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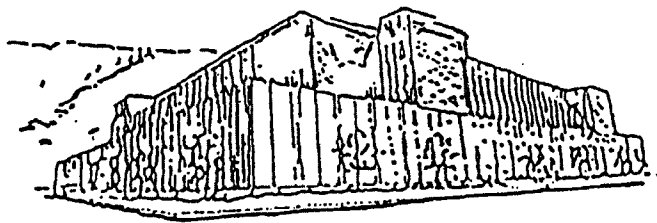
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QUETZALCOATL WITHOUT JESUS CHRIST

by

Steven P. Hartman

The University of Montana

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

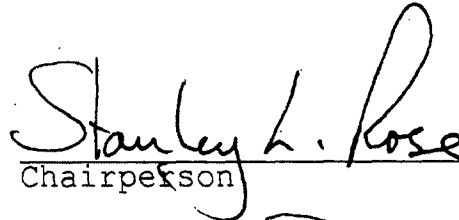
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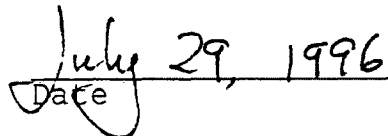
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Hartman, Steven P., M.A., July 1996

Spanish

Conversion of the Nahua to Christianity by syncretism.

Director: Prof. Stanley Rose



The evangel clergy, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Augustinians converted the Nahua to Christianity and the by product is syncretism. The legends dealing with Quetzalcoatl are heavily influenced by Christianity and European thought. This was caused by conscious or unconscious intrusions on the part of the clergy when they recorded the legends. This study will seek to identify these Christian and European thoughts in order to come to a better idea about what Quetzalcoatl signified prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nahua¹ god Quetzalcoatl² and the Christian god Jesus Christ exhibit points of comparison. The myths, rituals, and symbols of these gods seem to coincide. This is due to the fact that what we know of the myths of Quetzalcoatl comes primarily from post-Conquest Nahua accounts of his life, accounts which were possibly recorded about five hundred years after his supposed rule. These accounts were tainted by Spanish missionaries and Spanish-educated natives who were studying Quetzalcoatl through the magnifying glass of Christ. Even though not all of the myths, rituals, or symbols of the Nahuas or Christians were preserved in the writings of the Spanish missionaries, or the Spanish-educated natives, one may recognize the imposed similarities among the two gods.

Several sources help to explain myths, symbols, and rituals. One is The Power of Myth, by Joseph Campbell;

¹ The term Nahua refers to the culture that speaks the Nahuatl language and applies to more people that inhabited Central Mexico than the vague term "Aztecs," which is applied to the pre-Conquest Mexica empire.

² There are different ways that the name of this mythical god have been spelled. Gabriel de Rojas spelled it "Quecalcoatl" in his text Relación de Cholula, José de Acosta spelled it "Quetzhaalcoatl" (Historia natural y moral de las Indias), and León Diaz Cardenas spelled it "Quecadquaal" (El conquistador anónimo). Fray Bernardino de Sahagún spelled it "Quetzalcóatl" (Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España), and so have the majority of the scholars that I have researched, yet many omitted the accent.

another, Primal Myths: Creating the World by Barbara Sproul. The history of the conversion of the Nahua will be narrated from different sources: The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572, by Robert Ricard; The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America, edited by Richard Greenleaf; and The Slippery Earth: Aztec-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico, by Louise Burkhart; as well as Colección de tratados, 1552-1553, by Bartolomé de Las Casas; and Cartas y documentos, by Hernan Cortés. Some elements of the Quetzalcoatl myth which seem to coincide with similar ones of Jesus Christ will be taken from Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España, by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún; Historia de las Indias de Nueva España y islas de tierra firme, by Fray Diego Durán; the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, and the Codex Vaticanus A.

The focus of this study is to reveal the imposed Christian similarities of the myths, symbols, and rituals of the Nahua myths of Quetzalcoatl. Perceiving these myths of Quetzalcoatl as being syncretized with the Christian religion has not been widely discussed among the broad spectrum of intellectuals in academia. This study presents evidence to support the theory that indigenous religious beliefs of the Nahua have been changed due to their changed circumstances and altered perceptions.

Chapter 1

MYTH, RITUAL, SYMBOL, SYNCRETISM, AND QUETZALCOATL

The first missionaries to Mexico consciously or unconsciously assisted the Nahua in the syncretization process by Christianizing the god Quetzalcoatl. The priests were fulfilling one of Christ's commandments: to preach the gospel to all the world in order to prepare the people for Christ's second-coming. As a result of the priests' ways of looking at pre-Colombian gods and by their own particular form of Christianity, they recorded their best understanding of their perception of these gods, such as Quetzalcoatl.

The fusion of Christian and Nahua mythological characteristics is very evident in the writings of the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. For example, Motolinía, an early Franciscan missionary, portrays Hernán Cortés as a Christ-like deity who had returned to his throne with power and glory to rule the world (75-76). When the importance of myth, ritual, symbol, syncretism, prophetic tradition, and temporal distortion are understood, one may realize how and why the friars Christianized the myth of Quetzalcoatl, which resulted in syncretism for the Nahua.

Myths embody attitudes toward reality and organize the way we perceive facts and understand ourselves and the world. Whether or not we adhere consciously to them, they remain pervasively influential. Yet, the power of a specific myth is

not as important to understand as the power of myth itself (Sproul 1).

Joseph Campbell states in Power of Myth that myths are pieces of information from ancient times that coincide with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and sustained religions over the millennia. They have to do with deep inner problems, mysteries, and thresholds of passage (2). Campbell explains that myths are more than just stories about gods as personifications of a motivating power. They can be a value system that function in human life and in the universe, which encompass the powers of the body and of nature. They are metaphors of spiritual potentiality in the human being; the same powers that animate individual life animate the life of the world (28).

Just as the Quetzalcoatl myth is linked to the Nahua society, there are other myths and gods that correspond with other societies. There are, in fact, two totally different classifications of mythology. There is the mythology that relates people to nature and to the natural world; and then there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking the individual to a particular society (28).

There is no escaping our dependence on myth. Without it, we cannot determine what things are, what to do with them, or how to be in relation to them. The fundamental structures of understanding that myths provide, even

though in part dictated by matter and instinct, are nevertheless essentially arbitrary because they describe not just the 'real' world of 'fact' but our perception and experience of that world (Sproul 2).

It is important to remember that the truth of myth is existential and not necessarily theoretical and that myths are true to the extent that they are believed (3).

In a sense, myths are self-fulfilling prophecies: they create facts out of the values they propound.... As circumstances change and perceptions alter, cultures constantly revise their myths. (3)

Myths are an integral part of religion. They proclaim a central reality and then build a structure of valuation around themselves. They also clarify the distinction between the worldly and the world. In demonstrating how the temporal realm of change and flux reveals the structure and way of the timeless, Sproul suggests that myths try to show how everything profane and ordinary in itself is really sacred and extraordinary (23).

Myths are not just static pronouncements, pictures, or images that might be meaningful to the already convinced or meaningless to the unenlightened. Rather, they are whole stories or dramas that are placed in the familiar world of time and space that attempt to reveal, through their common details and particulars, truths that are uncommon and

universal (14).

What the myths do is to assert that the structure of the absolute pervades the relative: the Holy is the *ground* of being. And further they argue that the ways of the absolute are appropriate models for the relative: they are eternal, abundantly powerful and vital, endlessly productive of being, existence, and life. (Sproul 23)

If for some reason myths in themselves do not make clear this proclamation of an absolute pattern present in all aspects of relativity, their importance in the circle of life is often apparent in the use of rituals. "Ritual is the other half of the mythic statement: when myths speak only of the absolute reality, rituals ground it in the relative" (Sproul 25-26). A ritual can also be defined as a re-enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, one is actually experiencing a mythological life. It is through that participation that one can learn to live spiritually (Campbell, Power of Myth 228).

A myth is also known as "a manifestation in symbolic images, in metaphorical images" (46). Symbols are important in myths because they help to express mythological truth. The successful use of symbols requires a certain kind of consent. Sproul alleges, "They have to know what you are talking about; they have to understand both the fact of the person you are referring to and the value you ascribe to him, or else the

symbol is meaningless" (14). However, symbols are not always easy to understand and they may be related to their referents in very complex ways. Sproul states, "Based on common experience and shared history, we build up a wide range of conceptual associations and use these to enrich language and suggest more involved relations between things" (14). Sooner or later we perceive underlying similarities in the structures of such relations and create metaphors to express them (14).

Myths were conveyed by oral tradition in societies that were preliterate. Manuscripts and oral traditions were the tools for transmitting the memory of a people, such as the Nahua, and the fundamentals of their religion (Quiñones, Codex xi). The Spaniards gathered information about the customs of the conquered Nahua through oral tradition and wrote them down. This in turn assisted missionaries in their task of evangelization by providing written guides for recognizing and extirpating indigenous beliefs and practices. The missionaries in effect learned about another culture in order to better eradicate it. Dr. Eloise Quiñones Keber states that "there is no comparable situation in which missionaries copied the religious books of the converts; in which the colonizer replicated, sometimes verbatim, the works of the colonized," producing a hybrid document of indigenous and European beliefs (109).

The historian Jan Vansina has confronted the accusation

that oral traditions are regarded as unhistorical because they are an unpure source subject to temporal distortion. Vansina believes that oral traditions are a source of historical information just like any other source and that distortions of fact can best be discovered by using the comparative approach. The comparative approach confronts the oral tradition with other types of historical evidence such as archaeology, written documents, and linguistic analysis. If an oral tradition corroborates other sources of evidence, it is unlikely that history has been distorted through oral transmission. The comparative method alone does not usually "establish that one source contains more 'truth' than another" (138). In terms of the conscious or unconscious biases of their authors, even written sources can also distort events. "Each type of historical source not only has its own limitations, but also its own particular way of seeing things--its own particular bias" (141). Vansina claims that history "is always an interpretation" and "no more than a calculation of probabilities" (183, 185).

The Nahua priests who conveyed their religious information primarily through oral communication, and by some pictorial means, explaining the image and its meaning, the human and the divine, were pushed aside by newer interpreters, the friars. The friars mediated between indigenous and foreign worlds, that of the Nahua and European, who desired to

dominate as well as understand another people (Quiñones, Codex 111). Although the pictorial content of the manuscripts would present indigenous material, the annotators did not always attempt to communicate indigenous viewpoints. Usually it was the reaction of the missionary writer to the material represented in the pictorial. Also, one of the main purposes of annotating pictorial manuscripts may not have been to preserve information about the indigenous world but to interpret it to a Spanish audience (127). The Codex Telleriano-Remensis and the Florentine Codex are examples of this.

In addition to the considerations already mentioned about the problematic nature of early ethnohistorical sources in general, one must account for distinctions based on geographic, social, and religious-ritual factors. Manuscripts must be analyzed to try to acquire the original data preserved in the sources, and analyze related information extracted from other sources. At the same time, one must take into consideration the circumstances surrounding the making and use of the manuscripts.

Before the analysis can begin, it is important to understand the cyclical notion of time of the Nahua in order to understand their beliefs. The cyclical calendar of the Nahua not only counted the days, months, and years, but also when and which god revealed the prophecies announced to them.

The structure of their chronometry made it easy for them to remember traditions dating back for many years (134).

The Nahua calendar, a cycle of 52 years, was part of an ancient, complex, and wide-spread scheme for conceptualizing the temporal aspects of their world. At the end of the 52 years, a temporal cycle concluded. The completion of a 52-year period was a critical time for the Nahua because they believed that the world would be destroyed at the end of such a period (134). Their calendar represented the natural cycles and seasonal shifts governed by these cycles. It was through public ceremonies that the calendar regulated the social, economic, and religious aspects of Nahua life. The rituals and ceremonial order began again with each cycle. During the ceremonies, such as those performed honoring Tezcatlipoca, dough was shaped in the form of the deity and eaten (148-149). This type of communion is said to reinforce the resemblances between indigenous and Christian rituals.

The cyclical calendar acted as a divinatory handbook that expressed a specifically religious structuring of time. The natives believed that meaningful behavior and success was achieved by correspondence with this mystic temporal pattern (153). With their cyclical notion of time and history, the Nahua cultures emphasized structure at the expense of individuality in their myths.

Prophetic tradition, the manner in which the mythological

traditions of the world have been developed, maintained, and transferred--usually orally--by prophets and priests, many of whom have actually experienced and revered it, also explains the ease with which the Nahua adopted Spanish religious and political institutions (Campbell, The Masks of God 54). The natives tended to synthesize the two cultural patterns causing the Nahua religion to be perceived as a mixture of pre-Hispanic and European elements (Burkhart 7). The Christian elements were transformed consciously or unconsciously by the friars in order to make sense of it in a Nahua context (188). Edmonson defines the anthropological term for this acculturation phenomenon as *syncretism*, which is "the integration of selected aspects of two or more historically distinct traditions," or the amalgamation of previously existing systems, such as that of the Nahua and Christianity, that have been created by the reconciliation and union of a host of different principles, practices, and beliefs and making them part of another culture's religion (Nativism, Syncretism 192). For example, the Christian characteristics that were mixed with existing beliefs of the Quetzalcoatl myths have been presented with the inclination that it is actual Mesoamerican culture and not contaminated by the friars. Studies by Burkhart and others have shown that the processing of Nahua religion by the friars, whether consciously or unconsciously, produced a syncretic religion.

According to Edmonson, nativism is the prophetic tradition that ensures the conscious cyclical revival of selected aspects of a culture. For the Nahua, nativism and syncretic beliefs are calendrical in motivation, in that the past serves as the model for the present and the future. The heterogeneity of elements in Nahua folklore results from the processes of syncretism and temporal distortion. Syncretism integrates beliefs and practices of different origins and meanings and then made them part of Nahua history. Temporal distortion (the changing of things such as meaning and purpose through time) brings events into the timeless paradigm of myth and ritual. Elements from several epochs and continents are free to vary a bit within--but not between--categories in this structure. Therefore, the different versions of a myth or ritual represent alternate combinations of these elements (180).

We can use nativism, syncretism, and the cyclical concept of time as lenses to see and discuss Mesoamerican myths. Temporal distortion, the treatment of sequential events as structurally equivalent and interchangeable, is a logical consequence of the Nahua concept of time. Syncretism is the mechanism by which events from an alien tradition were absorbed into the generalized paradigm of ethnic culture.

The Nahua contribution to their cyclical notion of time and history was reinforced by a prophetic tradition. The

Nahua believed that all ethnic cultures could be reduced to a common structure that serves as an epistemological paradigm for understanding new ethnic cultures when they arise, because to them history repeats itself. For example, this information comprises the theory of knowledge of the Nahua, by way of their cyclical calendar, which is their metahistorical model for interpreting recurrent events.

Myths are a part of the functional context against which events must be evaluated. The same paradigm also serves as a guide for future occurrences; therefore, epistemology can be distinguished from ethics. Prophecy mediates between the past and the future, between myth and history, and also between ethics and epistemology. A myth is not plainly the "fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society" (Lévi-Strauss 22). It is, however, a dynamic theory of history that is constantly working to make events conform to an ethical paradigm (22).

The cyclical conformity of the Nahua to syncretize other myths, rituals, and symbols, which they had done with the Mesoamerican solar cult and the ancient practice of human sacrifice, possibly aided them in their acceptance of Christianity (Burkhart 4). The myths, rituals, and symbols of Quetzalcoatl are important to study in order to analyze how the missionaries consciously or unconsciously Christianized the myth, rituals, and symbols which possibly assisted in the

conversion.

Quetzalcoatl had various titles according to the special attributes or functions which were uppermost in the mind of the worshipper. He was not the principle Nahua deity, but was seen as a secondary god after Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca, and Tlaloc. Like other prominent gods in early mythologies, Quetzalcoatl was known by numerous names and had many attributes. His many names, what they symbolize, myths about him, and the rituals that he performed, which were mostly transferred by oral tradition from the cyclical calendar and subject to temporal distortion, will be discussed.

According to Durán, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl means our prince the feathered serpent (Book of the Gods 90). Clendinnen mentions in her text, Aztecs, that Quetzalcoatl's name is symbolic and the first part of it, *quetzalli*, literally means a large, handsome green feather, such as was highly prized by the Nahua. Therefore, the name evolved into meaning, in a metaphorical sense, as precious, beloved, beautiful, and admirable (40,120). The latter part of his Nahua name, *coatl*, means a serpent (Ixtlilxochitl 23).

Quetzalcoatl is represented in some contexts as a snake because of his coming back to life from the "dead land", as revealed in the Codex Chimalpopoca (Bierhorst 145-146). It is possible that this image was chosen because of the snake's ability to periodically change its skin. Chardonneau-Lassay

suggests that a changing of skin symbolized new life (54). Quiñones states that it is a union of the terrestrial and celestial spheres, thus symbolizing fertility and creativity to the Nahuatl (Codex 181). Sometimes a human face is seen peering out of the jaws of sculptured feathered serpents, symbolizing emergence and rebirth, which can be seen in the Musée de L'Homme, Paris (fig. 9).

Quetzalcoatl is also referred to as Ce Acatl, which literally means "1 Reed" and refers to the first Nahuatl calendrical cycle supposedly created by Quetzalcoatl (Sahagún, vol. 1 1969: 330). A fusion also appears to have existed in Cholula between the wind god Ehecatl and Quetzalcoatl. Durán alleges that Quetzalcoatl was also known as Ehecatl, the Wind; the Nahuatl word for whirlwind was *ehecoatl*, literally "wind snake." The twisting, whipping motion of the tornado, probably also explains the wind jewel, which was Quetzalcoatl's device worn on his breast as identification. The wind jewel was a transversely sectioned cut of a marine conch shell emphasizing the whorl (Historia 170). He is also referred to as lord of the dawn, or the morning star, and was associated with Venus, (Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, a culture hero of the Toltecs), the master of civilized arts, of the calendar and water, and of divination (Motolinía, Memoriales 56-57).

In his book, The Aztecs, People of the Sun, Alfonso Caso notes that when one deals with alien religious systems in

general, usually there is a real danger of oversimplifying the cosmography. Caso states that Quetzalcoatl was also known as the god of monsters (23-27). Quetzalcoatl was known to be a full grown man, and tall of stature (Durán, Historia 9). He is fully bearded, usually barefoot, and clothed in a long white robe (Ixtlilxochitl 25).

Quetzalcoatl was very reserved, who established fasting, and to whom the Nahua sacrificed only partridges, doves, and game (Motolinía, Historia 8-10). He did not believe in performing human sacrifices. He also prohibited, with considerable success, war, robbery, and murders (Las Casas, Apologética 326).

The Codex Chimalpopoca tells how Quetzalcoatl towered above all other gods and was appealed to as the creator of heaven, earth and the universe (Bierhorst 144-149). Quetzalcoatl is also considered to be a god of light because he is thought of as the one who swallowed the sun each evening and disgorged it each dawn. This symbolized the rising and setting sun at the horizon. Kaufman states that since this is how snakes eat their prey, the idea of swallowing beings whole relates to his name and the action that snakes perform, which illustrates how the Nahua "incorporated observations from nature into their conceptions of the sacred" (Quiñones, Chipping Away 168). Because he was identified with the sun, he was also "the Giver of Life" as well as "the Preserver of

Life" (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears xxi).

Some legends have Quetzalcoatl born of Chimalman. He was conceived when his mother swallowed a jade or precious green stone called *chalchihuitl*. Quetzalcoatl's father was *Iztac Mixcoatl* or white cloud-snake (Motolinía, Historia 9-10). Quiñones states that another echo of biblical passages inserted by colonial scribes pertaining to Jesus Christ is in the Codex Vaticanus A. The commentator seems to relate the Quetzalcoatl material with Christian allusions, calling him a reformer sent by his father into a world so sinful that it had been destroyed many times (165).

One of the stories of Quetzalcoatl states that he was with the Toltecs. In the time of the Toltecs, a renowned priest named Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, who was not born in any country known to the Nahuas, but appeared to them as a stranger. His fame spread throughout the Toltec empire. The residents of Tula petitioned to have him reside in their city and rule over them and to reform or renew the cult that he already had there. He agreed, and established a revived and reformed version of his cult in Tula (Durán, Historia 10-11).

The history of Tula, recounted by Franciscan Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España, describes the prosperity that occurred while Quetzalcoatl ruled. Sahagún mentions that the person who bore the name of the great feathered serpent and his supporters

received an overabundance of crops that exceeded their normal growth size, and that they became very rich because of him. Sahagún stresses that they had everything they needed, precious jewels and metals, such as silver and gold, and all they could ever eat or drink (vol. 1 1969: 278-279).

Most accounts reveal that Quetzalcoatl abstained from having sexual relations with all women, therefore following absolute chastity (Burkhart 74). The priests of his cult, abiding by their master's example, also practiced abstinence. The presence of this great god, Quetzalcoatl, and the astonishing new features in his penitential cult, proved to be divisive. The cult of the young warrior god Tezcatlipoca was also prominent in Tula, and it was centered on the act of human sacrifice. Quetzalcoatl despised the shedding of blood and proclaimed that, for his god, only the sacrifice of butterflies, snakes, and birds would take place in his temple where he prayed, performed penance, and fasted (Durán, Historia 11).

Thus, according to Durán, the new cult was severely penitential. However, strong opposition came from the other cults of Tula that were more congenial to the warriors' lodges in the city. This created a great deal of religious tension as well as political unrest in the outlying areas of the empire (11). Knowing that he and his followers were going to be ousted soon, Quetzalcoatl sang a farewell song, expressing

his deep anguish. As he sang, all of his attendants were similarly filled with anguish and wept (Galicia 142).

Quetzalcoatl and his allies were later cast out of Tula after the tension in the city became too great (Durán, Historia 11). He called all of his attendants to him and wept with them, and then they started off on their journey (12). The void created by the expulsion of him and his multitude depleted the population and resources of the city to such an extent that it was practically dormant and leaderless for almost a decade (Sahagún, vol. 1 1969:288-289).

Sahagún says that Quetzalcoatl's departure magically and instantly ruined the splendor of the great city. The groves of cacao trees turned into spiny mesquite, and the exquisite birds that had fluttered through the groves flew away before him, down to the coastal lowlands never to return. The treasures Quetzalcoatl had gathered for the city were consumed by the earth, and his jeweled house was burned to ashes (288).

As Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl moved east and south with his following, he performed miracles and named the great mountains on his route. One of the accounts has him finally reaching the beaches of the Gulf coast where it is said that he was distraught, wept, built a great pyre, and threw himself into the flames. His heart then flew upward from the conflagration. It appeared as a golden spark to become the morning star, Venus (Galicia 144). After he died, he dwelt in

the underworld, in Mictlán. When he reappeared, the feathered serpent was enthroned as a god (Galicia 145). Quiñones states that "the Mesoamerican underworld was not regarded as a place of punishment for 'sin' but merely one of the final abodes for the spirits of persons who had died a natural death" (Codex 183).

Another ending that contradicts this myth has Quetzalcoatl leaving in a fleet of canoes made from snakes for Tlapallan, which is the land over the eastern waters that is Yucatán today (Sahagún, vol. 1 1969: 291). The commentator in the Codex Vaticanus A states that before Quetzalcoatl disappeared into the sea, he prophesied the annihilation of the world when he returned, alluding "possibly to Jesus' prophecy on the day he 'disappeared' that his return would coincide with the destruction of the world" (Quiñones, Codex 166).

Ixtlilxochitl writes that Quetzalcoatl journeyed from city to city after leaving Tula, and arrived at Cholula. He lived there for twenty years and was remembered as being most chaste and considered "justo, santo y bueno" (470). Quetzalcoatl taught them by deed and word "el camino de la virtud y evitandoles los vicios y pecados, dando leyes y buena doctrina" (470).

Since he was known to be the first who adored and set up the cross, he was *Tonacaquahitl*, "our tree of food/flesh"

(Ixtlilxochitl 470). The cross was sacred to him as lord of the four winds. It was not the Latin cross, but that of the Greeks, which has four short, equilateral arms. Many of these crosses were painted on the mantle which he wore in the picture writings (Fig. 5), and are sometimes encountered engraved on sacred jades along with other symbols that relate to him.

According to the beliefs of the Nahuas, there had been four ages and each age had died out when the sun died. At the end of the first age, mankind was eaten by jaguars. At the end of the second age, mankind was swept off the earth by a great wind and then they turned into monkeys. The end of the third age brought fire that transformed mankind into turkeys. The people of the fourth age drowned and transformed into fish (Bierhorst 142-143).

Quetzalcoatl, charged by the other gods, descended into the underworld after the fifth sun was born and placed in the sky (145). He gathered the bones of the dead giants, which were badly mangled by the jaguars. Then, he pierced his own body and sprinkled his own blood over the bones that he had gathered. After doing so, they came to life and then became the ancestors of the Nahuas (146). Blood symbolizes a life-giving fluid and without it, death occurs. In this myth the game of opposites occurs, since death is necessary for the creation of new life. Quiñones says that because of his

actions, Quetzalcoatl is considered by the Nahuas as having performed the ultimate sacrifice of human blood (Codex 166).

Whether Quetzalcoatl had gone to the palace prepared for him; whether he had floated out to sea on his raft of serpents, or whether his body had been burned on the beach and his soul arose to the sky to be the morning star, commentators are not in agreement. Despite the differentiation of his departure by possible temporal distortion of his myths, there is one particular aspect held in unanimity (Anderson and Dibble 21). Quetzalcoatl was gone--he was not dead--but he would return: "hasta hoy le esperan" (Sahagún, vol. 2 1946: 51).

Many mysterious omens occurred to the Nahuas that have been described by Sahagún and Muñoz Camargo, omens which started 10 years before the arrival of the Spaniards. The omens were later depicted as being the signs and wonders that transpired before the return of Quetzalcoatl, and his identification with Hernán Cortés (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 4-8).

There were several omens that frightened and amazed the Nahuas. Once, in the eastern sky at midnight, a fiery signal burned till the break of day, until it vanished with the rising of the sun. Then, the temple of Huitzilopochtli (an Aztec tribal god) was said to have self-ignited and was inextinguishable. Thirdly, the temple of Xiuhtecuhtli (an old

fire god) was struck by lightning and no thunder was heard, so the people believed that it was struck by a blow from the sun. Forth, the wind pounded the lake around them until it boiled, and then the water rose high in the air and flooded the houses, which, in turn, collapsed into the lake. Lastly, a strange bird, the color of ashes, who wore a mirror in the crown of its head, was captured in a fishermen's net (4-8).

When Moctezuma II was presented with this peculiar bird, he could see the night sky in its face at noon day. The second time that he looked at the mirror, there was a distant plain and people moving across it. They were spread out in ranks and advancing hastily. They then fought against each other and rode on the backs of animals that resembled deer. When he asked his magicians and wise men to look into the mirror, the images had vanished and they saw nothing (9-10).

Another sign that appeared a little before the arrival of the Spaniards was a radiance that shone in the east every morning, about three hours before sunrise. So, by the time the Spaniards appeared in the east in their towers or small mountains floating on the waves of the sea which bore a strange people who had very light skin, blue eyes, long beards, and their hair came only to their ears, it was no wonder Moctezuma II was distressed (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 11, 13).

Seeing their tall white sails, the Nahuas believed that it was Quetzalcoatl coming, bringing temples (*teocallis*) over the sea (Motolinía, Historia 75). Alvarado Tezozomoc writes that Moctezuma questioned one of his magicians as to whether or not it was the returning feathered serpent god. The magician replied that Moctezuma II was predestined to suffer a great mystery which must transpire shortly in his land and that he could only wait for it (The Broken Spears 14-15).

Moctezuma II ordered his messengers to give the treasure of Quetzalcoatl which consisted of many valuables such as a serpent mask inlaid with turquoise, a decorated breastplate made of quetzal feathers, and a collar with a gold disk in the center. There was also a shield decorated with gold and mother-of-pearl and bordered with quetzal feathers with a pendant of the same feathers. In addition to Quetzalcoatl's treasure, there were other treasures from Tezcatlipoca, Tlaloc, and Ehecatl, consisting of a golden shield, a crooked staff of Ehecatl, and many other ostentatious, exquisite, and divine gifts (23-24).

After the messengers reached the Spaniards and later dressed Hernán Cortés in the sacred Quetzalcoatl raiment, they returned home and reported on their mission to Moctezuma II (25-29). The messengers recounted the awesome performances of the cannons, the unusual food that they consumed, and the unique apparel of the Spaniards, and then they divulged what

was the fulfillment of the vision that Moctezuma II had seen in the mirror of the bird. Sahagún reports: "Their deer carry them on their backs wherever they wish to go. These deer, our lord, are as tall as the roof of a house" (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 30). Then, they described the Spaniards as having white skin, some with curly, very fine strands of yellow or black hair, and long yellow moustaches and beards (30). After hearing this report, Moctezuma II was filled with terror, but he could not possibly fathom the monstrosities that were going to occur in the near future (31, 43).

The Spaniards received a friendly greeting when they arrived at Texcoco. After the obeisance, Prince Ixtlilxochitl, his brothers, and numerous others were told that the Christians were sent by their emperor, in order that they might receive instructions in the law of Christ. Cortés then proceeded to explain the mystery of the Creation and the Fall, the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and the mystery of the Passion and the Resurrection. When he drew out a crucifix and held it up, they all knelt, even Ixtlilxochitl and the other lords (56-59).

The legend narrated in The Codex Ramirez continues by saying that after Cortés explained the mystery of baptism, the conqueror continued his discussion by pronouncing how the Emperor Charles grieved that they were not in God's grace.

Cortés concluded that his Emperor had sent him among the natives to save their souls, for them to become willing vassals of the emperor, since that was the will of the pope, and it was in the Emperor's name that he spoke. Ixtlilxochitl burst into tears and declared that he and his brothers understood the mysteries that he spoke of very well. Ixtlilxochitl then gave thanks to God that his soul had been illuminated and desired to become Christian by being baptized in order to serve the emperor (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 59).

They all begged to learn more about the Christian religion but were told that others would be sent to instruct them. Following that announcement, Ixtlilxochitl pleaded for the crucifix, so that he and his brothers could worship it. The conquistadors wept with joy to see their true devotion. Later, Ixtlilxochitl and many members of his family, including his mother, were baptized (59-61).

After Moctezuma II was informed about the events which had occurred in Texcoco, he then prepared himself to meet Cortés and his commanders at Huitzillán. It was there that they received the biggest welcoming of flowers, treasures, and other divine gifts (62-63).

When the opening ceremony was completed, Moctezuma II addressed Cortés as if he were the returning god Quetzalcoatl:

Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you,

but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne . . . The kings who have gone before, your representatives, guarded it and preserved it for your coming . . . And now you have come out of the clouds and mists to sit on your throne again.

This was foretold by the kings who governed your city, and now it has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land, my lords! (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 64)

Cortés, through the aid of his native woman guide and interpreter during the conquest of Mexico, Marina or La Malinche, claimed that there was nothing to fear and that they had wanted to see him for a long time. La Malinche continued to translate by telling Moctezuma II that now that the Spaniards had seen his face and heard his words, that the Spaniards loved him and that their hearts were contented to see him and his people (65). Cortés then turned to Moctezuma II and insisted that they had come as friends and that there was nothing to fear. The conquistadors then contradicted their own testimony and pillaged the place of the majority of its treasures. When the raid was over, La Malinche had the audacity to ask them why they did not continue to greet them and if they were angry with them. (69)

The Nahuas were extremely frightened to approach these supposedly holy men, who acted as though they were wild beasts. They did not abandon the Spaniards, but continued to carry out their every wish, shaken with fear, and then turned and scurried away (69).

There are few surviving texts after the Conquest period which relate the narrative tale of Quetzalcoatl and his visual images. Cortés, his band of Spanish soldiers, the friars, and even archaeologists to this day are encountering many of his images on codices, statues, and glyphs.

Fray Diego Durán claims in the Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar that he based his image of Quetzalcoatl on an ancient pictorial source (fig. 1). His drawing is unique in that it is the only manuscript source to depict the feathered serpent god in a costume distinct from that of his role as the wind god Ehecatl.

In the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, Quetzalcoatl is adorned in his full raiment, which consists of a shell necklace, a wind-jewel pectoral, a neck-crest in the form of a fan, turquoise earplugs with twisted shells, a red buccal mask, and sometimes was painted with a large conical hat of ocelot skin, and flowing robe to illustrate that he was the wind god Ehecatl (fig. 2). His body is painted black, and a dark, vertical stripe separates the two sections of his face. As a patron of the priesthood who is described as the archetypal

priest, he is often shown with penitential items, such as a bone perforator or maguey spine which he is holding in his left hand. This is to associate him with sacrificial activities.

The figure in the Codex Magliabechiano shows Quetzalcoatl holding a curved staff and shield (fig. 3). The conical headdress that he adorns has a cluster of protruding objects. There is a flowering bone from which a second flower and bird are suspended.

Codex Vaticanus A shows Quetzalcoatl at Tlapallan standing on the steps of a pyramid temple (fig. 4). His apparel consists of a simplified Ehecatl costume carrying priestly items associated with penitential acts, and placed in a religious setting: a red loincloth, a conical hat, earplugs, and a neck fan. He is carrying a curved staff in his right hand and is painted black. An incense bag that is in his other hand is replacing the shield that is illustrated in other figures.

Another figure of Quetzalcoatl in the Vaticanus A, shows him dressed as a priest (fig. 5). He is carrying a penitential spike in one hand and in the other hand an incense bag that portrays a cross. His mouth area is painted red and he has a beard. He is also wearing a nosebar, a round breastplate, a double-headed serpent tied around his neck, and ear plugs.

Quetzalcoatl is often illustrated adorned with a conch shell, and in figure 6 he is covered with them. For the Nahua, the shell was a sign of a new generation, a new birth, and that which coincided with the tradition of what Quetzalcoatl did as creator of the human race. The natives believe that it signified an end of an era, a finished astronomical period (Séjourne 50).

Since Quetzalcoatl conquered the underworld and death, there are figures which illustrate it (fig. 7). The act of communication between the human world and the underworld was represented by the most profound symbols of native kingship. This figure portrayed him as a warrior. He was valiant in his fight with the underworld and therefore was shown holding arrows in his right hand. As in other figures, he also had his curved staff, which was in his left hand, and was wearing the typical *quetzal* headdress that symbolized his powers and glory. The statue of the "Plumed Serpent" portrays the magnificent beauty of the *quetzal* feathers which gives a symbolic representation of Quetzalcoatl (fig. 8).

It is important to note that the myths about Quetzalcoatl have undergone temporal distortion because they have been handed down to us through an impure source by oral tradition and were later written by Spanish missionaries and Spanish-educated natives, which has disfigured and perverted this god's original meanings and teachings. This is evident in the

writings about his different departures from Mesoamerica. Quetzalcoatl has numerous names that expressed more than one attribute of his divinity. All these names refer to and symbolize his characteristics and the wonderful deeds that he had performed. He was the creator and master of civilized life and of the arts. The aura of this god must surely match the meaning of the first part of his name that connotes the handsome and highly prized feathers of the quetzal bird. Quetzalcoatl descended into the underworld and returned. Cóatl, or the snake, is one animal that not only enters the crevices of the earth and returns, but also is known for creating new life for itself by the shedding of its skin.

Quetzalcoatl was the culture hero of the Toltecs and of other cities as well. The various myths about him agree that he was an influential leader greatly interested in both religious and cultural innovation. He was known for being radiant, which symbolizes his knowledge, power, and glory. Also unique about him is that he did not agree with the practice of human sacrifices, only sacrifices of partridges, doves, and other game. He was in command of the wind, the wise lawgiver, and the priest-king.

During his absence, the Nahua priests would have actors recreate the miracles that the Feathered Serpent performed when he was with them, such as healing the sick and the afflicted. These dramas during the festivals would remind the

natives how wonderful, great, and powerful Quetzalcoatl really was.

Many omens occurred to the Nahua before the arrival of the Spaniards: the fiery ball that burned in the eastern sky all night until the break of day, the hurricane that destroyed some of the city, and then the unique bird that was caught. The bird later foretold the future only to Moctezuma II, through a mirror that was protruding from its head. The vision that he saw of the Spaniards would later ring true. It was as though he was being prepared for the arrival of the strangers.

With the arrival of Cortés and his men, with Cortés dressed in the apparel of the Feathered Serpent God, they would receive a king's welcome from Moctezuma II. Then, Cortés and the conquistadors would contradict all that the natives had been taught and reminded of by the statues and images of the great Quetzalcoatl and of all the wonderful miracles that he had performed for others and their people. The greediness of Cortés, and especially that of his crew, made the Nahuas a little leery of him (León-Portilla, The Broken Spears 65).

Nevertheless, the Nahua would still keep in their minds and their hearts the image of Quetzalcoatl and the magnificent things that he had done, despite what the conquistadors would do to them and their belongings. When the friars, the

Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Augustinians would teach them about Jesus Christ, His gospel, and the tremendous miracles that He performed in the Old World, the friars, whether consciously or unconsciously, would then relate Christ to Quetzalcoatl and the result was a syncretization of the Nahua religion.

Chapter 2

THE CONVERSION OF THE NAHUA

The beginning of the evangelization of the New World can be attributed to Hernán Cortés who arrived in 1519 at New Spain; included in his party were several clergymen (Ricard 2). However, the Mendicant Orders were the architects of the spiritual conquest and were the founders and organizers of the Church in Spanish America (4). It was "the Twelve" Friars Minor, or Franciscans, clothed in the humble garb of St. Francis, who first began to bring the indigenous population to the Christian faith. They arrived in May, 1524 (5). Two years later, on July 2, 1526, the Dominicans arrived. They also were a group of twelve, choosing for symbolic purposes the exact number of disciples that Jesus chose to preach His gospel. The Augustinians reached New Spain in 1533 (2).

The first two prelates of the diocese of Mexico were Mendicant priests: the Franciscan, Fray Juan de Zumárraga (1528-1548), and the Dominican, Fray Alonso de Montúfar (1553-1572) (4). The diocese of Tlaxcala was founded in 1526. The diocese of Antequera (Oaxaca) was founded in 1534, and the dioceses of Michoacán and New Galicia in 1536 and 1548 respectively (6).

The first Franciscans were subject to the Spanish Province of San Gabriel de Extremadura, but later became the independent Province of Santo Evangelio. The Dominican

establishment, which at first was subordinate to the superior general of the Order, was later attached to the Province of Santo Domingo, and in 1532 was elevated into the independent Provincia de Santiago. In 1545 the Augustinian establishment, which was subordinate to the Province of Castilla, became the autonomous Province of the Holy Name of Jesus (6).

The Church held various ecclesiastical councils and synods. In the first one, the 1524 *junta eclesiástica*, several secular priests and the Franciscans discussed administration of the sacraments, specifically baptism and penitence. The second *junta* in 1532 included Franciscan and Dominican delegates, Bishop Zumárraga, and members of the Audiencia. They sent the Crown suggestions about the political and social organization of New Spain (7).

Spanish settlement of the New World was not without its problems. The new colonists subjugated the natives to forced labor and attacked them in outright war. Many earlier documents, such as the bulls of Pope Alexander VI (1493), the Will and Testament of Queen Isabel (1504), and the Laws of Burgos (1512) were used by the Spanish government to justify the conquest. Nevertheless, Spaniards began to feel the need for a more particular justification for the conquest, which resulted in the development of the Requerimiento in 1513 (Rivera 25). This legalistic manifesto of Christian faith and royal sovereignty was designed to be read to the enemy before

engaging in combat. This unique, complex pronouncement even when delivered audibly and in a language intelligible and comprehensible to the natives--conditions that were rarely consummated--led to one conclusion: that the ensuing battles, subjugation, enslavement, death, and robbery of the natives were their own fault and not that of the Spaniards (Gibson, The Spanish Tradition 58).

Although the organized conversion of New Spain did not begin until after the first Franciscan mission in 1524, before that date several friars preached the Gospel to the natives of Mexico. It is important in studying the history of the evangelization of Mexico to give emphasis to the religious preoccupation of Cortés. Ricard believes that he was a greedy political animal without scruples, and debauched, but despite his weaknesses, of which he later humbly repented, he had deep Christian convictions. Ricard further asserts that Cortés' main ambition seems to have been to carve out a niche for himself, but he could not admit the thought of ruling over pagans. Thus, he always strove to pursue the religious conquest while continuing the political and military conquest (15).

When Cortés and his companions arrived at San Juan Ulúa on Holy Thursday in 1519, and landed on Good Friday, they celebrated Mass on Easter Sunday (Díaz 79-80). Every day at the sound of a bell, the Spaniards recited their prayers while

kneeling before a cross they had erected. The natives questioned the actions of the Spaniards. Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, a Mercedarian who is known as the first apostle of New Spain, explained the Christian doctrine to them. He told them not to worship their wicked idols and explained the meaning of the cross and the basic tenets of Christianity. Olmedo also tried to persuade the natives to give up human sacrifices (81). Ricard contends that the indirect approach provided by the Spaniards--the masses, ceremonies, and prayers in the presence of the natives--would not have been more efficacious than fiery sermons, forced baptisms, and the violent destruction of temples and idols (17).

At Cempoal, the Spaniards constructed an altar with a cross and an image of the Virgin Mary. After Mass with the natives, eight Nahuatl women were baptized. Before leaving, Cortés advised the lord of Cempoal to look after the Virgin's image, the altar, and the cross (18).

Later, Cortés and his group went to Tlaxcala. After the refusal of the Tlaxcalans to embrace the Christian religion, Olmedo told Cortés that it was not ethical for the Spaniards to convert the natives by force and that it would be useless to repeat what they did at Cempoal (18). Wherever they went, Jalacingo, Chalco, Ixtapalapa, and Coyoacán, they preached against sodomy and human sacrifices, and explained Christian doctrine to the natives (19).

In Tenochtitlán, when the Spaniards arrived on November 8, 1519, Cortés wanted to convert Moctezuma II and to institute public worship (Díaz 187). Cortés gave a brief summary of Christian doctrine to Moctezuma II, spoke against human sacrifice, and told him of the coming of the missionaries. At first Moctezuma II refused the request of having a cross erected on top of the temple and having an image of the Virgin placed in the sanctuary, but later he agreed to it (189).

Even in the wake of the disastrous defeat of La Noche Triste, the Spaniards' proselytizing ardor was not extinguished (Ricard 19-20). In fact, Olmedo baptized the old *cacique* of Tlaxcala and the young lord of Texcoco. When Olmedo died in 1524, Ricard states that the natives mourned a great deal because they owed him their knowledge of the true God and their eternal salvation (20). However, since the records were not made about the religious conquest until the 1530's to 1580's, Burkhart insists that they cannot be interpreted accurately because the friars used "Christian influence" to illuminate the acquisition of indigenous culture (7,9).

After the fall of Tenochtitlán, and the establishment of Spanish authority, the effort of replacing the native religion continues. The arrival of the Twelve Franciscans at San Juan de Ulúa on May 13, 1524, marked the beginning of organized

evangelization (Ricard 21). Cortés did not think the Twelve were enough and that there was any order or method in the conversion process. On October 15, 1524, he reminded Charles V in his fourth letter to him that the natives were interested in Christianity and insisted that more missionaries be sent to convert them (Cortés 442-443). Cortés suggested that Charles V ask the pope to give the Franciscans and the Dominicans the holy authority to administer the sacraments of confirmation and ordination (444). Cortés also expressed the need for the founding of monasteries and that they and their priests would be supported by a portion of the tithes (444-445).

The Twelve members of the Order of the Friars Minor of the Observance were: Fray Martín de Valencia, Fray Francisco de Soto, Fray Martín de Jesús, Fray Juan Juárez, Fray Antonio de Ciudad-Rodrigo, Fray Toribio de Benavente "Motolinía," Fray García de Cisneros, Fray Luis de Fuensalida, Fray Juan de Ribas, Fray Francisco Jiménez, Fray Andrés de Córdoba, and Fray Juan de Palos (Ricard 21). Pope Adrian VI authorized the Mendicant Order in his bull *Exponi nobis feciste* to do everything they might deem necessary for the conversion of the natives (22).

Early in July of 1526, twelve Dominicans arrived (22). On May 22, 1533, the first group of seven Augustinians arrived at Vera Cruz (23). The Augustinians, together with the Franciscans and Dominicans, converted multitudes of natives to

Christianity with their missions.

The number of missionaries were too few compared to the native population, but increased rapidly. Even though many evangelists died or returned to Spain, there were others who arrived to fill their vacancy. By 1559 in all of Mexico, the Franciscans had eighty convents with three hundred and eighty religious assisting in the conversion process. The Dominicans and the Augustinians each had forty convents with two hundred and ten and two hundred and twelve religious assisting respectively (23). Greenleaf states that the religious conquest was far more than a remarkable military and political exploit; it was also one of the greatest attempts the world had ever seen to make Christian precepts prevail in the relations between peoples (31).

The Aztec empire occupied the region between the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the south and from the Coajuayana River to the Pánuco River in the north. Within the vast area there were many languages spoken. Nahuatl was the official language of the empire but other languages were spoken, such as Huastec and Totonac on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and Tarascan in the west. There were also many languages and dialects in independent territories that the missionaries had to learn, such as Pirinda or Matlaltzinca in the Valley of Tolula and in Michoacán. Linguistic multiplicity was a grave obstacle to preaching. Fortunately, it was lessened by the spread of

Nahuatl as a second language. For many missionaries it was necessary to know at least five or six languages (Ricard 25). The friars also studied the Nahua systems of writing, but it was difficult to know the exact meaning of the word because their systems seemed to be both ideographic and phonetic in representation. They drew or carved images and objects that had a similar name or sound to render the syllables of the names of people or places (28).

Despite the restraints for a quick religious conquest, there were many advantages that contributed towards the conversion of the natives. Ricard states that the Nahua religion was an extraordinarily rich polytheism, owing to the Nahua's custom of adopting the divinities of conquered tribes. They also believed in great gods, Tlaloc for example, who controlled the principal forces of nature and influenced the various forms of human activity. Because of this belief, they performed innumerable rituals, such as human sacrifice, during their lifetime to be at peace with these gods (29).

The Nahua believed that after death, only a few continued to live in a special afterworld. It did not matter how a person lived on earth, only their circumstances of death. Ricard believes that the natives were acquainted with the sign of the cross, which was a symbol of the four cardinal points and an attribute of the deities of rain and wind, including Quetzalcoatl (31).

The natives also practiced forms of communion with concepts similar to what the missionaries taught. The Nahua believed that by consuming a vital organ of the sacrificial victim, such as the heart, they shared the attributes of the victim. As another form, twice a year they ate dough images representing the god Huitzilopochtli. It is not known, however, if these images were symbols of the god, or if they became the god himself (31-32).

A kind of baptism and confession was practiced by the Nahua. The baptism of the infant Nahuas was not to cleanse the child of original sin, as is the Christian belief, but to remove the supposed filth of the sexual activity of the parents (López 326). In the Codex Vaticanus A a native child is noted as having been baptized by sprinkling and named after the day on which it was born. The natives would place an arrow and shield in its hand if it was a boy and say prayers for him to be worthy and brave (Quiñones, Codex 175).

The Christian and Nahua confession was similar yet slightly different. The Nahua confession (*neyolmelahualiztli* or "straightening one's heart") was believed to place the heart back to its proper place where it was before the transgression was performed. The friars used this term in relation to their type of confession, thus causing a syncretization of rituals (Burkhart 181). As with both confessions, one was not to be fearful of telling the

confessor everything, or not have trust in the mercy of the divinity he represented. The confessor was sworn to secrecy and lying to him was a serious sin. One of the differences between the two confessions is that the native act formed part of the temporal justice system. For example, in civil law drunkenness was punished by death, but the drunkard who confessed was only subjected to a religious penance and escaped the penalty of the law of the land. Adultery was considered a sin and a civil offence too. Confession, however, was a once in a lifetime occurrence (Ricard 32). After confession, the transgressor performed what appeared to be an imposed penance which sometimes involved the letting of blood (33).

Even though the missionaries found the rituals of the Nahua--baptism, confession, and communion--to be demoniacal, they still had a basis to work on which they consciously or unconsciously syncretized with their own. By utilizing this foundation, many priests unwittingly gave renewed substance to the old Nahua gods, such as Quetzalcoatl. An adaptation of Christianity in its representational forms coinciding with the rituals of the natives, or a syncretization of rituals, was necessary to be capable of working effectively in spreading Christianity. Ricard believes that using this method of teaching would have been very effective, yet very dangerous, because it would have risked jeopardizing the unity of the

friars' teaching methods. He also notes that syncretization is a delicate issue, yet possible. The problems that arise from this issue are that the missionaries might produce confusion and erroneous notions in the minds of the natives and that zealous friars might be tempted to sacrifice the integrity of the Gospel to their desire to radically increase the number of converts (34).

The syncretic process came about when the friars attempted to introduce into the old Nahua ideology new Christian moral precepts while at the same time maintaining important aspects of the Nahua's religious form. This is based on the friars' doctrinal writings and the ethnographic records. The friars placed more emphasis on the natives to behave like moral Christians than totally comprehend Christian doctrine (Burkhart 10).

The friars preached in Nahuatl because it would take longer for the massive native population to understand the Spanish language than for the friars to learn native languages. By doing this, the evangelization process was carried out at a more rapid rate and it enabled the friars to gain the natives' acceptance (11). Since Nahuatl not only named and influenced in a different way from Spanish, the priest adopted the rhetorical forms of expression appropriate to Nahuatl. To convince the Nahua to accept Christian precepts, the friars manipulated the religious structure,

consciously or unconsciously, by recording and communicating Christianity through the Nahua religion. Because religious speech was sacred and was an important method of social control, the friars replaced the authority of the native past with that of Christianity. It was by doing this, Burkhart believes, that they gained a significant degree of control over native behavior and thought (12). The friars attempted to convert the natives by converging indigenous beliefs with Christian beliefs, making the latter indigenous through adaptation of Nahua form (14).

In the beginning of the evangelization process, the missionaries deliberately avoided any accommodation in doctrine or rituals, and destroyed many idols and temples of native worship. Beyond their drastic measures, they still had numerous natives who wanted to be baptized but were put off because there were too few missionaries to baptize immense crowds (Ricard 36). Books, such as the Bible, confessional guides, and catechisms, were given to all the missionaries to assist them in teaching the natives Christian doctrine. The books also contained information on the administration of the sacraments. Many of these books have been either lost or destroyed, making it difficult to research what was actually taught to the natives (48).

The teaching of religious doctrine to the natives was not only done by ceremonies and processions, but also by the

educational play. Having observed that the Nahuas had constantly engaged in religious ceremonies, the Franciscans, such as Motolinía, replaced the ceremonies with edifying plays to instruct the natives in Christianity and history, as well as the justness of the Spanish Conquest (Ravicz 31, 32, 51, 54, 55). Religious plays were a part of life, and with them and by them Christianity penetrated that life a little more deeply. These plays were staged only in Nahuatl by the native converts, and only for them (39). They performed such plays entitled *El Juicio Final*, *Annunciation of the Birth of St. John the Baptist*, and some concerning Christ, such as *The Temptation of Our Lord* (49, 56).

An important role in the establishment of Christianity in the New World was played by those who wrote guides for instructing the indigenous people of Mexico, such as the Dominican friar Pedro de Córdoba who wrote a *Christian Doctrine* (Burkhart 197). He tried to portray their gods as devils who had deceived them, and exhorted the natives to reject their gods. The problem with this was that the natives did not believe in a struggle for religious dominance, with one deity placed against another. They believed in maintaining a degree of neutrality, and respect (188).

The missionaries had many difficulties with the language barrier, but once the friars became proficient in Nahuatl, their next problem was how to explain Christian doctrine in

terms that had never been expressed to the natives (Ricard 54-55). The natives had no words which pertained to Christianity, such as Holy Ghost, Trinity, and Redemption. The missionaries decided to either introduce into Nahuatl all the European words they deemed necessary, or try to translate to avoid paraphrasing. They felt that using the first method would give Christian ideas a native look so as not to appear foreign to the native mind (55). The second method required a thorough knowledge of native language and civilization, but was not without error (56).

The chronology of the religious conquest of New Spain is difficult to account for because the documents preserved from that era either ignore chronology entirely or give only round figures. The Dominicans arrived in July of 1526, and were limited in their expansion by the Franciscans to mostly the southern part of New Spain (69-70). The city of Oaxaca was their center and they branched out to Tonalá and Tehuantepec (63). Since the Augustinians were the last of the Mendicant Orders to arrive (1533), they built their missions in the regions left by the Franciscans and Dominicans which was mostly in the north-central part of Mexico (69). The evangelization process of the Augustinians advanced southward toward the eastern border of the state of Guerrero, between the Dominican missions of Morelos to the west, and the Franciscan-Dominican group at Puebla toward the east. The

Augustinians then began to evangelize toward the north in the Huasteca region. Later, they continued westward, toward Michoacán, and established themselves at certain towns, such as Tiripitío, Charo, and Yuriria (73). The religious made no spiritual penetration in any region without the consent of the temporal authorities. The Franciscans were in close collaboration with Viceroy Mendoza, Gov. Vázquez de Coronado, and Diego de Ibarra, for every apostolic exploration to the north (82).

Baptism was administered to the natives from the beginning and without delay. The three stages of conversion were: acceptance of briefly explained principles of the more important doctrine, baptism, and then catechism (83). The Augustinians baptized few natives after they first arrived because they felt that there were not enough priests to prepare the natives properly for the sacraments (84).

Pedro de Gante instructed his Nahua congregation only in the essentials, as did most missionaries, and would give them a brief lesson from the catechism. Natives could not be admitted to baptism unless they had learned the *Pater Noster* (the Lord's Prayer); the *Credo* (Creed), which is the sum of the Church's belief; the Commandments of God and the Church; along with having had formed an adequate idea of the nature of the sacraments (84-85).

After the Gospel was read to the natives, a missionary

explained the meaning of the ceremonies and emphasized the difference between them and the rituals. In their sermons, the missionaries would especially emphasize the nonsanguinary nature of the Christian sacrifice compared to the physical sacrifice of the lives and hearts of natives to their idols (84).

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún wrote that the missionaries would teach about a great lord called the Holy Father who was the spiritual ruler of the world. They would then explain what the Scriptures were and who the pope was (86). Later, the natives tried to explain their religion to the missionaries. However, they did not speak freely when they discussed their beliefs. The Nahuatl realized that their mythology was being put in Christian context and that the friars recorded only the religious information that they deemed fit (Burkhart 6).

The natives reminded the friars that they had a multitude of gods that were unhappy with them and who demanded sacrifice of their blood and heart. The missionaries preached that their god Jesus Christ was the true and universal God, and Creator and Disposer of all beings and life. They concluded their sermons by stating that the natives did not have to perform human sacrifices because Jesus made himself man here on earth, later died for all, and spilled His blood to redeem and free all from the power of evil spirits (Ricard 86).

The natives were then told that the Kingdom of God was the Catholic Church and that no one could enter without first obeying the laws of Jesus. They preached that the Holy Father was the head of the Church and the Emperor and the kings owed Him allegiance. The missionaries stated that they would receive into the Church those who desired to belong to it and were willing to renounce their cult of false gods. The natives were then told that their gods would no longer support them and that the God of the missionaries had allowed the Spaniards to conquer them (87).

Sahagún later wrote that the friars preached about having love for one's neighbor. Since the natives were performing human sacrifices, the clergy would stress the importance of the seven commandments that defined who their neighbor was, because they were breaking this commandment by killing their neighbor (87). They tried to completely inform the natives about the new religion they were going to practice and spared neither the precautions designed to dispel fears, nor the explanations necessary to overcome intellectual resistance (88).

Initially, the Spaniards relied on the labor provided by the *encomienda* to make their land and cattle holdings economically viable. Natives as a small permanent core, supplemented by tribute labor at harvest time, emerged to be a reasonable solution to labor needs. The Europeans tried to

justify the encomienda on the basis that it brought the natives into a close relationship with Christians, thereby facilitating their conversion (Rivera 114-117).

On the other hand, the Dominican, Bartolomé de las Casas, acting as the conscience of the crown and extreme defender of the natives in the New World, tried to establish that the indigenous people of the American continent were civilized beings. Las Casas exhorted that they were created by God without evil or guile and that they were obedient and faithful to whomever they served, whether it be their natural lords or the Christians. He added that they were submissive, virtuous, peaceful, and neither possessed nor desired to possess worldly wealth (Colección 7-8).

The controversy over the rationality of the natives in the New World and their capacity to become civilized and accept, as well as understand Christianity, preoccupied the Spanish crown and the friars during the first half of the sixteenth century. Greenleaf claims that the final estimation in the lasting struggle led to a victory for the church over humanism. He also states that "the experiments with utopian ideas and the intellectual speculation behind these ventures provided the philosophical background of the early sixteenth-century Mexican society" (Greenleaf 33).

The rationality controversy was resolved by 1536, but the resolution was reinforced in June of 1537 when Pope Paul III

issued two bulls on the subject matter, *Sublimis Deus* and *Veritas ipse* (Rivera 202). The bull *Sublimis Deus*, which condemned the encomienda, came about because of the harsh treatment of the natives by the caciques and would then give the clergy the authority to place the natives in the care of the church. It also proclaimed the aptitude of the natives for Christianity in order for them to receive the sacraments and practice the ordinances of the church in good faith (147-148) The bull *Veritas ipse* was a variation of the bull *Sublimis Deus* (301).

The Franciscan missionaries had great successes in baptisms. Letters written on June 12, 1531, one by Zumárraga to the general chapter of Tolsa and the other by Martín de Valencia to Father Mathias Weyussen, stated that since their arrival in 1524, they had baptized over a million pagans. Valencia wrote another letter a year later to Charles V and indicated that between 1524 and 1532 the Franciscans had baptized at least 200,000. Pedro de Gante claims that his group of missionaries performed 14,000 baptisms daily in a letter of June 27, 1529. Motolinía wrote that about five million natives were baptized between 1524 and 1536 (Ricard 91). These figures are highly inflated and should be taken as impressionistic only.

To perform the ceremonies preliminary to the baptism ritual, such as the exorcism ritual (to free them of all

demons), the insufflation of the Holy Ghost, the sign of the cross, and salt into their mouth, the Franciscans assembled all the candidates, and dressed them in white robes as a symbol of innocence (91). Each infant was baptized with holy water and sent away after these ceremonies were completed. Before the adult natives were baptized, they were given a second instruction concerning the significance of the sacrament they were about to receive and the corresponding obligations (92). The other members of the Medicant Order performed the preliminary ceremonies and baptism ritual in similar fashion. Pope Paul III, in his bull *Altitudo divini consilii* of June 1, 1537, stated that he wanted the missionaries to make sure that the natives were impressed with the grandeur of the sacrament, and for them not to confuse it at all with their pagan baptism (94).

Since the religious teachings were usually a summary of essential Christian doctrine, a supplementary meeting of instruction for all the natives was organized. Catechism was held early in the morning on Sundays and feast days. After being summoned by the *alcalde* of the village, the natives would assemble at the church bearing crosses and reciting prayers. The absent natives were severely punished, usually beaten by a rod or put in irons (96). Once assembled, they would repeat aloud two or three times a part of the catechism and then the sermon was given and Mass said (97).

Ricard states that in the mission of New Spain there was no general and systematic effort at adaptation in the presentation of the doctrine (102). The missionaries did not limit themselves to the printed text. After the missionary was finished with teaching the essentials, he was free to chose whatever else he wanted to add or expound on (103).

Knowing that the natives danced and sang during their religious ceremonies, music and pictures were used in the conversion process. Pedro de Gante composed verses on the Christian doctrine about such subjects as how his god made Himself man to save the world, how He was born of the Virgin Mary without sin, and the Commandments of God (104-105). Fray Jacobo de Testera was inspired by native manuscripts to adopt the custom of teaching the Christian doctrine by utilizing pictures. For example, he had paintings which represented the Articles of Faith, the Ten Commandments, or even the Seven Sacraments, and with a pointer would indicate to listeners the subject being taught. Ricard states that this proved successful in assisting the natives to acquire a better understanding of the faith (104).

The natives were given practical instructions about confession, confirmation, and communion. In addition to their penances from confession, the natives were instructed to fast (121). The bull *Altitudo divini consili* stated that all the natives should be given communion after frequent confessions,

when they knew what sacramental bread and wine were, and when their confessor was satisfied with their piety and conduct (122). The natives were given general instruction about the Eucharist, that it became, to the partaker of it, the real presence of Christ or, in other words, that He was present in the particles of the wafer (125).

While the discovery, religious conquest, and colonization was transpiring in America, the Christian humanist movement was being revived during the European Renaissance. Christian humanists and other reformers were thrilled for the opportunity to construct a perfect Christian society in the New World, because it would be free from the obvious imperfections of fifteenth and sixteenth-century European society (Greenleaf 30). The humanist movement influenced the thinking of many of the spiritual conquerors on New Spain. There were four questions which confronted the early Mexican humanists in putting their ideas into reality. They wondered if the natives could learn to live like Christian Spaniards; if Spain could colonize the New World with peaceful farmers and integrate the natives into such an agrarian society; if their religion could be preached peacefully; and finally, if the *encomienda* system should be discontinued (35).

These theorists had a relatively simple, yet concise, formula: return to the basic precepts of Christianity in its pure form, as it existed in the golden apostolic age of the

Church. The noble American savage, a predominantly oxymoronic title for the indigenous people of Latin America, were declared as blessed by nature, and free from the taint of hypocrisy and fraud. The natives were the main focus for the new order, a society which would later be built upon indigenous agrarian collectivism. The term that described such thinking was the Renaissance Utopia and its attempted application in America (31).

Bishop Zumárraga certainly contributed to the rise of the utopian experiments in New Spain, but it was the first bishop of Michoacán, don Vasco de Quiroga who is credited as being the first who transferred Thomas More's Utopia from paper to living model in the New World (Warren 24-25, 30, 79). Quiroga proposed the Utopian idea sometime before 1535 as a plan that regulated the lives of the natives (118).

One of the main obstacles that the Church had to overcome in implementing the Utopia in New Spain was that the majority of the Spanish settlers did not have the same idealism as the Christian humanist. Furthermore, they brought with them the very culture that the humanist had hoped to exclude from the colonization. This predicament between Christian humanism on one side and the greedy Spanish materialism on the other, created weighty problems in the framing of colonial policy which then created an astonishing amount of intellectual speculation on the nature of the indigenous people of Latin

America and how they should be treated (29-30).

Noted historian Lewis Hanke asserts that the Christian humanist position became a spirited defense of the rights of the Indians, which rested upon two of the most fundamental assumptions a Christian can make: that all men are equal before God; and that all Christians have a responsibility for the welfare of their brothers, no matter how alien or lowly they may be. (Greenleaf 275)

After the conversion of many natives, the work of congregating the natives in their own Utopian villages began. Warren believes that the villages were constructed not just to keep the new immigrants separate from the natives that had not been converted yet, but because the villages were so numerous and scattered that it was more convenient for the missionaries to have a social organization of their own. Within the villages the friars combined Christianization with civilization (35).

Because of pressure from the authorities and by their own ignorance, the natives were prevented from publicly discussing or opposing the new religion. They were faithfully attached to their ancient gods, and made a small resistance by avoiding contact with the missionaries (Ricard 267). This kind of resistance was seen by the Augustinians at Chilapa in the Sierra Alta as well as by others. Zumárraga wrote in 1536 that the natives did not want to totally abandon their

religion and would practice it in secret even more than before hearing of Christianity (268). After the Crown had forbidden the clergy to inflict corporal punishment on the natives, the vigilance of the religious relaxed. The natives then practiced openly the syncretized beliefs. Ricard confirms this by stating that the natives' "ancestral paganism came unconsciously to the surface, and, in their feasts and dances, they mingled Christian elements with the practices and beliefs of their old religion" (269). A letter from the bishops of Mexico, Oaxaca, and Guatemala, was written on November 30, 1537, pleading to the King for authority to take extreme action against the ceremonies of the natives (269).

Again in 1565, the bishops addressed a memorial to the Audeincia of Mexico and claimed that the natives were reverting to their idolatrous religion. Sometimes, such as at Chalma, the natives would gather in caves of difficult access and practice there, or bury their idols beneath the cross or in the altars of the churches, as at Cholula (269). While the natives were performing their Christian devotions, they worshiped the idols under the cloak. Ricard claims that if the idols were discovered and destroyed, the natives would just make new ones (270).

Sahagún believed that although the pagans did consent to become Christians and receive baptism, they never meant to abandon their old religion. After being admitted to baptism,

the early missionaries repeatedly assured their fellow clergymen that the natives had entirely given up their previous beliefs and accepted Christianity wholeheartedly. After the secret survival of idolatry was discovered, the friars, at first, concealed it to safeguard the official story and to avoid shocking the new converts (274).

Ricard claims that the natives were not truly Christian because they did not fully accept Christianity, but contented themselves with accepting a certain number of foreign practices and ceremonies. In doing so, they preserved their ancient religion by having it mixed with a superficial Christianity. Ricard also states that the sixteenth-century missionaries realized that paganism was ineradicable, and were reduced to accepting this apparent conversion, after they constantly observed the natives practicing the surface resemblances of the two religions (276). During the rituals that the natives performed, a Christian meaning was substituted for the pagan meaning, or the survival of paganism was within their Catholicism (280-281).

The European clergy viewed the discovery of the Americas as a spiritual stage that brought them closer to the millennium. They believed that their conversion of the last Gentiles was the final stage before the Second Coming of Christ. Since many Spanish clerics believed the American natives to be the last Gentiles, territorial discovery was

secondary to establishing contact with a vast native population. (Phelan 17-18)

This resulted in Hernán Cortés receiving more acclaim in Spain than Christopher Columbus. Cortés, who many believed was directed by divine inspiration, became the new Moses. Therefore, the enthusiastic friars defied the New World settlers' efforts to deny humanity to the native Americans, insisting that they possessed souls and were thus worthy of conversion. The missionaries even thought that the natives were the last Gentiles to be contacted by Christianity. The friars approached their conversion task as an important mission, convinced that God's pending reign on earth could be advanced dramatically by their efforts (28).

The Spanish Crown, by means of the evangelical clergy, tried to syncretize, or even substitute, the mythology of the Nahua for Christianity. Nevertheless, oral and written traditions contributed to the survival of much esoteric knowledge, and the cyclical concept of time continued to govern the Nahua view of history.

Because of the inextricable entwining of history and prophecy, the prophecies were greatly influenced by past events and institutions. To the degree that the prophetic tradition was responsible for the timing and form of Nahua revitalization movements towards Christianity, they have to be regarded as nativistic, as conscious attempts to restore

selected aspects of Nahua culture. Yet, the incentive for these movements was calendrical rather than political. A yearning for a past golden age was not what triggered the ultimate rationale for the Nahua, but rather prophecy.

At the beginning of the Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, the missionaries condemned all native tradition, in that everything that existed before their arrival must be destroyed, and a completely new edifice built upon new foundations with new materials. The friars believed that everything of the natives was corrupt, their religious, political, and social institutions, as well as their souls and spirits. The conversion processes was to be a total renewal of life (Ricard 284). The Holy See later changed and the natives were not obligated to break entirely from their former beliefs, but were allowed to retain part of their traditions. The indigenous people then openly practiced their syncretized religion. Just as the missionaries took what they found in the pagan customs and brought it into the Christian plan, so were the churches ironically built with the same materials from the temples that were destroyed by the Spaniards (285).

The religious philosophy of the Nahua permitted the acceptance of useful deities without the disengagement of their entire belief structure. A victorious god, such as Jesus Christ, who was powerful enough to topple the Mexica-Nahua empire, obviously could not, and should not, be ignored.

Moreover, the indigenous population rightfully perceived Christianity as a social instrument offering protection as well as access to an important element of European culture. The idea that all were equal in the sight of God offered a weapon to resist the social subordination of the Indian in the temporal world. After all, the King of Spain and a minor *cacique* shared the same spiritual fate. In general, European settlers opposed full acceptance of the natives within the heart of the Church. They understood the implications of Christianity, and the danger it posed to their monopoly of that important cultural instrument (Rivera 119).

The Franciscans were interested in the ethnographic and linguistic studies. The Dominicans were more attached to orthodoxy and less optimistic about the natives' religious capacities. The Augustinians were more competent in organizing native communities, building vast monasteries, and giving a higher and more advanced spiritual training to the natives (Ricard 285). It later turned out, according to Ricard, that the purpose of the missionaries was not to institute a new formalism, but to create a new environment (290). He also declares, "This was not merely a military and political triumph, but was above all a spiritual and religious triumph. The infidels recognize the supremacy of the Christians, and especially they accept the religion of Christ" (186). The result of the friars' efforts in the religious

conquest was the syncretization of Christianity within the natives' religion, which will be shown in the next chapter by some of the Quetzalcoatl myths as an example.

Chapter 3

QUETZALCOATL CHRISTIANIZED

Empire builders, such as Columbus and Cortés, were impelled by the urge to proselytize, which even amounted to a kind of religious ideology. This ideology was focused on a single god, a prophet, or Jesus Christ (Davies 244). The missionary friars converted the natives by--consciously or unconsciously--syncretizing their aboriginal religion. They assisted the Nahuatl and combined or syncretized selected Christian beliefs and practices with those of the natives, such as the myths of Quetzalcoatl.

The great man-God Jesus Christ, who the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians mentioned in their teachings, would seem to be comparable to Quetzalcoatl. However, by separating the Christianized biases from the Quetzalcoatl myths, the two are more separate than equal. For example, Motolinía added that Quetzalcoatl probably started the fasting ritual (Historia 8). He also mentions that the great feathered serpent god and his priests never married and were virtuous and chaste. This conjures up images of Christ and His disciples (9-12). The image that Ixtlilxochitl gives of Quetzalcoatl--fully bearded, barefoot, and clothed in a long white robe strewn in red crosses--does the same (25).

The signs that Jesus predicted to precede His Second Coming are similar to the same mysterious omens that the Nahuatl

experienced, and were supposedly interpreted by Moctezuma II and others as the return of Quetzalcoatl. Sahagún claims that the Nahua witnessed an extremely bright star in the sky, the temple of Xiuhtecuhtli was supposedly struck by the sun, and the lake boiled and rose high into the air until it flooded the houses (The Broken Spears 4-11).

Sahagún goes to great lengths to try to portray Cortés as the returning Quetzalcoatl for whom the Nahua were waiting. He seems to be writing as if it were the Second Coming of Christ. He is probably the friar who emphasized this concept and then other writers emulated his proposal. He tries to convince the reader of his implication by quoting what Moctezuma II supposedly said when he encountered Cortés face to face. For not having written this account until years after it transpired, it raises the question of historicity. Sahagún even goes so far as to name Cortés "Nuestro Señor" who has returned to earth to sit on his throne and rule the world (1946, vol. 3: 41-42).

Also, it is noted that Quetzalcoatl was the god who commanded the winds and the monsters, just as Christ was (Motolinía, Memoriales 13; Caso 27). For example, when Christ calmed the wind just before He and His disciples were about to be thrown into the sea while in a boat, or when He cast out devils. The Codex Vaticanus A and the Codex Telleriano-Remensis mentions that a messenger came down from Heaven sent

by the great creator-sky god, Citlalatonac-Tonacatecuhtli, to tell Quetzalcoatl's mother-to-be, Chimalman, that she was going to have a baby who would be born on the day "1 Reed," or Acatl, with full use of reason (Quiñones 165).

The two codices also state that Tonacatecuhtli made Quetzalcoatl come to life by breathing into him, just as Adam did in the book of Genesis. They continue by claiming that Quetzalcoatl was the only man-god out of all the pantheon of gods (165). Later, the commentator of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis tells how the Nahua began the sacrificing ritual to the feathered serpent god after the flood, which Christians may interpret it as the great flood of Noah, when in fact there was a flood in the Nahua Legend of the Suns (168).

Sahagún and Ixtlilxochitl both claim that Quetzalcoatl was the first to form a cross and adored it saying that he was the "árbol del sustento o de la vida" (1969, vol. 3: 291; 470). It was not the Latin cross, but similar to that of the Greeks, which has four short arms of equal length. Many of these crosses were painted on the mantle which he is said to have worn and can be seen in picture writings (fig. 5).

Just as Christ is said to be the creator of everything, so was Quetzalcoatl. The Codex Chimalpopoca tells how Quetzalcoatl towered above all other gods and was appealed to as the creator of heaven, earth, and the universe (Bierhorst 144-149). The brass serpent that Moses made was once symbolic

of Jesus, in that all the Israelites had to do was look and believe that they would be healed of their ailments (John 3.14-15). Quetzalcoatl was almost always symbolized as a feathered serpent.

As mentioned before by Quiñones, there are other echoes of biblical passages that were inserted by colonial scribes pertaining to Jesus Christ, and they are in the Codex Vaticanus A. The commentator seems to relate the Quetzalcoatl material with Christian allusions, calling him "a reformer sent by his father into a world so sinful that it had been destroyed many times" (165). The annotator even confesses that after the Nahua forged obvious links between the life and mission of Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ, they (the commentators) syncretized the deeds of Jesus with the feathered serpent god (166).

The Christian influences that were placed in the writings by the friars created a snowball effect, in that other writers just added more to the Quetzalcoatl myths until it reached the point when allusions were so obvious that the myths had to be re-analyzed. One such book, written over 100 years ago by Daniel G. Brinton, American Hero-Myths: A Study in the Native Religions of the Western Continent, is a good example of this.

The beliefs that Quetzalcoatl is said to have taught seem to parallel those of Christ. He preached against war, robbery, and that the Nahua should not kill (Las Casas,

Apologética 326). Ixtlilxochitl writes that he was considered "justo, santo y bueno" and even goes as far as to say that he taught them by deed and word "el camino de la virtud y evitándoles los vicios y pecados, dando leyes y buena doctrina" (470). Just as the God commanded Moses and the Israelites to sacrifice their herds and flocks and not perform human sacrifices, so did Quetzalcoatl (Motolinía, Historia 8-10). However, the commentator in the Codex Vaticanus A states that Quetzalcoatl was the inventor of sacrifices of human blood and then later contradicts himself and states that he despised human sacrifice and only allowed those of such animals as birds, as did Moses and the children of Israel (Quiñones 166).

Even the assistants of Sahagún, Pedro de San Buenaventura and Alonso Bejarano, added Christian elements to the Quetzalcoatl myths. They state in the Anales de Cuauhtitlan that he was invisible for four days after he died, and was in the underworld. After eight days, he then appeared and was enthroned as Lord (Garibay 316-317).

The commentator in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis names Quetzalcoatl the first pope (Quiñones 170). Durán states that Quetzalcoatl's other name was "Papa," meaning the pope (Historia, 1: 9). He also states that he was a very religious person, very venerable, who was highly esteemed and honored "como una persona santa" (1: 9). He continues by saying that

Quetzalcoatl refused to marry, prayed, fasted, and performed penance often (1: 9). After his arrival on earth, Quetzalcoatl gathered his disciples together, built temples and altars, and climbed the hills to preach with his disciples (1: 10). When the people were asked who made something or discovered something, Durán claims that they would say "este santo varón y de sus discípulos" (1: 11).

Durán goes to state that in his opinion Quetzalcoatl was some sort of apostle of God who came with his disciples to confirm his preaching with miracles, and who attempted to convert the people "a la ley evangélica" (1: 11). He went to many towns preaching and carved many crosses on rocks and cliffs (1: 12). After they witnessed the rudeness and hardness of the people's hearts, they left and returned to where they came from. But, before he left he prophesied the arrival of the Spaniards as punishment by God because of their bad treatment, and that none would escape their wrath (1: 14-15). One of the versions states that they left after parting the sea, walking on dry land, while their persecutors behind them were engulfed by the water, an allusion to the book of Exodus. Another account claims that Quetzalcoatl left by walking on water, an allusion to a similar event in the life of Jesus (1: 12). Durán even suggests that Quetzalcoatl might have been the "glorioso Santo Tomás," because he is known for preaching Christianity to all the world (1: 10). According to

the Codex Vaticanus A, Quetzalcoatl was also considered "the bright and morning star," as was Christ (Quiñones 175).

Christians, as well as the Nahua, started their calendar with the birth of a great man-god. Just as the birth of Quetzalcoatl is based on the calendrical cycle of the Nahua, the same applies to Jesus (159).

Quetzalcoatl and Jesus both were associated with a blood-letting ritual and the cruciform symbol. Even though Sahagún states that Quetzalcoatl was greatly penitent by performing the blood-letting ritual with thorns, it probably should not be thought of as Christian influence although Christ is portrayed with the thorns that caused Him to bleed as well. It is believed that Christ performed His blood letting ritual at the Garden of Gethsemane to renew the spiritual life of all Christians and Quetzalcoatl did it in the underworld to renew the physical life of the Nahua people. Quetzalcoatl's virgin birth and role as a god of light may or may not be thought of as Christian elements (Bierhorst 145-146). In mythology, these traits are not uncommon.

The deaths of the two should not be confused either. While one was crucified and afterwards placed in a tomb, at which time His spirit visited a spirit prison or purgatory, and in three days was reunited with His body as a resurrected being. The other, Quetzalcoatl, was noted as going to the land of the dead or underworld, Mictlán, as one person would

travel from one city to the next (Bierhorst 145). Quetzalcoatl returned from the land of the dead, but not as a resurrected being. Durán seems to be misconstrued, because he writes that Quetzalcoatl was to be the sole person to undergo human sacrifice and then come back to life (Book of the Gods 90-91).

Jesus created the sacrament of communion or Last Supper. He served bread and wine to His disciples, and told them to eat and drink in remembrance of Him. He also told them that by eating and partaking of these elements that symbolically they were eating His flesh and drinking His blood and who so ever did this would have a part of Jesus in him. The Nahuatl had a similar belief, in that by eating a symbolic element of a god, the consumer becomes part of that god (Ricard 32).

In fact, Baltasar de Obregón wrote in his text Chronicle, Commentary, or Relation of Ancient and Modern Discoveries in New Spain and New Mexico, Mexico, 1584, that the natives in the New World supposedly knew of the death of Jesus:

The second memorable curiosity is that by following the same account and relation, they came to know, through their ancient histories, the year and time when the earthquake took place and the eclipse of the sun when God our Lord suffered on the cross. (1-2)

The voyages of Columbus and Cortés paved the way for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the indigenous

people of Latin America. The missionaries were going forth to spread Christianity, to prepare the Nahua for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The possible syncretism by the natives of the two myths, Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ, possibly better prepared them for the acceptance of the rest of the Christian teachings. The crucifixion of Jesus and the whole process of blood sacrifice were amalgamated into the native's conception of Christianity. Even after Christianizing the myths, the commentator in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis expresses his opinion that, based on his conviction of the knowledge the Nahua had of Genesis and what they knew conforms so much to "Catholic truth" that they must have known the entire Bible (Quiñones 175).

CONCLUSION

Oral and prophetic tradition, myth, ritual, symbol, syncretism, and temporal distortion are important concepts. With these tools, one may comprehend the foundation of the syncretized myths of the Nahua. Myths may assist in the explanation of who we and other people are and the things of the world around us. According to Campbell, myths also can be a value system by which people follow and are even more powerful when believed.

A ritual, as a re-enactment of a myth, helps in the understanding and remembrance of a myth. A symbol, although not always easy to understand, manifests deeper relationships between rituals and features of life. By doing so, the symbol enriches the myth.

The oral and prophetic traditions--the manner in which myths are transformed and kept alive--of the Nahua were interpreted by the friars through their own Christian bias, whether consciously or unconsciously, and the result was syncretism, or the integration of Nahua and Christianity and making them part of the Nahua religion. An example of this can be found in the Quetzalcoatl myths. The myths of Quetzalcoatl not only have been tainted by the friars, but also by temporal distortion--the changing of things such as meaning and purpose through time--as well.

Even though Quetzalcoatl was a secondary god in Nahua

mythology, he still played an important role in their culture. As the great feathered serpent god, he went to the "dead land," gathered the bones of dead giants, sprinkled them with his blood, causing them to come to life, thus creating the Nahua people. He was sometimes referred to as Ehecatl, the wind god, the morning star Venus, and a god of light.

Some accounts claim that he was born of Chimalman and Iztac Mixcoatl after his mother swallowed a precious green stone. Durán states that later on in his life, Quetzalcoatl was a religious leader in Tula, who supposedly, along with his priests, were chaste. He also preached against human sacrifice. He and his followers were later ousted by the followers of Tezcatlipoca. After traveling east and south with his following, they reached the Gulf coast where he either cremated himself or left in a fleet of canoes made from snakes.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, several omens occurred that were later depicted as being the signs and wonders that were to transpire before the return of Quetzalcoatl, such as a fiery signal in the eastern night sky, the spontaneous combustion of the temple of Huitzilopochtli, and the strange bird that was captured and brought to Moctezuma II that showed him the arrival of the Spaniards. Awhile after that, Cortés and his party came to the New World. Cortés was later given the treasures of Quetzalcoatl, and

those of other gods, on orders of Moctezuma II.

The first group of the Mendicant Orders to start the conversion process were the Franciscans, who arrived in May of 1524. The Dominicans arrived two years later. In 1533, so did the Augustinians.

Documents, such as the Requerimiento, were written to justify the conquest. Even though Cortés was not considered to be a good person per se, he greatly assisted in the religious conquest. Whether at Cempoal or Tenochtitlán, he, and the friars with him, preached Christianity.

After the fall of Tenochtitlán, Cortés wrote to Charles V and asked for the increase of missionary efforts in New Spain. In time, more friars arrived. Following the arrival of the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Augustinians, convents were built, and the language barrier began to fall after the friars studied Nahuatl and utilized it to their advantage. Partly because of this, they baptized many.

After understanding the Nahuatl language, the friars realized that some of the Nahua rituals seemed to embody concepts similar to Christianity, such as the consumption of dough images or vital organs of the sacrificial victims, as well as a kind of baptism and confession. With this knowledge, the friars, consciously or unconsciously, introduced into the old Nahua ideology new Christian moral precepts while maintaining important aspects of the Nahua's

religious form.

Christianity was taught through ceremonies, processions, and the religious play. The Bible, confessional guides, and catechisms were given to the missionaries to help them in their teachings efforts. The friars preached against human sacrifice, love for one's neighbor, and other basic Christian doctrines. The utilization of pictures in teaching also assisted in the conversion process. The friars reported numerous baptisms, yet the total numbers of those baptized should only be taken as impressionistic.

This all transpired--the discovery, religious conquest, and the colonization of New Spain--during the European Renaissance. The *encomienda* system assisted in the colonization of New Spain, but was considered by some, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, as inhumane and deserving to be abolished. The Christian humanists tried to construct a perfect Christian society in the New World, a Utopian society based on More's ideas, away from the civilization-tainted European settlers.

Within the villages, the Nahua still practiced--discreetly--their own religion. At first, the survival of the aspects of the Nahua religion was concealed from the friars, but was later tacitly accepted by the missionaries.

With the discovery of the Americas, the clergy felt they were completing the final stage before the Second Coming of

Christ. The natives were supposedly the last Gentiles to be converted. By completing their mission, the friars believed that it would place God's reign even closer in time.

Because of the resulting syncretic beliefs, it would appear that the myths of Quetzalcoatl are comparable to Christ. However, after separating the Christianized biases from the Quetzalcoatl myths, they are not. These biases were amalgamated into the myths by such people as Motolinía, Ixtlilxochitl, Durán, and Sahagún. This helped to produce false images of Quetzalcoatl. For example, they write that Quetzalcoatl and his followers were virtuous and chaste, and that he was fully bearded, and clothed in a long robe strewn with red crosses. Even the omens that the Nahuatl are said to have experienced are similar to the same signs that Christ predicted to precede His Second Coming.

Other examples, such as a heavenly messenger visiting Quetzalcoatl's mother and informing her of his birth, his coming to life by another god breathing into him, and the doctrine that he supposedly taught, all have Christian overtones. These Christian allusions influenced others, such as Britton, to continue with these allegations and also added to them. Durán even goes so far as to state that Quetzalcoatl and his followers parted the sea and left on dry land, which reflects the legends of Moses in Exodus.

However, there are some aspects of the Quetzalcoatl myths

that should not be thought of as having Christian influence--even though they may resemble Christian stories--because they are of Nahua origin. The blood-letting rituals of the feathered serpent god and Christ are not associated with each other, or the virgin births of the two. Their deaths should not be confused either.

The majority of the Quetzalcoatl myths reveal that he was a mythical figure in the religious realm of the Nahua. Only a few of the myths portray him as a historical figure, such as a religious priest-king at Tula. The religious aspect, because of the imposed religious parallels, seems to provide a mutually enriched meeting ground, even if it is a matter of the inequitable exchange between the vanquished, the Nahua, and the victors, the Spaniards. Ironically, because the Spanish clergy consciously or unconsciously syncretized Nahua religious beliefs with Christianity, the Spaniards themselves helped to preserve some indigenous beliefs that in time provided the basis for a reassertion of an indigenous identity that would be quite different from that of a conquistador and missionary. Sproul was right when she stated that because of changing circumstances and altering perceptions, "cultures constantly revise their myths" (3). Even so, Quiñones claims, "Conquerors may destroy kings, temples, and priest, but it is vastly harder for them to destroy memory" (Codex 242).

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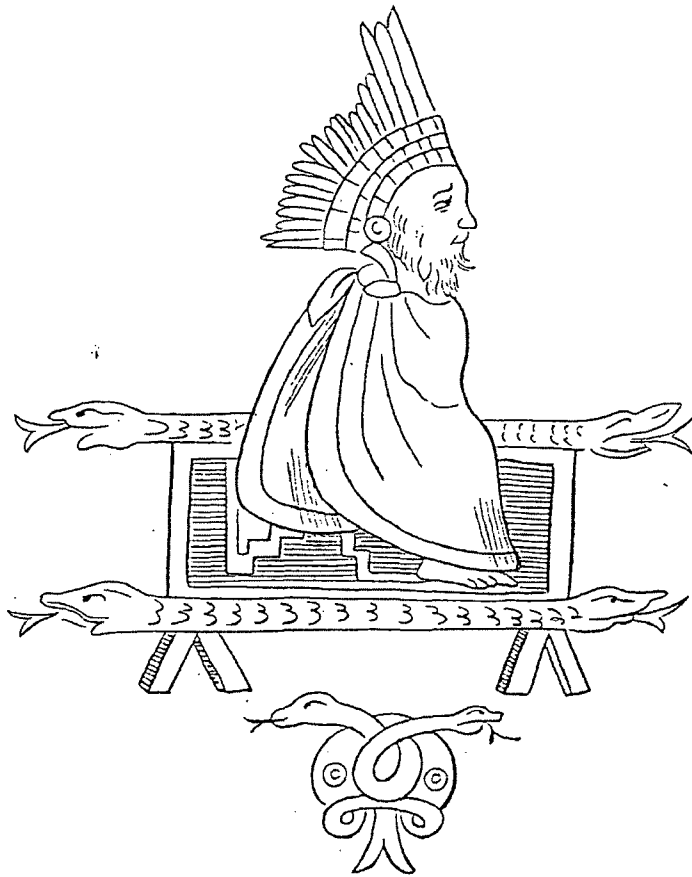


Fig. 1. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar.



Fig. 2. Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl. Codex Telleriano-Remensis.



Fig. 3. Quetzalcoatl figure. Codex Magliabechiano.



Fig. 4. Quetzalcoatl at Tlapallan. Codex Vaticanus A.

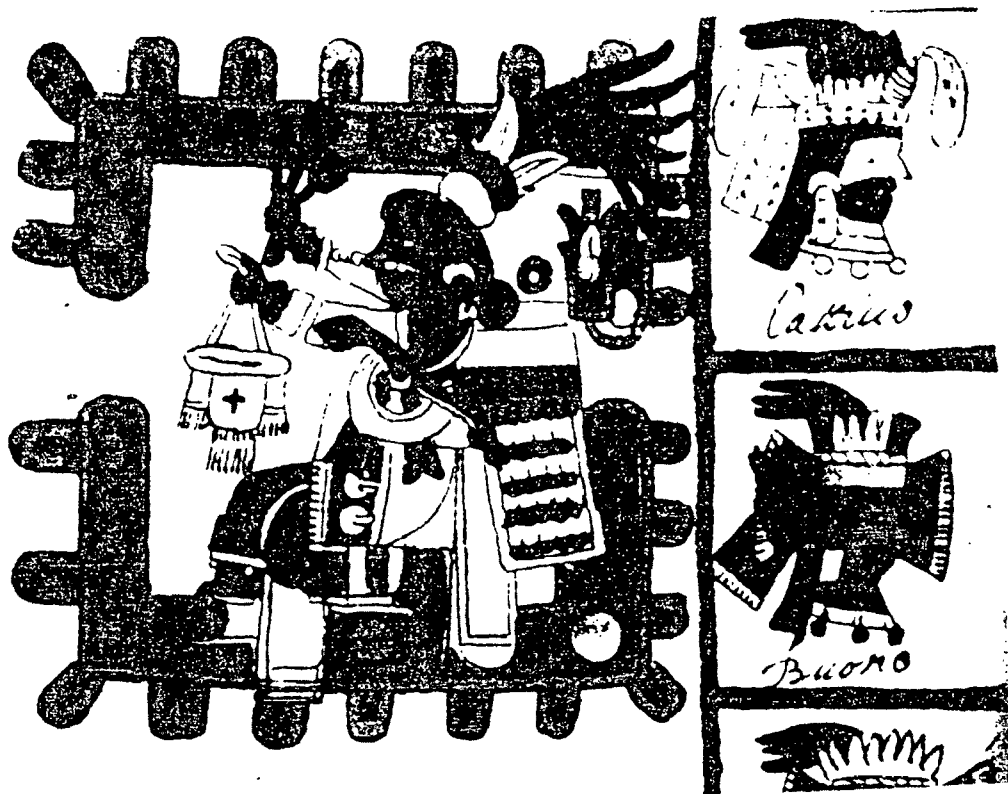


Fig. 5. Quetzalcoatl figure. Codex Vaticanus A.

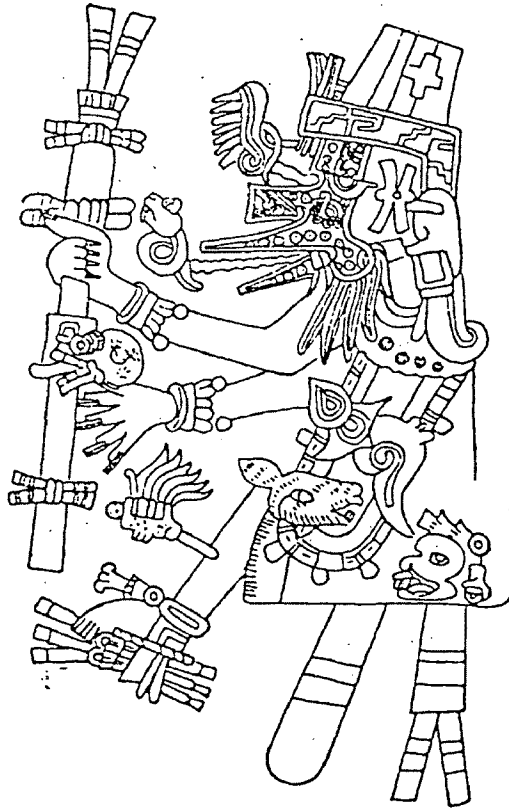


Fig. 6. Quetzalcoatl as creator. El universo de Quetzalcoatl.

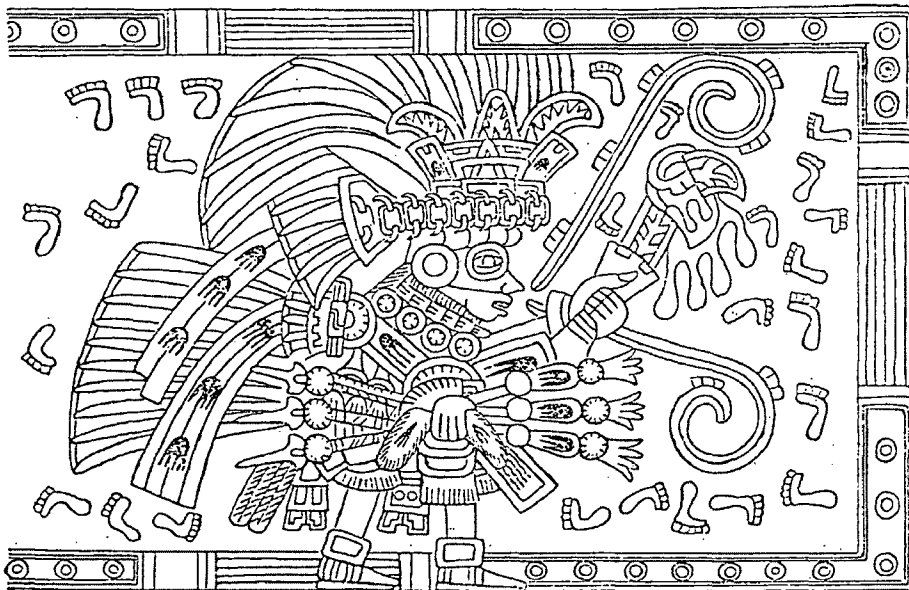


Fig. 7. Quetzalcoatl as conqueror of the underworld.
El universo de Quetzalcoatl.

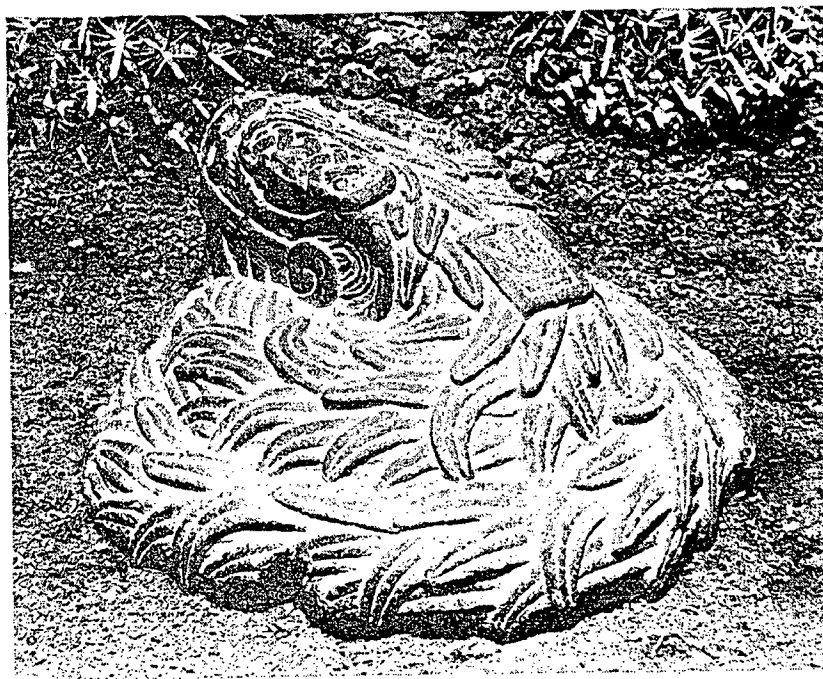


Fig. 8. Statue of the "Plumed Serpent." Nahua Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind.



Fig. 9. Quetzalcoatl. Inga Clendinnen. Aztecs.