the New Laws of 1542 which outlawed Indian slavery, came to New Spain in the person of Visitador General Francisco Tello de Sandoval.

Tello de Sandoval, Zumárraga's replacement, arrived in New Spain in 1544 and served, among other offices, as apostolic inquisitor. Out of the 152 trials heard between 1536 and 1543, only 19 involved Indians.<sup>50</sup> Despite their

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<sup>48</sup>Richard E. Greenleaf, The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 75.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Klor de Alva, "Colonizing Souls," 5.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 4.



relative scarcity, the *procesos* affected both Indian communities and the missionary effort. Though he was sent to stabilize Indian-Church relations, Tello de Sandoval still brought Indians before the tribunal for idolatry as did missionary priests in the Mexican hinterlands.

From 1544 to 1545, Tello de Sandoval investigated idolatrous practices by the cacique and two *principales* of Yanhuitlán in the Oaxaca region south of Tenochtitlán.<sup>51</sup> Concerns over the influence that Indian leaders possessed over their neighbors resurfaced and prompted inquiries by the Holy Office.<sup>52</sup> But the Spanish government's reaction to Zumárraga made Sandoval overly cautious. When the Dean of Oaxaca's Cathedral, Pedro Gómez de Maraver, sent Sandoval a report on his probe into Indian paganism and idolatry, Sandoval became more nervous. The report stated that the cacique, the governor, and a prominent noble of Yanhuitlán practiced idolatry, made sacrifices, and ridiculed Indian Christians.<sup>53</sup>

As the trial continued, Sandoval received both pleas from the accused Indians for leniency and admonitions from the Oaxaca clergy for action. The beleaguered inquisitor

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<sup>51</sup>See Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethohistorian," The Americas, vol. 34 (1978):328-31 for a summary of the Oaxaca Inquisition.

<sup>52</sup>Ronald Spores, The Mixtec Kings and Their People (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 175; Greenleaf, "Mexican Inquisition and the Indians," 328-31.

<sup>53</sup>Greenleaf, Mexican Inquisition, 76.

finally went to Yanhuitlán to hear the testimony himself. But his presence did little to resolve the situation. After almost three years of investigations, hearings, and procesos, Sandoval closed the cases, passing no sentence.<sup>54</sup>

The last act of Sandoval's inquisitorial ministry was the trial of Don Juan, the noble of Yanhuitlán. The formal accusation read like a guide to Indian religious practice. After stating that Don Juan had been baptized and instructed in the Christian faith, he had assumed the responsibility to "care for and venerate the said idols" and had "sent other people to the market place and to the vendors of the said province to buy quail and pigeons and other birds and dogs to sacrifice and offer to their idols with copal, feathers, stones, straws, paper, and bowls." The tribunal indicted Don Juan, saying that "he sacrificed blood taken from his ears and private parts with stone needles and blades, offering it to his idols in order to obtain knowledge about them, and to learn of the things of the past from the priests, and to insure fortune and success in his undertakings." The litany of charges continued: "He sacrificed and offered sacrifices...some ten years ago at the death of his mother-in-law when he had a girl sacrificed; and some eight years ago at the time of the great hunger the said Don Juan and some other *principales* ordered that five boys be sacrificed; and some five years

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<sup>54</sup>Greenleaf, Mexican Inquisition, 79-80.

ago he killed and sacrificed a boy and buried him in his own house; and some three years ago when there had been no rain he sacrificed two more boys."<sup>55</sup> But no substantial proof of the charges was ever found and Sandoval released Don Juan from the Inquisition's grip.

Inquisitional authority reverted to the bishops in 1547, when Tello de Sandoval returned to Spain.<sup>56</sup> The bishops, and even the friars in remote locales, exercised inquisitorial powers until 1571 when the prelates of the tribunal founded the formal Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico. Once established, the Holy Office operated for only fifty years. While Indian cases were rare, the inquisitors still tenaciously pursued idolaters.

By the 1620's, the Inquisition had largely failed in its attempt to stamp out traditional Indian practices. To bolster the faltering Catholic effort, Churchmen compiled accounts of Indian idolatry. In 1629 Franciscan, Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, recorded the ritual behavior of the Taxco-Cuernavacan Indians for use in future investigations of Indian idolatry and paganism: "I only aspire to open a path for the ministers to the Indians," he wrote, "so that they

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<sup>55</sup>Final Accusation against Don Juan, quoted and translated in Spores, Mixtec Kings and Their People, 25-27.

<sup>56</sup>Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians," 31; Greenleaf, "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain, 147.

can better attempt its correction, if not its remedy."<sup>57</sup>

Alarcón collected extensive descriptions of Indian rites and incantations. He discovered icons in rock piles and at crossroads and noted that passers-by offered something to these deities to ensure "that nothing bad happen to them on the voyage they are making, or to have a good harvest, or for similar things."<sup>58</sup> The Franciscan learned of the inheritance of religious images and scornfully penned:

The heirs to this little basket and what it holds within it are the offspring and descendants, with nobody of that generation daring to neglect it. In such a manner, if it comes about that the generation dies out of those to whom the custodianship of such a little basket belongs, [it passes] to those called in Nahuatl *ytlápial*, which means those who are obliged to watch over such a thing; so that none other dares remove it from the place where the owners and heirs had it, which is usually on the altar of their private chapels.<sup>59</sup>

As the friar investigated various hiding places for the idols, he learned of some of the images' functions. Carved images were in granaries, in heaps of squashes, on

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<sup>57</sup>Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, The Treatise on Superstitions of the Nations of This New Spain, 1629, in Aztec Sorcerers in Seventeenth Century Mexico, eds. and trans. Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker, pub. no. 7 (Albany: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies State University of New York at Albany, 1982), 61. See also Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions that Today Live Among the Indians Native to this New Spain, 1629, trans. and ed. J. Richard Andrews and Ross Hassig (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón, Treatise on Superstitions, 70.

<sup>59</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón, Treatise on Superstitions, 71.

mountainsides, by rivers, and in shrines in various structures across the region where they allegedly watched over food stores, kept evil spirits from the faithful, and oversaw the workings of Indian daily life. While much of what Ruiz de Alarcón described exemplified personal or individual worship, he found at least one instance of collective ritual among the settlements of Texcoco and Cuernavaca.

Native priests sent a selected member of the society to embark on a pilgrimage to a mountain summit. The *tlamacazqui*, or priest, told the *tlamáceuhqui*, the penitent, to take a portion of a concoction of tobacco-with-lime which the priest had prepared to a particular holy place. The Franciscan noted that "none excused himself from going to the place he had specified, no matter how burdensome."<sup>60</sup> The penitent left with offerings of copal, spun yarn wrapped in white paper made from tree bark, and the tobacco-with-lime. Ruiz de Alarcón wrote:

On arriving at the place of the idol or at the pile of stones, he prostrated himself where he was to place his offering. After he had placed it, he sacrificed himself by shedding his blood, for which he carried a point made from a sharpened sliver of cane. With it he pierced his ears in the parts where women place eardrops, until much blood was shed, and he cast this into some little receptacles like salt-cellars which they made in the rocks. They so pierced their ears that by the time they were old, they had come to be like large rings...He also pierced himself below the lip above the beard, until he had opened it up like a

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<sup>60</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón, Treatise on Superstition, 79.

window; some also did this to the upper part of the tongue...They say that some fainted or fell asleep, and in this ecstasy they either heard, or fancied that they heard, words which their idol spoke to them, which made them very happy and secure that what they were asking for had been granted them, which usually were children, wealth, long life, family, or health.<sup>61</sup>

When the ceremony was complete, the penitent broke off a branch from a nearby tree to prove the success of his mission. With fervent joy, the man returned to his village.

Instances of recurrent idolatry among various Indian groups in central Mexico continued to the nineteenth century. While the last cases of Indian idolatry brought before the tribunal concluded in 1779, the last Indian trial of the Mexican colonial period occurred in 1818.<sup>62</sup> The need for such investigations is proof enough that the Indians continued traditional modes of religious practice. One historian observed: "Wherever Christianity left a niche unfilled, it appears, there preconquest beliefs and practices tended to persist in their original form."<sup>63</sup> Ancestral rites satisfied the Indians' spiritual needs and most natives maintained some of their traditional beliefs.

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<sup>61</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón, Treatise on Superstitions, 80-81.

<sup>62</sup>Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians, 328; Greenleaf, "The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain, 165.

<sup>63</sup>Lockhart, Nahuas, 258.

### CHAPTER III

#### HUACAS AND LLAMAS

It was just before dawn in the Inca capital of Cuzco. At the peak of the Temple of the Sun, a berobed priest approached a sacred brazier whose fire slowly consumed a specially carved and fragrant wood. The priest maintained the constant flame, for from its sparks came all of the Inca state's sacrificial fires. Every morning, the priest kindled a second brazier to welcome the coming of Pachacamac, the sun. As the sun's rays crept over the horizon, the priest threw a portion of his carefully prepared breakfast into the second brazier's flames. With outstretched arms and upturned palms, he solemnly recited: "Eat this, Lord Sun, and acknowledge thy children." In the afternoon, he returned to the brazier with a dark red llama. The priest ceremoniously slit the llama's throat and sprinkled its blood and some coca into the fire. The sun accepted the Inca offerings and shone benevolently upon the Andean kingdom for another day.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Father Bernabé Cobo, Inca Religion and Customs, trans. and ed. Roland Hamilton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 113-14. See also J. Alden Mason, The Ancient Civilizations of Peru (United States: Penguin Books, 1968), 218.

The religious practices of Andean people developed on the level of the *ayllu*. A community descended from a common mythical ancestor, the *ayllu* was the basic unit of social organization in precolonial Peru. Since an *ayllu*'s ancestor was either a deity or mythical hero, the religious rites associated with his worship were intimately tied to community formation. When the imperial Incas conquered neighboring *ayllus* between 1450 and 1532, they not only allowed new subjects to worship traditional gods, but also absorbed these new deities into their own pantheon at Cuzco. While the conquered maintained most of their own religious ways, they also accepted the primacy of select Incan gods and the divinity of the Incan emperor.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, state religion united all tributary groups with Inca overlords; it provided Andean peoples with a common religious system.<sup>3</sup>

Atop the Inca universe sat Viracocha, the androgenous creator god. Equally important was Pachacamac or Inti, the sun. Pachacamac had a second form, called Punchao, who was God of the Sun and Lord of the Day. Pachacamac's female counterpart, Quilla, was the moon; Illapa was the god of thunder and rain; Pachamama was the earth goddess. In times of sickness, danger, want, thanksgiving, or celebration,

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<sup>2</sup>Louis Baudin, Daily Life in Peru Under the Last Incas, trans. Winifred Bradford (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 67.

<sup>3</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 3-4. Irene Silverblatt, Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 23.



Incas sacrificed and prayed to their all-powerful deities who were responsible for preserving all creation and for sustaining the Incas in their position of power.<sup>4</sup> By correctly worshipping the gods, believers secured favor and forestalled heavenly wrath.

Heavenly wrath could be devastating not only for existence on earth but for life after death. Andeans believed in the immortality of the soul and had concepts for both heaven and hell.<sup>5</sup> "Heaven" was the sun, a place where life was the same as on earth but with abundant food and drink for all. "Hell," like its European counterpart, was a subterranean inferno for evil doers.<sup>6</sup> While the Incas certainly believed they were bound for the sun, their subjects' fate was still in question. Andeans of all ranks frequently chastened themselves to allay their own fears and to secure divine assurance.<sup>7</sup> Thus, state ceremonies and sacrifices were of great importance.

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<sup>4</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 5. Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, The Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru, trans. and ed. L. Clark Keating (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 22. Garcilaso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries of the Incas: And General History of Peru, Pt. 1 & 2 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), Book II, 67-79.

<sup>5</sup>Pedro de Cieza de León, The Incas, trans. Harriet de Onis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 58. Garcilaso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries, Book II, 84-86.

<sup>6</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 19-21. Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 211.

<sup>7</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 143.

Incas created representations of their gods to serve as divine intermediaries during state rituals. Incas erected elaborate state temples in praise of their gods and placed in their sanctuaries shrines and altars adorned with these brilliant images of their deities. The Temple of the Sun, called Coricancha or "enclosure of gold," housed the most highly venerated Inca idol.<sup>8</sup> A Spanish friar was among the first foreigners to gaze upon the image:

It was entirely made of the finest gold with an exquisite display of jewels. It was shaped like a human face surrounded by sunrays, as we always depict the sun ourselves. The image was placed in a way as to face toward the east, and as the sun rose, it would strike the image. Since it was a sheet of the finest metal the sunrays reflected off it, shining with such brightness that it looked like the sun. The Indians said that along with its light the sun transmitted its power.<sup>9</sup>

A second idol of the sun was full of pulverized gold mixed with the ashes retrieved from the burnt hearts of former Incan kings.<sup>10</sup> Other statues of the sun representing the various powers of Inti guarded Corincancha's sanctuary. During festivals and general sacrifices, worshippers carried these images into the town center so all could properly

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<sup>8</sup>Garcilaso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries, Book II, 86-88.

<sup>9</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 26. A legend recounts how Manso Serra lost the idol in a gambling match during the Spanish conquest of Peru. Thus comes to us the Spanish phrase, "He plays away the sun before it rises."

<sup>10</sup>Sabine MacCormack, Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 113.

venerate them.<sup>11</sup> The importance of the sun to Inca people was paramount. In fact, Incas acknowledged only two sacred directions -- east and west -- which traced the path of the sun through the sky.<sup>12</sup>

Festivals in honor of Inca gods and images included sacrifices, offerings, singing, dancing, story-telling, confessions, and abstinence.<sup>13</sup> Often rituals lasted for days and involved priests and laity, state representatives and subjects. Food and *chicha* (corn beer) were the most common offerings.<sup>14</sup> Priests burned gifts of food and poured sacrificial *chicha* on the ground. Coca was another frequent present to the gods. Like food offerings, coca, corn flour, wool, llama fat, sea shells, eye lashes, eyebrow hairs, clothes, and gold or silver figurines were burned before the images of the deities.<sup>15</sup> Metal or wood figurines, carved in human shapes and clad in fine clothing, at times replaced living offerings in sacrificial rites. But living sacrifices were superior to material offerings and ultimately more pleasing to the gods.

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<sup>11</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 26-27.

<sup>12</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 210.

<sup>13</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 47.

<sup>14</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 41.

<sup>15</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 115-117. Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 42-43. Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 216.

Llamas and guinea pigs were the most common living sacrifices presented to the gods; llamas were the preferred gifts. Priests raised flocks of llamas for religious purposes. When conditions required a sacrifice, priests led llamas around the sacred figures, faced the icons, recited a prayer, and then cut creatures' throats. Sometimes priests removed the llamas' hearts, ate them raw, and divided the remaining llama meat among the ministers in attendance.<sup>16</sup> They sacrificed white llamas to the sun, brown llamas to the creator, Viracocha, and mottled llamas to Illapa, the thunder god.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, llamas were so vital to Inca ritual that they could, at times, replace humans on the sacrificial slab.<sup>18</sup> But human sacrifices did occur. Humans were the most precious of gifts and Incas rarely spilt human blood. Only the most sacred or most ominous occasions warranted human sacrifice: the installation of a new emperor, an emperor's serious illness or departure for war, a military defeat, a famine or plague.<sup>19</sup> Priests offered human flesh only to the most important deities and shrines during elaborate

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<sup>16</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 42.

<sup>17</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 113-114. Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 217.

<sup>18</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 145; MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 171.

<sup>19</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 111-12; Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 217.

community ceremonies. Thus, all shared in the seriousness of human sacrifice.

Boys and girls selected as offerings were physically perfect. Girls often came from among the chosen women, an order of beautiful maidens in service to the state gods. Boys were either offered by parents in great need or were recognized as exceptional specimens who would be pleasing to the gods. Adults, also perfect in physical appearance, came from conquered provinces. Before going to the temples, victims feasted and sometimes became drunk so to appear contented before the deities. They, like the llamas, marched around the icon and then stood before it while a priest strangled or slit their throats. At times, priests opted to cut out their hearts instead. The priest then marked or smeared the image with the victim's blood. Occasionally, they poured the blood on the ground. Then the priests buried the bodies with gold and silver.<sup>20</sup> Incas venerated their victims with great solemnity.

Respect for the dead was a critical part of Andean religion. When emperors or great lords died, Andeans embalmed their bodies and entombed them in places which they had frequented during life. Mourners surrounded their remains with the deceased's worldly possessions.<sup>21</sup> Families

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<sup>20</sup>Cobo, Incan Religion, 112; Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 217. MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 200.

<sup>21</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 27.

collected nail pairings, teeth, hair clippings, and other items cut from the deceased and stored them in a box next to their bodies.<sup>22</sup> Survivors believed that the spirits of their former leaders resided in heaven, so they made sacrifices to the dead who were recent additions to their religious pantheon. Families designated caretakers to organize ceremonies and to manage cults for the adoration of the dead.<sup>23</sup> Families also set aside farmland whose profits supported the worship of their ancestors remains.

In major festivals, families retrieved the mummies or *malquis* from their tombs and propped them up in the town square.<sup>24</sup> In imperial rites, entire communities worshipped deceased ancestors, emperors, and lords. In the Hátun Raimi ("very solemn feast") commemorating the harvest, priests enthroned statues of the dead Incas in the town plaza. For fifteen to twenty days, worshippers honored the statues and bones of their divine leaders. When the celebration ended, priests returned the statues to their temples and the dead Incas to their sepulchers.<sup>25</sup>

During ceremonies involving *malquis*, families selected one person to channel the will of the dead to the ears of

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<sup>22</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 70.

<sup>23</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 64-68.

<sup>24</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 19.

<sup>25</sup>Cieza de León, Incas, 181-83; Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 212.

the living. After he burned and poured portions of the food and drink offered to the malquis, the channeller consumed most of the remaining gifts for the ancestor and then shared the rest with the celebrants. He then relayed messages from the afterlife to the expectant survivors.<sup>26</sup>

Incan priests also practiced the art of divination, but did so on a larger scale than did individual family soothsayers. During the Feast Day of the Sun in Cuzco, priests sacrificed black llamas, considered the most perfect of the species, and opened their hearts and lungs. Oracles examined the organs for a verdict on the Incas' future.<sup>27</sup> Other celebrations also involved fortune-telling. Once a year, Andeans brought their sacred statues to Cuzco to divine the coming year. The state's priests and the Inca himself questioned each idol to discern the future.<sup>28</sup>

Priests similarly consulted the flames of sacred braziers. After offering objects of silver and gold, wood soaked in llama fat, and food and drink to the flames, priests asked for spiritual aid. Considering the flames that burst through holes in the brazier the voices of the

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<sup>26</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 39-43. For descriptions of Incan idols and ceremonies, see Huamán Poma (Don Felipe Huamán Poma de Ayala), Letter to a King: A Peruvian Chief's Account of Life Under the Incas and Under Spanish Rule, ed. and arr. Christopher Dilke, trans. from Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 69-72, 73-76, 81-84.

<sup>27</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 155.

<sup>28</sup>Cieza de León, Incas, 191.

spirits, priests knelt quietly by the fires to receive divine messages.<sup>29</sup>

Related to their ability to know what the gods desired, priests heard the confessions of Andean penitents. Concerned over the state of their immortal souls, worshippers confessed their sins to Inca priests who instructed them on ways to placate the gods and return to their good graces. Andeans believed in sins of intention (hatred, vengeance, to do harm or rebel, love for married persons), so confession also alleviated social stress.<sup>30</sup> After confession, priests performed divination rituals to determine if the penitents' admissions were complete and correct. Once priests deemed confessions legitimate, they instructed worshippers to cleanse themselves in rivers and to fulfill penances.<sup>31</sup> Only the Inca and the high priest confessed directly to the divinities.

The high priest, called *Villac Umu*, held his position for life and was always a relative of the emperor. Yet, he was not alone in the administration of his fellow holy men. Nine to ten elected priests formed a council below the high priest. A host of secondary priests associated with particular gods or ancestors followed the council. Priests inherited their positions, were elected by their ayllu

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<sup>29</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 220.

<sup>30</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 142.

<sup>31</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 123-24.



leaders (*curacas*), or assumed minor offices on their own by displaying personal ability. Generally, candidates' preparation included fasting for a month and abstaining from having sex, washing, or grooming themselves.<sup>32</sup>

The priesthood was vital to the Inca state. Priests were diviners, sacrificers, confessors, doctors, care-takers of sacred paraphernalia, and intermediaries between heaven and earth.<sup>33</sup> State clergy formed an exclusive part of Inca society. While the lower clergy lived close to their ayllus, the upper clergy lived within the walls of the great temples accompanied by monks, servants, and the chosen women.

*Acllacuna* (the chosen women) and *mamacuna* (virgins of the sun) were permanent staff members at the sacred temples. Both groups were associations of women who had taken a vow of chastity to be religious servants to the gods. They were the most beautiful and physically perfect women in the Inca territories, taken from their homes to live in Cuzco. In "convents" they learned religious rituals, weaving, cooking, and chicha manufacture. *Acllacuna* and *mamacuna* were guaranteed an afterlife of happiness and leisure. While some made their way to the sacrificial altars, most survived to serve the gods and to prepare the sacred drink for

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<sup>32</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 36-37; Baudin, Daily Life, 137; Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 212.

<sup>33</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 213.

festivals.<sup>34</sup> The Inca government fiercely guarded the integrity of female religious orders. Priests strangled any woman caught breaking her vow of chastity and buried her lover alive.<sup>35</sup> The punishments reflected the significance of the duties *acllacuna* and *mamacuna* performed.

Feast days revealed another important aspect of Inca imperial order: community participation in state religion. In almost every celebration, priests shared sacrificial meat and *mamacuna*-prepared *chicha* with everyone in attendance. They passed food and drink first to captains who had won recent battles, then to ministers, to great lords of the nobility, to attendants, and finally to the lower ranks. Then the offerings made their way back through the social ranks to the priests. Reciprocity was essential to the Incas' rituals.<sup>36</sup> One Spanish *conquistador* even commented on the reciprocal character of an Incan rite:

Most of these people served the dead...whom every day they carried to the main square, setting them down in a ring, each one according to his age, and there the male and female attendants [of the mummies] ate and drank. The attendants made fires in front of each of the dead...in which they burned every thing they had put before them, so that the dead should eat of everything that the living ate...The attendants also placed before these dead bodies certain large pitchers which they call *bisques*...and there they poured the

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<sup>34</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 213, 185; Silverblatt, Moon, Sun, and Witches, 81-84; Garcilaso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries, Book IV, 195-99.

<sup>35</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 214.

<sup>36</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 155.

*chicha*...the dead toasted each other and the living, and the living toasted the dead.<sup>37</sup>

These religious practices tied men and gods together in networks of obligation. If the ceremony was done correctly, then the gods behaved benevolently toward the Inca people.

But the state did not monopolize the religious attention of Andean peoples. Indeed, homage to state gods occupied only a portion of Andean religious life. Andeans believed that their world was alive with spirits; everything had a soul. Springs, stones, hills, caves, roots, mountains, quarries, bridges, palaces, houses, temples, and tombs all possessed potentially malevolent powers which Andeans had to placate through gifts or sacrifices.<sup>38</sup> *Huacas* or sacred shrines were the dwelling places of these spirits, the sites of worship for those who made offerings, and images of the spirits themselves.<sup>39</sup> At times consisting of ornate altars, at others involving crude piles of stones or simple niches in cave walls, huacas stood in every imaginable place across Inca lands.<sup>40</sup> In private homes, Andeans constructed domestic huacas where they praised their local gods in rites similar to those performed on the state level. Family rituals appeased domestic and ayllu deities

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<sup>37</sup>Quoted in MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 68.

<sup>38</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 209. Baudin, Daily Life, 65.

<sup>39</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 20.

<sup>40</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 209.

and kept the family in spiritual health. Just as state religion united the empire, private veneration of huacas bound ayllus and families together.<sup>41</sup>

State religion established and supported the availability of food supplies, care for the sick, avenues for spirituality and mysticism, and a code of ethics. Incas believed in sin, confession, penance, purification, divination of priests, and sacrifice.<sup>42</sup> Ostensibly, Incas had a great deal in common with the Spanish Catholics who entered the northern Andes in the 1530s.

Spaniards undermined the stability of the Inca empire years before arriving in the Andean region. In the 1520s, Spanish diseases spread from Panama to South America and claimed the lives of both the *sapa Inca*, Huayna Capac, and his chosen heir. With the Inca throne vacant, the two most powerful imperial cities vied for political power. Cuzco, the traditional political and religious center, supported one of Huayna Capac's sons, Huascar. Quito, the military hub of the empire, backed Huascar's brother, Atahualpa. A bloody and bitter civil war followed. By 1532, Atahualpa had captured Huascar, but the warring factions continued to struggle for political hegemony. So entered a third claimant into Inca territory. On November 16, 1532 at Cajamarca's central plaza, a small band of Spanish soldiers

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<sup>41</sup>Garcilaso de la Vega, Royal Commentaries, Book I, 30-35.

<sup>42</sup>Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 206.

under the leadership of Francisco Pizarro captured Atahualpa and slaughtered thousands of his retainers and servants. The Incan throne fell into foreign hands.<sup>43</sup>

But Pizarro's victory remained incomplete. In fact, Spaniards struggled for forty years to overwhelm Incan resistance. In 1572 Tupac Amaru, the last of the Inca emperors fell to Spanish soldiers. Spanish missionaries pressured the Inca ruler to convert to Catholicism before he met his inevitable end. Tupac Amaru finally succumbed to the friars' will. On September 21, he addressed his followers in his native tongue from the scaffold:

Hear now that I am a Christian and they have baptized me, and I wish to die in the law of God, and I must die. Everything that so far I and the Incas my ancestors have told you, that you should adore the Sun, Punchao, and the *huacas* [sacred shrines], idols, rocks, rivers, mountains, and *vilcas*, is false and a lie. And when we said that we were going to go in to speak to the sun, and that he commanded that you should do as we ordered you to do, and that he spoke to us, it was a lie. For it was not the sun but we who spoke, for the sun is a lump of gold and cannot speak.<sup>44</sup>

When Tupac Amaru had completed his speech, the Spaniards executed him. The last vestige of Inca state religion died with the native leader.

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<sup>43</sup>Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, Colonial Latin America (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 45-51. Nathan Wachtel, The Vision of the Vanquished: The Spanish Conquest of Peru Through Indian Eyes, 1530-1570, trans. Ben and Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1977), 16-30.

<sup>44</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 249-50.

Though militarily defeated and politically dominated, Incas did not easily bow to Spanish persecution. Incas maintained many of their private religious practices and their imperial religious beliefs through the lengthy conquest, during several inquisitors' investigations, and beyond. They kept aspects of their native religion, borrowed portions of Catholicism, and adapted their practices to accommodate parts of both belief systems. While Spanish Churchmen tried to destroy traditional Inca religion, the old ways survived.

But it was not for lack of effort. From the first expedition into the Andes, Spaniards plundered native temples and profaned Inca shrines. Francisco Pizarro, the first Spaniard to enter some Inca holy places initiated the attempt to overthrow native ways. Ignoring Inca objections that no one should see the Temple of Pachacamac's sanctuary, Pizarro ascended the pyramid, broached the labyrinth of passages, and passed through a door leading to a small, dark room. There, sitting amidst offerings of gold and silver, was a wooden pole. At the pole's top was a carved figure of Pachacamac. According to Inca belief, the most holy sun sustained humans, fed crops, and cured disease. But the god also controlled the natural environment's destructive forces and brought the ravages of disease.<sup>45</sup> Pizarro claimed the trove of rich offerings as his own and "erected a tall cross

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<sup>45</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 55-59.

on that dwelling place that the devil had held so much as his own."<sup>46</sup> While the Incas watched, Spaniards dismantled the native shrines and defiled sacred tombs.

While Spaniards were mostly concerned with ransacking Incan tabernacles, there was a small initial effort to convert the Incas. Between 1533 and 1548, few missionaries resided in Indian pueblos. Between 1548 and 1570, friars established convents in heavily populated areas, but conversions were few.<sup>47</sup> Indian parishes or *doctrinas* grew between 1570 and 1600, but problems persisted. Hindered by wars in central Europe against Lutheran princes, the Catholic church sustained a relatively modest presence in the Andes until the seventeenth century. Sixteen to eighteen Dominicans went to Chucito province in 1567 to serve more than 60,000 people.<sup>48</sup> In 1572, missionaries had established 451 Indian parishes in Peru serving approximately 800,000 souls. Each priest was responsible for roughly 1,800 parishioners.<sup>49</sup> What is more, missionaries performed short tours of duty, were frequently absent on *visitas* (ecclesiastical inspections), provided

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<sup>46</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 56-57.

<sup>47</sup>Antonine Tibesar, "The Early Peruvian Missionary Effort," in Richard E. Greenleaf ed. The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America (New York: Knopf Press, 1971), 54.

<sup>48</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 152.

<sup>49</sup>Karen Spalding, Huarocharí: An Andean Society Under Inca and Spanish Rule (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 250.

little religious instruction, never reached the Peruvian interior, and did not learn the native languages of Aymara and Quechua.<sup>50</sup> Ironically, the odds improved as disease depleted the Inca population. In 1792, the number of parishes grew slightly to 483, but the native population had fallen to 608,894.<sup>51</sup>

There was no systematic assault on Inca rituals until the 1550s. Gerónimo de Loayza, archbishop of Lima, issued the first *Instrucción* for the conversion of Indians in the 1540s. His guidelines urged priests to involve the natives in the destruction of traditional rituals. The first of their kind, the archbishop's recommendations were uninspired and timid.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, missionaries established *reducciones* (new Indian settlements) away from their traditional huacas in the 1550s.<sup>53</sup> Initial conversion efforts focused on the discovery and destruction of Inca holy places and sacred objects. After they had "eliminated" the enemy, missionaries organized catechism classes, enforcing mandatory attendance with help from secular authorities. Friars baptized natives early in the conversion process. More detailed instruction followed the administration of the

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<sup>50</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 152-53.

<sup>51</sup>Spalding, Huaro chirí, 250.

<sup>52</sup>Spalding, Huaro chirí, 245.

<sup>53</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 252.



baptismal rite. However, the missionaries' focus was on coercing Andeans to abandon their old ways rather than convincing them to adopt Christianity.<sup>54</sup> Theological instruction of the Andeans was minimal at best.

While catechists learned the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and the Creed and understood the Ten Commandments, the works of mercy, and the articles of faith, the foreign words meant little to native minds.<sup>55</sup> Andean religion survived largely because native rituals were closely tied to seasonal harvesting and planting. Every year, the fields, and therefore the Andeans, were exposed to the same natural dangers. These hazards made traditional rites necessary for natives.<sup>56</sup>

Incas even retained many of their traditional religious images. Discovery and subsequent suppression of the *Taqui Onqoy* rebellion in 1565 documented the survival of Andean religion. Literally "dance of disease," *Taqui Onqoy* was a millennial movement that combined Indian and Spanish religious beliefs. One Spanish observer noted that converts would "dance and tremble while moving in a circle, and in the dance they called on the devil and on their huacas and idols, at the same time abjuring...the true faith of Jesus

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<sup>54</sup>Sabine MacCormack, " 'The Heart Has Its Reasons': Predicaments of Missionary Christianity in Early Colonial Peru," Hispanic American Historical Review 65 (1985), 453-54.

<sup>55</sup>MacCormack, "Heart Has Its Reasons," 455.

<sup>56</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 180.

Christ and all the teachings they had received from Christian priests."<sup>57</sup> The ceremony was to bring disease to the Spaniards and victory to the Andeans through the intervention of local huacas and the Christian Christ.<sup>58</sup> Inspections across the colony yielded troves of Andean idols, which Spanish authorities ceremoniously destroyed. Yet many icons remained in native hands, including charred stone pieces salvaged from captured huacas.<sup>59</sup> Missionaries were still generally ignorant of Andean religious beliefs and practices.

From the 1550s to 1600, the Church waged only limited campaigns against the huacas and mummies. Churchmen swept into villages, rounded up idols and the bodies of preserved ancestors, burned what they gathered, placed crosses on piles of stones or places of worship too heavy to move, and then quickly departed. Yet with no continued pressure to abandon native ways, Incas returned to their old practices.<sup>60</sup>

Andeans worshipped abnormalities in nature as well as crafted religious icons. Unusual crop growths or human births indicated sacredness. Two ears of corn growing

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<sup>57</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 181. See also Spalding, Huaro chirí, 147-49.

<sup>58</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 182; Spalding, Huaro chirí, 246.

<sup>59</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 253.

<sup>60</sup>Spalding, Huaro chirí, 251.

together (*mamazaras*), human or animal twins, strange stones, exceptionally large trees or roots, even oddly shaped potatoes, were holy.<sup>61</sup> Andeans considered all of them huacas.

Clans maintained major and minor priests who cared for the communities' huacas and supervised ayllu worship of the gods.<sup>62</sup> Responsible for maintaining proper behavior among clan members and directing ceremonies, priests attended to the needs of individual ayllus.<sup>63</sup> During seed time, harvest, and other particular seasonal events, the entire community participated in grand festivals. Elders recited myths about the god-images, priests held confessions, and families observed days of fasting.<sup>64</sup>

At the household level, the oldest family member cared for the household idols, sacred stones, and *conopas* (material representation of the family's resources). Household idols were usually stone figures that possessed human and animal faces or no faces at all. They were simply smaller versions of ayllu huacas.<sup>65</sup> Sacred stones were

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<sup>61</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 44-45; Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 30; Baudin, Daily Life, 187; Mason, Ancient Civilizations, 210.

<sup>62</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 18.

<sup>63</sup>Spalding, Huaro-chirí, 64-65.

<sup>64</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 391-92.

<sup>65</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 25.

abnormally shaped or elaborately colored rocks said to be signs from the heavens.

Conopas were similar to household idols, observed Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, for "they are made of various materials, have a variety of faces, and are remarkable either in color or shape."<sup>66</sup> He continued:

Conopas are usually passed on from father to son, and it has been ascertained in the towns now being visited that the eldest brother keeps the conopa of his parents and is responsible for it to his brothers and sisters. The eldest also keeps the garments for the festivals of the huacas . . . they kept them [conopas] instead as the most precious objects they had inherited.<sup>67</sup>

Caretakers ensured their families' welfare by properly propitiating domestic deities. Families offered prayers, food, and chicha to their gods, just as state priests had done for imperial deities.<sup>68</sup> Conopa worship was private and personal, involving only members of the household. But like ayllu-wide rites, conopa worship occurred at prescribed times of the year and when Andeans needed particular help for sicknesses, harvesting, or travelling.<sup>69</sup>

When the situation demanded it, Andeans were careful to immediately satiate the spirits who inhabited the natural

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<sup>66</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 28.

<sup>67</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 29.

<sup>68</sup>Spalding, Huaro chirí, 63; Baudin, Daily Life, 188-89.

<sup>69</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 29; Cobo, Inca Religion, 47. See Cobo, 51-108 for extensive descriptions of idols, temples, powers, and worship of each huaca.

world around them. Before they started field work, farmers spread coca and chicha on the earth. When crossing a river, Andeans drank from its waters to ask for permission to pass. Before entering a grotto, natives recited prayers to please the spirits. Upon reaching the summit of a mountain, Andeans placed a stone on the peak to thank the deities.<sup>70</sup> During childbirth, priests sacrificed to a conopa and then held the image on or above the woman's body to bless the event.<sup>71</sup>

Ayllu religion not only survived but thrived after the Spanish conquest of Peru. Local religion was too strong for half-hearted proselytization. According to one version of Andean creation mythology, the reator Viracocha formed the Andean people from clay after the Flood of Creation. The various ayllus emerged from caves, hills, springs, lakes, rivers, and tree trunks. Thus, worshipping these places and these ancestors guaranteed the propagation of their ayllu.<sup>72</sup> The people's very existence depended upon satisfying their gods, so Andeans clung fiercely to their huacas. Peru's religious practices were relatively undisturbed until 1572. Francisco Toledo, the newly appointed viceroy, returned to South America in that year, regained control of Peru from both local Spanish lords and Manco Inca's

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<sup>70</sup>Baudin, Daily Life, 187.

<sup>71</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 52.

<sup>72</sup>Cobo, Inca Religion, 13 and 17.

separatist government at Vilcabamba, and began to institute reforms across the colony. Toledo was shocked to discover how the Spanish friars had failed to convert Andean souls. In 1580, Toledo recorded his disappointment with the missionary effort among Chucuito natives. He assembled the Indians of the area in front of the priests' homes and "forbade them to leave before they knew the prayers and the other [teachings] which are required for baptism, and that they should meanwhile be fed on the resources of the community." He continued: "This was done, and in very few days they knew [the prayers] and understood [the teachings] and were baptized."<sup>73</sup> Toledo's methods proved no different from, and therefore no more effective than those of the friars.

Local Andean religion continued through the chaos of the post-conquest period. It took almost forty years for Spanish missionaries to discover the extent to which ayllu religion survived. The official campaign against idolatry began in 1610 and lasted for the next fifty years.<sup>74</sup>

José de Acosta -- in Peru from around 1570 to 1583 -- was among the first Spanish missionaries to conduct *visitas* specifically designed to root out idolatry in colonial Peru. In the flurry of inspections that followed Acosta's venture, Spaniards discovered that regional deities and ayllu gods

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<sup>73</sup>Quoted in MacCormack, "Heart Has Its Reasons," 453.

<sup>74</sup>Silverblatt, Moon, Sun, and Witches, xxxiii.

had expropriated the power, lands, priests, and supplies once held by imperial divinities.<sup>75</sup> While state religion was gone, local religion thrived. Thus Spanish Churchmen went about frantically trying to amend the situation.

Dr. Francisco de Avila led a visita into Huarochirí province in 1610. After Avila gave the gathered natives a sermon, a brave soul stepped forward and recounted a tale that the priest found disturbing. The native explained that another Indian had happened upon a group sacrificing to a huaca. When asked to join in the ritual, the Indian refused. Then the Indian recognized the celebrants as Christians and harshly reproached them. Fearing that the Indian might reveal their act to the local Catholic priest, the group chased the Indian and killed him.<sup>76</sup> Upon further investigation, Avila found the man's story true. Over the course of his investigations, Avila learned that missionaries had taken local malquis from their shrines and had buried them in churchyards. Distraught natives secretly disinterred their ancestors' bones and returned them to their former sepulchers.<sup>77</sup> Also during his search, Avila discovered more than six hundred idols clothed in various garments and decorations. Andeans had lavished great care

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<sup>75</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 151.

<sup>76</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 10.

<sup>77</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 137. Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 18.

on these images. Avila's assistant, Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga described the icons as variously shaped if modest in size. He commented: "But one should not be astonished to hear that the Indians recognize deity in small things, for it is known that these figures and stones are images representing hills, mountains, and river beds, or even their progenitors and forebears, whom they invoke and worship as their creators and from whom they expect well-being and happiness."<sup>78</sup> Spanish missionaries were beginning to understand Andean cosmology. Unlike previous missionaries, Avila and Arriaga were thorough in investigating cases and meticulous in recording Andean religious practices.<sup>79</sup> The push to extirpate traditional religion from Peru had begun.

Avila convinced the viceroy that Andean idolatry was deep-seated and hidden from Catholic priests in the provinces. To rid the colony of traditional practices and beliefs, Spanish officials had the mechanisms of the Inquisition at their disposal. However, the crown had exempted Indians from prosecution by the Holy Office.<sup>80</sup> Thus Avila and his compatriots adopted Inquisition-like

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<sup>78</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 11.

<sup>79</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 390.

<sup>80</sup>Philip Ainsworth Means, Fall of the Inca Empire and the Spanish Rule in Peru: 1530-1780 (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1964), 168; R.J. Owens, Peru (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 33.



tactics and punishments in order to root out idolatry.<sup>81</sup> *Visitadores* used inquisitional jurisdictional rules and ceremonial order to impose their verdicts. Inspectors cross-examined witnesses in exhaustive detail. They burned objects of worship and punished wrong-doers in public *autos de fé*.<sup>82</sup> During a public ceremony in Lima, Church and state representatives called natives from four leagues away to witness the burning of collected idols. Two platforms, one with idols resting atop piles of wood, the other with a respected Andean tied to a stake, stood in the central plaza. Avila preached to the throng in their own language, ordered that Hernando Páucar of San Pedro de Mama be whipped for idolatry, and set fire to the wooden pyre of idols.<sup>83</sup>

Other *autos* followed. By 1660, Don Juan Sarmiento de Vivero perfected the process. He imprisoned, tortured, questioned, sentenced, and punished Andeans for idolatry. In true inquisitional fashion, Sarmiento put the guilty on mules and paraded them through the streets of Lima. He condemned them to forever wear six-inch wooden crosses around their necks as signs of their sinfulness. Finally, Sarmiento ordered their heads shorn, their limbs tied, and their god-images burned before their eyes.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 389.

<sup>82</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 389.

<sup>83</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 12.

<sup>84</sup>Spalding, Huarocharí, 256.

When idolatry was rediscovered in the early seventeenth century, concerned Spanish Churchmen responded by establishing in 1619 *el Cercado de Lima*, known as the House of Santa Cruz, where dogmatizers and ministers of idolatry were confined. But the new prison could not hold all the Andeans brought there. To lessen the pressure on the facility's resources, missionaries determined that one transgressor be chosen from each town to frighten the rest into conversion. Often local priests, considered the instigators for Andean religious relapse, suffered punishments for groups of native idolaters.<sup>85</sup> Churchmen believed that unconvinced members of the Andean population would follow their leaders' example, so they concentrated on punishing priests and curacas. Arriaga commented: "If [curacas] want [Andeans] to be idolatrous they are idolatrous, if they want them to be Christians they will be Christians. They have no will apart from their caciques, who are a model for them in everything that they do."<sup>86</sup> To ensure that future native leaders became Christian, friars constructed boarding schools in Lima and Cuzco to teach curacas' sons.<sup>87</sup>

By the time the Catholic Church prepared to handle guilty idolaters and to instruct future native leaders, they

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<sup>85</sup>Arriaga, *Idolatry in Peru*, xiv.

<sup>86</sup>Arriaga, *Idolatry in Peru*, 68.

<sup>87</sup>Arriaga, *Idolatry in Peru*, 17.

had already initiated their frontal attack on Andean religion. The archbishop had divided Peru among three *visitadores*: Dr. Francisco de Avila, Dr. Diego Ramírez, and Dr. Hernando de Avendaño.<sup>88</sup> Father Arriaga spent almost two years of his life observing and recording the investigations of Avendaño and Avila. Between February 1617 and July 1618, Avendaño heard 5,694 confessions, discovered and punished 669 icon ministers and 63 witches, seized 603 principal huacas, 3,418 conopas, 45 mamazaras, 189 protective stones, and 617 malquis, burned 357 shrines, and returned 477 disinterred bodies to the Church.<sup>89</sup> In a letter to Huarochirí's *corregidor* (provincial administrator) written three years after his impressive initial campaign, Avendaño lamented that "this will be the work of years."<sup>90</sup> Arriaga was more optimistic. He observed that it took missionaries only ninety years to bring Christianity to all of Peru where it took six hundred years for Christianity to take root in Spain.<sup>91</sup> Arriaga's confidence, however, was not entirely justified.

Though missionaries severely punished idolaters and carefully regulated people's behavior, going as far as banning songs sung in native languages, Andeans maintained

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<sup>88</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 17.

<sup>89</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 20.

<sup>90</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 140.

<sup>91</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 7.

their own practices and combined traditional and Catholic ways.<sup>92</sup> After Avendaño had burned Huari, the mythic forebear of Otuco, and five conopas associated with him, a priestess named Catalina Guacayllano replaced the icons with ten substitutes and led the continued worship. She incorporated Huari's burning into the ritual prayer: "Burned father, parched father, you who guard the irrigation canal, who guard the water and guard the fields, give me water, give me fields, give me food. Ever since you have been burned, since you have been scorched, we are dying of hunger, we have no food."<sup>93</sup> She then fed the sacrificial fire with chicha, guinea pigs, maize, coca, and llama grease. The god's destruction did not destroy the believers' faith.

When Avendaño discovered that Otuco's natives also worshipped two round stones that glowed in the dark, he burned the idols and arranged for a cross to be raised where they had been destroyed. In 1656, during another inspection of the town, Bernardo de Naboja learned that ayllu members continued to venerate their old deities in the same place. Though Avendaño incinerated their images, the gods still returned to the sacred location whenever natives made a

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<sup>92</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 170. MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 264.

<sup>93</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 408.

proper sacrifice and listened to those who correctly prayed for help.<sup>94</sup>

Naboa discovered that other practices involving formerly burned images persisted. Some priests ordered that followers of a charred deity create masks so that people could adore them in place of the lost icons. Though the gods' representations were destroyed, according to the native priests, their *camaquen*, their soul or spirit, lived.<sup>95</sup>

Andeans practiced religious rituals which were syncretic as well. Natives hid traditional holy objects in Christian altars so they could worship their own gods while ostensibly honoring the Christian deity.<sup>96</sup> Natives placed idols in church niches beside Catholic statuary and concealed Andean images beneath crosses wherever they stood.<sup>97</sup> Arriaga noted that Andeans had a "tendency to carry water on both shoulders, to have recourse to both religions at once...they feel and even say that they can worship their huacas while believing in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."<sup>98</sup> Increasingly, however, natives mixed traditional and Catholic beliefs. After the conquest,

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<sup>94</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 407.

<sup>95</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 409-411.

<sup>96</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 420.

<sup>97</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 70, 82.

<sup>98</sup>Arriaga, Idolatry in Peru, 72.

stories circulated about Pachacamac telling his followers that he and the Christian God were one and the same entity.<sup>99</sup>

The Spanish practice of building churches on the sacred grounds of Andean holy places further confused traditional and Catholic ways. Andeans put their icons in church doorways, behind the altars, and at the sacristy door. When one visitador discovered native idols in a local church, he ordered the removal of the altar and demanded that the sacred soil beneath it be extracted. Much to his dismay, he "found more than a hundred stakes, much stained and bespattered with the blood of animals which they had sacrificed to the huacas" buried in the soil.<sup>100</sup>

Christian festivals blended with Andean celebrations. At Chaupimarca during the Feast of Corpus Cristi, a native curaca ordered a sacrifice of a brown llama outside the parish priest's door in the village square. A procession of Andeans led the llama, adorned with feathers, through the town. Celebrants sang and danced around the offering. Then a native priest slit the animal's throat.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, during Lent, Andeans observed their own fasting rites rather than those stipulated by Catholic regulations.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 88.

<sup>100</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 156.

<sup>101</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 156.

<sup>102</sup>MacCormack, "Heart Has Its Reasons," 460.

Although, Andeans often observed Christian religion publicly, they privately retained traditional beliefs.<sup>103</sup> Natives still tended huacas in their homes, fields, and other holy spots. They still carefully offered libations of chicha to the spirits, they still presented their huacas with food, and still kept their eyes peeled for abnormal ears of corn, stones, and roots.<sup>104</sup> Many wished that the two cultures, Andean and Spanish, could harmoniously and completely unite. Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spanish conquistador and an Inca princess, wrote about the fusion of two worlds. While unity occurred there were still Andeans who followed precontact belief. By the eighteenth century, Spaniards lost the energy to extirpate the Andes of native beliefs.<sup>105</sup> Though Spanish Churchmen continued to level accusations of idolatry during the eighteenth century, Lima never again sanctioned organized ecclesiastical efforts to investigate Andean beliefs and practices.

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<sup>103</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 432.

<sup>104</sup>Wachtel, Vision of the Vanquished, 155-56.

<sup>105</sup>Spalding, Huarocharí, 267.

CHAPTER IV  
CENOTES AND COPAL

There are no rivers on the great peninsula. Beneath its shallow layer of soil lies a limestone base eroded by time and ancient streams to create a multitude of caverns. Surface pools, lakes, and several sink-holes called *cenotes* sprout from the land's underbelly. At the top of a certain sink-hole, spanning 150 paces and opening to a 70-pace drop, a crowd of people gathered. In solemn procession, carrying a variety of jade ornaments, gold plaques and bells and sandals, copper bowls and rings, painted clay vessels and god-images carved from wood and stone, they made their methodic way to an altar at the cliff edge. The god-images were arranged on the altar. A priestly figure led some of the most beautiful among the people's young women to the altar and the edge of the chasm. At times of grave danger, drought, war or pestilence, these people came to Chichén Itzá to sacrifice to the sun god. At times they offered a great warrior or a nobleman. At times they excised the heart of the sacrifice. This time, they let the young women fall to the water below.<sup>1</sup> The Mayan people hoped the

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<sup>1</sup> Frans Blom, The Conquest of Yucatan (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1971), 165.



ceremony would appease the sun-god embodied in the statuettes resting on the altar; they hoped he would accept their offering.

"When the Spaniards discovered this land," a Franciscan friar wrote of one of the earliest meetings with the Mayas, "their leader asked the Indians how it was called; as they did not understand him, they said *uic athan*, which means, what do you say or what do you speak, that we do not understand you. And then the Spaniard ordered it set down that it be called Yucatan...."<sup>2</sup> Thus, inauspiciously, began the mingling of Mayan and Spanish cultures on the Yucatan peninsula. The contact changed many aspects of life among the Indians, not the least of which was the practice of Mayan religion. The Spaniards preached a monotheistic, exclusive Catholicism, quite contrary to the Mayas' inclusive, polytheistic beliefs. The newcomers assaulted the Mayan religion from the beginning of Hernán Cortés's conquest, for among the conquistador's goals were the destruction of Indian idols and the conversion of native souls.<sup>3</sup> By believing that idolatrous practices made the

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<sup>2</sup> Antonio de Ciudad Real, 1588 - Relación de las cosas que sucedieron al R. P. Comisario General Fray Alonso Ponce quoted in Inga Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vi.

<sup>3</sup> A. R. Pagden (ed. and trans.), The Maya: Diego de Landa's Account of the Affairs of Yucatan (Chicago: J. Philip O'Hara, Inc., 1975), 36 (hereafter Landa, Maya); Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 33; Robert Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of

Indians inferiors and pagans, the Spaniards rationalized their invasion of Indian lands and the destruction of Indian religion.<sup>4</sup> Yet Mayan idolatry survived beyond Spanish attempts to extirpate the practice from the peninsula.

Cortés's first encounter with Mayan religious statues was on the island of Cozumel in 1518. After destroying the images of the gods, the Spaniard replaced them with a tall timber crossed near the top by a second, smaller timber. Below it he placed an image of a woman holding a small child in her arms. He then made a long speech about the one true deity and a kingdom beyond the sea. Cortés's initial instruction of the Mayas was a confusing jumble of strange sounds; the destruction and usurpation of their icons was a clearer message. Before the Spaniards, Aztec conquerors had given the Mayas new gods to worship in addition to their own. The Mayas knew that the strange new comers offered them new gods and a new faith.<sup>5</sup> But the Spaniards were not simply adding deities to an already extensive pantheon; they were replacing the Mayan gods and Mayan worship with a new religion that accepted no others. A Franciscan chronicler

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California Press, 1966), 16-17; R. C. Padden, The Hummingbird and the Hawk: Conquest and Sovereignty in the Valley of Mexico, 1503-1541 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 121-22.

<sup>4</sup> Richard E. Greenleaf, Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543 (Washington, D. C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1962), 26-32.

<sup>5</sup> Landa, Maya, 17,36; Padden, Hummingbird and Hawk, 121-122,143.

forty-eight years later would claim that Cortés had met his goal: "And with this, public idolatry ceased."<sup>6</sup>

But Spanish efforts to establish themselves in Yucatan were not as complete as the chronicler suggested. Even before Cortés's landing, any attempts to explore the peninsula were met with hostility from the various Mayan peoples. Threatened, frightened, ambushed, and eventually expelled, the first parties of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba and Juan de Grijalva had returned to Cuba in failure.<sup>7</sup> The unsuccessful efforts convinced Cortés to avoid the peninsular mainland *en route* to central Mexico. He stopped only off its coast on the island of Cozumel.<sup>8</sup> Continuing their resistance in 1535, the Mayas repelled a sustained Spanish attempt to establish missions among them.<sup>9</sup> Finally, after twenty-seven years, the effective beginnings of the missionary program in Yucatan began under the direction of two separate Franciscan groups: one from Mexico, the other from Guatemala.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Landa, Maya, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 7-10; Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 11-13.

<sup>8</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 20; Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 80.

<sup>10</sup> France V. Scholes and Ralph L. Roys, "Fray Diego de Landa and the Problem of Idolatry in Yucatan" in Cooperation in Research (Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1938), 585-86.

While powerful and influential in Spanish America, the Franciscans were a relatively small group compared to the indigenous Indians. They could spare but few brothers to initiate the proselyzation of the Yucatan. Though disease had reduced the Mayan population from approximately 800,000 to around 300,000, their diminished numbers remained formidable to the eight Franciscans sent to open the Yucatan missions in 1544.<sup>11</sup> Beyond demographic hindrances, few of the Franciscans learned the Mayan language well enough to instruct the populace. Instead they trained native schoolmasters to speak Spanish and, in turn, to educate their Mayan brethren. Schoolmasters, recruited among the nobility's sons, bore the responsibility of instructing the Mayas in the Christian faith. The education given to a prospective schoolmaster was rudimentary; they learned the Pater Noster and Ave Maria, attended Mass regularly, and received basic instructions on the meaning and importance of the sacraments, especially baptism, marriage, and extreme unction.<sup>12</sup>

Since the Franciscans were so few, they concentrated their efforts on the more settled regions of Campeche and Mérida where they easily rounded up students. The native schoolmasters gave weekly lessons to the adults and daily

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<sup>11</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan", 586; Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 36,51.

<sup>12</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan", 586.

instruction to the children. The first bishop of Yucatan, Fray Francisco de Toral, set aims for the diocesan education in the missions: Indians were to be baptized as rapidly as possible after some basic catechism. Lessons in the new faith emphasized belief in one God, the nature of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth of Mary, reverence for the Cross, respect for the clergy, attendance at Mass, and the nature of and regulations governing Christian marriage.<sup>13</sup>

But the classes focused on correct external behavior and form of worship rather than comprehension. The Mayas learned rote Christian prayers in a sequence of foreign sounds they may or may not have understood. Even the explanations of Catholic beliefs were confused and unclear. A Franciscan linguist, Fray Maturino Gilberti, discouraged idolatry by illustrating that one does not pray to stone or wood during the veneration of images and crucifixes but "one prays to or adores the Lord our God who is in heaven."<sup>14</sup> To some in the Catholic hierarchy, the book Gilberti published seemed to repeat Protestant indictments of Catholic treatment of images; the Church banned the book as

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<sup>13</sup> France V. Scholes, "The Beginnings of Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan" in Carnegie Institution of Washington Supplementary Publications, No. 30 (Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1937), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Richard E. Greenleaf, The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 124. See also Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, 17, 60.

heresy in 1560. The missionaries themselves had problems understanding and explaining the use of religious icons in the Catholic faith.

The Franciscans enforced the new rules on the Mayas' religious behavior by prohibiting human sacrifice, controlling ritual dances, and forbidding the use of tattooing, body painting, ear and nose decorations, and ceremonial costumes. The friars declared that celebrating Indian festivals at night was illegal and carefully supervised those performed in daylight. Secret gatherings in the chiefs' homes were not permitted for fear that they would spread knowledge of old traditions.<sup>15</sup>

The Franciscans enforced their regulations through corporal penalties administered by the provincial authorities. Once baptized, the Mayas were subject to the rules and punishments of the Spanish, Christian society; baptism was a means of social control as well as spiritual salvation.<sup>16</sup> While some Mayas converted out of genuine spiritual dedication, many others were forced into at least a show of belief by the *encomienda* system. The *encomiendas*

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<sup>15</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan", 586-587; Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan", 8; Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 47-48.

<sup>16</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 589; Roberto Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century" in Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 25-26.

were rights granted to Spanish colonists to use Indian labor. The Spanish colonists were then responsible for the religious instruction of their labor force.<sup>17</sup> Ninety percent of Mayan towns in Yucatan were granted as *encomiendas*.<sup>18</sup> At least in word, the Mayas lost much of their freedom to rule themselves and to practice their traditional religion.

Despite the strict statutes restricting Mayan religious behavior, the friars knew that traditional ceremonies continued in the more isolated regions of Yucatan. The secular priest in Sotuta, Lorenzo de Monterroso, frequently punished the Mayas for offering food and drink to images hidden in their *milpas*.<sup>19</sup> The local priest in Cochuah province whipped the Mayas for their continued idolatry. But the Franciscans were shocked when two Mayan boys discovered native icons freshly stained with the blood of sacrifice alongside human skeletal remains in a cave near Mani.

The boys reported their discovery in May 1562 to Fray Pedro who notified Fray Diego de Landa. Landa, the Franciscan Provincial, was an ambitious and driven man. His

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<sup>17</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 586-89; Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan," 3; Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 38, 58-71.

<sup>18</sup> Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan", 4.

<sup>19</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 73. A *milpa* is a corn or vegetable field cultivated by slash-and-burn techniques.

tenacious religious zeal won for him the position of head of the missionary province of Yucatan and Guatemala when he was only thirty-seven.<sup>20</sup> But it was the ease with which he personally dealt with the Indian populace that secured for Christianity thousands of Mayan souls. Even with general Franciscan success, however, Landa now heard that the Mayas had lapsed into the practice of their traditional religion and were neglecting, even rejecting, Catholic teachings. Fearing the exodus of the Mayas from the Christian fold, Landa initiated inquisitional queries in Yucatan. Because tribunals of the Holy Office of the Inquisition were not established in the New World officially until 1569, Landa relied on his own resources to investigate the discovery in Mani.<sup>21</sup>

Landa himself knew that some Mayas still worshiped in the traditional way. He had personally reprimanded the chiefs and lords of Valladolid for their continued delinquency.<sup>22</sup> But the find in Mani suggested that something more than vestiges of the Mayan religion existed. A fellow Franciscan voiced Landa's fears by pointing out that Mani was the first Franciscan mission in Yucatan and

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<sup>20</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 71.

<sup>21</sup> France V. Scholes, "An Overview of the Colonial Church" in The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America, ed Richard E. Greenleaf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), 28.

<sup>22</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 73.



the cornerstone of their enterprise.<sup>23</sup> Landa ordered a full investigation. Fray Pedro interrogated several Indians and put most to the torture called *garrucha*, the hoist. Victims were lifted from the ground by their wrists and held suspended until they confessed.<sup>24</sup> Fray Pedro learned that many possessed images of the Mayan gods and still performed the ancient rites to them.

Sensing the enormity of the situation, Fray Pedro called on Landa to take over the proceedings. The Provincial arrived in June 1562. Landa set up a court with three fellow Franciscans: Pedro de Ciudad Rodrigo, Miguel de la Puebla, and Juan Pizarro. They tortured hundreds of Indians who admitted participation in rites of human and animal sacrifice. It is little wonder that after being put to the torture, Landa observed, "they all showed sincere repentance and a willingness to be good Christians."<sup>25</sup>

The investigators concluded that the *caciques* or native chieftains, with the aid of other Indian leaders and native schoolmasters were the principal offenders and that the *macequales* or commoners, were their victims. Landa arrested some forty Indian headmen and tried them for idolatry. When his actions sparked an Indian revolt, Landa summoned Don Diego Quijada, the *alcalde mayor*, to Mani to secure peace.

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<sup>23</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Landa, Maya, 62.

The Spaniards physically punished hundreds of Mayas, imprisoned twenty-five convicted Indian leaders, destroyed thousands of Mayan images, and even exhumed and burned bodies of deceased transgressors. In an *auto de fé* in July, Landa meted out sentences varying from heavy fines and whippings to various periods of personal servitude. Several Indian penitents, idols in hand, walked to the church with the *coroza* headdress of shame on their heads, *san benito* garment over their shoulders and ropes tightly secured about their necks. They made a public penance for continuing their native religion.<sup>26</sup>

During the Mani investigation many reported that traditional religious ceremonies also continued in nearby regions. Fearing that most Yucatan Indians had returned to their old ways, Landa sent Pizarro and de la Puebla to initiate inquiries in the neighboring provinces of Sotuta and Hocaba-Homun. The second round of testimonies proved as colorful as those taken in Mani. One told of Juan Couoh, a native schoolmaster of Yaxcaba village, who had promised to remain silent about a ceremony that the caciques and ah-kines (Indian priests) had performed inside a Christian church. Juan Couoh explained that the ceremony began with a

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<sup>26</sup> Landa, Maya, 13-14, 62; France V. Scholes and Eleanor B. Adams, Don Diego Quijada Alcalde Mayor de Yucatan, 1561-1665 (Mexico: Antigua Librería Robredo, de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1938), 1:69-71; Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan," 8; Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 590-92; Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 74, 77, 80.

company of Mayan leaders and witnesses approaching the altar where "they put the idols in a row, each on the leaves of the castor oil plant, and spread out before them a long mat and upon the mat they placed a large flint knife with the handle wrapped in a white cloth."<sup>27</sup> The *ah-kines* brought forward a young boy who had been visiting relatives in the town, shirtless with his hands tied behind his back. They untied him and "threw him on his back and they seized him by the feet and hands, and Pedro Euan [an *ah-kin*] came and took up the flint knife and with it struck open his side to the left of the heart, and when it was opened he seized hold of the heart and with the same knife cut away the entrails [arteries] and gave the heart to the *ah-kin* Gaspar Chim, who lifted it on high having first given it two little cuts in the shape of a cross, and this witness does not know what part it was he took out of it, and put in the mouth of the greatest of the idols there which was called Itzamna."<sup>28</sup> The company then collected the idols, the boy's body, the mat and the knife and departed for the chief's house to hide the religious implements and dispose of the sacrifice's remains.

Another witness from Kanchunup testified that the Mayan *ah-kines* there had crucified the sacrifices before removing their hearts. The Franciscan investigators

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<sup>27</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 198, translation of original transcript published in Scholes and Adams, Don Diego Quijada.

<sup>28</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 198-99.

recorded similar stories of crucifixion in Sotuta village, where the bodies were thrown into a cenote to conclude the ritual.<sup>29</sup> In each instance, the hearts of the sacrifices were given to the gods by smearing them on the mouths of the stone images. To the horror of the friars, Mayan religious beliefs and practices were thriving.

By the end of the three-month inquiry of the Mayas, more than 4,500 Indians were tortured; 158 died from the strain, 13 committed suicide to escape being put to the torture, 18 others disappeared. The questioning left still others crippled and all survivors emotionally affected for the remainder of their days.<sup>30</sup>

Landa lamented that "after these people had been instructed in religion and the boys had benefitted from their studies, as we said, they were perverted by the priests whom they had at the time of their idolatry, and also by their chieftains, and returned to the worship of their idols and began to offer them sacrifices, not only of incense, but also of human blood."<sup>31</sup> Even so, Landa's treatment of the Indians was enough to cause them to complain to Bishop Toral. Observers increasingly saw Landa's method as too harsh and beyond the bounds of his

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<sup>29</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 202-07.

<sup>30</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Landa, Maya, 62.

authority.<sup>32</sup> In defense of the 1562 trials he had authorized and executed, Landa claimed that he was less searching than he should have been and had checked his inquiry for "all [the Mayas] being idolaters and guilty, it was not possible to proceed strictly juridically against them...because if we had proceeded with all according to the order of the law, it would be impossible to finish with the province of Mani alone in twenty years, and meanwhile they would all become idolaters and go to hell."<sup>33</sup>

In response to growing Indian anger, Bishop Toral took over the investigations and effectively ended the use of torture as a means of fact-finding.<sup>34</sup> Toral concluded that idolatry was evil and had recurred in Yucatan but that Landa's hasty auto de fé was wrong.<sup>35</sup> Landa angered the Indians which threatened the encomiendas and had done so on questionable legal footing. Pope Adrian VI's bull *Exponi nobis*, issued May 10, 1522, stated that "in case there were no bishops" friars could act as secular clergy and exercise the jurisdictional rights reserved for the bishop, including

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<sup>32</sup> Scholes, "Landa and Indian Idolatry in Yucatan," 595-97, 601-03.

<sup>33</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 77 (my emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 600-604.

<sup>35</sup> Landa, Maya, 15.

inquisitorial powers.<sup>36</sup> Landa exercised the secular powers while Bishop Toral made his way to the New World. Toral had to deal with the repercussions of Landa's actions from the moment he landed in New Spain. As a gesture of goodwill, Toral freed the twenty-five convicted caciques and headmen held in Mérida, resentencing them to small punishments.<sup>37</sup>

Landa's assumptions concerning the "return" of idolatry in Yucatan were exaggerated. He had known that Mayan converts still performed some traditional acts and had even let offenders escape with only a verbal reprimand before the Mani discovery. But the missionaries' efforts were not entirely without success.

There were genuine conversions to Christianity among the Mayas, people who completely acceded to the tenets of the new religion.<sup>38</sup> Christian morality was much like that taught by the Indian god-hero Kukulcan and was familiar to the Mayas. But the exclusive nature of the missionaries' religion differed from the teachings of Kukulcan. Mayas had to totally reject their old ways to fully embrace Christianity. While some willingly accepted Christian exclusivity, other Mayas converted to a syncretized religion of their own making, one that embodied both Christian and

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<sup>36</sup> Moreno de los Arcos, "New Spain's Inquisition for Indians," 28-29.

<sup>37</sup> Landa, Maya, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 605.

Mayan aspects.<sup>39</sup> Landa and the Franciscans targeted the latter group in the investigation and left the former alone.

Those who practiced a combination of faiths did so with various degrees of acceptance; some incorporated Christian symbols or ideas into the Mayan rituals, others made a show of practicing Christianity while participating in traditional ceremonies behind closed doors, still others truly believed in both, forming essentially a new religion. The possibilities were as numerous as the individual Mayas who grappled with the clash of religions in Yucatan. Yet generally, idolatry continued in many forms throughout Mayan society, despite Christian efforts to exterminate it.

Landa believed that Indian leaders had significantly destroyed Christianity among their people and "that they were never so idolatrous even when they were heathens."<sup>40</sup> While the challenge of Christianity may have induced such a reaction, it is more likely that the use of graven images in religious practice never stopped in Mayan society. During the initial investigation in Mani, the Indians freely confessed to the possession of Mayan icons and the worship of them to induce rain or to secure a good corn crop or deer

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<sup>39</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 605-609; Arthur G. Miller and Nancy M. Farriss, "Religious Syncretism in Colonial Yucatan: The Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Evidence from Tancah, Quintana Roo" in Maya Archaeology and Ethnohistory, ed. Norman Hammond and Gordon R. Willey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 223-40.

<sup>40</sup> Landa, Maya, 12.

hunt.<sup>41</sup> Idol worship was an integral part of Mayan daily life; planting a milpa, communal hunting, and bee tending involved the worship of god-images as a vital part of the endeavors.<sup>42</sup> The Mayas made offerings to gods to manipulate the rain, winds, agriculture, commerce, hunt, medicine, war and death.<sup>43</sup> The god-images were significant parts of Mayan society that explained natural phenomenon and the means of conciliating supernatural powers.<sup>44</sup>

The Mayas took great care in making their gods. Most of the images seized in the 1562 trials were made of clay; the few that were wooden appeared to be the most prized.<sup>45</sup> The Franciscans did not recover many stone icons, though the latter certainly existed.<sup>46</sup> Some ah-kines, wishing to preserve their sacred icons from the friars, had instructed Mayas to yield only "pieces and broken ones [god-images] so that the new and whole ones should remain."<sup>47</sup> Whittlers, stone-craftsmen, and wood-carvers were seen working in the

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<sup>41</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan," 7.

<sup>43</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 585.

<sup>44</sup> Scholes, "Hispano-Indian Society in Yucatan," 7.

<sup>45</sup> Landa, Maya, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Landa, Maya, 80-82; Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan", 610.

<sup>47</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 200.



streets by the first Spaniards in Yucatan.<sup>48</sup> But by 1562 they were performing their art secretly. The Mayas even dedicated a month, called Yax, to the replacement of cracked or broken icons and incense burners and to the repair of temples and houses.<sup>49</sup>

The religious images themselves ranged in size from large to small and represented animal and human figures. There was "no animal or insect they did not make a statue of; and all of these were made in the likenesses of their gods and goddesses." In addition to the public temples, the lords, priests, and chieftains had shrines in their own homes for personal prayers and private offerings.<sup>50</sup> Women held the great responsibility of caring for the household icons. They would swaddle the images in leaves to bring them to collective ceremonies for community worship.<sup>51</sup>

The Mayas offered various sacrifices to the gods. Corn bread and a drink called posole, sometimes mixed with chocolate, were the most common food gifts. The most frequent animal offerings were dog, deer, peccary and turtle whose used carcasses were at times roasted and eaten by the

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<sup>48</sup> Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 140.

<sup>49</sup> Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 164-65. See Charles Gallenkamp, The Maya: The Riddle and Rediscovery of a Lost Civilization, 3rd ed. (New York: Viking Penguin Press Inc., 1985), illustration #113 for incense burners of the rain god.

<sup>50</sup> Landa, Maya, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 142.

worshippers, and at others disposed of haphazardly. Human sacrifices marked the most important rituals. War captives or young children were typical victims. By the 1562 trials, most all the cases of human sacrifice involved children who had been kidnapped, purchased, or given by pious members of the community.<sup>52</sup> At times the people demanded that the ah-kines perform human sacrifice to alleviate some social grief or anxiety.<sup>53</sup>

Ah-kines performed the ritual sacrifices with a stone knife called *u kab ku* (the arm or hand of god). Excised hearts were frequently placed in a flat bowl called *zuhuy lac* (virgin plate), taken to the icons, smeared on their mouths, then burned in another flat dish called *cajete*. Cajetes were also used to burn copal and other incense before religious images.<sup>54</sup>

The bodies of human sacrifices were disposed of in a variety of ways, depending upon the nature of the ceremony. Usually the body was buried in the temple courtyard or cast into a local cenote. The Mayas normally followed events of human sacrifice with big feasts where they consumed the food offerings, *posole*, chocolate, and *balche* (Spanish wine).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 610-12.

<sup>53</sup> Landa, *Maya*, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 613.

<sup>55</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan", 613-614.

Religious icons were a part of every ceremony imaginable. Some Mayas placed an image of *Ixchel*, the goddess of childbirth, in bed with women in labor.<sup>56</sup> Mayan travellers carried with them a small plate and copal incense to pray to *Ekchuah* for a safe journey; those awaiting their arrival copied the same ritual prayers.<sup>57</sup> Religious images were even a part of their sporting events.<sup>58</sup> Periodic celebrations marked by the Mayan calendar, particularly the New Year ceremony, involved feasts and services with images of the gods.<sup>59</sup> Annual ceremonies related to hunts, beekeeping, maize culture, or medicine occurred on monthly cycles.<sup>60</sup> The Mayas kept idols representing the *Katun* (ten-year cycle) in a temple to watch over them. In the tenth year of the *katun*, they placed next to it a second icon representing the coming *katun*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Landa, Maya, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Blom, Conquest of Yucatan, 144.

<sup>59</sup> Landa, Maya, 83-84, 94-105. See Dennis Tedlock, trans., Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) and A. V. Kidder and J. E. Thompson, "The Correlation of Maya and Christian Chronologies" in Cooperation in Research (Washington, D. C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1938), 493-510; Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 585.

<sup>60</sup> Scholes and Roys, "Landa and Idolatry in Yucatan," 585.

<sup>61</sup> Karen Bassie-Sweet, From the Mouth of the Dark Cave: Commemorative Sculpture of the Late Classic Maya (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 89.

Religious images accompanied Mayas to their graves. But if the deceased was a great lord, he became an icon himself. The ashes from a portion of his body were secreted in a hollow statue of clay or wood, sealed with a piece of stripped skin from the back of the deceased's neck. Some ah-kine's heads were cut off when they died to be cooked, cleaned of flesh, and covered with bitumen molded into an exact likeness of the deceased. The Mayas offered food and drink to these remains as they would to the carved images of their gods.<sup>62</sup>

Landa recorded some of the Maya practices that involved the "devils":

Those who were to participate gathered in the temple and stood in a row, then each made a hole in his virile member at a slant through the side, and once this had been done he passed through it as great a quantity of thread as he could, and in this fashion they were fastened together. They also anointed the devil with the blood from all these parts, and he who offered the most blood was considered to be the most brave. Their sons began to concern themselves with such things at an early age, and it was a terrible thing to see how inclined they were to it.

The women did not shed their blood in this fashion, although they were most devout, but they smeared the faces of the devils with the blood of the birds of the air and the animals of the earth and the fish of the sea and any other thing they could obtain, and made offerings of their possessions. They drew the hearts from some animals and

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<sup>62</sup> Landa, Maya, 94-95.

offered them; others they sacrificed whole, some alive, others dead, some raw, some cooked, and also made great offerings of bread and wine, and of all manner of the food and drink they used.<sup>63</sup>

The Mayas believed in the sacred nature of certain places. Landa called attention to similarities between the Mayan and Christian practices: "They held Cozumel and the sacrificial well at Chichén Itzá in the same veneration as we do pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome; and they therefore used to visit them and offer gifts, chiefly to Cozumel, as we do at the holy places."<sup>64</sup>

The devout nature of these ceremonies testifies to the significance of the Maya religion to its practitioners as much as it is a credit to the Maya priests. The ah-kines were teachers, physicians, preachers, scientists, astrologers, soothsayers, ministers of sacrifice, and mediums between the gods and their people.<sup>65</sup> The functions of the ah-kines assured them an important place in Mayan society. They were the guardians of the mystical ceremonies and the trusted human emissaries to the spiritual realm. In a world where honor and bravery were related to the amount of blood shed in sacrifice, the ah-kines were the most respected members of society. Landa recognized the

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<sup>63</sup> Landa, Maya, 82.

<sup>64</sup> Landa, Maya, 81.

<sup>65</sup> Landa, Maya, 81.

significance of their appearance: "They offered sacrifices of their own blood, sometimes cutting pieces from the outer part of their ears which they then left in that state as a sign. At other times they pierced their cheeks or lower lips, sometimes they sacrificed parts of their bodies, and at others they pierced their tongues at a slant through the side, passing through the hole some pieces of straw, which caused them great suffering. At other times they slit the superfluous part of the virile member, leaving it like their ears."<sup>66</sup> Ah-kines were always recognizable in the Mayan world; they carried with them the clotted and scabbed marks of their trade as a symbol of power and devotion to the god-images. As such, they were visual ties to the ancient Mayan past.

Many of these Mayan religious practices had been a part of the culture for hundreds of years. The temples of the early Maya were decorated with stone carvings which depicted some of the traditional ceremonial rites. One shows a woman decoratively dressed in jade kneeling before the Mayan god called Shield-Jaguar as she performs a blood sacrifice. She pulls a cord of thorns through an incision she has made in her tongue, while her blood runs into a bowl of bark paper lying beneath her.<sup>67</sup> Other sculptures showed

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<sup>66</sup> Landa, Maya, 82.

<sup>67</sup> Gallenkamp, Maya: The Riddle and Rediscovery, illustration #53; Linda Schele and David Freidel, A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya (New York: William

vision serpents growing from symbolic representations of blood sacrifices while giving life to ancestors or gods who emerge from their mouths.<sup>68</sup> The mouth was an important symbol in Maya religion. Almost every recorded account of Mayan ceremonies involved the smearing of blood or an excised heart on the mouth of a god-image. The facade of one particular Mayan temple at Tabasqueña, Campeche was a giant sculpture of a god with the door as his open mouth.<sup>69</sup> Any ritual performed in this temple was literally and symbolically a feeding of the gods.

But contact with the Spanish missionaries challenged the Maya religion and forced many of its followers to alter their ceremonies. Public rites became private affairs performed in secret. One ah-kine cautioned a witness to human sacrifice: "Look here, now, say nothing, because they'll burn the lot of us and even if they were to burn us alive we won't say anything."<sup>70</sup> Christian churches were built over the ruins of Mayan temples where images of the cross and the Virgin Mary replaced the Mayan images. Though the church structure and decorations were different, the

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Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), 72. For additional archeological information, see Gordon R. Willey, The Artifacts of Altar de Sacrificios, Vol. 64, No. 1-3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> Schele and Freidel, Forest of Kings, 69.

<sup>69</sup> Schele and Freidel, Forest of Kings, 72.

<sup>70</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 199.

space it occupied was still the sacred place of the ancient temples. So Christian churches, patios, and cemeteries became the sites of traditional Mayan services.<sup>71</sup>

Spanish attempts to extirpate idolatry did not end with Fray Diego de Landa. The official Inquisition tribunals were in the New World. By 1580, Dominican missionaries continued Landa's work outside of the formal Inquisition's control. But regulations limiting the jurisdiction of the Holy Office over Indians checked the investigators. The final Indian idolatry case in Yucatan occurred in 1785 when the Inquisition charged a mestizo and his sons. By the late eighteenth century, "idolatry" still existed in Yucatan.<sup>72</sup>

A man takes a photograph of a large stone icon resting on the ground beside a *milpa*. A pile of flat stones lies before it holding burning copal. The incense's smoke curls around the god-image. A shaman's rock crystals and maize seeds rest on a stone altar next to the carved figure. To bring the god to life, the shaman smears on the idol's mouth a chocolate bar. It is 1990.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian" The Americas, XXXIV (January 1978), 332-333.

<sup>73</sup> Schele and Freidel, Forest of Kings, see illustrations.



## CHAPTER V

### SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

There are inherent difficulties in discerning the pre-Columbian religious practices of the various Indian peoples of North and South America. Few first-hand native accounts of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru survive; contemporary first-hand native accounts are completely absent. Yet, the conquering Spaniards were copious record-keepers and dutifully wrote of their attempts to subdue the people of two continents. They left historians an impressive body of primary documentation concerned with the conquest of the New World.

Though voluminous, Spanish texts dealing with Indian-Spanish relations are hobbled by ethnocentric biases. Crusading missionaries rarely stopped to consider the cultural ramifications of the introduction of Catholicism on native peoples, and conquistadors rarely assessed native responses to Spanish political, social, economic, and cultural encroachment. Even the occasional sympathetic Spanish observer -- Bartolomé de Las Casas comes readily to mind -- is not free of bias. To Las Casas is attributed the "Black Legend," the exaggerated account of Spanish brutality and inhumanity toward Indian peoples of the New World. But

the imperfect Spanish descriptions of native experience are what historians must use to decipher the Indian past. The lack of written Indian sources forces historians to pry information about Indians from non-indigenous records. Therefore, historians study the Indian past through the distorted and distorting lenses of Spanish chroniclers. The method is imperfect, but vital in retrieving the Indians' elusive past.

While the ethnocentric bias of Spanish documents hinders historians from easily conducting research on Indian-Spanish relations, the particular history of conflict over religious belief in the Spanish New World creates unique problems in and of itself. The extent to which Indians understood, acknowledged, and adopted the Catholic message is often unclear. While Indians accepted, assimilated, and renounced Spanish religion, the reactions held different meanings for natives in different situations and periods. Scrutiny of early Spanish missionary methods demonstrate why it is difficult to ascertain Indian religious belief in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Miguel León-Portilla, one of the best Latin Americanists to study Indian peoples, discussed the spiritual conquest of Indian groups throughout the Americas in his 1990 work, Endangered Cultures. In his discussion of Spanish missionary activity in sixteenth and seventeenth-century New Spain, León-Portilla noted that ecclesiastics, for the most

part, were euphoric over their successful conversions of millions of New World natives. At times, missionaries boasted of baptizing natives by the thousands in a day's time. While a handful of churchmen questioned the validity of the initial Spanish missionary work, most friars in New Spain had faith in the sincerity of Indian baptisms.

Bernardino de Sahagún, the Franciscan linguist and Indian advocate, was among those who soberly criticized Spanish missionary success. León-Portilla quotes Sahagún at length, suggesting that the friar recognized that evangelists remembered Christ's warning to "be prudent like serpents and simple as doves," but that missionaries failed to take the former strategy to heart. Sahagún believed that Indians noticed the evangelists' tactical flaw and "thus with their sly humility they quickly offered themselves to receive the faith that was being preached to them." Sahagún continued: "But they remained deceitful in that they did not detest or renounce all their gods with all their customs, and thus they were baptized not like perfect believers but as fictitious ones, who received that faith without leaving the false one they had of many gods."<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that Sahagún harbored serious doubts about the genuine conversion of Indian catechumens. The early sixteenth-century missionary approach to Indian

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<sup>1</sup>Bernardino de Sahagún quoted in Miguel León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, trans. Julie Goodson-Lawes (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 59-60.

conversion was unrealistic and poorly thought out, if well-intentioned by Spanish standards. Spanish missionaries took a short time to instruct Indian peoples, were too few in number to administer proper religious instruction to native converts, and focused what instruction they did attempt on Indian nobility. Evangelists taught converts largely in Spanish because few missionaries commanded native languages. Most instructors relied heavily on rote memorization of prayers and rituals with little emphasis on full comprehension.<sup>2</sup> Churchmen constructed Catholic churches where native temples formerly stood. Unwittingly, priests encouraged the mixture and confusion of Spanish and Indian faiths among native worshippers. Missionaries also had no contemporary or local religious miracles with which they could win skeptical native souls. Friars settled Indians near Spanish colonists who frequently proved to be dubious moral models, showed Indians inconsistencies in the Catholic faith by exposing them to regular and secular squabbles, and, at times, resorted to severe methods of instruction to teach Catholic dogma. With so many problems, it is

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<sup>2</sup>See Sabine MacCormack, "'The Heart Has Its Reasons,': Predicaments of Missionary Christianity in Early Colonial Peru," Hispanic American Historical Review 65 (1985): 451-454; Jean Pierre Dedieu, "Christianization in New Castile: Catechism, Communion, Mass, and Confirmation in the Toledo Archbishopric, 1540-1650," in Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds. Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 6-7 and 22; León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 56-80.

remarkable that Spanish missionaries won souls for Catholicism at all.

And yet evangelists did secure Indian souls. León-Portilla cited young Indians who studied at the College of Santa Cruz of Tlatelolco as particular examples of genuine Catholic piety. The students frequently wrote poems and hymns which cogently described Catholic theology and expressed their religious faith. Similarly, adults showed their adherence to Catholic practices in their wills. One woman asked her survivors to sell her home and property and use the proceeds to have masses said for her own soul and the souls of her husband and in-laws. She concluded these arrangements by leaving "forever my soul in the hands of the Lord God, of whom I am a creature redeemed by the precious blood of our respected Lord Jesus Christ in whose faith I will die."<sup>3</sup> While León-Portilla admitted that some Indians professed Catholicism out of fear, accommodation, or self-interest, he correctly ascribed genuine faith to the native woman who left her soul in the hands of the Spanish God.

There is no denying that the woman arranged for her death in Spanish terms. Thus, she either accepted missionary instruction to the point of adopting Spanish linguistic styles herself, or accepted Spanish conquest enough to employ Spanish attorneys who drafted the will for her. Yet in either scenario, the woman accepted both the

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 67.

Spaniards and their religion. Other Indians, León-Portilla noted, were not so accommodating. Fray Diego Durán wrote of one native who told him not to be surprised about Indians' failure to fully embrace Christianity. The man revealed that many like him were *nepantla*, in the middle. Durán pressed the man to explain: "He told me that since they were still not well rooted in the faith, I should not be surprised that they were still neutral, that they neither answered to one faith nor the other or, better said, that they believed in God and at the same time keep their ancient customs."<sup>4</sup>

Conversion is, therefore, a murky phenomenon. Anthropologist Robert W. Hefner observed that a "necessary feature of religious conversion is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true."<sup>5</sup> Essentially converts create a new reference point for their identity and commit to a new moral authority. This task is easier for some than others.

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<sup>4</sup>Fray Diego Durán, quoted in León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 71-72.

<sup>5</sup>Robert W. Hefner, "World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," in Hefner ed. Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 17.

Many Indians could not convert, rejected Spanish Catholicism, and fiercely maintained traditional religious practices. But determining what aspects of pre-contact Indian religion to retain and which aspects to abandon or change was a difficult task. Indian notions of what traditional religion meant changed with circumstance and time.<sup>6</sup> León-Portilla observed that language, traditions, beliefs, historical consciousness, symbols, meanings, possession of ancestral land, value systems, world view, and ethos -- what he termed meaning and moral orientation of culture -- combine to form the roots of identity. None of a community's identity is static. As León-Portilla stated, identity constantly changes "from within and without".<sup>7</sup>

At times, traditional religion, however perceived, became a vehicle for resistance to Spanish domination. The *Taqui Ongoy* rebellion in Peru during the 1560s exemplified both the combination of Christian concepts and traditional rites. But the "dance of disease" also called for a renewal of old Incan rituals. When the Andeans returned to their traditions, followers of the *Taqui Ongoy* believed, the Spanish encroachers would leave Peru.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>6</sup>León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 8; MacCormack, "The Heart Has Its Reasons", 459-60; MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 4-5.

<sup>7</sup>León-Portilla, Endangered Cultures, 8.

<sup>8</sup>MacCormack, Religion in the Andes, 181-82; MacCormack, "Heart Has its Reasons," 459-60.

popularity of *curanderos* (folk healers) among Mexican and Peruvian Indians contributed to the survival of traditional religious and medicinal ceremonies.<sup>9</sup> This "nativism" was a conscious effort of people to perpetuate, promote, or revive their own culture when it was threatened by a foreign culture.<sup>10</sup>

Certain elements of native pre-contact religion seem to have survived the advent of Christianity and the influx of Catholic missionaries. Indians' use of traditional images and god-icons proved resilient and endured inquisitional flames and ecclesiastical brimstone. While notions of what is and is not traditional Indian religion perpetually change, deities fashioned of wood and stone seem to have retained importance and significance among Indian peoples of Mexico and Peru.

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<sup>9</sup>Noemí Quezada, "The Inquisition Repression of *Curanderos*," in Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, eds., Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37.

<sup>10</sup>Bradley Wheeldon Case, "Gods and Demons: Folk Religion in Seventeenth-Century New Spain, 1614-1632." Cornell University, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (1977), 8.



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