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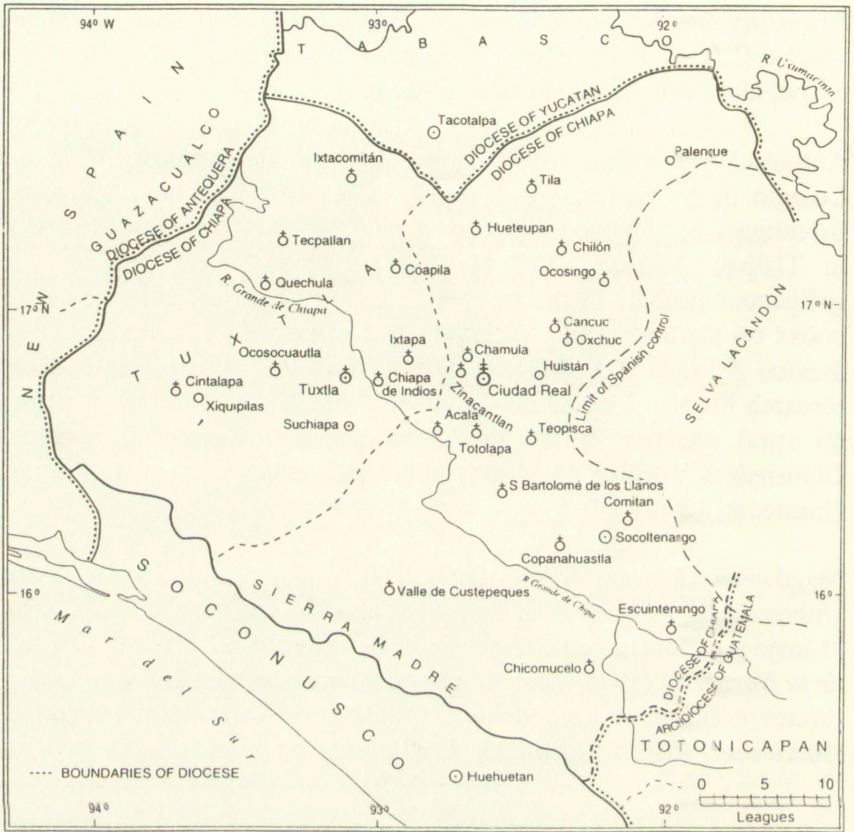
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Diocese of Chiapa, c. 1670. Map courtesy of Amos Megged.

Poverty and Welfare in Mesoamerica During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: European Archetypes and Colonial Translations

AMOS MEGGED

The profound mental and social impact of the moral reformation of the poor in sixteenth-century Europe on colonial perceptions of the Indian in Spanish America has rarely been considered by colonial Latin Americanists. The precepts that missionaries, churchmen, and crown officials serving in the New World "borrowed" from contemporary European discourse on poor relief to mold their concepts, attitudes, and policies towards the native Indian will be the focus of this study; it will also illustrate how native Indian customs of corporate support and assistance in Maya society became deeply interconnected with European-Catholic notions of charity.

Communal poor relief in the Maya communities of Mesoamerica during the post-conquest era was essentially based on the merger of native traits of common support that lingered from the indigenous past and the institutions established by Christian religious orders, such as the parish Indian *cofradía* (confraternity), a major religious, social, and economic institution which emerged in the 1560s. In its local version in Mesoamerica, the *cofradía* was the most important model of the way in which European concepts of poor relief and collective welfare were administered across the Atlantic. As shall be argued here, it also became the most crucial institution for the realization of common and individual relief based on indigenous *calpulli*¹ arrangements and

¹ The original Toltec-Aztec form of the *calpulli* as a semiautonomous ward within a town, with its own ceremonial center, was largely maintained in many Maya settlements in Mesoamerica long after the Spanish conquest. The *calpulli*'s residential area was characterized by its ceremonial center as well as by its surrounding holy water holes, caves where common ancestors were thought to be buried, and land

the late-colonial *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) system. Through the rhetoric of Spanish royal paternalism and the influence of the European poor laws polemic on local communal arrangements, Indians were assigned the task of relieving themselves of what the colonizers perceived to be their "dishonored" past, while at the same time remaining wholly responsible for their own welfare. Ultimately, overall colonial policy with regard to the implementation of welfare regulae in the areas of Chiapa and Guatemala will be examined here.

Several well-established Spanish and Latin American historians of the past generation, such as Marcel Bataillon, Lewis Hanke, and especially Silvio Zavala in his classic study on the influence of Thomas More on New Spain,² have illustrated the intellectual links between Old and New World authors like More, Juan Luis Vives, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, and Vasco de Quiroga. These historians have contributed considerably to the understanding of the roots of political thought in the New World during the sixteenth century. In their writings, however, the issues of social welfare and social reform are dealt with primarily in the limited context of the intellectual history of Utopianism, while crucial facets of other social thought and social realities remain neglected.³

divided among patrilineal groups. The *calpulli* possessed exclusive rights over a defined territory, which included arable land as well as forests. Major towns sometimes included between seven and twelve *calpultin*, while on the periphery hamlets and small settlements were made up of one or two only, according to lineage and kin affiliation. Current scholarship argues strongly against regarding the *calpulli* as kin-based units, but there is still a tendency to refer to some sort of kin grouping beyond the level of the household, which tendency this study follows. On extra-familial kin groupings in Aztec society, see, for example, Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 173-75.

² Silvio Arturo Zavala, *La "Utopía" de Tomás Moro en la Nueva España y otros estudios* (México: Antigua Librería Robredo de Porrúa, 1937). His Spanish follower, José Antonio Maravall, wrote on the origins of Utopianism in Hapsburg Spain in *Utopía y reformismo en la España de los Austrias* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1982), 226-40. See also Margarita Zamora, *Language, Authority, and Indigenous History in the Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially chap. 6.

³ On the profound need for a constant use of social history's tools and concepts in the writing of Latin American history, see Eric Van Young, "Conclusions," in *Indian-Religious Relations in Colonial Spanish America*, ed. Susan E. Ramírez and Murdo J. MacLeod (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1989), 89-92.

Zavala's thesis may serve as an illustration. Zavala attributed the existence of a system of communal wealth and the efforts towards meeting the needs of Indian communities in Spanish America during the colonial period, as well as the more far-reaching instances of the first hospital-villages of Santa Fé founded in Mexico between 1530 and 1550 by Vasco de Quiroga, to the direct influence of Renaissance Utopianism on prominent church figures and missionaries. He analyzed the main features of Quiroga's utopian villages in great detail, highlighting the community of goods, the organization of work, and the integration of families in groups. He also emphasized Quiroga's concern for maintaining strict discipline within the hospital structure in order to reform the Indians' morality and social habits, for which "Quiroga had no particular admiration."⁴

This last important point was, unfortunately, pursued neither by Zavala, whose thesis concentrates mainly on how features of Quiroga's program were directly related to More's *Utopia* and does not attempt any sociocultural analysis, nor his successors. In fact, what lay behind Quiroga's approach was not only the goal of a rigid implementation of a utopian program, but also a whole worldview of welfare, deeply entrenched in contemporary European social thought.⁵ Moreover, utopian programs like Quiroga's were characterized by a strong sense of coercion and restriction for the sake of an ideal cause.

In two separate books published on Jesuit missions in Paraguay in 1968, Maurice Ezran and Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham also discuss the utopian aspect of these great missions, which by the end of the sixteenth century encompassed nearly 100,000 Indians. The Jesuit model was basically quite similar to Quiroga's hospital-villages, featuring an economic system which consisted of private and common ownership and obligatory communal service for the cultivation of

⁴ Silvio Arturo Zavala, *New Viewpoints on the Spanish Colonization of America*, trans. Joan Coyne (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 108-10. See also Zavala, *La "Utopia" de Tomás Moro*.

⁵ On the far-reaching syncretic influence of European social thought on Utopian and millenarian movements in colonial Mesoamerica, see the excellent study by Serge Gruzinski, *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), especially the epilogue and conclusions. See also William B. Taylor, "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An Inquiry into the Social History of Marian Devotion," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987):9-33.

common lands, part of whose yield was allocated to orphans and widows. The Jesuits are described in both books as having applied rigorous measures against the "natural idleness" of the Guaranees; for instance, food and clothing were withheld from those who did not work or were negligent until they improved their habits. Work was part of the more general educational goal of implanting Christian ethics.⁶ Other social welfare reforms in the New World, by contrast, involved much more of a dialogue between local Indian recipients and their mentors, the parish priests, as shall be illustrated in the case of the indigenous *cofradías*. The usage of some cultural categories in colonial discourse pertaining to what the Spanish identified as inherent indigenous traits, such as "vagrancy," "idleness," "rusticity," and "iniquity," will be examined first as part of an effort to consider the preconceptions that influenced sixteenth-century Spanish images of the Indian in the territories across the Atlantic and to trace their roots.

The cultural categories employed by Spanish colonial discourse with regard to the native peoples of the New World are identical to those used to describe the peasants and poor in early-modern Europe, notably with regard to the issue of poor relief passionately debated in Spain and elsewhere beginning in the 1530s.⁷ For example, much of Juan de Solórzano y Pereyra's famous litigant treatise, *Política Indiana sacada en lengua Castellana de los dos tomos del derecho y gobierno municipal de las Indias* (1680), which studies the *raison d'être* behind Spanish colonial rule in America, is dedicated to the issue of reforming the Indians in the same way as the poor of Spain. A royal commissioner to the Indies who had served in Peru as an *oidor* for twelve years, Solórzano y Pereyra expressed the opinion that civic law and the well-being of the human republic obliged the Indians, like the poor and

⁶ Maurice Ezran, *Une colonization duce: les missions du Paraguay* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1968), 117-21; Robert Bontine Cunningham Graham, *A Vanished Arcadia: Some Accounts of the Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607-1767* (New York: Haskell House, 1968), 177-86.

⁷ On such comparisons, see, for example, Peter Burke, "Le domandé del vescovo e la religione del popolo," *Quaderni Storici* 51 (1979):541; and Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 357-62. On Spanish contemporary attitudes towards nomadism, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 197.

vagabonds in Europe, to assist in public and private works and other occupations "for just and competent hours."⁸ In chapter 25 of his work, he prescribes the first step in educating the Indians in Christian ethics and discipline as reforming their low habits of idolatry, drunkenness, idleness, and nakedness, reiterating the cultural categories that his predecessors in Europe had included in their welfare programs for the masses. In chapter 28, he goes on to declare that the Indians were, and should be, considered as belonging to the category of persons whom Spanish law labeled as "*miserables*," first because of their imbecility, rusticity, and poverty, and second, because of the forced labor and services they were required to provide. Moreover, "privileges," such as adequate frameworks for poor relief and rehabilitation, should be created for the Indians in the same manner as for European *impedidos* (incompetents).⁹

To strengthen his case for the "amendment of the local poor," Solórzano y Pereyra cites a number of royal ordinances dispatched to New Spain between 1530 and 1552 which indicated that Indians should not be allowed to wander aimlessly but rather should be made to labor on their properties and on communal lands under the direct supervision of the crown judges, since "idleness was prohibited."¹⁰ European reformists associated the freedom of movement of vagrants with an acute threat to society's harmony and integrity; such freedom was a source of pollution and anticulture, since, presumably, culture was to be found only in the Renaissance notion of the disciplined urban republic. A life of wandering was regarded as rebellion and a sin to be punished in early-modern Europe: it was seen as chaotic and anti-social, and associated with living in forests ruled by demons, away from the cultural enlightenment of cities and towns.¹¹ It also went against the proclaimed need for supervised enclosure of the poor, meant to reform them morally and culturally; hospitalization of the poor was the standard European solution to most of these concerns. A vigorous

⁸ Juan de Solórzano y Pereyra, *Política Indiana sacada en lengua Castellana de los tomos del derecho y gobierno municipal de las Indias*, 1680, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid (hereinafter BNM), Sección Manuscritos Raros, folio 25v. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are by the author.

⁹ Solórzano y Pereyra, *Política Indiana*, chap. 25.

¹⁰ Solórzano y Pereyra, *Política Indiana*, chaps. 25, 28.

¹¹ See A.L. Beier, "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England: A Rejoinder," *Past Present* 71 (1976):130-34.

restriction of Indian migration, particularly in the form of their confinement to newly-established Christianized communities (*reducciones*) within the *encomienda* system, was the parallel remedy offered by churchmen and royal officials in the New World for such depravities. As Antony Pagden describes it, "nomadism was...held to be inimical to every aspect of civilized life; and the Spaniards therefore did their best to prevent the Indians from moving very far from areas in which they were settled."¹² By the end of the seventeenth century, welfare carried a strong, paternalistic message of power and submission to "the good rule" of the Spanish colonial regime.

In a 1552 letter to Charles V, for example, Don Francisco Marroquín, bishop of Guatemala, indicated that the liberty granted to Indians to be wherever they wished was ruinous "as we have already learned from our own experience, of what it meant for idlers, vagabonds (*holgazanos*) and the mischievous (*perjusos*)."¹³ A similar opinion had been expressed a year earlier, also in a letter to the king, by the Franciscan commissary general to New Spain, Fray Francisco de Bustamente. Bustamente commented that the main cause of the deterioration of Christianity among the Indians was that the New Laws of 1542, which freed all Indian slaves in the Spanish colonies, did not grant them "Christian freedom" but only "diabolical freedom" to sin. He therefore suggested that freed Indian slaves in the regions of New Spain and Guatemala should remain supervised and confined by their former masters for a period of two years, during which time they would be taught different trades and "prevented from idleness, drunkenness and idolatry."¹⁴

Thus the Franciscans deemed it necessary to combine education with correction; under the patronage of the powerful, such correction was considered as suitable for Indians as it was for the poor in the Old World. As early as 1544, the Dominicans in New Spain expressed the same view when they defended the *encomienda* system, which had been

¹² Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 195.

¹³ Carta al Rey, por Don Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala, 29 March 1552, Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (hereinafter AGI), Audiencia de Guatemala, legajo 156, folio 3r.

¹⁴ Carta del comisario general, Francisco de Bustamente, al emperador, 22 March 1552, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (hereinafter AHN), Diversos/Indias, document #111.

subjected to thorough revision after the 1542 New Laws were enforced. They employed Antonio de Guevara's sixteenth-century concept of the "disciplined republic," in which good faith, order, and prosperity were to be maintained by the rich and powerful, while the poor would live under their rule "the same as it was in all the kingdoms where there was discipline and good order and stability, as was the situation in Spain itself." This state of order was thus established as a precondition for native survival, without which both colonists and native populations would be lost.¹⁵ One hundred and twenty years later the same prescription remained in use, as the words of one veteran creole clergyman in Guatemala attest. The acting Dominican provincial Fray Francisco Murcillo described the Indians as

people forsaken and companions of idleness, and in order to make them fulfill what is of proper utility, which is, to build their houses, dress up their wives and go to Mass, it is necessary that they be compelled by justice, because they still absent themselves from their communities, which they do for the simple sake of vagrancy.¹⁶

The Dominicans in Guatemala claimed that the Indians were kept under constant supervision in order to prevent crimes, "which originate out of such people of idleness," and asserted that the personal service forced upon them should be regarded as a form of education. Consequently, they defended the creole farmers' right to recruit Indians to work for them because of the educational and disciplinary value of labor.¹⁷ This program for reeducation and moral reform was reinforced by social reality. During these same years, a sharp rise in Indian delinquency and drunkenness was recorded, especially in the villages

¹⁵ Parecer de los frailes de la orden de Santo Domingo de la Nueva España sobre repartimientos, 5 May 1544, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid (hereinafter RAH), Colección Muñoz, vol. 65, fols. 137-39; see also Antonio de Guevara's *Institutione del Principe Cristiano*, 1543, BNM, Sección Manuscritos Raros.

¹⁶ Don Martín Carlos de Mences, sobre repartimiento de labores, trabajos de campo de pan llevar y servicio en casas vecinos españoles por los indios del Valle, 1663-64, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 132, fols. 12v-14r.

¹⁷ Don Martín Carlos de Mences, sobre repartimiento de labores...., 1663-64, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 132, fols. 12v-14r.

neighboring the main Spanish towns: "...everything ends up in saving one's *toston* for eating, drinking, and dying by the axe, because these Indians have the urge to wander all year round like vagabonds... and due to this [habit] there are so many taverns to which they enter and drink until they fall to the ground."¹⁸ Such an interpretation obviously reflects the local Spaniards' preestablished attitudes regarding the moral decay of the local poor, just as in Spain.

A "good republic" modeled on the disciplined urban scheme was conceived of as one which could teach its poor and needy how to be more independent, and so become useful to society at large. For the Indians, as the New World's poor, a new moral reform was vigorously recommended in official as well as unofficial colonial circles throughout the sixteenth century. In 1551, Tomás López Mendel, a high-ranking crown official to the colonies, indirectly expressed such a notion in a letter to the Council of the Indies in Spain. He recommended that in order to turn the unruly, rambling Indian population into a "true society," Spanish carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, weavers, "and other necessary roles" should be sent from Spain to Indian communities to teach "these poor" their crafts. At a later stage, Indian commoners (*macehuatlin*) selected from each community would be sent to nearby colonial towns to train as master craftsmen in order to benefit the whole community.¹⁹ Thus, correction of the Indians-as-poor could also entail a "total" program for the transformation of an entire society. The Indians certainly remained wholly responsible for their own well-being, especially in the more remote areas of Mesoamerica such as Chiapa and Yucatán, where responsibility for local welfare proved to be one of the principles of limited native self-rule. As Nancy Farriss has outlined in the Yucatán case, "In the absence of any public program of welfare, which the rudimentary colonial bureaucracy would have been ill-equipped to manage even if it had existed, poor relief, like almost all other local affairs, was left to the Maya to arrange in their own way."²⁰

¹⁸ Los vecinos españoles del pueblo de San Antonio Suchitepéques...., AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 60, fol. 10r.

¹⁹ Lic. Tomás López Mendel to the Council of the Indies, 29 March 1551, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 9, fol. 7v.

²⁰ Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 261.

The European origins of all these cultural categories and preconceptions concerning idleness, rusticity, lack of moral discipline, nomadism, and vagrancy as sources of moral pollution and anticulture can be found in the drastic transformation in both thought and social action between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. As studies of the last three decades have demonstrated,²¹ this transformation can be attributed to two major reasons. One was the intensification of the "war of mirrors" between Lutheranism and Catholicism during the 1520s and 1530s, in which both sides constantly "borrowed" from each other's programs and modified their own ideas accordingly. An example of this can be found in Ignatius Loyola's 1535 program for the elimination of begging in the Basque country in which, with church sanction, village *mayordomos* were entrusted with the task of distinguishing between those who were healthy and capable of working and who would not be granted alms, and those who were truly needy. Loyola was almost certainly influenced by new ideas circulating in his day in Nuremberg, Strasbourg, Paris, and Flanders.

The other major cause of this shift was the growing view of poverty and vagrancy as a social menace and a source of disruption, which was related to what Brian Pullan has called "the pronounced need to amend the character, morals, and behavior of the outcast poor through coercive policies, as well as through the establishment of Christian, disciplinary and custodial frameworks for them."²² In his essay on poor relief and social discipline in sixteenth-century Europe,

²¹ Brian S. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 254, 255, 281, 286; Miri Rubin, "Development and Change in English Hospitals, 1000-1500," *The Hospital in History*, ed. Roy Porter et al., Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine (London: Routledge, 1989), 41-60; Brian Pullan, "Support and Redeem: Charity and Poor Relief in Italian Cities from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century," *Continuity and Change* 3:2 (1988):177-208; Barbara Beckerman-Davis, "Poverty and Poor Relief in Sixteenth-Century Toulouse," *Historical Reflections* 17:3 (1991):267-96; Daniela Lombardi, "La demande d'assistance et les reponses des autorités urbaines face a une crise conjoncturelle: Florence, 1619-1622," *Melange de l'école Française de Rome, Moyen Age, Temps Modern* 99:2 (1987):935-45; Sandra Cavallo, "Charity, Power, and Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Italian Hospitals: The Case of Turin," in Porter et al., *The Hospital in History*, 93-122; and Sandra Cavallo, "Patterns of Poor Relief and Patterns of Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Evidence of the Turin Ospedale di Carita," *Continuity and Change* 5:1 (1990):65-98.

²² Pullan, "Support and Redeem," 177-208.

Robert Jutte has likewise outlined how vagrancy and idleness, associated with the poor, were seen as threatening the well-being of the Christian community and potentially leading to growing delinquency, civic and moral chaos, and rebellion. Social and moral "cleansing" were, therefore, sorely needed: "while the state had the prerogative of inflicting punishment and compelling the poor and idle to work, it remained for the Church to inculcate the new mentality in every parishioner's mind."²³ Here, indeed, was a critical change in cultural values which signified that contemporary Europeans would allow no more acts of charity and mendicancy as they had been previously conceived.

The focus of jurists, councilmen, and ecclesiastics on the redemptive, reformatory facets of welfare and the salvation of the "sinful" poor was first called for in Juan Luis Vives' 1523 treatise *Del socorro de los pobres, o de las necesidades humanas*, in which he claimed that, without such reformation, only ignorance and sin would exist among many of the poor throughout Europe, and that remaining unemployed doomed them to a constant state of wicked and immoral behavior. Vives therefore recommended that those among the able-bodied, unemployed poor should be put to work by the city councils; that the needy should be placed in hospices where they would be looked after, as well as reeducated according to proper Christian discipline; and that vagabonds should be placed under rigorous restrictions and penalties.²⁴ Vives' earliest Spanish disciple was Fray Juan de Robles, whose treatise *Obra de Agricultura*, written in Alcalá in 1524, continued this theme. For his part, Robles claimed that vagabonds were the enemies of public health, the economy, and the social order of the community, and therefore it was not unjust to limit their liberty. His recommendations for "practical" solutions to the sin of idleness included a public declaration that work was obligatory for those who could perform it; the elimination of mendicancy by means of municipal supervision; and the establishing of public funds to maintain the

²³ Robert Jutte, "Poor Relief and Social Discipline in Sixteenth-Century Europe," *European Studies Review* 11 (1981):25-52.

²⁴ Juan Luis Vives, *De l'Assistance aux Pauvres*, traduit du Latin pour le prof. Ricardo Aznar Casanova (Brussels: Editions Valero & Fils, 1943), 2:186-92, 194, 197. See also Brian Pullan, "Catholics and the Poor in Early Modern Europe," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, 26 (1976):15-34.

incapable and shameful poor, as well as the denial of charity to those who, "for not wishing to work, were hungry."²⁵

The application of Vives' poor laws as a credible cure for immorality and antisocial phenomena among the poor was first attempted in the Spanish town of Zamora in 1534 after more than ten years of repeated petitions to the Cortes in Madrid. The Zamora poor laws were governed by a local committee of eight administrators responsible for the examination of the poor and the collection and distribution of charitable funds. These laws included the prohibition of public begging, and the creation of a type of public almonry for supporting disenfranchised deserving beggars and for housing and feeding poor travelers for a period of three days.²⁶ Only in 1544, well after the cities of Lyons, Nuremberg, and Venice had implemented their own laws, did the city of Salamanca follow suit, introducing its own welfare reforms in accordance with Zamora's example.

The issue of poor relief opened up a complex moral and theological debate right from its first implementation in Spain. One of the most influential figures in Salamanca regarding this topic was the famous theologian Domingo de Soto, who later became an ardent supporter of church charity. In his treatise *Deliberación en la causa de los pobres* (1545), he argued in favor of leaving poor relief exclusively in the hands of churchmen, as well as maintaining freedom of movement for paupers.²⁷ On the subject of the freedom of movement of the poor vis-à-vis the problem of vagrancy and the justice of mendicancy, Soto argued that "depriving the poor of their liberty of movement was not only morally untenable, it was also against the divine law."²⁸

One of Soto's most important recommendations, that relief should be administered primarily through parish confraternities, ought to be borne in mind when considering his approach to the structuring of collective welfare via the *cofradías* in Maya communities. From the middle of the sixteenth century on, outdoor relief, as recommended by

²⁵ Juan de Robles, *Obra de Agricultura*, Alcalá, 1522, BNM, Sección Manuscritos Raros, fol. 202. See also Maravall, *Utopía y Reformismo*, 229-40.

²⁶ Linda Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain: The Example of Toledo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21-25.

²⁷ Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain*, 24, 27-28.

²⁸ Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame*, 202-03.

Soto, was implemented throughout Spain by *cofradías* and hospitals which were supported by revenues obtained from the establishment of *mayordomías* made up of ecclesiastical benefices.²⁹ The parish confraternities in Spain were primarily charitable institutions for running local hospitals. Unlike the poorhouse, these confraternities were financed by taxes levied from the faithful. They dedicated themselves to burying the poor, spreading knowledge of Catholic doctrine to homeless children, and providing shelter as well as technical training.³⁰ By 1700, the main task of the San Juan de Dios hospital founded in Murcia was to provide food and clothing "perpetually, to the sick, well-born and respectable, shamefaced persons who are in great need;" to marry off orphan maidens, providing them with a dowry; and to spend the rest of its income on abandoned children.³¹

All these programs in Spain and southern Europe resembled each other in their theoretical preconceptions. Catholic welfare during the early sixteenth century certainly relied on traditional principles and methods, mainly those of outdoor relief. Yet even those patterns of alms-giving and charity were modified according to changing concepts. The most acute problems guiding the programs at this time in Europe lay in several economic and social phenomena mainly related to famine, the fear of widespread diseases carried by vagrants and migrants to new areas of settlement, and the growing need to create and control labor for swelling numbers of urban unemployed. Moreover, the powerful current of territorial expansionism was clearly in the forefront of these changes. David Vassberg and John Lynch have illustrated how, in the face of rising inflation during the latter sixteenth century in Spain, land became the most predominant factor. During this time, merchants, government officials, artisans, and religious orders, especially the Dominicans and Augustinians in Andalusia, invested in rural property bordering cities of varying size in Old and New Castile. City dwellers exploited the economic crisis to buy land, often at half its original

²⁹ Martz, *Poverty and Welfare in Habsburg Spain*, 180; Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame*, 203.

³⁰ Sara Nalle, *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the People of Cuenca, 1500-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 159; Maureen Flynn, *Sacred Charity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

³¹ Ceferino Caro López, "Beneficencia, asistencia social y represión en Murcia durante el siglo XVIII," *Estudios de Historia Social* 2 (1989):165-200.

value. The founding of new towns by migrating populations and their urgent quest for additional land only made the situation in the rural domain more grave. The need for a more effective response to waves of migrant workers and the urban unemployed was therefore grounded in important economic considerations.³²

In a similar fashion, studying European cultural ideas on poor relief and their implementation among the indigenous native populations of Mesoamerica reveals how they and Spanish socioreligious institutions such as the *cofradías* were affected by Spanish colonial perceptions as well as by new meanings which arose in response to such institutions. Works of charity and welfare among the Indians, however, are scarcely documented in colonial, native-written sources or in Spanish colonial sources and therefore have been given little attention in the historiography of Latin America.³³ Welfare services are usually mentioned in these works in relation to the levying of tribute and exemptions from it, rules of inheritance, and distribution of common property. The question this study will go on to address is whether there existed any inherent concern about charity and welfare in the indigenous societies of Mesoamerica and other areas of the South American continent which could provide a basis for assimilating new concepts brought in by Spanish rule.

According to a variety of early colonial sources relying on indigenous informants and projecting long-lasting indigenous traits, such as etymological dictionaries (*Artes*) of native languages and the early colonial Spanish chronicles of Sahagún, Durán, and Diego de Landa, the perception of poverty in indigenous societies in Mesoamerica was generally associated with supernatural afflictions, that is, it was seen as an inevitable disaster brought about by the gods' wrath. Poverty was not an integral aspect of human destiny, nor was it part of "natural" social conditions, as it was conceived of in Europe. But similar to the Catholic Church's traditionalist treatment of "Holy

³² David E. Vassberg, *Land and Society in Golden Age Castile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 147-50, 167-76; and John Lynch, *Spain Under the Hapsburgs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 1:119-20.

³³ See, for example, James Lockhart's brief treatment of the redistribution of land to members in need within the Aztec *calpulli* as one particular form of local welfare in 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), 158.

Mendicancy," these societies regarded destitution as a given unalterable condition. As shall be illustrated, indigenous rulers, priests, and lords granted a variety of charities to relieve the indigent to some degree, but never to reform their situation. A profound change in this attitude came only as a result of the fusion of pre-existing local modes of charity and the novel European perceptions and programs of poor relief implemented by Spanish priests.

In Maya-Spanish dictionaries composed by Spanish priests during the sixteenth century, Maya expressions to describe the poor and the condition of poverty carried grim connotations of misery, ostracism, worthlessness, and death. For example, Fray Domingo de Ara's *Arte de la lengua Tzeltal* and *Vocabulario en lengua Tzeltal* (c. 1570) both list the entry *mebaaghel*, sadness, with its linguistic inflections: *meba*, poor, orphan; *mebaal*, misery, poverty; *mebatay*, to be sad over the dead; *mebachonbil*, sold as worthless, common. *Pobre* (in the Spanish-Tzeltal dictionary) is translated as "the one who does not possess any relatives." Manifestations of charity (in the Tzeltal-Spanish dictionary) stemming from the root *obol* (to provide for) are: *obelvanegh*, to offer alms; *oboltay*, to be charitable, to perform exequies; *obolil*, affliction; *obol qba*, to experience hard labor or torture.³⁴

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* reveals an association of poverty with divine retribution for sins and death among the Mexica of the Valley of Mexico. In a prayer offered in times of drought to Tlaloc, god of rains and abundance, the priest pleads for food and the ability to sustain those who are on the verge of dying so that they may withstand "the journey to the beyond."³⁵ A prayer to Tezcatlipoca asks the god to punish an evil king with poverty, misery, and illness.³⁶

³⁴ *Tzeltal* is the modern spelling form of *tzeldal*. Fray Domingo de Ara, *Arte de la lengua Tzeltal*, copy at the Latin American Collection, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana; Fray Antonio de Guzmán, *Vocabulario en lengua Tzeltal*, copy of the original by Ara, Bancroft Library, California.

³⁵ Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España (Códice Florentino)*, intro. and notes by Alfredo López Austin and Josefina García Quintana (1577; reprint, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), vol. 1, bk. 4, chap. 8, pp. 328-32.

³⁶ Sahagún, *Historia general*, vol. 1, bk. 4, chap. 6, p. 314. See also Thelma D. Sullivan, "Rhetorical Orations, or Huehuetlatolli, Collected by Sahagún," 87, 90; and Edward E. Calnek, "Sahagún's Texts as a Source of Sociological Information," 191-92,

In the *Book of Rites and Ceremonies* written in 1570 by Diego Durán, sixteenth-century Dominican chronicler of New Spain, the author describes the poor of Tenochtitlán as responsible for going from door to door to collect alms for the temple of the god Xipe during the god's feast days. During this festival, a solemn sermon delivered by one of the temple dignitaries emphasized reverence, shame, obedience, and charity, qualities that the local poor and foreign pilgrims were expected to possess. At the close of the festival, collected offerings were commonly shared and some were distributed among the poor, who also received food and clothing when these were given away publicly.³⁷ A similar attitude towards poverty and charity under the Inca rule in Peru was observed by the great Peruvian chronicler Huamán Poma de Ayala, who in his book *Nueva Crónica y buen gobierno* (1614) described how poor people from outside the Inca capital were invited in to partake of the free food and drink extravagantly offered by the Inca ruler as part of the monthly feasts.³⁸

Under the tightly-controlled power hierarchy of the Aztec state in the Valley of Mexico, in which all authority, duty, and responsibility were allocated through the supreme and incontrovertible rule of the lords, commoners relied on the goodwill of the lords to consider their social circumstances and excuse them from certain customary obligations and dues. This could be done through special arrangements offered to those formally recognized as poor and disabled, especially those who were without lineage or familial support, or those too old to sustain themselves (the latter category was generally also recognized by Spanish colonial authorities, who excluded men over sixty and women over fifty-five from the tribute rolls, as in Europe). The Aztec state freed the *tlamaitle*, or subcommoner class of serfs, from tribute, since many had sold themselves into virtual slavery as a result of being unable to sustain themselves.³⁹ Often a commoner unable to pay his dues to the local lord chose to serve in his household until he could

both in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The Works of Sahagún*, ed. Munro M. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).

³⁷ Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la Tierra Firme*, ed. Angel María Garibay Kintana, facs. ed. (México: Porrúa, 1967), 1:chap. 9.

³⁸ Karen Spalding, *Huarochirí: An Andean Society Under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 96.

³⁹ Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 153-54.

cover his debts.⁴⁰ In this category were also widows, who usually returned to their parents' household, and unmarried sisters who remained under their older brothers' protection. Such discharge from tribute among the Aztecs lingered well into the seventeenth century, when all *macehualtin* (commoners) became equal *calpulli* members and therefore had to pay direct *alteptl* tribute and be drafted for public works.⁴¹

Other forms of charity were also evident in traditional native practices retained throughout the colonial period. In Mexico, unassigned communally-controlled plots within the *calpultin* were held for those who were about to marry or who possessed no lands.⁴² When a commoner died in colonial Guatemala without legitimate heirs, part of the land was sometimes distributed among local inhabitants, poor commoners, landless freed slaves, or vagrants. This custom was especially prevalent in times of plagues, when truancy and vagrancy became an acute problem.⁴³ Disasters like plagues, famine, and drought were usually alleviated by acts of charity from "above," namely by local lords. During the great pestilence that struck the community of Zinacantan in 1590, Gaspar Gonzales, the affluent local Indian governor, and his father donated sizable sums of money as well as exchange products such as *mantas* (woolen cloth) to pay the parish priests for burying the numerous dead among the poor. In the terrible famine that followed, they also contributed a considerable number of cattle from their ranch to provide for the sick and dying "as acts of pure charity."⁴⁴

Poor relief in Mesoamerica was in fact locally organized without ever becoming institutionalized. Among the Maya of Yucatán,

⁴⁰ Residencia de Lic. Francisco Briceño, testimony by Don Cristóbal Chiabitl, October 1566, AGI, Justicia, leg. 317, fol. 37v.

⁴¹ *Altepetl*: The Aztec city-state, subdivided into different *calpultin*. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 114-17, 160.

⁴² Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 267.

⁴³ Ordenanzas del visitador general en Suchitepéques y la costa de Zapotitlán, 30 January 1646, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 11, fols. 15r-27v. See also Elias Zamora Acosta, *Los mayas en las tierras altas en siglo XVI: tradición y cambio en Guatemala* (Sevilla: Diputación Provincial, 1985), 390-94.

⁴⁴ Fray Tomás de Blanes contra Gaspar Gonzales, principal de Zinacantan, 1613, Archivo General de Centro-América, Guatemala City (hereinafter AGCA), A.1.11, expediente 943, leg. 123, fol. 32.

as Diego de Landa was informed by his Indian interpreters, and as he briefly described in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, welfare was one of the formal roles and duties of the lords of the towns. They, in turn, appointed "governors" who made it a habit to seek out the disabled (mained and blind) and supply them with their daily needs, and to "treat the poor kindly." Public works programs of communal labor in these towns, initiated by their lords, were also partly devoted to the management of the *milpas* of the old, the disabled, and the widowed.⁴⁵ Moreover, in his *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos*, Spanish historian Antonio de Herrera y Tordecillas states that the poor and disabled in Yucatán were brought from afar to towns where they were given shelter at the residencies of the *mayordomos*.⁴⁶ More recently, John V. Murra has described the communal working of lands for the benefit of the old and disabled among the Inca of Peru.⁴⁷

Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European cultural categories, concepts, and programs concerning welfare became tightly fused with such preexisting native conceptions of charity and mutual aid as the Indian *cofradías*.⁴⁸ In the early colonial sources of Mesoamerica, indications exist of a dialogue between indigenous concerns over care for the disabled and contemporary Spanish-European conceptions of welfare, leading to a gradual assimilation of the latter during the 1530s. This merger became necessary largely because of a great increase in the number of orphans, widows, widowers, the displaced, and the infirm in native communities. A direct consequence of the ravaging pandemics, this situation

⁴⁵ Diego de Landa, *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán, a Translation*, ed. and trans. Alfred M. Tozzer (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1941; reprint 1966), 26, 96. *Milpa*: a clearing in a forest for slash-and-burn agriculture; cultivated land, possible *calpulli* land, or land in the private possession of lords, *tecpan* in Nahuatl. The term was also used by the Spaniards throughout the colonial period as a general term to denote any type of a field or plantation.

⁴⁶ Antonio de Herrera y Tordecillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del mar océano* (Madrid: Emplanta Real, 1726-30), facsimile edition at the BNM, Manuscritos Raros, vol. 4, bk. 10, chap. 2.

⁴⁷ John V. Murra, "Social Structures and Economic Themes in Andean Ethnohistory," *Anthropological Quarterly* 34 (1961):47-59.

⁴⁸ Amos Megged, *Exporting the Catholic Reformation: Local Religion in Early Colonial Mexico* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), especially chaps. 3 and 4.

called for an immediate response and the creation of institutions for the relief of such persons.

In the early stages of contact, pure forms of indigenous cooperation and welfare were interwoven with the forms introduced by the *cofradías*. In later stages, these forms diverged to create the *compadrazgo* system, or godparenthood, a unique type of mutual assistance. Indeed, both the *cofradía* and the *compadrazgo* systems were founded upon ideal types of pseudo-kinship relationships, even though the *compadrazgo* later evolved into a purely patronal form of aid. John Bossy has convincingly demonstrated how godparenthood in sixteenth-century Europe was based on compaternal relations between people related by marriage; godparents were usually chosen from amongst natural kin, so that kinship was transformed to reinforce preexisting alliances.⁴⁹ Thus, the most distinct forms of mutual assistance in indigenous Mesoamerica continued well into the late colonial period in the forms of the communal-institutional welfare of the *cofradía* and the individual-familial relief of the *compadrazgo*. Both systems incorporated some European aspects of poor relief and communal charity, while the *cofradías* also retained their reforming role.

In his study of the *compadrazgo* system, Hugo Nutini has described how what was a purely religious institution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had by the late eighteenth century developed into a system of socioeconomic kinship-type networks. Originally introduced by the Spanish friars as an obligatory feature of ritual sponsorship by Spaniards when Indians received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and marriage, the *compadrazgo* later evolved into an important and stable mechanism for "organizing and structuring individual and community action and social, economic, and religious behavior."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ John Bossy, "Godparenthood: The Fortunes of a Social Institution in Early Modern Christianity," in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: German Historical Institute; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 194-201.

⁵⁰ Hugo G. Nutini, *Ritual Kinship: The Structure and Historical Development of the Compadrazgo System in Rural Tlaxcala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 353-58.

Surprisingly, however, Nutini never really connects the *compadrazgos* and the *cofradías*. Furthermore, if for the Indians in indigenous and colonial times the *calpultin* were the macrocosm of the extended family in which kin and next-of-kin functioned together as a corporate group, the colonial confraternities reinforced such ties by turning them into ritual kinship.⁵¹ During the late eighteenth century, the *compadrazgo* system took on similar attributes and assumed the form of individual networks based on pseudoconsanguinity, in which *compadres* were bound by mutual obligations ranging from close cooperation in cyclical-agricultural activities to sponsoring sacramental duties and fiestas. The more differentiated and fragmented native societies proved to be, the more syncretized institutions such as the *cofradía* and the *compadrazgo* replaced traditional indigenous forms, which gradually disintegrated. From the late seventeenth century onward, ritualized activities of welfare within the domain of the *calpulli* were part of a more general current of change, directly related to the traditional patterns and microcosm of the *calpultin*, which emphasized local identity over an integrated identity of the entire community.⁵²

Preliminary efforts by Spanish missionaries during the early sixteenth century to provide for the unfortunate as an essential aspect of evangelization had evolved by the 1560s into a holistic system of self-support. Among them were those measures created by Quiroga in his hospital-villages of Santa Fé and Michoacán mentioned above. In 1532, he established the first hospital and community center for Indians in Santa Fé five miles southwest of Mexico City. The deed of donation Quiroga made for the hospital included lands, farms, country places, and cattle ranches. In 1533, a second hospital, Santa Fé de la Laguna, was opened at the northern end of Lake Patzcuaro. Finally, a third was founded in the city of Patzcuaro which contained a ward for the sick, quarters for their attendants, and special rooms for the Indian board of directors. Once a week, eight to ten Indians attended to the cleanliness and care of the sick. Each hospital grew into a large community center with homes for numerous families working in and around the institution. Eventually, these community centers included large living quarters

⁵¹ This point is developed in Amos Megged, "Social Disintegration and Religious Change in Indian Communities in Mesoamerica, 1565-1680" (under consideration, *Ethnohistory*).

⁵² Megged, "Social Disintegration and Religious Change."

surrounding the hospital, each of which housed eight or ten married men with their wives and children; each group was governed by the oldest man, and several groups were under the orders of the rector assisted by the principal and a board of directors elected for the year.⁵³

In 1565, Quiroga wrote detailed *ordenanzas*, or regulations, for the hospitals which, according to M.M. Lacas, put into practice the ideas of

fraternity, mutual help, common work, organization, and just distribution of wealth among the members of the cooperative and their children. Here we witness the extinction of pauperism and mendicancy, and the acquisition of common and personal habits of thriftiness.... They would set aside whatever was necessary for the hospital and the community. The rest... was stored up to be distributed to the poor.... If someone became scandalous or misbehaved, he was expelled from the community.⁵⁴

In the introduction to these *ordenanzas* Quiroga wrote:

My purpose has been, first of all, your eternal salvation, then your temporal welfare, your bodily support, and your peace and rest. I also had in mind that you might set a good example to others by conquering the natural indolence with which you are afflicted.⁵⁵

Quiroga's *ordenanzas* certainly embody contemporary European views of the "moral reformation for the sinful poor," according to which material support and relief for the needy should be preconditioned by a reeducation program and spiritual salvation from their vices.

⁵³ Juan José Moreno, *Fragments de la vida y virtudes de D. Vasco de Quiroga* (1766; reprint, Mexico City: Edición Morelia, 1939), 77.

⁵⁴ M.M. Lacas, "A Social Welfare Organizer in Sixteenth-Century New Spain: Don Vasco de Quiroga, First Bishop of Michoacán," *The Americas* 14 (1957): 57-86.

⁵⁵ Lacas, "A Social Welfare Organizer in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," 57-86.

During the mid-sixteenth century, efforts like those of Quiroga were gradually combined for the purpose of transforming the native community and its local institutions to meet the different goals of the mission, among them serving the needs of the poor. In 1551, for example, the Franciscans requested permission from Bishop Marroquín to designate an Indian community in the Valley of Guatemala as a place for teaching Indian orphans Christian doctrine and as a shelter for abandoned Indian women.⁵⁶ The dismal circumstances of the time made such educational shelters an attractive choice for the displaced.

But it was by offering welfare aid through the native *cofradías* that economic and social betterment could be directly managed by the local community. The European notion of the "good republic" undoubtedly lay behind the structure and meaning the Spanish clergy rendered to the Hispanic-Indian *cofradías* established in native communities beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century. In his classic work *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, Charles Gibson recognizes the *cofradía* as playing an important role in late sixteenth-century Indian life as both a parishioners' association and a financial institution, as well as a spiritual haven, which reinforced native collective identity and instilled "a sense of stability in a population seriously reduced in numbers and undergoing hardship of many kinds."⁵⁷ If their official mission was primarily religious, the *cofradías* soon proved to be particularly useful for institutionalizing charity and welfare, financing public offices and feasts, burying the dead at the local church, and recruiting men for collective labor according to traditional patterns of the *calpultin*.

In its combination of economic and spiritual purposes, the *cofradía* was probably a merger of the European religious confraternity and some predominant features of such late medieval Spanish rural brotherhoods as the Andalusian Mesta, the great association of cattle and sheep owners ruled by the aristocracy, which fused an economic enterprise with spiritual care for its members.⁵⁸ In his article on the

⁵⁶ Carta del obispo Francisco Marroquín al emperador, Guatemala, 20 March 1551, RAH, Colección Muñoz, vol. 87, fols. 53-53v.

⁵⁷ Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 127-30.

⁵⁸ On the characteristics of the Spanish *mesta* see Charles Julian Bishko, "The Andalusian Municipal Mestas in the Fourteenth through Sixteenth Centuries: Administrative and Social Aspects," in Charles Julian Bishko, ed., *Studies in Medieval*

confraternities and communities of the diocese of Lyons, Jean-Pierre Gutton has likewise shown how the capital of local confraternities of the Holy Spirit, which consisted of rents, lands, vines, houses, and the use of common lands, was closely tied to communal property and management. In the mid-seventeenth century, for example, when the confraternity of the Holy Spirit in Neuville-sur-Saone became extinct, all its possessions were transferred to a "poor relief department" of the entire community, managed by the curate. Gutton thus concludes that the confraternities "facilitated the consolidation of communal autonomy."⁵⁹

The *cofradías* were considered by the colonial church to be an effective social and religious mechanism for controlling "idolatrous" and "superstitious" practices and for converting and reeducating the Indians. Because of the direct influence of European poor relief, Spanish colonists also viewed the *cofradías* as an effective catalyst for the development of such communal property as livestock ranches and cotton fields, by which means the native population could improve its self-reliance and administer its own form of welfare. Nancy Farriss has discussed how the *cofradías* and the *caja de comunidad* (the community chest, or fund from which community resources were drawn for particular purposes) should be considered basically the same institution under different names.⁶⁰ However, the Indian *cofradías* of Mesoamerica undoubtedly featured distinct traits inherited from indigenous socioeconomic structures preserved in the *calpulli* framework, which can also be regarded as forms of mutual support. These traits included,

Spanish Frontier History (London: Varorium Reprints, 1980), 347-74.

⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Gutton, "Confraternities, Cures, and Communities in Rural Areas of the Diocese of Lyons under the Ancien Régime," in Von Greyerz, *Religion and Society*, 202-11.

⁶⁰ Farriss, *Maya Society*, 263-65. On the dual role of the Indian *cofradía* see, for example, Murdo J. MacLeod, "Ethnic Relations and Indian Society in the Province of Guatemala c. 1620-c. 1800," in *Spaniards and Indians in Southeastern Mesoamerica: Essays on the History of Ethnic Relations*, ed. Murdo J. MacLeod and Robert Wasserstrom (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 207; and Robert Hill, "Guachivales," *Mesoamerica* 11 (1986):226-50. Adriaan C. Van Oss discusses the eighteenth-century *cofradías* of Guatemala, relying mainly on Archbishop Cortés y Larraz's accounts in *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524-1821* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 89-91. See also Megged, *Exporting the Catholic Reformation*, chaps. 2 and 3.

among others, a variety of services levied regularly from *macehualtin* (commoners), such as the obligation of women to weave *mantas* from cotton harvested from the common *milpas*; the clearing of woodland; the sowing and harvesting by men of the *calpulli*; the regular supply of *tlamames* (porters) to carry heavy loads of merchandise to distant towns on the Pacific coast; and the enforced *derramas* (exaction) of fowl, cocoa, and wood from each household.⁶¹ All these traits fused indigenous and European-Catholic socioeconomic traits of lay brotherhoods within the new framework of the Indian *cofradía*.

Evidence of economic enterprises which developed within the framework of the *cofradía* in native Mesoamerica during the latter sixteenth century is scarce, but a few notable examples demonstrate their form and orientation. Two are found in Zoque communities in Chiapa on the southeastern border of New Spain, where by 1571 the local *cofradía* of Tecpatlán possessed a cocoa plantation and a ranch of mules and cows, while in Copainala, another Zoque Dominican parish, the *cofradía* owned a ranch of horses and mules.⁶² In 1575, Chiapa de Indios, also southeast of New Spain, owned two ranches of four thousand sheep managed by the local *cofradía*,⁶³ and in 1576 the *cofradía* of the Maya-Tzeltal community of Comitlán owned a ranch on its outskirts, which consisted of 520 sheep, fifty cows, and fifty mules, a paramount economic community asset by any standard.⁶⁴ During the 1570s in the Valley of Guatemala, *cofradías* also established their own particular modes of charity based on the management of common lands in the communities of former slaves, reserving certain portions of these lands as well as orchards for poor relief.⁶⁵ Thus, the economic mecha-

⁶¹ Relación de las derramas, peticiones y otros autos...., 12 March 1582, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 56, fols. 174r-175v.

⁶² Testimony given by the fiscal of the *audiencia*, Juan de Vitoria, 28 August 1581, in Relación de las derramas, peticiones y otros autos...., 12 March 1582, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 56, fols. 200r, 287r.

⁶³ Relación de las derramas, peticiones y otros autos...., 12 March 1582, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 56, fol. 380v.

⁶⁴ Testimony given by the cabildo of Comitlán, 1581, in Relación de la derramas, peticiones y otros autos...., 12 March 1582, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 56, fol. 190v.

⁶⁵ Juan de Arguyo, defensor de los indios de los asientos y barrios de Santo Domingo, San Francisco, la Merced y milpas del valle y comarca de la ciudad de Santiago, contra Lic. Antonio Mendiola, fiscal de Su Magestad, sobre que los

nisms of this institution adopted by the Indians in the sixteenth century served as effective channels to care for their own well-being. This aim clearly coincided with what the Spanish clergy who established the *cofradías* regarded as crucial to the "restructuring" of the native realm: a self-sustaining relief from both spiritual and material anxieties.

The implementation of poor relief in Spanish colonial ordinances and local policy making in Mesoamerica had several crucial variants which are linked to sixteenth-century European practices concerning the poor, although modified to suit the colonial situation. First, the implementation of relief regulae was often reassessed due to the impact of colonial anxieties about the ability of indigenous communities to remain self-supportive in the face of pandemics. Second, colonial welfare policies were affected by the socioeconomic situation in Indian communities, especially in times of plagues and famine, as well as by Spanish territorial expansion into the Indian countryside. Finally, Spanish colonial regulae regarding welfare should not be regarded as a "social policy," mainly because such policy was heavily influenced by the differentiation between Hispanicized indigenous elites and the rest of the indigenous population.

To address the last point first, it is important to note that beginning in the 1570s, indigenous Hispanicized elites were in fact regarded by royal officials, encomenderos, and parish priests as worthy of special status and esteem due to their close cooperation with the colonial regime and to their absorption of Hispanic-Catholic cultural, religious, and moral tenets. They were therefore granted a variety of economic exemptions and symbols of prestige such as the privilege to ride horses and carry swords. Both the worldly and spiritual prerogatives granted to them were quite distinct from those of "insubordinate" indigenous commoners (*macehuatlin*), who were viewed, in their lowly ways of living and behaving, as still far from fulfilling the ideal of the reformed poor. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, for example, parish priests in the Indian communities of Chiapa refrained from administering the last communion to Indian commoners or attending to their burials, due to their favoritism towards local

indios...fuesen relevados de pagar tributo, 1570, AGI, Justicia, leg. 292, núm. 3, ramo 2, fols. 197r-201v.

Hispanicized elites.⁶⁶ Such distinctions made between indigenous social groups no doubt had a profound impact on colonial welfare.

As for the effect of disasters on welfare policies, relief at the local level generally came in the aftermath of crisis, usually pandemics, and was often implemented in the form of tax exemptions. Thus, beginning in the mid-1550s, it became routine for the poor and those over the age of fifty as well as *alcaldes*, *regidores*, *alguaciles*, and *teopantlactl* (those serving in the local church) to be exempt. Moreover, widows and widowers under the age of fifty paid only half the normal tribute assigned to a nuclear family; the same applied to bachelors over the age of sixteen who were not living with their parents. In 1553, after witnessing the devastation wrought by pandemics in Guatemala, Bishop Marroquín instructed that the poor be exempt from offering alms to the church.⁶⁷ By 1562, as waves of epidemics resulted in the demographic decline in the Indian populations of Mesoamerica to their lowest historical levels,⁶⁸ the crown instructed the *audiencia* of Guatemala to grant Indian communities most affected by the plagues a sum of two reales per capita "to be able to recuperate."⁶⁹ The *audiencia* followed suit in 1582 by publishing a decree of its own which abolished the duty of paying tribute for deceased and absent members in the Indian communities.⁷⁰ During a 1623 visit to Soconusco on the Pacific coast, the bishop of Guatemala, Fray Juan Zapata, wrote to the Crown that he recommended a number of reforms

due to the grim circumstances of the plagues: that the poor should not pay the tributes of those who had died,

⁶⁶ For further discussion of this point, see Megged, *Exporting the Catholic Reformation*, chap. 2.

⁶⁷ Carta de Fr. Tomás de la Torre al emperador, Santo Domingo de Guatemala, 16 August 1554, RAH, Colección Muñoz, vol. 87, fol. 118.

⁶⁸ Between 1540 and 1582, about two-thirds of the indigenous population in Guatemala was wiped out by pandemics. The slow process of demographic recuperation in the Indian communities probably began only in the 1640s. See Thomas T. Veblen, "Declinación de la población indígena en Totonicapán, Guatemala," *Mesoamerica* 3 (1982):26-66.

⁶⁹ Cuentas de tributos...., 1562, AGI, Guatemala, leg. 45, fols. 17v-19r.

⁷⁰ Información por la real audiencia de Guatemala sobre la relación que vuestra magestad en su real consejo hizo de los malos tratamientos y excesos que en esta provincia se hacían contra los indios naturales, 7 November 1582, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 114, fols. 27r-34v.

or fled from the communities; they should pay only what they were able to obtain from their harvests; they should not be obliged to wander off to other regions, looking for odd jobs to sustain themselves; and that the sick should not be forced to partake in the "personal services" to the Spaniards.⁷¹

In 1675, Fray Juan Terazno del Barco, parish priest of Teopisca, Amatenango, and Aguacatenango in the province of Chiapa, recommended an exemption from personal services and tribute of the entire populations of Teopisca and Amatenango so that they might provide mutual assistance and "charitable works" to those of Aguacatenango, who had been severely struck by pestilence.⁷²

Nevertheless, economic circumstances in both Spain and the colony conspired to cause these tax and labor exemptions to be revoked. The demographic decline in Mesoamerica was followed by a severe shortage of grain as well as of profitable cacao,⁷³ and by a sharp increase in prices.⁷⁴ This crisis worsened in the colonies when a decline in grain production in Spain resulted in the Cortes' petition to the crown to restrict grain exports to the New World.⁷⁵ Local markets were unable to provide all the food needed for a growing Spanish population, and the demand that the *audiencia* of Guatemala should order Indian communities to increase their grain production was futile since the decimated population could no longer supply the *servicio ordinario* of men to work the fields.⁷⁶ From the 1560s

⁷¹ Bishop Fr. Juan Zapata to the Crown, 31 May 1623, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 156, fols. 3r-7v.

⁷² Autos que siguen en el pueblo de Aguacatenango de la provincia de Chiapa sobre relevados de servicio personal para asistir en la fábrica de la iglesia, 1675, AGCA, A.1.11.25, exp. 653, leg. 64, entire.

⁷³ By 1600, for instance, the Suchitepéques region in Guatemala, where most of the cacao plantations were located, witnessed the lowest level of cacao production in recorded history. Testimonio de los autos tocantes a los juzgados de milpa, 28 November 1600, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 14, fols. 5v-8r.

⁷⁴ Between 1558 and 1575, an abundance of letters sent to the Council of the Indies and to the Spanish crown enumerate grievances and the effects of the price increase of grain on the colony. See Numerous Letters, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 10.

⁷⁵ Vassberg, *Land and Society*, 164; Lynch, *Spain Under the Hapsburgs*, 1:133.

⁷⁶ Cuentas de tributos, 1562, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, leg. 45, fols. 40v-41r, 45v, 54r.

onward, therefore, welfare for "poor" Indians was perceived by Spanish *vecinos* as hindering the betterment of their own people most injured by the economic crisis.⁷⁷

The results of this attitude can be seen in the following cases. In 1562, the Dominican provincial of Chiapa and Guatemala, Fray Tomás de la Torre, protested in a letter to Philip II that none of those who had been classified as "disabled"—neither the sick, the old, nor those serving the church—were now exempt from tribute by the *encomenderos*.⁷⁸ His protest must have gone unheeded, however, for in a measure partly designed to increase the crown's income, which had been badly affected by the demographic collapse, the *audiencia* published a decree in 1570 which stated that all those formerly exempt from tribute should pay at least four reales a year "to do justice to those who carried most of the burden."⁷⁹

To offer another example, in a royal decree of 1559 the former slaves of the Valley of Guatemala were exempted from personal service and from paying tribute to the crown due to their recognized condition as "disabled." This ordinance was utterly ignored by the town authorities of Santiago de Guatemala for more than fifteen years, however, until the former slaves presented their case for exemption at the court. After two separate sessions, it was finally ruled in 1574 that widows and widowers, the very poor, and the old, in addition to the local Indian authorities, were to be exempt from tribute.⁸⁰

Another manifestation of economic crisis in the colony was the lifting of the prohibition against encroachment on Indian common lands surrounding Maya communities. Like their contemporaries in Castilla and Andalucía, many *encomenderos* turned to investing in land, which provided relative security against poverty. Prior to the 1560s, Indian

⁷⁷ Cristóbal Lobo contra Lic. Alonso López de Cerrato, sobre ciertos repartimientos de indios, memorial de los pobres y viejos conquistadores, vecinos de Guatemala, 1555, AGI, Justicia, leg. 283, fols. 57r-62v.

⁷⁸ Carta de Fray Tomás de la Torre y otros religiosos de la orden de Santo Domingo a Felipe II, avisando que hay que remediar la ruina que amenaza los indios de la provincia de Chiapa, por los grandes tributos que se les exigen, 1 April 1562, AHN, Diversos\Indias, document #182.

⁷⁹ Juan de Arguyo contra Lic. Antonio Mendiola, 1570, AGI, Justicia, leg. 292, núm. 3, ramo 2, fols. 201r-208v.

⁸⁰ Juan de Arguyo contra Lic. Antonio Mendiola, 1570, AGI, Justicia, leg. 292, núm. 3, ramo 2, fols. 201r-208v.

arable lands were used by Spaniards only for cattle grazing; at this time they were now cultivated to raise desirable cash crops, especially since the demographic decline in Indian communities made it easier for them to acquire vacant lands from native lords.⁸¹ After 1562, therefore, Spanish presence on the peripheries of main towns and within the boundaries of Indian communities extended from the valleys of Chiapa and Grijalva in the northwest to the Golfo Dulce in the southeastern part of the district. The valleys of Petapa and Canales around Lake Amatitlán became populated by Spaniards who had moved out of the city of Santiago de Guatemala, settling on Indian lands where they cultivated mainly *pan llevar* (wheat) and indigo, and founded sugar mills and cattle ranches. As a result of this situation, the communal cultivation of cotton, wheat, and maize by Indian *cofradías* previously established by religious orders for the purposes of Christianization, maintenance of common property, and provision of welfare, gave way in the 1570s and 80s to the emergence of separate *estancias* and farms expropriated by the Dominican priories, where Indian men and women were employed.⁸² This same phenomenon occurred during this period in the valleys of Mexico, Atlixco, and Cuernavaca in New Spain, owing to similar circumstances of grain shortages.⁸³

This study has attempted to reexamine the issue of welfare and poor relief in Mesoamerica in light of the profound impact of the sixteenth-century European poor laws polemic and the moral reformation of the poor on Spanish colonial policy, thought, and action concerning the Indians. It demonstrates how Spanish colonial discourse, in Mesoamerica in particular and Latin America in general, reiterated contemporary European moral and ethical categories describing peasants and the poor as needing to be reformed of their low habits, as well as how the Spanish imposed prescribed social programs for the

⁸¹ On rural expansion during this period in other areas of Mesoamerica, see François Chevalier, *La Formation des Grandes domaines au Mexique, terre et société aux XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1952), 305-06, 311-12; William B. Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 174-80; Ronald Spores, *The Mixtecs in Ancient and Colonial Times* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 132-33, 145.

⁸² Testimony by Luis Gómez, *alcalde mayor* of Guatemala, 28 August 1581, in *Relación de las derramas, peticiones y otros autos...*, 12 March 1582, AGI, Guatemala, leg. 56, fol. 287v.

⁸³ See Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant*, 198.

poor in Europe onto local realities across the Atlantic. In contrast with past intellectual historians of Utopianism who failed to distinguish between intellectual and political theories of welfare and their realization in the New World, this study instead approaches the subject from the angle of social and cultural history, emphasizing the dialogue established early in the colonial period between indigenous forms of assistance and charity and colonial relief structures superimposed by the Spanish.

As has been shown, European concepts and frameworks concerning welfare became fused in Aztec and Maya societies with preexisting native conceptions of charity and mutual aid. The fusion was evident, particularly within the sphere of the local *calpultin* and the evolving indigenous structures of the Hispanic-Catholic *cofradías*. The basic theory behind colonial programs was that of the European disciplined urban republic, which implemented programs to teach the Indians, as it did the European poor, how to become self-supportive and thus more useful to society at large. Spanish colonial jurists and parish priests believed that by offering welfare through the native *cofradías*, economic and social betterment could be directly managed through the common enterprise of the local community. In contrast with Europe, however, welfare in Mesoamerica cannot be regarded as a stable implementation of a "social policy," due to the fact that relief *regulae* were constantly changed or abandoned in order to adapt to Spanish economic concerns in the colonies, as well as to maintain a marked cultural differentiation between Hispanitized indigenous elites and the rest of the indigenous population.