

The Talcigüines of El Salvador:

A Contextual Example of Nahua Drama in the Public Square

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ABSTRACT:

Anthropologist Louise M. Burkhart has spent decades studying the literary dramas of the Nahua speakers of 16th and 17th century Colonial Mexico. While many of these dramas illustrate the blending of Christianity with pre-Christian indigenous religion in Latin America, they have seldom been studied as early examples of contextualized Christianity or syncretism within early Spanish missions in Latin America.

These early Nahua dramas became elaborate performances that expressed indigenous understandings of Christian stories and theology. Burkhart notes that Spanish priests controlled Nahua drama through reviewing and approving the scripts, but also by keeping the performances out of the church buildings. This approach did not stop these contextualized dramas, but rather integrated them into traditional religious performances acted out in public spaces.

While many of these dramas exist now only as ancient scripts or recorded accounts, some modern remnants may still exist. One possibility is the Talcigüines of Texistepeque, El Salvador. Performed every Monday of Holy Week, this festival continues to combine Christian themes with indigenous symbols, moving from within the church to the literal public square. Developed for the Nahua speaking Pipil people of one of the oldest colonial parishes in El Salvador, this drama contains many of Burkhart's elements.

INTRODUCTION

On the Monday of Holy Week each year, a unique performance occurs in the small town of Texistepeque, in the western region of El Salvador in Central America. Masked figures dressed in red, called locally the Talcigüines, emerge from the local church of San Esteban and infest the public square adjacent to the church. Armed with whips, these figures attack the local population gathered in the square for a local fiesta. These attacks go on for the entire morning, until noon, when a figure representing Jesus Christ emerges from the church and battles and subdues the Talcigüines.

While this event is enjoyed by both the local population and visitors, it also presents an interesting possible remnant of early Spanish mission practice in Central America. This paper explores this event in more detail, especially in the light of historical studies of Nahua dramas to understand the origins and indigenous meanings behind this practice, where Jesus leaves the confines of the church to enter and save the public square.

NAHUA DRAMA AND EARLY SPANISH MISSIONS

In many ways, it is time we reexamined early Spanish missions in the field of missiology. Work has been coming out since the 1970s in other fields, particularly drama, music, and linguistics focused on the indigenous response to colonization in the Americas.¹ Unfortunately, many missiologists have not really picked up the torch to reevaluate such studies from what is often maligned as a dark time in missions. We often forget that early Spanish missions were the dawning of a new age in the Church that was not familiar with cross-cultural mission. While there were tragic mistakes and problems, made well known through works like *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* by Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, there were also new and innovative attempts at developing catechisms in the indigenous languages, training indigenous clergy, and innovative attempts at evangelization through drama, which are often underreported in the missiological literature. As linguists and art and music historians have begun to uncover documents in the

1 Cf. John F. Schaller, "Evangelization as Performance: Making Music, Telling Stories," *The Americas* 66(3): 305-310 (Jan. 2010).

voice of the original peoples of the Americas, it is time to reflect again on this time period in mission history.²

Anthropologist Louise M. Burkhart has done most of the historical academic work on Nahua dramas over a number of decades, where she has focused on collecting and documenting the written sources of these dramas, primarily in Mexico. She does not look at them through a missiological lens, but rather a literary or historical lens. It is interesting to note that drama as an evangelistic tool started quite early. Burkhart writes,

The early Franciscan friars began staging Nahuatl plays as a strategy for evangelization. The first such performance on record is a dramatization of Judgment Day, with Christ meting out punishments on sinners who were unprepared for the world's end. Enacted in Tlatelolco in 1531 or 1533, this play so impressed the native audience that the event was recorded by Nahua chroniclers. The same or a similar play was performed in 1535 at San José de los Naturales in Tenochtitlan. The friars thought that the play led many people to accept Christianity. Drama became a standard tool of the missionary trade throughout the colony, with the other religious orders, even the Carmelite monks at San Sebastián, eventually following the Franciscans' example.³

She points out that pre-colonial religious ceremonies in Mexico were public events in which religious stories were dramatized, with sacrificial victims actually becoming the gods and being involved in processions while people participated in preparing food, decorating public spaces and watching the performance as well.⁴ It is significant to point out her comments regarding how Nahua culture perceived the actor in a religious role from the pre-conquest period. She notes,

That Nahuas conceived of the human being not as a firmly individualized personality but as a rather unstable assemblage of

2 Cf. Louise M. Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Colonial Nahuatl Literature*. Institute for Mesoamerican Studies Monograph 13. (Albany, NY: University at Albany) 2001. This work is a good example of how the indigenous voice can be heard again within a religious context.

3 Louise M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1996, pp. 42-43.

4 Louise M. Burkhart, ed. *Aztecs on Stage: Religious Theater in Colonial Mexico*, 2011, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 5.

parts affected their conceptions of impersonation. Putting on the costume of a deity made that being manifest in one's own person. The regalia represented the god via metonymic substitution; the god's identity added itself to the aggregate of components that comprised the person. Both personae were fully present. This situation might be best expressed not as a state of being "not" and "not not" oneself, but rather as an equally liminal condition of being both oneself and another.⁵

As evidence of this state, even after the conquest, she points out to how indigenous believers would collect fake "blood" shed by the character playing Christ for its healing powers, or offer him incense or kisses, because the actor in part became Christ.⁶

At the same time, religious performance in Spain, from the Middle Ages was also popular, with biblical stories being conveyed in dramatic fashion through outside pageants at various festival occasions. It seems natural that the early Catholic missionaries would combine the religious pageantry they knew in Spain with local tradition in order to communicate the Gospel through indigenous symbols and language.

Burkhart⁷ writes that Nahua dramas could be divided into two major categories: morality plays, and stories from the Bible. Stories from the Bible were more numerous, and of these, the largest numbers were designed as Passion plays to be performed at Easter time. Catholic priests would attempt to control the content of the plays by writing them out in the indigenous languages.⁸ But at the same time, Catholic priests frequently relied on native speakers to help them with translation, so many of these dramas were true cross-cultural collaborations. In this type of transition, often the Catholic saints became mixed with the ideas of various traditional deities.

5 Louise M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1996, pp. 44.

6 Louise M. Burkhart, ed. *Aztecs on Stage: Religious Theater in Colonial Mexico*, 2011, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 18-19.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

8 Of course translation has always been a complicated issue in terms of communicating religious ideas. For more on this from a Nahua perspective, see Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*. (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press) 1989.

In a political sense, the performance of a drama allowed the local community a place to celebrate their group identity and to bring in commerce to the local marketplace, as well as to produce an event with religious meaning. In terms of religious power, according to Burkhart, this accomplished some interesting side effects,

Another reason for colonial authorities to be suspicious of Nahuatl drama lay in the very nature of theater. Even if priests scrutinized the scripts and checked to see that people recited their lines correctly, they were ceding power to the performers. Actors are themselves and their characters at the same time. Plays tell stories yet at the same time comment on the local setting, the place and people around the performance. Theater allowed Nahuas to become Jesus, Mary, saints, angels, devils, Jews, Romans, soldiers, priests, and every other sort of character, right in the centers of their own communities, while also remaining themselves- looking and talking like ordinary native people, one's friends and relations, not foreigners who spoke Nahuatl with Spanish accents, if they spoke it at all. Most statues and paintings in Nahua churches had European features, but the actors did not. The performance space- typically the churchyard, at the community's symbolic center- became Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome, heaven, hell. Cosmic events were made local; sacred powers, both helpful and harmful, were embodied in Nahua persons.⁹

As Burkhart goes on to mention, especially with Passion plays, the images of an indigenous Jesus being crucified by oppressive powers was most likely a very powerful symbol for indigenous people under the colonial oppression of the Spanish Empire. One way she notes that Catholic authorities tried to exert control over dramas was by banning them from the use of the church, but this of course encouraged the movement of such dramas into the public square even more,¹⁰

9 Louise M. Burkhart, ed. *Aztecs on Stage: Religious Theater in Colonial Mexico*, 2011, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p.. 18.

10 It is important to recognize that the "church" as it was understood in this context was also different. An excellent diagram of the church can be seen in Diego Valadés' *Rhetorica Christiana* from 1579, with a good discussion of this found in Kenneth Mills and William Taylor's *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1998: 138-140. The church itself was only part of a larger area where baptisms, marriages, catechesis, and group instruction occurred more in a courtyard

with Passion plays sometimes even occurring in the local cemetery. Such dramas in Mexico were performed from 1533 to the late 1700s. While it is often assumed that the practice of these traditional dramas has died out, I believe it may still be possible to find remnants, such as the Talcigüines of El Salvador, which are still being performed.

Key aspects to note as we examine the Talcigüines of El Salvador as a form of Nahua drama are the following:

1. Nahua dramas often occur in Holy Week
2. Nahua drama typically takes place in the public square
3. Indigenous local performers play the key roles
4. The Nahuatl language or pantomime is used
5. Nahua dramas date back to the earliest period of Spanish mission
6. Nahua drama incorporates Nahua indigenous symbols

It is my hope to demonstrate in this paper, how the Talcigüines performance might be a surviving case of the Nahua dramas Burkhart records from ancient Mexico.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE TALCIGÜINES

One of the first points of concern will be to indicate how a Nahua performance from Mexico came to be performed in El Salvador. The indigenous people of western and central El Salvador are the Pipil people. Linguistic and archaeological evidence shows that they are the result of a migration of Nahuatl speaking peoples from Mexico along the coast of Guatemala between A.D. 700 and A.D. 1350.¹¹ In many regards the Pipil are more similar to the Aztec in terms of their deities and religious practices than their Mayan neighbors. While some aspects of their culture were borrowed from contact with local Mayan groups, the Pipil clearly spoke a version of Nahuatl, and worshipped Nahua deities.

or *atrio* adjacent to the church itself. Large numbers of indigenous followers mean that activities, like dramas, would necessarily have to occur outside of the church itself.

11 William R. Fowler, Jr. "Ethnohistoric Sources on the Pipil-Nicarao of Central America: A Critical Analysis." *Ethnohistory* 32(1):37-62. Both the Pipil of El Salvador and the Nicarao of Nicaragua are Nahuatl-speaking people from this migration. This article also lists most of the documentary evidence that indicates that the principle language of the Pipils was Nahuatl.

In the records of the early Catholic church in El Salvador, San Esteban and the parish at Texistepeque are part of the one of the oldest centers for Roman Catholic mission in El Salvador. By 1546, the town of “Texistepeq” is listed among the towns falling under the ecclesiastical division of San Salvador.¹² In addition, early records indicate that some of the first clergy to come to El Salvador were trained in Guatemala (modern day El Salvador was part of the Spanish Empire administered by the authorities in Guatemala, who in turn were closely tied to Mexico) and trained in the indigenous languages of Mexico.¹³ The Franciscans themselves were clearly in San Salvador by 1573 and possibly as early as 1553.¹⁴ Therefore, there is every reason to believe that historically it would be possible for the practice of Nahua drama to be brought as an evangelization practice by these early priests and friars to Texistepeque.

There is no clear beginning date for the Talcigüines performance. Local people simply state that it has been performed for “at least one hundred years,” or basically as long as anyone alive can remember. In 2015, the government of El Salvador actually gave it special status for being a part of the cultural patrimony of the nation. So, the performance is recognized as something unique to Texistepeque and quite old in terms of actual practice. Texistepeque is a small town in the Department of Santa Ana about 17 kilometers north of Santa Ana city on the main highway to Metapán. The town still has some cobblestone streets and a traditional town square surrounded by municipal buildings and the 18th century colonial style church of San Esteban. Since it lies a good deal inland from the coast, it has experienced little change over time, and remains primarily a rural agricultural town.

In terms of its connection to the Nahuatl language, the Talcigüines performance does not have any speaking parts, and is done entirely in pantomime; but the very name is Nahuatl in origin. It has been translated as “the demon possessed men,” but its original meanings are probably much more obscure. As Burkhart mentions, “devils” in Nahuatl were called *tlatlacatecolo* (singular *tacatecolotl*) by

12 Jesús Delgado Acevedo, *Historia de la Iglesia en El Salvador*, Biblioteca de Historia Salvadoreña, volumen 21, San Salvador: Dirección de Publicaciones e Impreses, (2013 reprint of a 2011 work), p. 136.

13 Ibid., p. 62. One record of a presbítero Martín Muñoz from 1583 indicates that he had served ten years in the parish of San Salvador in the work of evangelization and that he “knew the language of the Indians as if it was his own language.”

14 Ibid., p. 74.

the Nahuatl speakers of Mexico.¹⁵ But this term is not directly translatable to a Spanish understanding of demons or devils. For the Nahuatl speakers of Mexico, this term referred to human sorcerers who could transform themselves into owls. I do agree that the root word for the first part of the term “Talcigüines” is most likely *tlacat*, which can be translated as “devil” in the Spanish understanding of the term; however, I can find nothing to help translate the *güines* ending of the word. It is possible that the word has become corrupted over time, as no one in Texistepeque speaks Nahuatl today, but its origin is clearly not Spanish and is most likely rooted in Nahuatl.

THE TALCIGÜINES PERFORMANCE¹⁶

Early Monday morning on every Holy Week in Texistepeque, El Salvador, the performers who will play the Talcigüines begin to gather at the small colonial style church of San Esteban, which sits on the main square of the town. In a brief interview with one of the performers, it was made clear that this act is considered a very special honor and many of the performers are the sons and grandsons of men who have served this drama in the past. They must come early for confession before the Mass, where they take communion before the performance begins. Some of the performers seem to be in their 40’s and others are as young as six or seven, but the majority are young men in their twenties.

15 Louise M. Burkhart, ed. *Aztecs on Stage: Religious Theater in Colonial Mexico*, 2011, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 17.

16 All of the information and photographs in this section come from the author’s field notes and personal observation when he attended the performance of the Talcigüines on Monday, May 30, 2015. Special thanks go to Moisés Antonio Godoy García, Kelly Jacqueline Godoy de Danielson, and Krissia Roxana Godoy Torres for taking photographs so the author could observe and interview participants.



Talcigüines Prepare their Outfits in the Church Courtyard

In the interview, I was also told that the performers are very respectful and that older people will not be whipped during the performance unless they give permission. If an older person is whipped without consent, it is usually because a friend of the person has encouraged the Talcigüin to whip them. For the most part, the Talcigüines will focus on young people in their teens or twenties (many of whom are personal acquaintances). During the Mass, the Talcigüines sit together in the front of the church along with the performer who plays Jesus. This performer has a great deal of respect in the community and has played the role for many years. He also appears to be training his son to take on this responsibility as well. Following the Mass, the Talcigüines put on their red cat-like masks and run out to the main town square from a side door in the church.



Roles Are Passed Down Through Families of Talcigüines

The outfits of the Talcigüines are short red tunics that extend to the knee and red hoods that cover the entire head. These hoods have cat-like ears and embroidered whiskers. From past images, I have sometimes seen what might be tails on the tunics, but in 2015 I did not observe any costumes like this. Each of the Talcigüines carry a short whip, and they often wear modern tennis shoes and t-shirts and shorts under the tunics because of the heat and the athleticism the performance requires. From about 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon, the Talcigüines will run throughout the town square and whip people at random. This often involves running, jumping, and sometimes acrobatics as they entertain the crowd. Given the high temperatures, they must exhibit a great deal of endurance to last three hours.



Mass is Held Before the Performance for the Costumed Performers

The people of the town and visitors gather in the main square of the town. There is a stage with musicians and vendors of various foods, drinks, candies, and toys for the children. There is also a special booth set up with t-shirts and handmade Talcigüines dolls, complete with red outfits and miniature whips. This is a festive atmosphere where people enjoy watching the whippings of the Talcigüines, even at the cost of getting one themselves. I have been told that local legend holds that for every lash received from a Talcigüin, God will forgive one sin from that person.

The Talcigüines primarily strike people on the legs with their whips. True to what I was told, older people are almost never struck, and young children might be touched lightly with the whip in a playful manner. The real targets seem to be young people, especially young men in their teens and twenties who are dressed in fashionable clothing and usually accompanied by friends or young ladies. Young women are also struck quite harshly, especially if dressed in shorts or with exposed legs. They were often targeted in a flirtatious way and seemed to enjoy the attention, even if they make a big commotion out of being struck. Many of the Talcigüines

stop and take photos with visitors, and some older people encourage the performers to hit other friends or acquaintances of theirs. The audience played an active part in the performance as the targets of the Talcigüines, by watching the performance, and in some cases encouraging the Talcigüines to attack others.



The Talcigüines Torment People in the Public Square for Three Hours

About 12:00 noon, in the heat of the day, older women from the church began using hoses to water down the cobblestone road separating the church from the town square. They also use the hoses to wet the Talcigüines who were beginning to gather as well. As the Talcigüines began to act more lively and bring people into the street for whippings, the character of Jesus entered the scene from the left side of the church. He was dressed in a purple robe with a long black wig. In one hand he carried a small cross about ten inches high, and in the other hand he carried a small bell. Around his waist was tied a very thick rope that extended quite some distance behind him. Sometime earlier, he had emerged from the church and

began to cleanse the sides and rear of the church. Now, at the front of the church, he begins to confront the Talcigüines one-on-one.

The Jesus figure confronts each Talcigüin in a crouching position, holding out the cross and ringing the bell, as if they were weapons. The Talcigüin runs back and forth seeking a way to approach and whip the Christ figure, but the Jesus character turns and continues facing the Talcigüin with the bell and cross. Finally, the Talcigüin falls onto the road, sometimes in very dramatic or acrobatic ways. Each falls down on a wet sheet placed in the road, laid out straight with their heads on their hands in an orderly row. Older women of the church straighten their tunics, give them bags of water and continue to hose them down because of the heat. When all of the Talcigüines have succumbed to the power of Christ, the Jesus character walks over the line of bodies pulling the thick rope over the entire line. At the end of the row the Talcigüines jump up and run into the church, and the performance is ended.



Jesus Confronts the Talcigüines at Noon in the Street in Front of the Church



Jesus Walks Over the Defeated Talcigüines Puling a Long Rope

SYMBOLISM AND SALVATION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

It is possible to read a great deal of symbolism into the Talcigüines performance from a loose reading of Nahua religious beliefs and cosmology, but some of that might be drawing conclusions that never really existed. It is also important to separate what might have been a traditional Pipil interpretation of the performance with its modern function in Texistepeque today.

There are several key things to keep in mind about El Salvador as we consider potential meaning and symbolism. First, Holy Week is typically the hottest time of the year and traditionally signals the beginning of the rainy season, so there may be traditional fertility symbols at work in this performance. Second, while the Pipil cosmology is not well known, the presence of several large clay

statues of the god Xipe Totec¹⁷ found in various archaeological sites may argue for a special focus on this deity.¹⁸ Xipe Totec was an agricultural god associated with the fertility of spring and the planting of corn.¹⁹ His name means “Our Lord, the Flayed One.” Which comes from the Aztec practice of human sacrifice associated with the god. Priests or gladiators for Xipe Totec would wear the bloody flayed skins of sacrificial victims during his celebration, since he was believed to come to earth and wear human skin. The wearing of the flayed skin was related to the idea that corn must lose its husk before it can be planted to bring forth new life. In Mexico, mock gladiator combat would be held by warriors of Xipe Totec to sacrifice new victims.

It is curious that if the Talcigüines is a Nahua drama, it does not relate to any specific scriptural story. Jesus does heal demon-possessed men (Cf. Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 4:33-37, Luke 8:26-39) but nothing that seems to point to defeating a large group of such men in one biblical story. One would suspect that an allegorical play would have a consistent number of demons representing specific sins that plague human beings. Since there is not a clear biblical parallel, it does begin to look more like a contextualized drama that might have had strong original indigenous meaning. It is possible to see the Christ figure as a form of Xipe Totec sacrificing warriors in gladiatorial combat, whose red outfits may represent the flayed bodies needed for the fertility of the fields. On the other hand, the Christ figure may be defeating the warriors of Xipe Totec who are wearing the flayed skins of their sacrificial victims. This may also be a performance of Christ defeating the powers of evil represented by sorcerers who could transform

17 Paul E. Amaroli and Karen Olsen Bruhns. “Second Xipe Statue Found in El Salvador.” *Mexicon* 26 (2): 24 (April 2004). This article notes that this is the 7th near-life-sized statue of Xipe Totec found in El Salvador, compared to only one of such size in Mexico.

18 It is only speculation on my part, but given the symbolism of Xipe Totec as a god who dressed in human skin to come among the people, it makes sense that early Nahua speakers would associate the incarnate Christ with Xipe Totec, and if this is the case, the choice of Christ as Savior of the World as the patron saint of El Salvador, might point to the close association of the Pipils with the worship of Xipe Totec. It is also interesting that in the local legends of El Salvador is a unique figure known as Cipitio, who is seen as a mischievous child with a large hat who eats ashes and whose feet face backwards. It is possible he also relates to some form of the god Xipe Totec, in part because he is not found in any other Latin American folklore outside of El Salvador.

19 Cf. with any major reference work. For a quick overview of Aztec and Mayan deities, see Clara Bezanilla, *Pocket Dictionary of Aztec and Mayan Gods and Goddesses*, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010, p. 24.

themselves into jaguar type beings.²⁰ Either way, I think indigenous Nahua symbolism is clearly being used in this performance.

Whether for the original audience of recent Pipil converts, or the modern context, the Talcigüines drama does convey certain powerful images. For each audience, Christ is clearly the conqueror. No matter if the Talcigüines represent the need for fertility in agriculture or the forces of evil or temptation that attack all of us, Christ clearly prevails in this cosmic battle and brings salvation to the public square of Texistepeque. While the audience is partly passive observer, it is also active participant as well, as the people plagued by the forces of evil. Christ's actions replace the need for cosmic battles and bloody sacrifices.

In addition, the drama brings the community together, strengthens community identity, helps the local economy, and presents local visual religious symbols that everyone can understand at some level. Christ is not just the image of a saint confined to the sanctuary of the church building, especially using European imagery. The actor representing Christ becomes a type of living statue of a saint who walks out of the building and brings salvation to the people in the streets of the town itself. Not only that, but this Christ is clearly not European, but indigenous. While such a symbol may not be as powerful today as it was when the drama was created originally, it still has the ability to help us understand how such drama may have been a very effective evangelistic tool in early Spanish missions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can see many similarities between Burkart's description of Mexican Nahua dramas and the performance of the Talcigüines in Texistepeque, El Salvador. Like the Mexican historic dramas, the Talcigüines are performed on Holy Week, in this case on the Monday of Holy Week. While done in pantomime, the origin of the name is clearly Nahuatl in origin and tied to the religious symbols of human sorcerers who can change into animal forms, or to the Nahua deity Xipe Totec. The drama takes place in the public square, beginning in the church and moving out into the center of the town, which seems typical of many of the

²⁰ While the Mexican term for such sorcerers implied they transformed into owls, the jaguar has a long history of religious symbolism within the Mayan world, and this may be reflected in the different geographical region of Nahua speaking people in El Salvador and their Mayan neighbors in Guatemala. Jaguars also were important in Aztec culture, with elite jaguar warriors being the men who performed the gladiatorial sacrifices for Xipe Totec. So the cat-like symbolism of the masks remains unclear.

Nahua dramas in Mexico, which took place outside of the immediate confines of the church in the larger community. In the same way, the larger community participates in the performance by watching and playing the role of the victims in the drama. Local people also play the major roles of both Jesus and the Talcigüines, with these roles often being hereditary within the family.

While its history cannot be directly traced back to the early years of Spanish mission, there is evidence of the early founding of San Esteban in Texistepeque and the early arrival of religious leaders trained in the languages and practices of Mexico at the same time as the Nahua dramas there. Given the similarity of culture between the Pipils and the Aztecs, it would be natural for similar methods of evangelization to be used.

While beyond the confines of this paper, I would argue that the ingenuity and creative use of drama by the early Spanish mission in the Americas, helps to argue for the need of more missiologists to re-examine and re-evaluate this early period of mission history. Ritual practices that have survived the test of time are probably not the best way to do this, but if they serve to remind us of how early mission evangelization practices brought salvation out of the church building and into the streets, perhaps they can also remind us of how much we can learn from mission history to impact contemporary evangelization in our current context.

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