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DOES GOD HAVE A RIGHT TO JUDGE?
THE AZTECS' FALSE WORSHIP PRACTICES RESULT IN GOD'S JUDGMENT IN THE UNLIKELY FORM OF HERNÁN CORTÉS

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PREFACE

This thesis covers religious aspects of the Aztec culture right before and right after the conquest of Hernán Cortés between 1519 and 1521. One of its chief aims is to highlight two predominant features of God's judgment as visited upon the Aztecs, viewed by many even today as a notoriously savage people group living in the Valley of Mexico just over two centuries prior to the first quarter of the sixteenth century. One aspect of this thesis details the Aztecs' history and rise to power, followed by their rapid demise at the hands of Spanish conquistadors, while the other examines the highly flawed but effective instrument used in the destruction of their sprawling Mesoamerican empire—a conquistador from Spain by the name of Hernán Cortés. Regardless of the perspective or aim of the historical record consulted in tracing this people group's history, one is sooner rather than later confronted by what Christians consider the Aztecs' routine violation of the biblical doctrine of mankind as the pinnacle of God's creation. This briefly stated observation is supported by the many religiously motivated ritualized sacrifices shown to have been commonplace in many Mesoamerican cultures, but which were systematized within a grand scheme inspired by the Aztecs' complex divine mythology. The Aztecs' understanding of the spiritual element of a person was linked to myths about the rebirth of a deity, a concept expanded on in a later chapter.

At the root of this controversial topic is God's perfect justice in relation to this culture's blatant and repeated disregard for those created in His image—by all accounts a swift and catastrophic judgment—presented here as having been executed through a very unlikely tool in

the form of a cunning and calculating Spaniard. It must be acknowledged in this thesis that the concept of "good"—as defined by orthodox biblical standards—can and does emerge out of what most people have come to regard as singularly evil acts which they believe could have been prevented. What is usually implied in these sorts of statement is that God is to blame for allowing evil to flourish, an age-old stance wherein one believes that he or she can point to the existence of evil as either the absence of God, or that if He does exist and He is all-powerful, then He does not or cannot care enough to prevent evil from happening, or is in fact the very source of it. Any human observer is by nature fallible and limited in their scope of comprehension, even in matters of their own existence, and therefore is not truly qualified to pass lasting judgment on certain events that he or she feels is unnecessary, or even an outright tragedy. The case study presented herein will examine the problem of evil as it appears within the context of God's justice in the face of false worship that demeans the *imago dei* in humanity. This thesis will expand on this aspect by focusing on Hernán Cortés's conquest of the waning Aztec empire, during the turbulent beginning decades of the sixteenth century, when religious rituals commonly regarded as brutally savage by Western standards in general were widely accepted practices in Mesoamerican cultures. While attempting to refrain from imposing twenty-first century American mores upon either of these diverse cultures, it will be shown that the biblical notion of the corruption of mankind may be demonstrated graphically in the Aztec practice of human sacrifice and other cruel traditions, as well as the treacherous ambiguity on the part of the conquistadors to the New World now known as the Americas.

Since the majority of the sources consulted for this project were secular in nature, it soon became apparent that by and large the primary thrust of the historicity of the destruction of the people group(s) in question is to place the blame squarely and solely on the conquistadors'

evident avarice and persistent or perhaps even willful ignorance of the cultural, political, and religious motivations at the heart of these particular societies. What most of these writers fail to notice, however, is that although overt lip service may be paid to their desire to preserve the Aztec culture for accurate historical purposes, they also provide little evidence of a call to account for the circumstances or primary causes of their enemies' violent demise or the violence used to further their own presence and domination in the area, with precious little verbiage devoted to addressing the futility of such religious practices that by and large had a negative impact on the social welfare of a tribal community heavily dependent on the sustainability of advanced agricultural practices, as well as inter-tribal communication, collection of tribute and maintaining a vast empire, and trade practices throughout the region. It is one thing to observe from relative safety and comfort such a well-known series of historical events unfolding hundreds of years ago, and blithely claim that such conflict or violence is now just a colorful part of world history. It is quite another to read legible, detailed, first-hand accounts of this part of history, and continue to maintain that while God is good and loving, such events were allowed by Him (cf. Job 1:12 ff); to claim that He is somehow able to utilize tragic decisions such as those for His own glory in keeping with orthodox views. It could be viewed as presumptuous for any one person living in any particular period of time to point to certain isolated historic events as having been somehow "redeemed" later on.

By way of comparison, many today may state that the horrors committed by those throughout the centuries who have claimed to be Christ followers (such as the Spanish conquistadors) were equally egregious as those of pagan rituals in which the Aztecs typically participated. Such examples—while certainly acknowledged as unfortunate incidents in church history—simply cannot compare to the sacrifices of tens of thousands of victims (most of them

unwilling participants) over a period of two hundred years, forced to undergo detailed preparations for ceremonial rituals and public fanfare inevitably culminating in their gruesome deaths. These were usually performed as part of the worship practices esteeming a pantheon of Mesoamerican gods which demanded blood sacrifices from their obedient followers, as a means of progressing through a cycle expressed elsewhere in this thesis as part of their cosmic mythology.

The issue of the necessity of evil vis-à-vis the justice of God has been compounded by the fact that in the years following the death of Christ, those who have labeled themselves as guardians of church history and purveyors of the gospel to distant lands have themselves perpetrated vast and well-documented evils and oppression on various indigenous populations in the name of God. This thesis will combat the idea that the end justifies the means, with reference to the numbers of those converted to Christianity. Church history is replete with disappointing examples of how leaders in the church have abused their positions of authority for personal or political ends, and how monarchs and other leaders have operated under the guise of religious virtue and solidarity with the state, to justify persecution or repression of religious minorities. While brutal campaigns of greed and exploitative behavior are not and never have been the divinely authorized means or method by which the truth of God should be advanced, as the omnipotent being that He is, it is vital that a Christian's theology acknowledge that God is fully capable of using anything and anyone to accomplish His purposes.

While the majority of these violent forays may originally have been inspired by the pursuit of acquiring vast wealth and landholdings or of gaining political advantage within the courts of the sending nations, it can usually be traced to a comparatively simple charge of mishandling Scripture, which typically stems from holding to a faulty view of God. An

unforeseen consequence of this leads people further into bondage and away from the gospel's life-giving power, rather than drawing them to freedom—its revealed intent for all peoples regardless of cultural background. Implied in several areas throughout this thesis is the importance of being in the Word and operating in discernment when communicating vital elements of the gospel of Christ, and not pursuing a policy veiling an ulterior motive, such as an ambition for personal gain, as that revealed by countless adventurers and conquistadors with royal backing, such as Hernán Cortés and his contemporaries.

This author's ongoing interest in Aztec culture and religion is the reason for choosing to examine the deep and tragic cultural conflict between Cortés and the peoples of the Aztec empire, specifically with regard to if and how God chooses to judge the wickedness of a nation which pursues unrighteousness and disregards the value of human life. This interest extends into examining how certain aspects of pagan worship coupled with the Aztecs' religious assumptions were eventually challenged by the initially ineffectual efforts of evangelization or conversion by priests who were attached to expeditions to the New World. The influence of Catholicism, covered in chapter five, can still be seen in the large modern-day metropolitan area known as Mexico City and its surrounding environs, still one of the most popular vacation spots for American and European tourists. To this day, many syncretistic practices are performed in the region, involving familiar symbols of Christianity or Catholicism mixed with elements of Aztec or Maya pagan rituals refashioned for contemporary practitioners.[1] Mexico City's local populace, which includes descendants of the ethnicities comprising the Aztecs and their contemporaries, has carefully preserved some of the Aztecs' most controversial contributions to history, one of which is carved stone altars—macabre receptacles designed to hold freshly

[1] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1990), 126-127.

harvested organs of recently sacrificed victims just prior to being presented as burnt offerings to a particular god or gods. Such items are similar in form and function to the Mayan *chac mool* figures of the same era.[2]

DELIMITATIONS/LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis will examine both the realities of Aztec history culminating in the rule of Montezuma Xocoyotzin (1502-1520), nephew of Montezuma Ilhuicamina (1440-1463) and final ruler in a monarchy instituted roughly around 1428,[3] who continued the legacy of imposing ruthless vassalage upon surrounding tribes in the Valley of Mexico as did his predecessors. This thesis will also consider the Aztec empire's wavering stance toward a relatively small band of Spanish conquistadors led by Hernán Cortés, as it affected the Aztec peoples and neighboring tribes hostile to their rule—many diverse ethnic groups living within the first quarter of the sixteenth century. A few details of Cortés's expedition in this area will be covered, such as their conquest of Montezuma's empire, a bloody affair that took nearly two years to achieve. Also presented will be the persistent thread of Christian influence in the form of Roman Catholic priests and friars who came to be in the company of these rugged men of war, and who felt it their calling to convert the locals to Christianity; these were among the first of such concerted efforts in central Mesoamerica. Though the topic merits greater understanding beyond the scope of this thesis, there will be a brief discussion of the religious dynamics between Catholicism and Islam, and Catholicism and Protestantism developing in Europe a quarter of a century earlier, coinciding with Cortés's conquest of the Aztec capital.

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[2] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1990), 37.

[3] Matthew Restal and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 16.

A few biblical examples will be presented, most notably from the book of Jeremiah, which recounts similarly vile behavior from Judeans, paralleling the Aztecs' violent ways, the purpose of which will be to underscore how God may have executed judgment on the variety of people groups and cultures living in the Valley of Mexico during this time frame. Though the Aztecs were clearly not the sole practitioners of the ceremonial rituals involving human sacrifice and blood-letting in the vast region known as Mesoamerica, nor were they the ones with whom such rituals originated, this thesis will compare their model of false worship with a time in Israel when God condemned the entire city of Jerusalem as evil, a place incapable of producing even one person who sought after the truth or cared to act justly before God.

Due to the scope of this thesis, areas of discussion will include only a brief mention of other indigenous Mesoamerican cultures (i.e., the ancient Toltecs) which have in some way shown a connection to the Aztecs living in the Valley of Mexico prior to the arrival of Hernán Cortés (i.e., religious practices, cultural impact). While there will be no specific mention of the Aztecs' exquisite architecture or art apart from relevant illustrations or sculptures depicting worship practices, most of the information derived will serve to shed light on a minority of artists or scholars brave enough to posit an alternate means of worship to human sacrifice. Although ancient texts in the original languages will not be included in this thesis, the thread of the story will incorporate excerpts from records preserved from this period—the preponderance of which comes from the perspective of the Spanish conquistadors and priests, translated into modern English, as well as nineteenth century works which remain seminal to the history of Mexico, such as those authored by William H. Prescott (1769-1859) and Alexander von Humboldt (1796-1859). Most of the records preserved from Aztec authors recounting confrontations with

Spaniards, though graphically and beautifully illustrated, unfortunately yielded very few details specific enough for the scholarly purposes of this project.

As the preface has mentioned, this thesis will avail the reader of a detailed snapshot of disturbing Aztec religious practices, greatly at odds with the orthodox biblical stance that God has created all human beings to worship only Him, in the ways He has laid out in Scripture. Such a mandate has revealed itself in many cultures throughout history as revering a being greater than oneself, typically of supernatural origin, and wholly other—differing from humanity in nearly every way. For the Aztec hierarchy of false gods, however, devout worshippers were on a regular basis required to perform blood sacrifices and autosacrifice (blood-letting)—the former finding its source from both animals and humans. Regardless of a culture's ethnic background, including the cherished but misguided traditions of pagan religious practices, it is this author's understanding that the revelation of Scripture confirms that every human being has been created in God's image, and that no one can claim ignorance of this fact (Rom. 1:18-20). By definition, this includes a rejection of any form of human sacrifice, including but not limited to the related practice of cannibalism, and all other abhorrent practices promoting the degradation, physical harm, or dehumanizing of persons for any reason. For purposes of clarity, this thesis will use the definition of human sacrifice provided by Carrasco and Sessions as "the killing of human beings and the use of their bodies and blood for ritual intentions that include some purposeful communication with the gods."[4]

[4] Davíd Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 193.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The region described as Mesoamerica in this thesis will follow Davíd Carrasco's definition as "a geographical and cultural area covering the southern two-thirds of mainland Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and parts of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica."[5] Because the topic covered in this thesis involves a distinct people group flourishing nearly five hundred years ago, defining certain terms is in order, as well as a few linguistic nuances commonly overlooked or perhaps considered irrelevant. One of these addresses the transliteration of names from the Aztec language (the Nahuatl dialect) and other indigenous dialects. Another is the fact that in their independent study of this culture, different sources consulted for this thesis vary slightly but noticeably in the spelling of persons, titles, and place names.

It is also important to note that the Aztec peoples did not use the moniker of "Aztec" to refer to themselves. Some sources refer to them as Tenochca or Mexica (pr. mə-SHEE-kah), the latter term used by the Aztecs to describe themselves as descendants of the Chichimecas (literally, "people with dogs on leashes"), indigenous peoples who endured a long and difficult journey to eventually settle on the banks of Lake Texcoco and build and maintain Tenochtitlan, their capital, an undertaking authorized by their patron god Huitzilopochtli.[6] The vast expanse of the Aztec empire consisted of the nearby conquered people groups throughout the Valley of Mexico.[7] Many researchers of these fairly diverse cultures have put forth variants of the names with which they reference the Aztecs, some of which differ greatly from the more well-known

[5] Ibid., 1.

[6] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18.

[7] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), xix.

and traditional spellings. Unless otherwise noted, any mention of "Montezuma" is a direct reference to Montezuma Xocoyotzin, the second ruler with Montezuma as part of his title.

In addition, since Spain was at the time one of the nations exercising the greatest worldwide influence via sea-borne explorers or conquistadors such as Cortés, this thesis will follow the traditional nomenclature or transliteration of the names of Spanish locations, individuals, and titles. Because of the prominence of the role of Hernán Cortés in this thesis and his renowned fame, his first and last names will consistently bear the properly placed accent marks, while those on the names of his contemporaries will be omitted, so as not to distract the reader. Roman Catholicism, touted in sixteenth century Spain as the dominant religion which had vanquished Islam in Europe,[8] will be briefly touched upon in this thesis, as that affecting the worldview and motives of the conquistadors and priests in their midst. Also covered will be the founding of the modern city of Mexico City upon the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the capital city, and the whereabouts of this modern-day people group. In addition, whenever the term "theist" is used by this author, it explicitly refers to Christians, unless the word "theist" is part of a direct quote from a source which may or may not make a distinction between Christians and other self-described monotheistic groups, such as Muslims or Jews.

[8] Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 28.

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this thesis is to present a biblical and well-reasoned response to a two-fold inquiry that should be asked at any period of history: "Can a just God overlook or suspend judgment on a culture which performs abominable worship practices based on its flawed understanding of proper worship as set forth by the living God in His revealed Word? If not, can we argue with Him in terms of what tool, if any, should be used to administer His perfect judgment in any circumstance or event?" These questions may apply both to an individual's spiritual condition before God, as well as His acceptance or rejection of corporate worship such as that demonstrated by Aztec ceremonial rituals, which were known to involve human sacrifice and bloodletting. The thesis will seek to establish the fact that God calls to account individuals and even entire nations for their disregard of His laws and the improper worship and lawless behavior that inevitably develop from such willful ignorance. One of the primary emphases brought to the fore will be the Aztecs' suppression of truth (Rom. 1:18-19), while being confronted with basic truths of the gospel by foreigners (sometimes via means insensitive to the culture) who were initially and collectively regarded as pernicious outsiders, and later as brutish landowners wielding limitless power as though operating within a feudal-like system.

There will also be some evidence presented that a small but significant and highly respected minority of the Aztec population which wished to do away with human sacrifices, attempted to instill into their society a less bloody alternative to appeasing the gods. Also covered will be the equally crucial topic related to the Aztecs' suppression of truth and the

tactless approach taken by Cortés and his men, as they indiscriminately desecrated the Aztecs' most holy places as the first step in converting the conquered natives by coercion. In the face of apparent evils perpetrated by two very different cultures will be a third and primary consideration: the judgment of God on a nation which has repeatedly rejected biblical precepts involving the intrinsic and eternal value of each human life on its own merits, and not as part of an intricate cyclical view of humanity and the supernatural.

A byproduct of this project is to equip believers who may be interested in Christian apologetics that are geared more toward pagan cultures, by urging them to evaluate more closely legitimate forms of worship (i.e., how to prepare oneself properly in order to approach the throne) as set forth by God Himself throughout the Bible. While the worship of the true and living God in every culture and people group varies around the globe, it is absolutely critical to distinguish which religious practices or observances are considered abominable and unacceptable to the Lord, in order to gain skill in answering skeptics and others who may view such questions from a morally relativistic perspective. Many individuals do not subscribe to the assertion that all persons have been conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). According to Isaiah 6:5, everyone who enters the world is naturally blinded by darkness and is therefore utterly corrupt in thought and speech—another way of saying this is that any type of worship by someone who has not accepted Christ as their Savior is essentially idolatry. That is the basis for understanding the claims made here regarding the Aztecs' misguided attempts at worship, as they desperately strove to maintain their dominance in the Valley of Mexico by appeasing their violent deities with a level of bloodshed unmatched by their predecessors or their contemporaries in this isolated part of the world. Most sources concur that this sort of activity was as much for political

expediency as it was a way of preserving a culture committed to serving a pagan pantheon of gods whose very survival depended on such sacrifices.

The third and final goal for this thesis is to educate the reader about the history of the documented violence of the Aztec peoples and their clash with the religiously motivated aspirations of Roman Catholic efforts of early sixteenth century evangelization/colonization in the New World, a joint strategy in many cases. The object of such a discussion is to encourage the reader to take a hard look at certain assumptions concerning the origins of their own cultural background, in light of the foundations of their faith. It is hoped that the reader will be prompted to examine commonly-held presuppositions likely built upon Western philosophical views or influenced by the insidious encroachment of Eastern mysticism or syncretism—and to subject these views continually to the priority of the person and work of Christ, along with exemplary standards of personal conduct of those professing to be in right relationship with Him.

Since this thesis covers the Aztecs in the sixteenth century and some of the early history of Christianity/Catholicism in Mexico, it is hoped that many common elements in this work can be applied by students of apologetics to their own personal situations. At the foundation of this thesis is an apologetic that presents a theodicy firmly grounded upon the character traits of the living God as revealed in Scripture. While some passages may appear to evoke uncertainty as to the Lord's purposes in allowing or even causing destruction and suffering, it is hoped that the reader will recognize that not only have there been grave injustices perpetrated against humanity by other members of humanity for all time, but that readers will be encouraged to examine honestly certain events in history and ask probing and philosophically-based questions that take into consideration such aspects as, "What should God have done instead, in that situation?", "What have been the results (long- and short-term) of certain events or decisions?", "How were

the perpetrators held accountable, if at all?", and even "What would I have done differently in such a situation, if I had had the power to prevent such an evil? And if I *had* prevented [said evil], could I have known that a greater good would have come from the original situation, if left unaltered?"

It is this author's contention that this thesis would be a good starting point for believers to examine their own history and lineage, as well as stirring up interest in comparing key biblical accounts of suffering, in order to observe how the Lord has orchestrated certain events with certain people within specific generations, in order to fulfill His purposes for redemption. Otherwise, one may be misled into thinking that God has not already defeated every evil, as bound up in the finished work of Christ. While it is of course obvious that God can and will work all things together for His good purposes for believers (Rom. 8:28—an overly-cited passage particularly vulnerable to eisogesis or being wrenched out of context), it is critical that Christians not view this activity on God's part as somehow "second best" to what He really desires for each of His children. It is this author's observation that many Christians interpret "His good purposes" as something which would result in something for *their own* good purposes.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEGACY OF HERNÁN CORTÉS

THE EARLY YEARS

Most sources are in agreement as to the background and desire for adventure and fame that rang resoundingly within the heart of Hernán Cortés throughout most of his life. As a young man still living under the auspices of his parents, Cortés eventually abandoned his studies—which would have afforded him a respectable career in law—and returned home to Medellin in Spain to envision vividly the plethora of possibilities that would surely be his reward as part of an expedition to Hispaniola under Nicholas de Ovando (Christopher Columbus's replacement as governor to the Spanish West Indies).[9] However, an imprudent and fleeting romance with a married woman, which resulted in a back injury received from a fall from her window, followed by a thorough pummeling by her husband immediately thereafter, changed his original plan to sail to Hispaniola.

After a delay of nearly two years, Cortés arrived in Hispaniola to procure a modest parcel of land and a handful of local natives to tend his small estate, a common arrangement of payment known as an *encomienda*.[10] Over the next several years, while living in Hispaniola, he

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[9] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 99.

[10] Buddy Levy, *Conquistador: Hernan Cortes, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs* (New York, NY: Bantam Dell, 2008), 319.

became involved in some questionable escapades, one of which was of a sexual nature, coupled with a questionable charge of treason. The result for Cortés was to suffer the first of two instances of imprisonment; the second imprisonment was a direct result of his first escape.[11] His second escape was from a ship anchored in the harbor; he eventually cleared his name and, after acquiring a wife (née Catalina Suarez) and a modest fortune and plot of land in Hispaniola with which to finance his own expedition to the New World in search of adventure and gold, Cortés departed Cuba and sailed for the Yucatán early in 1519.

HERNÁN CORTÉS IN MESOAMERICA

Having enjoyed varying levels of success in initial encounters and dealings with the natives of Cozumel and other Mayan peoples, Cortés's entourage eventually sailed into San Juan de Ulua, where they were welcomed by friendly if curious natives who approached by canoe. Translation efforts were at first handled by Jeronimo Aguilar (a Christian Spaniard recently rescued from a life entrenched in Cozumel's pagan culture, after surviving a shipwreck[12]) and a former female Mayan slave commonly known in the Tabasco region as Malinche, later baptized by the Spaniards as Doña Marina, who also happened to be fluent in Chontal, the Mayan language, while yet retaining her native tongue of Nahuatl (the language of the Aztec peoples). Having accepted a warm reception from the odd-looking Spaniards and a few cheap trinkets to take back to the court of Montezuma, additional higher-ranking Aztec personages lugging a chest weighed down by items of gold and textile products approached the Spanish ships on what is

[11] Massimo Livi Bacci, *Conquest: The Destruction of the American Indios*, translated by Carl Ipsen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 134.

[12] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 123.

recorded as Easter Sunday; by most accounts a respectful dialogue was thus established between Cortés and representatives from Montezuma's court.[13]

Despite repeated requests to meet the Aztec emperor in person, Cortés was not allowed into the presence of Montezuma for quite some time. By several accounts Montezuma was an extremely superstitious and fearful ruler who considered the distinct possibility that the Spaniards had come to his land as emissaries of the great god Quetzalcoatl. Perhaps the leader (Cortés) was Quetzalcoatl himself, come to take back his land rightfully. Numerous preparations and divinations from wizards and trusted counselors portended a friendly but cautious initial encounter in the near future, should it come to pass. Many gifts were offered by his ambassador Tendile at this time, with the hope that this would excuse the ruler's conspicuous and continuing absence, while he pondered his next move. Some historians believe the amount and quality of gifts offered to the conquistadors is evidence that the Aztecs considered them gods, while others point to a phenomenon within such cultures which has come to be known as "the stranger-effect," whereby the locals' traditions compelled them to value and honor these visitors.[14]

On one of these occasions, shortly after Tendile had departed, Cortés forged ahead to establish a colony for Spain with members of his crew as its officials, after formally resigning his commission from Cuba's Governor, Velazquez. He fully intended to invade Tenochtitlan at his first opportunity, to claim the treasures there for himself and for his loyal band of men.[15] Ever the opportunistic statesman, though having recently severed ties irreparably with his superior in Cuba, Cortés once again weighed his options and commenced communicating directly with the

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[13] Ibid., 130-131.

[14] Matthew Restal and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91-92.

[15] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 152.

king of Spain—Carlos I, soon thereafter crowned Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. Many of Cortés's letters would recount or embellish his various successes in military campaigns, as well as allegiances forged among the local tribes, plus reports of the inhabitants' unusual customs and astonishing wealth. Having tracked the movements of the Spaniards and their considerable achievements, several Totonac natives from the neighboring town of Cempoalla had accosted a small entourage of Spaniards, requesting an alliance against the Aztecs, their much-feared enemy. Once Cortés learned of this opportunity, he embarked on a guided tour of the Totonacs' populous and well-ordered city. In talks with these natives, who informed him of other similar vassal cities within the Aztec empire, Cortés quickly realized the extent and vast wealth of the Aztecs, a fierce people who had conquered a large swath of neighboring regions and had forced the residents into paying tribute, which in their case included not just providing textiles and precious stones from their region, but also in handing over their residents to be used as victims of sacrifice to the Aztec gods. The Cempoallan chieftain apparently failed to see the irony of such sorrowful remarks, which was not lost on the Spaniards, by this time already aware of the grisly evidence of human sacrificing within the Cempoallas' own shrines. In talking at length with this cooperative leader, Cortés calculated that the geographical domain and wealth of the Aztec empire far exceeded even that of his homeland of Spain.[16]

Another ally, the Quiahuitzlan tribe, was brought to their side by the efficient efforts of the Cempoalla chieftain, followed by leaders of nearby Cingapacinga, all of whom were duly impressed by Cortés's diplomatic mannerisms and his way with words, two well-known components of his character, rooted in his background in law,[17] which served him well in these

[16] Ibid., 154.

[17] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 135.

sorts of endeavors. Tlaxcala, a proud and powerful tribe that had refused to be conquered by the mighty Aztecs, had wrongly assumed, via their spy network, that the Spaniards were allied with Montezuma. Their council hastily instigated three attacks against the Spaniards, resulting in the loss of many thousands of Tlaxcalan warriors before they were finally persuaded to side with Cortés. Though it was understandably an uneasy alliance, over the course of several months, these native troops proved a solid asset by providing Cortés a further alliance with their sister tribe, the Huexotzinco, which lay in closer proximity to Tenochtitlan. Meanwhile, Montezuma had been keeping close tabs on the conquistadors by their repeated contact with many of his vassals throughout the region. When told the news of their stunning victories throughout the empire, especially with groups that he himself had never been able to conquer, Montezuma offered Cortés multiple gifts of gold and other items he surmised would be of value to the conquistadors. At one point Montezuma even agreed to pay an "annual tribute of gold, silver, and precious stones in whatever amount Cortés requested, provided that they agreed to return at once to the land of their king."[18] What he could not possibly know was that the more gifts he plied to this ambitious foreigner, the more determined the latter became to march on the capital and in essence plunder this mysterious and wealthy island city and to bring it under his own rule via colonization and the establishment of *encomiendas*, a type of feudal system operating in Cuba, which further enslaved the natives.[19]

It is important to expand on the note in the previous section which emphasizes the fact that the eventual demise of the Aztecs was not solely that of the work of Cortés and his well-

[18] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 174.

[19] Roberto Himmerich y Valencia, *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521-1555* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 103.

armed and well-trained band of conquistadors. Extensive research on this topic has revealed that due to the cruel practices based on the bloodthirsty rituals of the Aztecs, culminating with the weakened condition and uninspiring speech to the Aztec populace by Montezuma mere hours before his death, Cortés successfully rallied hundreds of loyal warriors of neighboring tribes with whom he had established solid alliances at varying intervals of his stay in Central Mexico. These neighboring tribes were typically either those who had been ruthlessly subjugated by the Aztecs in the past and had been forced into paying tribute, or had themselves engaged in fierce battles with the Aztecs. Thanks in large part to the disunity exhibited by their highly localized nature, or "micropatriotism,"[20] these vassals were more than willing to contribute to the Aztecs' downfall. Cortés had convinced these allies that he and his men were heroic warriors aiding tribes who desired to throw off "the shackles of Tenochtitlan."[21]

A visit to the holy city of Cholula, legendary birthplace of the god Quetzalcoatl, turned treacherous for the Spaniards. While the Cholulans played host to the Spaniards, a steady stream of messages were sent back and forth between the Cholulans and the Aztec monarch, revealing a conspiracy to destroy the troops while under their care or shortly after their impending departure. The Tlaxcalans, ironically, had tried to warn their newly-acquired allies of Montezuma's firm grip on this province, and were not the least bit surprised by this unfortunate turn of events. Murderous plot uncovered, Cortés ensured that the Aztec emissaries (denying any such involvement) knew of his severe disappointment with this state of affairs, and that he would hold Montezuma personally responsible for this betrayal. As an example to others who might entertain similar schemes, the citizens of Cholula paid dearly; about 6,000 men, women, and

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[20] Matthew Restal and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 94.

[21] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 175.

children were slaughtered that day by the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans, while the Cholulan rulers and most of their warriors were forcibly restrained by the conquistadors, forced to watch the carnage. By the time he was finally granted a half-hearted audience with Montezuma, Cortés boasted hard-won alliances at different times and places with many soon-to-be former Aztec vassals; among these were the cities of Cholula, Tlaxcala, Texcoco, Chinantla, and Huexotzinco. Though not one to be deterred from a plan such as his decision to march on Tenochtitlan, Cortés felt ever more justified in making such a decision in light of the accounts from these and other natives, all of which contained a recurring theme of Aztec oppression and the relentless demands of tribute and their citizens to be sacrificed to the Aztecs' many gods.[22]

During the arduous march to Tenochtitlan, Cortés collected additional native allegiances along the way (i.e., Ayotcingo on Lake Chalco), while he his men continued to receive a wide variety of gifts and emissaries from Montezuma, who still remained hesitant about receiving them in peace, despite assurances from his god Huitzilopochtli that the Aztecs would destroy them if enough human sacrifices were offered. One of the first emissaries sent after Montezuma had received the vision from Huitzilopochtli was plainly an impostor—a nobleman named Tziuacpopocatzin, disguised in royal raiment. Since by this time Cortés was well-informed of Montezuma's age and physical attributes, thanks to the descriptions from trusted indigenous allies, he was neither fooled by this obvious ruse, nor impressed with such a blatant disregard for what he considered a respectful request for a peaceful introduction. Further, the impostor was accompanied by several sorcerers whose anxious incantations for the

[22] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 501.

conquistadors' destruction clearly proved futile.[23] The closer the foreigners came, the more elaborate the gifts and excuses from the emperor; at one point he had even pondered hiding in a cave at Chapultepec. However, Montezuma eventually gathered his regal composure and greeted these explorers on the massive stone causeway connecting Ixtapalapan to the southern end of Tenochtitlan.

Such a momentous event was witnessed by tens of thousands of Aztec inhabitants who had lined the edges of the causeway and flanked the canal, with onlookers drifting quietly and somberly in a virtual flotilla of canoes. Each principal presented to the other a token gift which accorded well with the famed stature of men such as these during the tense yet cordial occasion. The subsequent tour of the city revealed a veritable cornucopia of wondrous and bountiful natural beauty and awe-inspiring architecture and other engineering marvels; all they had previously encountered heretofore paled in comparison. In providing such a warm reception to these brash intruders, Montezuma felt he had succeeded in obeying Huitzilopochtli's command to lull the Spaniards into letting down their guard,[24] while he continued to plot their destruction, fretfully biding his time for when he would receive the signal from Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war. The signal never came. In fact, the exact opposite happened.

Never at a loss for strategy or subterfuge to further his aims, Cortés and his men cleverly used a number of devices to their advantage, including recent news of the demise of one of Cortés's smaller garrisons which had remained behind in Vera Cruz, effectively to place Montezuma under house arrest in their quarters, which were located in his father's palace. He was purportedly well cared for by the Spaniards, but for all intents and purposes had been

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[23] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 189-190.

[24] Ibid., 197.

rendered ineffectual—a mere figurehead of this sprawling empire. Almost inevitably, Montezuma succumbed to the vision that had reportedly troubled him years before which had predicted this very outcome, wrought by just such a figure as Cortés. He formally capitulated, declaring to his official council of chiefs that the Aztec peoples were now officially the vassals of the returned god of Quetzalcoatl, by which he meant the king of the Spaniards (Carlos I, also known as Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire).[25] As a last sovereign gesture, Montezuma divested from his coffers a vast treasure of gold, carefully tallied and distributed by the Spanish notaries.[26] Meanwhile, Cortés and his allies steadily and resolutely disposed of native political elements which were not aligned with his strategy to conquer Tenochtitlan; on certain points his methods were understandably questionable.

Having secured the Aztec kingdom of Tenochtitlan at long last, Cortés suddenly found himself having to deal with other Spaniards in the area who had heard of his exploits from one of his men sent to Spain whom he had instructed to avoid Cuba on the way. These others speedily arrived at the Yucatán, prepared to seek Cortés's arrest for his outstanding treachery against Velazquez, Cuba's governor, to which was now added theft of the riches of this wild land, and disconcerting news of his initial efforts at colonization. Former alliances with natives and former allegiances with a few of his own men were damaged, some irreparably.[27] Pedro Alvarado, along with about 100 soldiers, had been left in charge of Tenochtitlan, a tenuous position which deteriorated rapidly after Cortés left, since the Aztecs had resumed regular observance of ritual sacrifice in the guise of an annual festival. Hoping to put a stop to this

[25] Ibid., 208.

[26] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 152.

[27] Ibid., 339-441.

flagrant violation of Cortés's permanent moratorium of such practices, Alvarado's regrettable reaction instead ignited a backlash against the remaining Spaniards, who were forced to retreat to the palace to defend themselves until Cortés finally reappeared. Though they recovered, this incident was the turning point for Montezuma, marking the true end of his rule.[28]

In actuality, it was a turning point for Spaniard and Aztec alike. What began as one week of fierce combat with the multitude of Aztec citizenry dragged on for at least another week, during which time Montezuma passed away, disregarded by his former subjects, and declining all efforts by the Spaniards to sustain him. July 1, 1520: under cover of a moonless night, Cortés, his men, and their Tlaxcalan allies attempted to escape unnoticed, failing miserably. They wound up fighting their bloodiest battle yet; around 400 Spaniards died that day or were captured alive and later sacrificed to Huitzilopochtli. Having reached Tlaxcala at last, they recuperated and gained fresh support from these and other allies, adding to their number fresh recruits from Hispaniola and Jamaica eager for adventure; estimates put the total number of Cortés's army at no less than 110,000 at the start of this campaign.[29] He had thirteen vessels commissioned, forty-five feet in length, which could be dismantled for transport and rebuilt at their destination. On their way back to recapturing Tenochtitlan, Cortés successfully enlisted the aid of tribes who no longer pledged allegiance to the Aztecs, gaining thousands of additional native warriors. By sheer coincidence, a smallpox plague broke out at Tenochtitlan at the same time, wiping out or severely weakening a large portion of its citizens.[30] However, those who were still able to move put up a fierce and admirable resistance employed through clever tactics.

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[28] Ibid., 383-393.

[29] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 254.

[30] Miguel Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, translated by Lysander Kemp (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1962), 92-93.

During a break in the battle, the Aztec survivors of the first wave of fighting were extended the opportunity of ending this battle if they would but submit to Spain's rule. Cortés's gracious offer was summarily rejected, and the skirmish continued unabated. When the siege ended, about eighty days later, it was estimated that nearly 15,000 Aztecs had perished.[31] The rest were allowed to evacuate; most of the smallpox survivors would be disfigured for life. A desperate search for the remaining treasure was conducted, with precious few items of any real worth recovered. The entire city along with the Huey Teocalli temple was burned to the ground by order of Cortés; in its place were erected the foundations of New Spain.

[31] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 261.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORY OF THE AZTECS

This chapter will examine the history of the Aztec culture from the beginning of the sixteenth century, under its last legitimate emperor, Montezuma Xocoyotzin (hereafter referred to simply as Montezuma), whose last few days of waning rule were usurped by his brother Cuauhtemoc. The latter was in power at the time Tenochtitlan fell to Hernán Cortés, but had very little contact with the Spaniards before his death shortly after wresting power from his sibling. Briefly covered will be the period of time just prior to the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. Some of their unique cultural contributions will be discussed, with the preponderance of this study centering on the brutal practice of human sacrifice as an integral part of their way of life and religious observation to appease the gods whom they believed provided for every aspect of their existence, and who demanded sacrificial payments, or restitution.[32]

This thesis will synthesize the majority scholarly opinion of certain pivotal events between these two radically different people groups, with the emphasis decidedly on how God was working within, through, and despite certain events and people in this area of the world that happened to be concurrent with the European Reformation involving famous personages such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. Most sources confirm that the fall of the Aztec capital of

[32] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67-69.

Tenochtitlan was not due to any one particular factor or element, but that the decline of this people group was in fact inevitable, given their ruthless expansionist strategies, combined with the rebellion of thousands of subjugated peoples and the timely interference of Cortés, the tail end of whose final presence in Tenochtitlan coincided with a devastating outbreak of smallpox.

AZTLAN: LEGENDARY HOMELAND OF THE AZTECS

A quick glance through the timeline of Carrasco's *Religions of Mesoamerica* reveals several groups that flourished prior to the arrival of the Aztecs in Central Mexico. One of the oldest groups that settled in Mesoamerica was known as the Olmecs (circa 1500-900 B.C.), famous for sculptures collectively named "Colossal Heads" such as those found in San Lorenzo in Vera Cruz. The next distinguished group is the Maya civilization in south-central Mesoamerica, arising around 300 B.C. The Classic Period of Mesoamerican culture is A.D. 200-900, with Teotihuacan ("City of the gods"),[33] situated about thirty miles northeast of Tenochtitlan, falling within this time frame as an established city-state. It later becomes the capital of a far-reaching empire, peaking about A.D. 500, and ending around 550 by most estimates. This culture is one of the most important for the study of the Aztecs, as many of their significant religious rites and perceptions of the reality and purpose of the supernatural are derived directly from Teotihuacan.

Without delving into all the details surrounding the advanced civilization of Teotihuacan, it will suffice to mention here that it was known for its enormous pyramids, dense urban population, and complex mythology. By the time of the Aztec domination established at Tenochtitlan in 1325, Teotihuacan had long fallen into ruin. The Aztecs however, felt that these

[33] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1990), xix-xxi, 40.

people were their spiritual ancestors, and had incorporated their traditions into their own lore, looking to this ancient capital for "inspiration, political authority, and mythic legitimacy."[34] Even as late as 1518, Montezuma and a group of priests would journey to this ruined capital every twenty days, in order to offer sacrifices.[35]

One of the difficulties involved in this undertaking was the disheartening realization that the Aztecs, as sometimes happened with other Mesoamerican groups during this pre-Columbian period of history, would on a regular basis rewrite or embellish the details of their cosmic mythology and even of their own history.[36] To add to the level of difficulty in pinning down historically accurate details, it was also discovered that the Spanish conquistadors themselves had, not surprisingly, exaggerated or shaded certain events from their own perspective, which diverged greatly in key areas from historians who perhaps may have written more in favor of the indigenous versions of events for a variety of reasons. The Aztecs, known for their pagan beliefs and reliance on religious rituals to ensure success in every aspect of life, came to settle within the valley of the Lake of Texcoco, on the island of Tenochtitlan, which they established as their capital city, and which was later renamed New Spain by the Spaniards, and which now bears the name Mexico City.[37]

The name Aztec as used and understood in the present day to describe this people group is vigorously debated by scholars today, though most would agree that this general term points to

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[34] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25.

[35] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 29.

[36] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 2.

[37] Massimo Livi Bacci, *Conquest: The Destruction of the American Indios*, translated by Carl Ipsen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 122.

a shared culture and Nahuatl as their common language. It was first proposed by Humboldt and later popularized by Prescott in *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843).[38] "Aztec" is an eponym derived from the legendary Aztlan, "Place of the White Heron," the homeland of seven desert tribes located north of the Valley of Mexico, and usually applies only to their ancestors of Mexica at Tenochtitlan. In referring to themselves they reportedly preferred any of the following indigenous names: Tenochca, Méxica, or Colhua Méxica.[39] The last term listed as an ethnic name for this people group has its beginnings in the alliance struck early on in their history in the Valley of Mexico with a Colhuacan ruler who had placed one of his nobles on the throne of Tenochtitlan. Their lineage through the Toltecs was thus established, confirming their connection to the priest-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.[40] The legendary homeland of the Aztecs, where their ancestors were said to have begun their spiritually-inspired journey to the promised land of Tenochtitlán on Lake Texcoco, had been foretold in ancient oracles as the place they were to settle permanently. This journey took place under the auspices of their god Quetzalcoatl, one of the most important Mesoamerican deities.[41] The image they were given as the sign that they had reached their promised land was that of an eagle clutching or consuming a serpent (coatl), perched on a prickly pear cactus growing out of a rock. This distinctive image is emblazoned on the flag of Mexico as its coat of arms.

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[38] John Pohl, "Aztecs: A New Perspective," *History Today* 52, no. 12 (2002): 11 http://search.proquest.com/docview/202815166?accountid=12085 (accessed August 1, 2012).

[39] Ibid.

[40] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24.

[41] John Pohl, "Aztecs: A New Perspective," *History Today* 52, no. 12 (2002): 9 http://search.proquest.com/docview/202815166?accountid=12085 (accessed August 1, 2012).

HUMAN SACRIFICE: RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN MESOAMERICA

This section required reading through numerous distressing and disturbing accounts of religious rituals practiced by the Aztecs, the most portentous of which usually climaxed in human sacrifice and even cannibalism. In some of these rituals the victims were dressed up to impersonate deities and given a numbing narcotic to ease their suffering or performance anxiety. Engaging in these sorts of activities was not uncommon for many Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures. In fact, most of the vassals subject to Aztec rule also had temples for sacrificing humans to their own gods, albeit on a smaller scale. For the most part, the deities worshipped by the Aztecs, as members of this culture, demanded and received blood sacrifices from humans that by today's Westernized standards would shock and appall most nations which have been influenced by the message of Christianity. Those who hold to the biblical concept of *imago dei* take it for granted that human beings are never to be treated in such a manner. As with most polytheistic religious activities practiced by primitive tribes in the Americas and elsewhere, the Aztecs boasted a panoply of powerful gods ruling over every aspect of the life of the community, providing for their needs as well as maintaining social order for their faithful subjects. Sacrifices ranged from small personal petitions such as barrenness (not always requiring the shedding of human blood), to impressive ceremonies involving requests for a bountiful harvest or victory against a common enemy, requiring multiple blood sacrifices conducted at the top of the temple pyramid. The main idea was that the victim's heart would be born upward to the spiritual realm, as "payment" to the gods.

One of the Aztecs' main gods was named Huitzilopochtli, the son of Tezcatlipoca and grandson of Ometecuhtli—an arrangement loosely akin to the Christian concept of the Trinity—

worshipped by the residents of Tenochtitlan.[42] At this point it is most beneficial to stress the significance of the natives' dealings with Cortés on this matter. Many including Montezuma himself feared that Cortés was either a messenger of Quetzalcoatl or his reincarnated personage, who according to legend, plainly opposed human sacrifice and was actively working at convincing his followers of this change of worship. This comparatively compassionate form of the god Quetzalcoatl had instead put forth animals as an alternative, or even offerings of food or drink.[43] Similarly, the poet-priest-king of Texcoco named Nezahualcoyotl (Fasting or Hungry Coyote) favored offerings to the gods that were based on composing esteemed literature or producing artistic forms such as poems, songs or lyrics. Receiving scant mention in many of the sources consulted for this thesis, Nezahualcoyotl was a high-ranking member of an elite group of what would probably best be known to westerners as "philosophers" referred to in the native tongue as *tlamatinime*, the "knowers of things," "who were renowned as the living embodiments of wisdom and the artistic pathway to achieving [wisdom]…"[44]

One of the most memorable and ghastly reigns of the Aztec empire was that of Lord Ahuitzotl, an ambitious young member of the court who succeeded Lord Tizoc in 1486. This brash new ruler was determined to restore with brute strength the respect he thought should be accorded the powerful Aztecs, which had waned under his predecessor, a much less violent man. As a skilled warrior and strategist on the field of battle, he well knew the quickest way to accomplish this noble goal was fortifying his military forces and conquering new lands by fully exploiting the talents of a contingent of scouts who were trained specifically to locate new tribes

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[42] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 109.

[43] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 183.

[44] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 97.

to conquer and subjugate. During this time Ahuitzotl reportedly conquered over forty territories, securing Aztec dominance in the outlying regions and adding to the number of victims gathered to be sacrificed at the dedication of the new temple.

This extensive renovation of The Great Temple or Huey Teocalli (known to the Spaniards as the Templo Mayor) was a substantial aspect of Ahuitzotl's successful reign. Scarcely one year after being crowned emperor, Ahuitzotl gathered up "a multitude of sacrificial victims for the newly restored temple that honored Huitzilopochtli as well as the god Tlaloc."[45] At the pinnacle of this astonishing dedication, upwards of 20,000 people (depending on the source consulted, actual numbers vary dramatically between 2,000 and 84,000) were sacrificed at the top of the temple over a four-day period. The natives would cheer as the bodies tumbled down the steps, gathering around pools of blood collecting at the bottom. Several years after such a horrific display that had sent a chilling message to the surrounding tribes and shock waves throughout his own community, Ahuitzotl slipped on a loose rock while inspecting the public aqueducts after a city-wide flood, and died three days later from a serious head wound sustained during his tragic tumble down an embankment.[46]

[45] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 113-115.

[46] Ibid., 118.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

This chapter will examine biblical evidence, culled from both Old and New Testaments, of God's enduring attributes of love, goodness, mercy, and perfect justice. In order to examine God's judgment on evil, the reality of divinely administered judgment must be stated in no uncertain terms, since it is an integral part of the goodness of God. This step would necessitate taking the reader back to the beginning of creation in the Genesis account, when there was no evil ("…and God saw that [it] was good.."), and hence, an absence of judgment. It is only when the perfect attributes of God are understood as well as His other attributes (i.e., justice, love, goodness, mercy), that one may be able to perceive divine judgment as the corrective measure for the corruption of all that He has deemed good.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

In order to understand how good God really is, and that this pure goodness is beyond the human capacity to comprehend fully, one must start with a brief introduction of the orthodox biblical view of God as the Creator of the universe. This God has always existed, is love itself, and has declared the beginning from the end (Eccl. 3:11; Is. 46:10). The eternal goodness of God is a critical point to cover in this thesis, since heretical movements such as Open Theism or Progressive Theism have made God out to be a personage who loves people and is merciful, but who more or less resembles the marred and fallible image of mankind. These types of beliefs

that fall outside the parameters of orthodox Christianity promote foolhardy ideas such as God's inability to predict or prevent any of the end results of the decisions of free moral creatures throughout all of human history, and who therefore is unable to offer any tangible consolation in terms of the capacity to work out anything for the [greater] good of His children, as plainly stated in Rom. 8:28. That He can and does exercise dominion over all of creation and is active in the lives of human beings within the bounds of history is a solid claim put forth by the apostle Paul in a passage that has comforted many generations of Christians. Though a second mention is not to be taken as an endorsement of such a belief system, another concept from Open Theism designed to lessen the perfect character of God might help to clarify a claim that at first glance seems to relieve God of ultimate responsibility: that it is possible for God to express regret at His own and others' decisions, and that He simply hopes for the best, much like the rest of us.[47] Such an unbiblical view of God appears to be gaining popularity in America, and stands in complete opposition to how He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Unwisely lessening some of His unfathomable character traits in order to help explain the complexities of divine judgment on evil acts or individuals does not solve it. In fact, doing so has the effect of making other areas of the Christian faith come across as less authentic or unnecessarily more complex than they need to be. It would take but a few examples from the Old Testament to refute this idea; one could find the opposite of such a concept expressed in Psalms 16 – 19. In these, David takes refuge in his God, praising Him and trusting Him with his very life and future. It is clear from just these Psalms that God is ever-present in the lives of believers, ready to meet their needs and sustain them through any conflict—internal or external. The only caveat is that they abstain from idolatry and turn to Him for their every provision.

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[47] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 194-195.

What Is Meant By God's Good?

When confronted with arguments or propositions attempting to answer what the fields of philosophy, theology, psychology, and sociology commonly refer to as "the problem of evil," most laypersons in the Western world, and especially in America, typically react in one of two ways: either they agree wholeheartedly with the reality underlying this phrase (i.e., that it is a real problem) as they generally understand moral evil and its implications, or they shy away from the subject as something that can—and does—very quickly become too intense or personal. A third view, albeit usually held by a tenacious few, is that due to the corrupt nature of humanity as defined in the Bible, evil has no hope of being diminished apart from God's involvement, and in fact is here to stay, until Christ's second coming. It is clear from Scripture that evil, in both its moral and natural forms, has been and continues to be a universal element experienced daily in every society, and indeed for all of creation (Gen. 2:9, 3:17-18; Rom. 8:19-22). As such, it is subject to the wrath or judgment of God Himself, within a time frame of His choosing.

If asked in a candid moment to explain the problem of evil or expound upon its root from their limited perspectives, nearly all Americans would very likely recoil at the thought that evil, or their perception of it—although it was not always so—has by necessity become part and parcel of the attributes of humanity (known as moral evil), and the world in which we now live (known as natural evil). Many might register shock or even visible outrage at the thought that no one can or should even try to explain away or avoid this unpleasant but universal part of life. They would perhaps question whether or not a supreme being (assuming they believe one exists) would or should allow intrinsically evil acts throughout human history to result in what this being might deem a "greater good."

Though the stakes may seem to be much higher for theists who worship this being (i.e., Christians or Jews), whom they call Lord or God, every person capable of reason and abstract discourse must invariably make provision for the judgment that must be imposed on evil within their own worldview, whether held consciously or unconsciously. Theists (a generic term only applied here to Christians) confidently proclaim the God of the Bible as one who not only possesses omnipotence and omnipresence, but by His very character is omnibenevolent (a term meaning both fully good and fully just). It is declared all throughout His revealed Word that God is incapable of being otherwise (1 Jn. 1:5b; Jas. 1:17). Over the course of church history, the stance usually taken by this camp is that all evil will eventually find redemptive purposes both for humanity and ultimately for God's glory, even though subsequent generations may not perceive it as such, or may be unwilling to acknowledge the merits of what some may consider as holding to a controversial view.

DOES GOD KNOW THE FUTURE?

Another biblical example of God's provision for His people takes place in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, after Moses has been installed as the leader of the Israelites, all of whom will shortly prepare for their exodus from Egypt to a land promised to Abraham in the twelfth chapter of Genesis. In this example, Moses is presented as a reluctant leader who needs encouragement from God to take on his important role in leading the Israelites to the promised land. By way of assurance, the Lord tells Moses exactly what he should say to the Israelite leaders, and how these leaders together will request of Pharaoh the liberty to travel three days' journey from Egypt into the wilderness in order for their people to offer a sacrifice to God. Already up to this chapter, it may be pointed out that the Israelites had been suffering under Egyptian bondage for several

hundred years, crying out to God for deliverance. The narrative reports that He had heard their anguished cries (Ex. 3:7-9) and had made arrangements to rescue them from Egypt and to bring them to the promised land. Several verses later, though, one comes across a direct quote from God to Moses, as evidence of His foreknowledge and His love for His people: "However, I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, unless he is forced by a strong hand…after [My signs and miracles]…he will let you go" (Ex. 3:19-20, HCSB). From there follow several passages that detail the communication between Moses and Aaron, and the people of Israel, and later how these two leaders conduct themselves in the presence of Pharaoh.

Though there are many elements within this passage that can be drawn out and discussed at length, the main focus for this section of the thesis is that God is always in control. In the above quote, one can see right away a number of things that speak volumes of God's sovereignty and His love and provision for His people and ultimately for His purposes for all of mankind: (1) He hears prayer and responds to cries of injustice, even if it seems to the sufferers as though He has forgotten them completely, (2) He knows the proclivities of the heart and mind of every person (Ps. 139:1-4), (3) He does not force people to bend to His will, but sometimes works in conjunction with their own evil inclination in order to fulfill His purposes, which may be at odds with theirs. Though the word "force" is used by the HCSB translation where this author has used "bend," it is a term that refers not to forcing an individual's will to be in line with His own, but rather that His purposes will be fulfilled *despite* a person's ignorance or conscious unwillingness to be used by Him. It has always been God's will for His people to occupy the promised land; he has simply chosen to go about fulfilling this prophecy and promise in ways that are neither devised nor determined by human intellect or will. According to 1 Cor. 1:27, He has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; for how could anyone

entertain the possibility of a murderer and fugitive from Egyptian justice tending sheep for forty years in the Midian wilderness ever be used mightily by God? And one whose speech was faltering and unsure?

Is God In Control?

A prime example from Scripture indicating that God exercises control over all things is taken from an historical account from the Old Testament. This passage concerns that of prophecy—specifically the prophecy that Judah was slated to be destroyed by God because of her prolonged disobedience and idolatry, one expression of which was causing their children to "pass through the fire" as an offering to a statue of the false god Molech. This detestable practice of human sacrifice was borrowed from the Canaanite peoples, godless pagans who had previously occupied the land and from which they had been expelled by the Israelites. One may trace this sad tale of Judah's history beginning in 2 Kings 22, when the book of the law of God (i.e., Deuteronomy) was discovered in the temple by the high priest Hilkiah, during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. A godly king who had walked in the ways of the Lord, Josiah was mortified by the news and immediately sent his advisors to consult with Huldah, a prophetess living in Jerusalem. Huldah prophesied the destruction of the people, but only after Josiah's death. Even in the midst of plotting Judah's destruction, the Lord had poured out His grace on this ruler, publicly acknowledging Josiah's faithfulness. Josiah was later killed in battle by the Egyptian pharaoh Neco. His successor was Jehoahaz, who reigned for three months before being imprisoned by Neco, who also imposed a tribute on the people of Judah at the same time.

Neco then installed Jehoiakim on the throne. But during his reign of eleven years, Jehoiakim did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, eventually becoming a vassal for Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar for the next three years. After which he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

What one reads next in this account should clear up any questions about God making and keeping promises, as attested by the words of the book of the law which King Josiah had read to the people many years prior (2 Kgs. 23:2). Once Jehioakim decided to rebel, the resulting judgment came swiftly and decisively: "The Lord sent Chaldean, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders against Jehoiakim. He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord He had spoken through His servants the prophets. This happened to Judah only at the Lord's command to remove them from His sight. It was because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all he had done, and also because of all the innocent blood he had shed. He had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not forgive" (2 Kgs. 24:2-4, HCSB).

A brief look at Manasseh's reign should suffice in determining the context for this verse. To begin with, it is a tragic irony that the wicked Manasseh was born of Hezekiah, one of the few godly kings of Judah (2 Kgs. 18:3-6) whose reign did not span nearly as many years as his son's. Manasseh ruled Judah for a total of fifty-five years, committing innumerable atrocities in the sight of God for nearly the entire duration of his reign (2 Kgs. 21:1-2). Although he repented a few years before his death, the Bible points out that the period of time in which Jehoiakim ruled and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar was reserved for judgment as a direct result of Manasseh's great evil, which had led astray three generations of God's people into idolatry, infanticide, and all manner of iniquity. Even the way in which Manasseh came to repentance is telling. One reads in 2 Chronicles 33:10-13 that the Lord spoke to Manasseh and the people, but was ignored; it was then that He "brought against them the military commanders of the king of Assyria" (v. 11a). These military leaders captured and dealt savagely with Manasseh, binding him in shackles and imprisoning him in Babylon.

It was only when he finally found himself in this deplorable condition that he humbled himself, repented, and sought the God of his ancestors in his distress. "So Manasseh came to know that the Lord is God" (v. 13). Afterward he set about rebuilding the city's walls and trying to rectify the wretched spiritual condition of his people by tearing down and destroying all the idols. The hasty reforms however, had very little effect on the people in that generation. They continued to worship at the high places, but now in place of the idols, they sacrificed instead to the living God in a place not of His choosing (vv. 15-17). Although the Lord relented and had shown Manasseh great mercy by freeing him and bringing him back to Jerusalem, as a just being, He simply could not overlook the wickedness perpetrated by this king and his subjects—a variety of abominations perpetrated over a period of several decades. As it is with individuals who persist in pursuing a godless and wicked life without thought for the future or for the welfare of others, so it also is with nations, though the consequences are on a much grander scale, and affect future generations yet unborn.

We now turn to a well-known example from the New Testament, at a time where the apostle Paul is still known as Saul. The passage in question is from chapter nine of the book of Acts, which records Saul's being accosted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and his dramatic moment of conversion. Just prior to this momentous occasion, Saul had obtained official documentation from the high priest in Jerusalem, and was preparing to arrest and deport the Christian believers living in and around Damascus. One of the first insights this author received concerning this passage was the fact that most of the attention has traditionally been focused on the newly converted Paul, and where the Bible is strategically silent about his other victims as he eagerly embarks on a campaign to stamp out this new religion. A later verse informs the reader that when Saul later tried to associate with the disciples in Jerusalem, they

still feared him greatly. Where was God the day before the occurrence of such a wonderful event in the life of Saul? How many believers perished directly or indirectly by the rough and self-righteous hand of such a zealous but misguided man? The point is, it is not possible or even beneficial for humankind to know or postulate about such things, or to presuppose that he knows better than God does in terms of timing or God's decision in choosing to use a particular individual or circumstance to carry out His will; nor can someone offer any degree of regret or grief that can possibly equal His. In verse four, one is given all they need to know in the sharply painful inquiry from Jesus Himself: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

What is of further interest concerning this account is the conversation Ananias later has with the Lord about Saul, as he is instructed to go and retrieve him from the house of Judas and restore his sight (vv. 13-16). Rather humorously, as though God is not aware of the flawed character traits and many terrible choices Saul has made to this point and will continue to make, Ananias points out that this particular person has gained notoriety among the Christian community by persecuting believers. Such a condemnation is delivered as though this should be enough of a reason to dissuade the Lord from commissioning Saul, or that it should provide a plausible excuse for Ananias not to heal such a disagreeable person. This passage is rife with several such examples proving that in many cases, God still uses the most unlikely candidates to fulfill His most audacious plans for humanity. In the broader canon of Scripture, having written nearly half the New Testament, one can surely recognize Paul as having been granted more than enough grace to be redeemed and used mightily for God's purposes in ways that other believers may never fully comprehend.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD'S JUDGMENT

This chapter will survey God's judgment on the sin of mankind, including personal or corporate accountability before God, and the devastating effects of the sin nature as it proliferates in practices such as the pagan rituals performed by the Aztecs. The initial thread of the fall of mankind mentioned in chapter three will be picked up and expanded upon, with the preponderance of this chapter's focus on moral evil—specifically the Aztecs' exemplary model of man's innate corrupt nature which, if left unchecked, leads naturally to idolatry and in this particular case, the perversion of religious observance. A brief overview of the sin and shortcomings of Adam and Eve will be presented, as well as the fact of the depraved nature of all men. God's solution to mankind's fall into disobedience and the subsequent curse upon all the earth will be examined, as well as His judgment on sin and evil. By necessity, much of this chapter will be devoted to what may be labeled the Calvinist approach to the seriousness of sin, and its far-reaching effects on everything man endeavors to do, including upholding his original divinely-appointed responsibility of stewardship and dominion over the whole earth. The flip side of this discussion will be a look at the free will of man, and his accountability to God for his actions—whether for good or for evil.

WHY THE JUDGMENT OF EVIL IS NECESSARY

This author staunchly defends the position that despite all the evils that have befallen mankind, including the inexcusable evils perpetrated by those who sincerely believed they were sent by God to conquer nations by the sword instead of the Word, the Lord uses everything and everyone to serve His purposes. As an evangelical Christian who holds to the inerrancy of Scripture as well to as the pervasive love and justice of God, it is this author's understanding that the Lord sees the end from the beginning, while allowing evil to flourish. As an omnipotent being, He cannot be compelled to answer any man's query for what He does or does not allow. The main purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that precisely through events perceived as irretrievably evil, God's plans and purposes may be fulfilled, even when all the evidence amassed at the time points in the opposite direction.

One of the main issues at stake here is God's judgment on evil, and how one may be able to discern when it is at work in and through the horrific events which people typically claim as evil, or unpleasant events which sufferers may view as utterly pointless to have experienced. This may also be referred to as a misfortune that someone "did not deserve," or an outwardly "gratuitous evil" that seems to have had no value to a person or situation whatsoever—either at the time it was visited upon the sufferer(s), or in the foreseeable future. A biblical example of this is in the twentieth chapter of Genesis, when Abimelech's entire household lived under the curse of barrenness directly attributed to Abraham's faithlessness in God, and his unjustified deception toward Abimelech. When the Lord at last grants mercy on this household by healing these women and enabling them to conceive, it is quite feasible that some of them came to faith during this time. One may consult Genesis 16:7-13, the account of Hagar, the former Egyptian

maid who was compelled to flee into the wilderness in order to escape from mistreatment at the hand of Sarai, and God's promise to her offspring.

Old Testament Examples of God's Judgment

It is clear from analyzing many of the philosophical works for this thesis that the understanding of the concept of sin as biblically defined can no longer be taken for granted in Western culture as an element attendant to every person in every culture. Sin is no longer viewed as something to be confronted at every turn—an unwelcomed reality which persistently defiles every human endeavor, and indeed every thought of a man's heart (Gen. 6:5). More often encountered is the fact that the very definition of sin has been sanitized out of existence or re-fashioned to mean either a type of sickness or a "lack" in someone's character or reasoning powers, that can be overcome by availing oneself of greater knowledge or education, but which certainly can be nothing of a spiritual nature that can only be dealt with at the foot of the cross. There are clear instances in Scripture which call to mind the goodness, grace, and mercy of God as He interacts patiently yet unequivocally with the patriarchs of Israel and Judah, and later deals with the people of Israel as wayward and willful children through His prophets (i.e., Gen. 15, 32; Ex. 3; Deut. 5-7; 2 Sam. 2; 5; Ps. 88-90; Is. 6-8; Jer. 5-7, 26-29; etc.). The main part of this section is to verify through Scripture that although Adam's disobedience is the root of the world's evil and pain, and ultimately death, so also came life to every person through Christ (1 Cor. 15:22). He who confesses on His name and repents of his ways will be forgiven and will see life (1 Jn. 1:9).

Adam and Eve were originally created good, having not yet experienced judgment or condemned to live under the curse of sin. Both spent an indeterminate amount of time living in the garden of Eden before being approached by the serpent with its lies and empty promises that

they could become like God through the mere acquisition of knowledge. They mistakenly believed there was no real need to rely anymore on God to fulfill their needs. For conservative orthodox Christianity, the theological basis for explaining the corrupt nature of man is properly founded upon this account of the though processes and activities of Adam and Eve that led to the fall of all of creation discussed in the third chapter of Genesis and the hopelessness and frustration that reigned over creation—most of all in the foolishness and darkened hearts and minds of men (Rom. 8:20, 1:21).

Since God has no beginning or end, and was the only one present at the beginning, He alone knows all things, including how the two original representatives of His pinnacle of creation would choose to act, as well as those of every succeeding generation (Rom. 11:2, 8:29; Ps. 139). He is also the only one who is capable of offering the simple and forthright solution found in salvation through the shed blood of His Son. If one chooses not to start with this very basic account of humanity's standing and responsibility before God in His Word, one must also be prepared to admit even through their own experience that the world offers very little by way of a solution that may be universally applied, and which will also provide answers sufficient for the degree and depth of the world's ills, including their own troubles.

GOD JUDGES THE AZTECS

This author is aware that this section may be the most controversial of this entire thesis; the subject must discussed, however, since it is at the core of what this thesis is attempting to prove. Not only can evidence be offered that the Aztec empire was eventually destroyed because of their abominations before God, but there is ample reason to believe that Hernán Cortés was the main catalyst for their demise—a flawed instrument used by God to administer judgment upon a wicked and unrepentant nation. Most of the writers of the material consulted for this

project would be offended at this statement, and would likely vehemently deny the truths underlying such a bold and unapologetic pronouncement. At this juncture the reader is encouraged to continue reading, as certain truths about divine judgment and the main characters involved in this part of history will come to light.

Starting in the fifth chapter of Jeremiah is an extensive prophetic oracle that is addressed to and about the people of Jerusalem, soon to be caught up into Babylonian captivity for their idolatrous ways and persistent refusal to return to God. The first verse in this section (Jer. 5:1) will be broken down and examined for universal or timeless principles which might be applied to the Aztecs' wickedness. Under the heading "Jerusalem's Godlessness," and uttered by God Himself, this verse reads:

> Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
> And look now and take note.
> And seek in her open squares,
> If you can find a man,
> If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth,
> Then I will pardon her. (NASB)

In the English Standard Version (ESV), chapter five's heading is titled "Jerusalem Refused to Repent." As with any biblical passage which is studied for applicational purposes beyond the original context, one must be careful to observe context and the basic principles of hermeneutics. For example, it is not permissible to apply this passage wholesale to the Aztec peoples prior to, during, or after the siege and the eventual downfall of their nation as a consequence of the tactics of Cortés and a concurrent incident of smallpox inadvertently unleashed on the native population. While this author concedes that context is the key to understanding the message and impact of any scriptural passage, many verses within the first several chapters of Jeremiah seem to describe vividly Tenochtitlan's residents during the sixteenth century, along with other verses detailing God's sure and swift judgment on such

rampant immorality and violence. It is of course understood that the Aztecs were not God's people in the sense of being descendants of Israelites; though the Bible ensures us that in the broader sense, all people are ultimately accountable to the Lord, for acting on the inner guide of conscience (Rom. 1:18-23). This means that false worship and the type of violence the Aztecs inflicted on other human beings cannot go unpunished, if God is indeed as just as He claims to be in His Word.

The first verse of chapter five invites the reader to take a close look at the wayward city of Jerusalem: all of her inhabitants are portrayed as utterly corrupt, self-serving, and self-deceived. God Himself has issued a challenge for anyone to find even one righteous man dwelling there—just one individual who seeks after truth. If this one person can be found, we are assured in this verse that God will pardon all of Jerusalem's iniquities. Such a promise is reminiscent of the passage in Genesis 18:23-32, where Abraham has been interceding for the city of Sodom, that the Lord may relent in His desire to annihilate this wicked city, should fifty righteous men be found. Abraham eventually talks Him down to finding ten righteous men in that city, and receives the same response—that His wrath would be stayed if indeed ten people are found to be upright. Due to the destruction of this infamous city, one may conclude the obvious: that this city was incapable of producing even ten righteous men.

John Calvin weighs in on Jeremiah 5:1 with this comment: "…God shews that he was not too rigid or too severe in denouncing utter ruin on his people, because their wickedness was wholly incurable, and no other mode of treating them [that is, Babylonian captivity] could be found."[48] As already mentioned, though this passage was originally written with the people of Jerusalem in mind, universal consequences for a blatant disregard for God's laws can be

[48]John Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Kindle edition (Amazon Digital Services, December, 2012), location 2804.

extracted and applied with care to other times and places which parallel the biblical account in some way. In case anyone may object to where this is clearly headed, one need only consult other examples in the Bible of heathen nations suffering the judgment of God, after an untold passage of time in which they had been experiencing His [common] grace and were allowed to live and prosper despite their sinful behavior. One of the most clear lists of such judgment against the nations occur in multiple chapters of Isaiah: 10 (Assyria), 13 (Babylon), 15 (Moab), 17 (Damascus), 18 (Cush), 19 (Egypt), 20 (Egypt and Cush), 23 (Tyre and Sidon) and 24 (the whole earth).

The fifth chapter of Jeremiah continues with its warnings of judgment: verse three confirms that the Lord is seeking righteous people in this city, but despite having undergone earlier trials at the hand of God, they still refuse to repent. Even Jeremiah himself attempts to defend his own people, by claiming ignorance, or a poverty of knowledge, on their part. This next may be seem to be appropriately applied to the Aztec peoples, even on a surface level: "…they are foolish; for they do not know the way of the Lord or the ordinance of their God" (NASB). Though this is God-breathed Scripture and as such enjoys infallibility, it does show the humanity and compassion of the prophet Jeremiah, in a feeble attempt to avert the disaster that is surely looming on the horizon for his people. Again, one must be careful in drawing direct parallels from the people of Judah to the Aztec nation, since the people of God had been given the law and were in covenant with Him. By way of contrast, many people today may be tempted to point out that the Aztecs (and for that matter any other unreached nation) had no such privilege of hearing the gospel, and should therefore be excused for their detestable practices. However, while understandable and even commendable from a human perspective, this exact sentiment or excuse cannot be found in Scripture. Some of the more well-known passages that

address this issue are Romans 1-2, Psalm 19:1-4, and Psalm 14. This last parallels that of Jeremiah 5:1, where the lament is recorded that not one righteous man can be found, and that in his heart, the foolish man says, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1).

The Bible is unequivocal in stating its promise that believers and unbelievers alike will be held accountable to God. He has made it plain that in terms of the knowledge of His plan for salvation, He will not accept a plea of ignorance from anyone. Even when Jesus traveled and preached throughout the Judean wilderness during His earthly ministry, there were scores of people within earshot or line of sight who witnessed His miracles and heard His voice, yet refused to repent and call Him Lord. Though there are places which state this in so many words (Mt. 8, Jn. 7), such details in scriptural passages must sometimes be inferred; the word "some" or "few" indicate that not all who heard His words came to know Him as their Savior. Other passages recount second-hand conversations from those who were there, but that not all of those who remembered their words and His actions agreed with the call to repent and believe on Him. Back in Jeremiah, starting in chapter seven, is a discussion of the original purpose of the Temple, and how the Israelites were now relying on their traditions and half-hearted rituals to save them, rather than cultivating true faith in God. One of the greatest and most obvious transgressions within the Aztec camp was their Templo Mayor, or the Great Temple upon which many macabre events unfolded, resulting in abominable worship practices that were supported and encouraged by the general populace. The same situation reigned in Jerusalem, where the lazy leaders and false prophets were leading the people astray, many of whom were only too willing to deviate from the path of truth.

At last, one comes across a judgment eerily parallel to the demise of the Aztec empire: "…I am about to bring a nation from far away against you...this is the Lord's declaration. It is…

a nation whose language you do not know and whose speech you do not understand. Their quiver is like an open grave; they are all mighty warriors. They will consume your harvest and your food. They will consume your sons and your daughters…they will destroy with the sword your fortified cities in which you trust…" (HCSB). Though the mighty Aztec capital was brought to utter destruction, a few survivors remained from the last battle with Cortés's ranks and the smallpox outbreak. Those who decided to stay on and join forces with the conquistadors in expanding their territory eventually found themselves subject to Spanish rule and customs, including working in the *encomienda* system, which restricted their freedom even further, despite being once considered equal members of the company.[49]

In the examples taken here from Jeremiah, and in many other places in the Bible, God proves over and over to His people that He is sovereign and just by raising up and using barbaric peoples to serve His purposes—even a decision to punish the Jewish nation for their idolatry and apathy toward Him. It is clear from these few passages cited that the Lord takes the worship that is due Him and Him alone very seriously. The Aztecs had set up an elaborate system of ritual worship based on a faulty and fatalistic worldview (or as Carrasco terms it, "cosmovision"[50]). Again, though the Aztec peoples cannot be compared point-for-point with the ancient Israelites, God has consistently revealed in His Word that He will not share His glory with another, and that dire consequences will surely follow those who worship another (Is. 42:8). Also consistent with Scripture is the idea that despite such a flawed character as Hernán Cortés and in His own timing and manner, God will judge both nations and individuals who persist in denying His right to reign over them.

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[49] Matthew Restal and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 57, 68-69.

[50] Davíd Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 247.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INFLUENCE OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

As mentioned in chapter two, sixteenth century Aztec culture was composed of at least three distinct Mesoamerican ethnicities or tribes, loosely associated by their common language of Nahuatl, a dialect distantly related to that of the Mayans. There has been some disagreement from historians on the exact whereabouts of where the survivors and descendants of the Aztecs eventually settled, other than a large contingent claiming Mexico City and its outskirts as their homeland. Jay Silverstein seems to believe that after having been banished from a ruined Tenochtitlan, the survivors "settled in the valley town of Acapetlahuaya, where their descendants now live."[51] He also speculates on the enigmatic existence of a colonial era church constructed of stone located in the capital city. However, most of the evidence that would have provided solid proof of Spain's colonization in this part of Mesoamerica has either been purposely dismantled or ravaged by fire over the centuries.

The Spaniards who accompanied Hernán Cortés to the New World boasted diverse backgrounds, many of whom had risked everything to attach themselves to this expedition with the express hope of wealth beyond measure and adventure in exotic faraway lands. Those serving directly under Cortés were mainly well-trained soldiers and a cavalry regiment, plus various officials from Cuba or Hispaniola. These were accompanied by Roman Catholic priests

[51] Jay Silverstein, "Aztec-Chontal Relations During the Late Postclassic and Early Colonial Periods," in Aztec Imperialism At Oztuma, Guerrero. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 12 (2001): 42.

who performed mass and provided spiritual guidance or general counsel to those in leadership positions, as well as performing baptisms for converted natives. In *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture*, a book fairly brimming with informative and relevant details, in his retelling of Cortés's exchanges with these tribes, Koch interjects accurate though at times condescending references to the God of the Bible (even spelling God in lower-case letters, lumping together the God of the Bible with all the various pagan deities encountered in this land). Despite such bias, however, there are moments where, even recounted by one attempting to deny the spiritual realities present in this chapter of North American history, it seemed quite inappropriate and ineffectual for Cortés himself to pontificate on the virtues of the gospel and the "proper" worship of Mary and the baby Jesus, given his reputation for selfish motives and duplicitous mannerisms evident in his communication with native and compatriot alike.

Most of these rudimentary and ill-implemented efforts of conversion and/or baptism by the Spaniards are reported to have taken place almost immediately upon encountering a heretofore unknown but seemingly cooperative indigenous people group. This brief introduction was usually followed in short order by desecrating the locals' idols and places of worship—abrupt actions executed seemingly without adequate explanation relayed in the natives' language(s). As it happened, and unknown to the conquistadors at the time, the Christian cross was similar in shape to a symbol the Aztecs associated with a pagan god whose dominion of influence was lakes and rivers—Chalchihuitlicue, the moon goddess.[52] For the Aztecs, since the cross symbolized fertility, there was virtually no assurance for the priests or friars that an outward acceptance of the Christian symbol of the cross meant that the natives had actually

[52] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 292.

experienced an authentic spiritual conversion. The true message of the cross of Christ, usually translated in their own tongue,[53] clearly did not penetrate the hearts of those who openly displayed abject dismay over the desecration of their sacred temples by foreign and repugnant images. Several reports of situations like these arose, where the gospel was allegedly presented to the remaining natives, after many of them had already perished violently at the hands of the Spaniards and were left with few alternatives.

In explaining the spiritual importance of the idols involved in the religious observances of Mesoamerican tribes, both Peter Koch and Davíd Carrasco note that it was common for conquered tribes to abandon their gods and adopt the gods of the victors.[54] These gods were perceived by the conquered remnant as more potent than their gods meaning that to resist them was to invite graver misfortune upon themselves and provoke these gods' continued wrath. Carrasco traces such a worldview by recounting activities in which the Aztecs would bring back foreign idols seized from the temples of recently conquered tribes and would deposit them triumphantly into their own temple in Tenochtitlan: "These captured sculptures signaled not only the defeat of the town they represented, but also the Aztec acquisition of the cosmo-magical powers embedded in the statues."[55] This insight would go a long way toward explaining the Aztec survivors submitting to conversion techniques by Catholic priests, albeit with some reluctance. It would also explain the tendency of some of the "converts" to continue worshipping their old gods secretly. One such example was where locals erected Christian

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[53] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 9.

[54] Peter O. Koch, *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the Making of Mexican Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 159.

[55] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 101.

symbols on top of buried idols, ostensibly to "worship" the Christian God, all the while secretly venerating their buried idols.

Two members taken aboard Cortés's expedition were men of the cloth: Father Juan Diaz and Father Bartolome de Olmedo. Koch mentions that on several occasions, whenever consulted, de Olmedo was said to have wisely counseled to Cortés on how best to present God's truth without inciting further conflict and thereby undoing all the hard work of establishing alliances with other natives, accomplished earlier by mutual trust and earned respect. It was de Olmedo's later discreet involvement with the natives with whom Cortés came into contact that proved critical in several pivotal moments throughout this expedition/conquest, on which the majority of the sources for this thesis have concurred. Well educated and more worldly than his younger counterpart Father Diaz, de Olmedo's cheerful demeanor was tempered by the seriousness of his mission and the responsibilities his office brought to this party.[56] Catholic mass for these troops was performed on a regular basis, as were attempts to convert the natives whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Overall, de Olmedo instincts were profound in his dealings with the natives. While naturally appalled by worship culminating in human sacrifice as a direct affront to almighty God, on a number of occasions, he stepped in and counseled Cortés on a wiser course of action than the one being contemplated. Many times this resulted in a course of action that in the long run would have a better chance for a peaceful resolution and greater impact on an evangelical mission than would a reckless strategy to abolish human sacrificing forthwith, and likely devoid of any sensitivity toward the natives immersed in such practices, or even so bold as to rush headlong into a plan to free all the sacrificial victims encountered and possibly anger and

[56] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 152.

bewilder their hosts. Such rash actions may very well have resulted in swift retribution, or a situation in which they themselves could suddenly become sacrifice victims.[57]

During one of the few times in which Cortés imprudently declined to take Father de Olmedo's advice, a delicate situation arose in Tenochtitlan which called for a greater degree of sensitivity, rather than less. It happened during a tour of the city. Montezuma had granted the request of Cortés and some of his men to visit the top of the Huey Teocalli temple— no grander honor in this ruler's eyes, with an equally grand view of the entire Valley of Mexico. Even Montezuma had a difficult time convincing his pagan priests to allow these foreigners to gain entrance to their sanctuary, a brief but portentous exchange whose significance was apparently lost on the Spaniards, as one shall shortly see. Soon after reaching the top step, a foul stench merely hinted at during the climb, but which engulfed them at the top, was discovered to have been emanating from an area several feet away, where lay the rotting remains of human organs from a recent sacrifice. Cortés and his men were visibly offended, registering unvarnished shock and horror at the sights and smells which accosted them in this most holy place of Aztec splendor.

While standing under the very shadow of the huge wooden image of Huitzilopochtli towering over him, Cortés wheeled to face to Montezuma, and, fixing him with a glare, blurted out how it grieved him that the Aztec people had been deceived into worshipping these horrible graven images of Satan, and that they were not truly gods. While their host was still reeling from such an unexpectedly blasphemous remark, to add insult to injury, Cortés in the very next breath voiced a shocking request: permission to erect the cross of Christ at the very top of this imposing temple, as well as constructing an interior space that would accommodate the statue of the

[57] Ibid., 208, 234.

Blessed Virgin of Roman Catholicism. Clearly this was not the proper response of someone who had been trained in missions work, although Cortés reportedly had received nominal instruction on preaching.[58]

For his own part, Montezuma was understandably provoked to anger, but, recovering quickly, he masterfully restrained himself from responding with barely more than a profound disappointment at his guests' shameless conduct in this sacrosanct place. He also denied their request to install a Christian cross on this temple. He indignantly informed this impertinent visitor that because of the humble fealty of his people, these gods had provided for their every need, and would continue to do so under his reign. He would accept no further discussion on the matter, but when asked the next day, unexpectedly and magnanimously granted the Spaniards permission to erect their own sanctuary for the Virgin Mary in the quarters assigned to them in his father's palace, even going so far as to donate construction material for the project. In all fairness it must be noted that Cortés did apologize sincerely for his rash remarks the following morning.[59] More than one source on this topic relates parallel accounts which, though deviating slightly from this version, were no less interesting in terms of Cortés's impulsive nature when confronted by similarly evil symbols of satanic bondage.

Early missions and evangelization efforts by Roman Catholic priests and friars arriving a few years after the fall of the Aztec empire were undertaken by the Dominican, Augustinian, and Franciscan orders of friars.[60] Beginning in 1523 the Franciscans began their journey to the region north of Mexico Valley–Costa Grande and Acapulco. Ten years later, the Augustinians

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[58] Ibid., 160, 200-202.

[59] Ibid., 201.

[60] Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 28.

arrived in the central valleys of La Montaña and the Tierra Caliente regions. The Augustinians made a lasting impression on the peoples in the area of Mexico City and central Mexico, rapidly gaining converts and constructing churches and other religious edifices. Alonso de la Vera Cruz was a prominent figure in Mexico in the sixteenth century; he was credited with being a "missionary, educator, writer of philosophical texts, canon lawyer, and administrator."[61] His impressive credentials and seminal work on defending the rights of the natives and detailing the history and religious progress of the natives came to his aid in 1562, when he was recalled to Spain to rebut charges submitted to officials of the Inquisition. Alonso de la Vera Cruz not only survived the ordeal, but returned to continue his tireless work among the Mexican natives, boldly advocating their full inclusion into every aspect of the Roman Catholic Church.

At this point it is critical to provide an overview of several pivotal events regarding the religious atmosphere permeating much of Europe and Spain in particular, prior to and during Hernán Cortés's exploration of Mesoamerica, in order to grasp what was at stake in expeditions such as these, with odds that were unmistakably stacked against explorers fearless enough to set sail for these shores. To begin with, the famous exploration of Christopher Columbus to these lands in 1492 resulted one year later in Pope Alexander VI granting to Ferdinand and Isabella, king and queen of Spain, the right to evangelize and colonize the native populations.[62] While it is not this author's intention to disparage another denomination's doctrinal views or method of evangelization in a remote and fairly hostile environment occurring hundreds of years ago, it seems evident from the subsequent actions of the "converted" local populace that, in most of the

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[61] Arthur J. Ennis, "Augustinians," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, edited by Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Charles Scribner and Sons, 2008): 399. http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/ps/i.do?action=interpret&id=GALE|CX3078900456&v=2.1&u=vic_liberty&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&authCount=1 (accessed August 1, 2012).

[62] Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 28.

cases of conversion examined within the time frame of Cortés's conquest of the Aztecs and their capital of Tenochtitlan (1519-1521), there was no undisputed concept of the term "born again" impressed upon the natives. It is therefore prudent to take this into consideration when reviewing material from this period, which may claim inaccurate or unverifiable information regarding the number of natives who actually accepted the gospel of Christ during the time of Hernán Cortés, or even after the first orders of priests began arriving a few years afterward.

In Europe, around the same time as Cortés's conquest of Tenochtitlan, Protestantism was on the rise, with notable characters such as Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, followed by Luther's defense of his views at the Diet of Worms in 1519 in the presence of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. This was the same year that Cortés arrived in Cozumel.[63] Regarding the religious worldview of Hernán Cortés and his men, Mark Noll's *The Old Religion in a New World* insightfully observes that Catholic Spain's hard-won centuries-long victory over Islam in 1492 (formerly acknowledged in Alhambra, Grenada) was still reverberating through her emissaries in various parts of the world, such as her conquistadors in Mesoamerica, impacting the thrust behind the strategies of battles laid out in these new territories, as well as strategies of spreading the message of Christianity essentially by mass conversions.

[63] Davíd Carrasco, *The Aztecs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the resources which have been consulted for this thesis, while diverse in emphasis and mainly secular in outlook, have nevertheless proven invaluable in integrating the various threads for this thesis. Concerning the controversial topic of God's judgment in relation to the expression of false worship practices perpetrated by the Aztecs of Mesoamerica, it was vitally important that this author's opinions and biblical worldview be routinely held up against the unchanging truths of Scripture and the unchanging character of God. Having begun in earnest a study on a specific aspect of the Aztec civilization's religious rituals involving human sacrifice, it became vitally important to differentiate between the varying assumptions, presuppositions, and personal motives of the authors of each resource, as well as my own. Though most sources attempted to present the historical data from an objective aspect, there was a noticeable difference in tone and perspective regarding certain details for those authors who in some way may have been personally affiliated with how the history of Mexico in general or Mexico City in particular has been interpreted and presented for English-speaking audiences. In such cases the tone was appreciably more sympathetic toward the Aztecs' perspectives on this slice of history. Probably one of the most obvious examples of this outlook is in *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, by Beacon Press, and edited by Miguel Leon-Portilla. A cursory search on this book's history reveals that it was first printed in Spanish at a university in Mexico, under the title *Visión de los Vendidos*, or "Vision of the Defeated." There are also numerous instances of differing statistics with regard to certain well-known

battles between the conquistadors and their local allies, as well as the confrontations between the Aztecs and their allies or loyal neighboring tribes.

With just a surface glance at either Testament, one should note that Scripture has made it clear that those who practiced rituals similar to those of the Aztecs were under the influence of satanic forces which deceived them into believing, among other things, that sacrificing human beings was not only an acceptable part of their sacred duty as they participated in religious rituals, but that it was actually necessary to fulfill their cosmic mythology and continue their way of life as a dominant group in Mesoamerica. Such activities were an inherent part of a complex system of worship and as a platform for petitioning various gods for the basic needs of their citizens (i.e., rain for a successful harvest), or honoring a traditional ceremony, or even heralding the pomp and ceremony of the inauguration of a new king. At least one individual in Aztec culture, Nezahualcoyotl (Fasting Coyote), lobbied for a less violent means of worship. Though one could not argue with any degree of certainty that Nezahualcoyotl was ever a true monotheist or advocating devotion to the true God,[64] what little was written about such a character and the profound respect paid to the group to which he belonged, indicates that though they may have been dismissed as a minority in the midst of savage and cruel practices, the Aztecs were fully capable of contemplating worship by means other than human sacrifice and other rituals equally heinous.

Because of the influence of these explorers and conquistadors hailing from Spain, many indigenous peoples (comprised of ethnicities descended from the Aztecs and Maya) reportedly did either come to Christ or were baptized into the Roman Catholic church. Still others married the remaining Spaniards and other European foreigners to produce entirely new ethnic groups,

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[64] Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 13-14.

one of which today is known simply as the Mexican peoples. At least one source (Thomas) has done an admirable job of rounding out the usually caricatured figure of Cortés, as one who apparently felt the effects of the conflict between his flesh and his faith. Father de Olmedo noted that Cortés faithfully attended mass and spent much time in prayer on his knees.[65] However, it is also well known that Cortés struggled greatly in the area of sexual purity and marital fidelity. It has certainly been a challenge to shed multiple cultural assumptions and temper a staunch Christian worldview to understand the complexities of this time in history, wherein Spain had gained a foothold in the New World, and had initiated a weak but lasting Christian influence on the local peoples. At the very least church building were erected, as well as other structures of worship alongside or in place of pagan temples.

One of the key elements that was touched upon in this thesis, and one that needs to be expanded on more fully in this section, is the similar belief held by many indigenous peoples in various parts of the world that when one people group conquered or subjugated another, it meant that the victors' gods were superior to those worshipped by the conquered. As the indigenous Aztec peoples may have put it in Cortés's time, this meant that the battle in the physical realm was chiefly being played out between the gods of the opposing people groups, and that the strongest or most cunning god(s) emerged victorious. Superior weaponry and artful strategy was not always the deciding factor. This sort of belief would usually translate into a situation wherein the survivors were either killed or sacrificed outright, enslaved, or subjugated corporately as vassals of the more superior group—forced to pay a steep or lengthy tribute. This typically resulted in wholesale or partial rejection of their current god(s) and adopting or following those of their conquerors. While on the surface this seems like a reasonable way to

[65] Ibid., 156.

proceed in the short term, it is certainly not the biblical view of who the real God is, and what constitutes true victory, and how He shapes history through ordinary human events.

This author is reminded of a vivid account in the Bible during the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah that shares striking parallels with the beliefs of the natives in places like the Valley of Mexico. In 2 Kings 18, one reads of Sennacherib king of Assyria's capture of all the fortified cities of Judah, and where Hezekiah hastily dashes off an apology to Sennacherib for rebelling against paying tribute (v. 7b). In verses 15-16 one reads that he complies with Sennacherib's demand of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold: "So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace….[and] the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the Lord, and gave it to the king of Assyria" (NIV). For whatever reason, this offering was rejected by Sennacherib. The next several verses reveal that the king of Assyria then marched on Jerusalem and used common scare tactics to weaken the resolve of the people of Judah, saying, among other taunting phrases, "On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?" (v. 19).

Next, he claims that the Lord is on his side in this conflict: "Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the Lord? The Lord himself told me to march against this country and destroy it'" (v. 25). He makes ludicrous but tempting promises to the people on the wall that if they leave Hezekiah and join with him, he will provide abundantly for them. The actual imagery used is very similar to other parts of Scripture (cf. Deut. 6:11, 30:19) where the Lord is speaking to His people, promising them abundant life, much like Sennacherib is in this passage: "…eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own—a land of grain and new wine, a land

of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death!" (vv. 31-32a).

The last insult hurled at Hezekiah's subjects reveals an ancient Near Eastern worldview that surprisingly reflects that of the indigenous peoples of the Valley of Mexico in the early sixteenth century: "Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" (vv. 32b-35). Sennacherib clearly believes that his god is superior to that of the people of Judah, implying that they should be worshipping his god and not relying on the Lord God to deliver them from such a mighty foe who has recently conquered their sister cities. He is clearly boasting in the proven abilities of his gods.

In a few of his prison epistles in the New Testament, the apostle Paul emphasizes that he did not consider his sufferings or trials to be the direct result of personal failure or by serving an inferior god. On the contrary, he (and other believers like Peter and John in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts) rejoiced in his difficulties and persecutions precisely because they were living proof that he had been crucified with Christ and accordingly had discarded his own agenda, in order that his suffering should bring more people to Christ. The more he suffered the greater his impact with the gospel, and the further it went throughout the land. While the scope of this thesis will not allow for the following theme, it is sufficient to note that as horrific as the act of human sacrificing is on the surface of it, there are some very basic elements to this ritual that, if examined closely, point to the sacrificial death of Christ. At its root, Aztec worship

points to an understanding—admittedly skewed though it may be—that the human heart is the seat of a person's soul and character, an understanding transmitted in their written records or crudely rendered in their drawings or in the details of their sculptures or icons. Some of their illustrations involving human sacrifice graphically depict the heart's ascent, followed by the person's soul, both headed to an eternal supernatural destination.

The Aztec people group discussed in this thesis were far removed from the religious awakening taking place in Europe, and were being conquered by the forces of Hernán Cortés at the beginning of the Reformation in writings penned by such luminaries as Martin Luther. Even so, they could boast of a small group of highly revered and intellectually superior men who had devoted themselves to a lifelong study of the humanities and finer arts. Though none of the members of the *tlamatinime* group described in detail in the second chapter could be considered monotheists, this elite contingent of scholars and literati nevertheless were able to exert some influence over their society, even in terms of suggesting an alternate means of worship. These figures, especially Nezaualcoyotl, might roughly be compared to the prophets of ancient Israel commissioned to portend doom prior to Babylonian captivity—a small counter-cultural group, trying in vain to abolish the bloodshed of idolatrous worship within their respective culture. Though this unusual analogy may not be a perfect fit for the Aztec culture, based on the sources consulted for this project, even the *tlamatinime* concept of alternate worship in how to approach God was still based on a false premise of who God is, and was not sufficient in pointing a true seeker toward the Lord of the Bible. So while some may argue against the perfect justice of God regarding Aztec worship practices, this author again asserts that this is the precise point in history where Hernán Cortés was used as God's tool of judgment for a culture fully committed to carrying out atrocities that demeaned human beings and by extension, God Himself.

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