The Slippery Earth

Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico

Louise M. Burkhart

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Tlaalahui, tlapetzcahui in tlalticpac.
It is slippery, it is slick on the earth.

—*Nahuatl proverb*

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CHAPTER 1

Evangelization, Dialogue, Rhetoric

Central Mexico in the sixteenth century was the scene of a social experiment which, though hopelessly quixotic, bequeathed to modern scholarship an excellent and extensive record of intercultural contact, including the largest body of native-language texts from anywhere in the New World. Europeans here did not simply pass through and describe what they saw: they sat down with the natives and, over a period of decades, listened to them speak in their own voices while they themselves learned to answer in kind. This dialogue owes its existence to an odd mix of medieval theology, which insisted that all human souls were equal, Renaissance humanism, which suggested that something of worth might be found in another way of life, and Catholic intolerance, which justified—or excused—the study of pagan things on the grounds of facilitating their eradication. The Indians of Mexico were contacted at a time when educated, religious men of Europe could deem them worthy of the effort required to communicate with them.

On August 13, 1521, Cuauhtemoc, the last ruler of the Mexica Indians, surrendered to Hernán Cortés the island capital of Tenochtitlan. Cortés's three years of schemes and shrewd alliances had paid off, and to the possessions of Spain's young king, Charles V, newly crowned Holy Roman Emperor, was added the vast territory known in history as the Aztec Empire. The colony of New Spain was established; its capital, now Mexico City, was built upon the ruins of Tenochtitlan.

Central Mexico, the mountain-ringed Basin of Mexico and its surrounding territory (now the states of Puebla, Tlaxcala, Morelos, México, and Hidalgo), had been the seat of urban civilization since before the time of Christ. Through time, shifting political alliances periodically united the area or fragmented it among rival city-states. In periods of political upheaval, such as the fall of the ancient city of Teotihuacan, seminomadic tribes would migrate into the area from the north. These tribes brought with them the Nahuatl language, a Uto-Aztecan tongue related to languages of the western and southwestern United States, and an origin myth about a place called Aztlan, source of the term Aztec (from *aztecatl* 'person from Aztlan') which is often used to describe these peoples. From the local inhabitants the settlers learned the arts of agriculture and civilization, and acculturated their tribal rites and deities to ancient Mesoamerican patterns.

The Mexica were the last of these immigrant groups, entering the Basin of Mexico in the twelfth century and founding their island city in about 1325. A warlike group, they synthesized their tribal cult with the Mesoamerican solar cult and the ancient practice of human sacrifice, inventing a militaristic ideology which eventually helped them to win hegemony over most of Mesoamerica. As their soldiers went forth to bring back captives for sacrifice, demands for tribute were imposed on the vanquished polities and wealth poured into the capital. But aside from their state cult and their politically dominant position, the Mexica were culturally very similar to the other Nahuatl-speaking peoples who surrounded them.

After the Spanish Conquest, aside from some temporary privileges granted to Cortés's closest allies, all of these peoples shared similar experiences. It is here more fitting to speak of Nahua culture, the culture of peoples speaking the Nahuatl language, than to distinguish the Mexica from their neighbors or to speak of "Aztecs"—a vague term that is better applied to the pre-Conquest Mexica empire than to the particular ethnic groups that composed, and outlived, that organization.

Located at the center of the new colony as well as the old empire, the Nahuas came into closer and more immediate contact with the Spanish colonial administration than did peoples in more isolated regions. This area was also the center of the colonial Church. It was the missionaries who entered into closest contact with the Nahuas, learning their language and attempting to understand how their culture operated. These missionaries were friars of the Mendicant orders—Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. They came to New Spain in the hope of establishing among

the Indians a new and exemplary Christian community. They believed that this could be achieved only by residing in the native communities and paying close attention to their customs, however alien or repugnant these might have seemed. Hence, they entered into a dialogue with these people, of which a fragmentary transcript survives in the missionaries' many writings.

The purpose of the dialogue—to transform the Indians into a model Christian society—was thwarted by various factors. The Nahuas resisted, actively and passively. The indigenous population was decimated by disease, overwork, and dislocation. A powerful colonial order based on an economy of exploitation was institutionalized. Religious authority was transferred from the Mendicant monastic orders to the secular Church hierarchy, while at the same time the heavy hand of the Counter-Reformation pulled the priests away from their immersion in native language and culture. What remains are the records—and the challenge they pose for turning an attempt at religious conversion into the basis for anthropological analysis.

Information on indigenous culture has permitted ethnographic studies to be written on pre-Conquest culture, with a degree of detail impressive for a culture never visited by a modern anthropologist. A very few examples are Berdan (1982), León-Portilla (1963), López Austin (1980) and Soustelle (1961). Such cultural reconstructions strive to block out European influence, to show the Indians as they "really were." The results are fascinating and are probably valid for the most part, but they tend to overlook the realities of the contact situation and their influence on the sources. Also, this emphasis on the pre-Conquest period, this quest for the authentic Indian, ignores what these sources are best suited for: the study of culture contact.

The use of colonial sources to reconstruct pre-Conquest culture is symptomatic of a general tendency within anthropology to place other cultures into an "ethnographic present" in which they are described as static, self-perpetuating systems. Fabian (1983) attributes this disposition to anthropology's need to justify itself as a science, to make of culture a passive object of inquiry on the same order as those of the natural sciences. Living societies, with whom an investigator has had extensive personal contact, are made to seem removed in time and space, objectified; the investigator's dialogue with individual people becomes his or her monologue about the "culture," now presented as a homogeneous unit.

Sahlins (1985) also criticizes the tendency to remove cultures from their

own history. He emphasizes that a culture exists in time and reveals itself through time, as its conceptual categories come into contact with an ever-changing reality and it is forced to interpret and organize that reality using whatever symbolic equipment its own past has bequeathed to it. His analysis of British-Polynesian contact shows how Polynesian culture shaped the course of that contact and was at the same time changed by it.

Nahua culture is rooted deeply in a past known only through archaeology and continues today among several hundred thousand Nahuatl-speakers. To single out the pre-Conquest "Aztec" as its quintessential representative is to perpetuate the ahistorical bias plaguing traditional anthropology. Colonial sources are best suited to the study of colonial Nahuas, and in some ways colonial Nahuas are more interesting than their predecessors. It is they who faced the greatest challenge ever presented to Nahua culture—how to make sense of an invasion by alien beings intent not only on seizing their wealth and territory but on altering their most deeply held religious beliefs. That they survived with a large part of their cultural identity intact is perhaps a more impressive achievement than the feats of the poet-kings, warriors, and scribes so beloved of pre-Conquest enthusiasts.

Even if one's goal is to discover the pre-Conquest Indian, European "influence" in the colonial texts is not simply a screen or a veneer that can be easily peeled away. It is the colonial Indians who speak through these records, Indians who are in the process of adapting to the colonial environment, not by simply adding European traits to their own cultural repertoire but by reinterpreting those traits to make them consistent with preexisting cultural models. At the same time, Nahua culture is undergoing what Sahlins (1985:ix, 31) calls a "functional revaluation of categories," the ongoing process of change that all cultures undergo through time in response to changing experiences but which becomes accelerated, and perhaps more easily observable, in a situation of contact. The Nahuas reinterpreted their own culture and their own past in the light of their new experiences and pressures; their own image of the "ancient Aztec" was in part a colonial artifact.

In discussing their culture, the colonial Nahuas did not speak freely, for Europeans created the context within which information was set down. They sought answers to particular questions, determining not only what matters would be recorded but the form the records would take. Investigators, especially those who were priests, tended to respond to what they learned about indigenous religion with shock or zeal, depending on their

own values. Even if the Indians were encouraged to be honest, they soon understood what their interlocutors thought about some of their most cherished traditions.

The records were not made immediately upon the arrival of Cortés in 1519 nor upon the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521 but mainly during the 1530s to 1580s, while the Indians were adapting to colonization and learning at least as much about Europeans as the Europeans were learning about them. The very language of the interaction, what is now called Classical Nahuatl, was adopted from native upper-class usage and preserved by the friars; thus, its survival was a result of Nahua-European dialogue (Karttunen 1982:396–97).[1] Without taking into account the context of the dialogue, the expressions of either side cannot be interpreted accurately.

Studies of the continuities in native culture have tended to focus on the "survival" of native elements despite the appearance of Christianity, or on "syncretism" (for example, Madsen 1957, Uchmany 1980). Modern Indian religion is seen as a mixture of pre-Hispanic and European elements, a middle ground between the two cultures. While this approach has been useful in identifying the often surprising extent to which ancient beliefs survive, it does not account adequately for which kinds of elements from each culture are present, and how they came to be integrated through historical processes into a cultural system that is more than a simple sum of parts. Nor does Ingham (1986), who chooses to emphasize the Catholic character of a formerly Nahuatl-speaking community, adequately explain how the many clearly indigenous cultural elements are integrated into this Catholic structure as anything other than the shreds and patches of a vanished identity.

Gossen (1986a), in an excellent collection of essays on Mesoamerican thought, stresses the persistence of a pan-Mesoamerican ideological structure characteristic of the entire region from pre-Columbian times to the present. Culture change has been structured in terms of the system's own inner logic and without violating important symbolic precepts, such as concepts of space, time, and duality. However, the volume's five essays on Central Mexico include four on pre-Conquest thought and one based on modern ethnography; there is nothing to bridge the gap.

From the European side, Church and academic historians have long studied the conversion of the Nahuas and their neighbors. In these studies the Indians are presented as the objects of great humanistic experiments, of innovative missionary methodologies, of apocalyptic or millenarian musings, of inflexible dogmas. What the missionaries say they did or said

is accepted. Native culture is treated as a given, the inert clay that the friars tried to mold as they pleased. The missionaries' ingenious methods of introducing Christianity are described with little or no attention to the process of translation, or to the Indians as active partners in a dialogue.

In recent years a new interest in the Nahuatl language and colonial Indian society has yielded excellent work based on long-overlooked non-religious texts in Nahuatl. Legal records, municipal proceedings, land documents, and wills provide insight into the realities of Indian life in the colony not recoverable from Spanish records. They also document linguistic acculturation, filling in the "middle years" between Classical Nahuatl and its modern descendants. This category includes such works as Anderson, Berdan and Lockhart (1976); Karttunen and Lockhart (1976); Lockhart (1982); Lockhart, Berdan, and Anderson (1986); Cline and León-Portilla (1984); and articles edited by Harvey and Prem (1984).

Along with this new emphasis on colonial society has come a new interest in colonial religion, involving a critical synthesis of Church history and studies of indigenous culture. Some of the best Nahua scholars are studying Christianization. León-Portilla (1974) has looked at indigenous reactions to Christianity. Klor de Alva (1979, 1980b, 1982b, 1987b) has debunked the "spiritual conquest" legend, the claim promulgated by Ricard (1966) and others that the Indians of Mexico were quickly and easily Christianized, and has focused upon dialogical aspects of Nahua-Christian interaction from the perspective of indigenous philosophy. The *Colloquios* of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, the most overtly dialogical text, has been translated and analyzed by Klor de Alva (1980a; 1982a); León-Portilla has brought out a facsimile edition with a Spanish translation (Sahagún 1986). Bierhorst (1985) has analyzed the *Cantares mexicanos,* the Nahuatl poems long ascribed to pre-Conquest authors, in the context of the mid–sixteenth-century cultural milieu in which they were recorded and at least partially composed and reworked. Baudot (1972, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1983) approaches Franciscan ethnography from the perspective of missionary goals and interests, applying his proficiency in Nahuatl to the study of Fray Andrés de Olmos's and Sahagún's catechistic writings. Anderson and Dibble, translators of the *Florentine Codex,* Sahagún's ethnographic encyclopedia, have shown interest in this friar's doctrinal writings as well (Anderson 1983; Dibble 1974, 1988). Todorov (1985), from outside the field, treats the conquest of Mexico from the standpoint of Indians' and Europeans' perceptions of one another, that is, the extent to which they were able to enter into a dialogue with one another. He treats the texts as

expressions of particular voices rather than as passive collections of information. For the colonial Maya also, Farriss (1984) and D. Tedlock (1985) have moved beyond the syncretic model to view religious change in terms of dialogue and creative synthesis.

The study of Nahua culture is opening up to include the missionaries—those men who, though they misunderstood so much, were more familiar with it than the modern investigator can ever be. It was they, their teachings, and the culture they represented that were posing the greatest challenge to indigenous cultural categories at the very time those categories were being described.

In order to apply an anthropological perspective to the missionaries' dialogue with the sixteenth-century Nahuas, the traditional enmity between the anthropologist and the missionary must be set aside. This is not, after all, so outrageous a proposition. Both anthropologists and missionaries engage in intercultural dialogue, in contexts where the contacted cultures tend to be in a materially and politically weak position relative to the culture represented by their visitors. Malinowski (1935:II, xxi, cited by D. Tedlock 1983:334) saw anthropologists and missionaries as "inverted twins," the missionary's role being to translate the European's point of view for the native while the anthropologist's is to translate the native point of view for Europeans. The missionaries to the Nahuas were sent to do the former but also did quite a bit of the latter, for themselves as well as for a broader European audience. Distance in time enriches their records by providing a historical perspective usually lacking in modern field studies. Their ultimate goal was to silence indigenous voices, to resolve dialogue into monologue, to replace cultural diversity with conformity. But since they themselves were silenced with the task incomplete, and since they also championed Indian rights (albeit within the colonial context), the anthropologist cannot judge them with severity.

D. Tedlock (1983:333–34) succinctly points out the flaws of the traditional approach to the ethnohistorical documents. He criticizes the rejection of whatever seems "contaminated by the presence of Spanish missionaries," as well as the general neglect of the catechistic literature written in native languages by men familiar with native customs. Such texts are significant because they "show, from both sides and with moments of thunderbolt clarity, the dialogical frontier between European and Mesoamerican cultures during the colonial period." Tedlock's work with the Quiché Maya *Popol Vuh* (1985) reveals how one can use the presence of "Christian influence" to illuminate the processes of indigenous culture.

Approaching the friars' records with attention fixed on both sides of the dialogue, one can come to understand native culture—and the friars' impact on it—better than they did themselves. Something more than a static reconstruction begins to emerge. Nahua culture becomes not simply a thing to be described but a process to be analyzed, a method for coping with experience, a dialectic by which the old accommodates new content while maintaining important aspects of its form.

It is into this context of inquiry and interpretation that the present study falls. It explores one aspect of Nahua-Christian interaction: the attempt to introduce into Nahua ideology Christian moral precepts, particularly the Christian concept of sin. It is based on the ethnographic records and the friars' doctrinal writings in Nahuatl.[2] This topic was chosen partly because of the texts' own emphases: the friars put a great deal of effort into making the Indians behave like moral Christians. It was considered more important that the Indians lead a simple, Christian life than that they understand Christian doctrine on a metaphysical and philosophical level. In addition, the topic was selected in reaction to the tendency for studies of Nahua culture to emphasize the world-view aspects of ideology. To borrow Geertz's phrasing (1973:93), "models of" reality (the structure of the cosmos, the organization of the calendar, descriptions of rituals) are analyzed at the expense of "models for" behavior. This position contributes to the view of indigenous culture as a static given rather than something to be adapted and manipulated by people as they faced the challenges of existence.

Moral precepts both reflect a particular world view and provide models by which one may live in accordance with that view. They are involved in the dialectic between culture and behavior. But they are not to be identified by an observation of behavior; they are, like other kinds of beliefs, part of an ideology. According to Ladd, a philosopher who studied Navajo ethics, a moral code should be investigated only through the explicit statements of informants and the logical presuppositions—conscious or otherwise—upon which those statements depend (1957:12–17). Moral concepts are an apt subject for ethnohistorical investigation, because the ethnohistorical record is in essence a collection of statements, many of them dealing explicitly or implicitly with values. The inability to observe behavior directly—and the fact that contemporary reports of behavior vary widely and are clearly biased—does not affect the validity of the study. Statements about behavior can be treated as part of the discourse rather than as an accurate reflection of reality.

Fundamental to the dialogue of evangelization was rhetoric, or the ability to use language effectively. Friars and Indians had not only to understand one another and exchange information; the former had to persuade the latter to accept new ideas and attitudes that would lead them to think and act in ways compatible with Christian doctrine. Missionaries are known to have resorted to whipping recalcitrant Indians, and even burned a few at the stake, but on the whole the friars were, for their time, a peaceable lot who preferred to do their persuading with words, with pictures explained in words, and with the example set by their own lifestyle.

From Christianity's earliest days its preachers relied upon their powers of persuasion. Saint Paul believed that "faith comes from hearing": if he could persuade his listeners to accept his doctrine, they would believe—and behave—differently from the way they had under paganism (Burke 1966:5). The same applied to the sixteenth-century missionaries. This explains why Fray Diego Valadés, a Mexican-born Franciscan who journeyed to Europe as spokesman for his order, chose to incorporate his apologia on the Franciscans' work with the Indians into a Latin treatise on the rhetorical art, his *Rhetorica christiana* of 1579.

Christian rhetoric is what they used, but they cast it in Nahuatl terms. Evangelization had to be carried out in Nahuatl and the other native tongues: the soul-saving mission was too urgent to await the massive acculturation program that would have been necessary to impose the Spanish language on a huge native population. Learning native languages enabled the friars to gain the Indians' acceptance, but it was also a factor in the friars' downfall: having bound themselves so closely to the Indians, they raised the suspicions of colonial authorities and the leaders of the secular Church hierarchy. In an effort to avoid such suspicion a century later during missionary efforts among the Pueblo peoples, the Franciscans neither learned the native languages nor won their subjects' acceptance (see Spicer 1962).

The friars were not modern linguists; they lacked sensitivity to the relationship between language and thought, between words and mental categories. They looked for synonyms and used whatever they could find; some Spanish terms were introduced but almost always as the equivalent of something Nahuatl. The meanings of Nahuatl terms were, of course, not immutable, and they did shift somewhat under the friars' manipulation, but there was no escaping the fact that Nahuatl selected, organized, and named a different set of ideas and objects than did Spanish or Latin—and did so in harmony with a particular ideology. In addition, translation

from Spanish or Latin into Nahuatl was something quite different than translation from Latin to Spanish, or between other European tongues sharing both a common origin and a long experience in the expression of Christian doctrine.

Nahuatl not only named but persuaded in a different way from Spanish or Latin. In order to use Nahuatl effectively, to persuade as well as to explain, the friars had to adopt the rhetorical forms of expression appropriate to Nahuatl. Christian precepts had to be expressed in a way that was not only grammatically correct but that would convince Nahua listeners to accept them. To this end, friars elicited and recorded native oratory, listed the figures of speech and adages contained therein, and strove to master the elegant speaking style of the native orators. Both Olmos and Sahagún, who compiled the principal sixteenth-century collections of rhetoric, focused upon this activity quite early in their respective careers. Their interest in this material was not without precedent. St. Augustine, a teacher of rhetoric before his conversion to Christianity, expressed in his *De doctrina christiana* an interest in adapting the verbal skills of the pagans to Christian uses (Burke 1970:49).

For the Nahuas, as for Mesoamerica in general, words had tremendous symbolic force. A key aspect of pan-Mesoamerican thought is, in Gossen's words (1986a:7) this "extraordinary power of spoken and written language as a symbolic entity in itself, beyond its neutral role as medium for routine communication." Rhetorical speech was sacred and was also an important method of social control: the words of elders and ancestors set forth the proper behavior of their descendants, which was to replicate the established pattern inherited from the past (Sullivan 1986). If the friars could usurp the power of those words, replacing the authority of the Indian past with that of Christianity, they would gain a significant degree of control over Indian thought and behavior, with all the social and political consequences that such control implies. The words, though, were Nahuatl words, and their symbolic power was accorded them by Nahua minds. The friars could successfully manipulate the system only by adapting to it; violation of its basic precepts would strip it of the authority the friars sought to borrow.

Based on Burke's idea of language as "entitlement," by which "the things of the world become material exemplars of the values which the tribal idiom has placed upon them" (1966:361)—that is, the words are not simply tools for naming things but ascribe culture-specific meanings and values to the things named—Crocker develops a scheme for the ethnographic analysis of rhetoric (1977). It is equally applicable to ethnohistory. "Rhetorical entitlement" is the process by which someone says something about a social situation "which summarizes its moral essence in such ways as to define possible actions" (Crocker 1977:37). The situation, simply by the terms in which it is described, entails a certain moral interpretation, which, in turn, suggests appropriate behavior. Behaviors pick up morally positive or negative valuations by association with terms that carry those values.

Rhetorical statements can be interpersonal, with the speaker aiming to persuade the listener to do something, or they can refer to a social situation wider than the relationship of speaker to listener, narrating events pertaining to a third party, or even events from history or myth, and using them as a general prescription for behavior. Rhetorical devices exist also as a verbal codification of the culture's ideas and values, and can be analyzed as such even apart from their applications to particular contexts (Crocker 1977:37–38).

To be effective, a rhetorical device must be "felt" as well as "thought." That is, it must function cognitively in giving a name to a complex situation, classifying it in accordance with some ordering principle, but it must also evoke an emotional response. This depends on an interplay between external metaphors (analogies) and internal metaphors, or between metaphor and metonymy (Crocker 1977:53–58).

The terms used in this study for the various types of tropes are consistent with the classification of Sapir (1977). The term "metaphor," though often applied by rhetoricians to a broad range of tropes including synecdoche (substitution of part for whole or whole for part within a semantic domain) and metonymy (substitution of part for part within a semantic domain), is here restricted to tropes which relate elements from separate semantic domains. To illustrate these relationships with an example from Nahua-Christian discourse, the external metaphor or analogy "sin is to virtue as dirt is to cleanliness" provides a way of thinking about immoral acts by relating the domain of morality to the domain of sanitation. Within this analogy, sin is related to dirt by internal metaphor. It is this internal metaphor which is "felt," because it evokes toward sin the emotional responses evoked by dirt. This internal metaphor may in turn slip into metonymy, sin and dirt being treated as contiguous, as two elements in a single domain of dirty, contaminating phenomena. This particular analogy is explored extensively in Chapter Four.

This study focuses on how the friars attempted to convert the Nahuas

by converting indigenous rhetoric to the expression of Christian moral concerns, and how Christian rhetoric was made indigenous by its adoption of Nahua form. It is organized according to principal metaphors used in indigenous moral argument which were adopted into Christianity. The following chapter summarizes mission methodology and examines how the friars handled the major problems posed by the differences between Nahua and Christian morality.

CHAPTER 2

The Missionary Missionized

A paradoxical figure in Mexican history is the *Conquistador conquistado*, the Spaniard's child "conquered" by the new land, who rejects Spain for New Spain and ultimately demands independence (Keen 1971:92). One might speak in similar fashion of the missionary missionized, of the friar whose sympathies come to lie with the Indians against the colonists and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, against an Old World perceived as corrupt, and who adopts Indian ways in order to fulfill his mission. A very brief account of this man and his mission follows.

MISSION AND METHOD

Evangelization was for Spain inseparable from conquest and colonization: the Crown must have its gold but God must in return have His souls. Thus, in the early decades—until almost all the Indians had at least been baptized—the friars were ceded considerable powers. They were permitted to act as parish priests, tending congregations and administering sacraments, in addition to their usual role as teachers and healers. They held positions of bishop and archbishop and acted as Inquisitors in the absence of the Holy Office. Until after mid-century, when the *repartimiento* system of labor assignment increased Indian contact with colonists[1] and secular

priests began to oust friars, Indian interaction with Europeans was dominated by the Mendicants.

For conversion to be accomplished, Christianity had to be made appealing to the Indians. This could be achieved only by adapting it to indigenous forms of religious expression. Cortés himself showed a realization of this need when he advised Charles V that the Indians could only be converted by priests who, like their own, held to an ascetic lifestyle (Cortés 1979:203).

Such were the friars of the Mendicant orders, fresh from Observant reforms which had reemphasized ascetic principles after a period of increasing worldliness. The first official missionaries were twelve Spanish Franciscans who arrived in 1524, following a party of three Flemish Franciscans who had come unofficially the year before. The first Dominicans came in 1526, the first Augustinians in 1533. In the central Nahuatl-speaking areas, Franciscans dominated the mission in numbers and influence, developing the strategies that other orders followed after them. Dominicans were concentrated in present-day Morelos; Augustinians in present-day Hidalgo. Disputes between the orders arose from the Dominicans' greater concern with legality and orthodoxy, which conflicted with the Franciscans' simpler, more personal faith; and the Augustinians' tendency toward sumptuosity, which offended the poverty-obsessed Franciscans. All three orders left important records, but the Franciscans were by far the most prolific in both ethnographic and doctrinal writings. Figure 1 shows the locations of major Mendicant establishments in the central, most heavily missionized, predominantly Nahuatl-speaking area of Mexico.

What the Franciscans and their fellow friars desired, what they achieved, and how they lost it have attracted the attention of many scholars.[2] Their high educational and ethical standards, their acceptance by the Indians, their learning of the native tongues, the many churches and monasteries built for them by Indian hands, their political struggles on behalf of the Indians, their sponsorship of Indo-Christian art and literature, the suppression of their writings by Church and even Crown authorities, their eventual irrelevance as the Indians died out and secular priests took over their churches—all of this adds up to a fascinating tale of intrigue and adventure.

Because they contrast so strikingly with the colonists in their concern for the Indians, the friars have an undeniable appeal to the modern humanist and the Church historian alike. Tragic figures on a doomed mission, enjoying a brief glory before they were flattened by the relentless

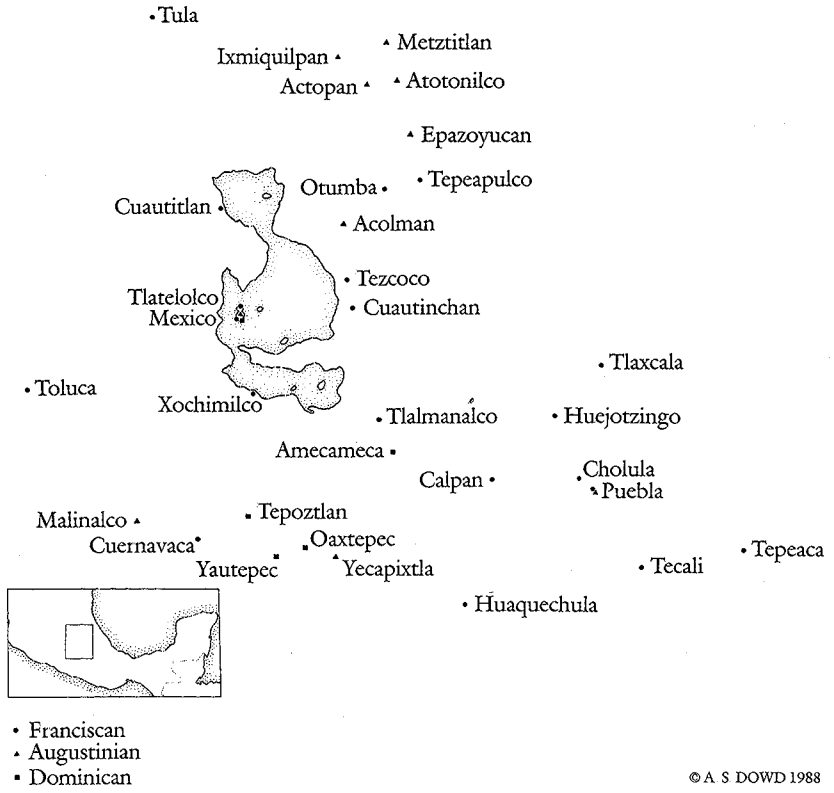

Figure 1. Map of Central Mexico, showing locations of principal Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian establishments. (Map drawn by Anne S. Dowd.)

machine of colonialism, they seem to provide a glimpse of a Mexico—or for that matter a Third World—that might have been, had compassion prevailed over greed. Yet in their own seemingly gentle way they were as ruthless as any conquistador. They supported conquest and colonization in theory; they merely objected to its abuses.[3] The utopia they sought to create was paradise as they defined it, with the Indians cast in the role of perpetual children—docile, obedient, powerless reflections of the friars' own images of themselves. Indians were barred from the priesthood as effectively as from the upper echelons of the colonial government; in the hands of the friars or of the colonists, they were deprived of self-determination.

The friars lavished on the Indians a paternal love sincere in its affect but sternly demanding in filial obedience. They viewed the Indians as basically good but errant children who, with guidance and constant supervision, could become model Christians. What the friars hated most about European culture—the power exerted by pride and greed—they found absent in Nahua culture. The emotional reserve the Nahuas shared with most Native Americans appeared to the friars as a lack of choler, the "humor" responsible for sins of anger. The Aztec sumptuary laws strictly controlled access to luxury goods, so that most people had few and humble possessions. The Nahuas' profound religiosity was praiseworthy whatever its original object; the forms of personal devotion—fasting and other mortifications of the flesh, sexual abstinence, the adornment of temples and images—were consistent with Christianity. The Nahuas were a humble, devout, simple folk. This view altered as the mission itself began to falter: the Indians came to be seen as subtle, conspiratorial, stubborn, intractably carnal. To view them except through a screen of value judgments was impossible.

The friars' attitude toward the Indians is expressed well in Figure 2, a woodcut from Fray Alonso de Molina's confession manual. A Franciscan friar admonishes a penitent Indian who kneels before him in an attitude of prayer (the Indian's ethnic identity is indicated by his mantle). The friar is raised above the Indian by a stone step as well as the bench on which he sits (wooden confessional booths were not yet in use at this time). The source of the friar's moral authority is clear: behind him an angel stands, pointing to heaven. This authority is conveyed to the Indian through the friar's pointed finger. The moral status of the Indian is equally clear: a demon clutches him, poised as if to drag him back into the idolatrous ways of his forebears. Such were the terms of the dialogue.

The friars' Church gave way to the secular Church with its less educated and less austere parish priests, its tithes, its contentment with formal orthodoxy. The Mendicant orders lacked the authority to control parishes except in the context of conversion; despite the friars' desire to maintain their position, their very success in attracting converts soon rendered them obsolete in the eyes of the ecclesiastical powers. The transferal process began in the 1550s and was largely completed in the 1570s and 1580s. Aside from the occasional and ineffectual campaign to extirpate idolatry [such as those of Ruiz de Alarcón (1982) and Villavicencio (1962)], the Indians were thenceforward left alone to practice their own version of Christianity, centered on community rituals and the saints as embodiments of the divine.

Figure 2. Indian confessing to Franciscan priest. Woodcut in Fray Alonso de Molina's Confessionario mayor, *1565 edition, f. 71r. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.)*

Priests presided when necessary but entered into few dialogues with their subjects, satisfying themselves with the basically Christian appearance of what the Indians were doing. Thus, what the Indians adopted of Christianity was mainly what they learned in the first half-century of Spanish rule.

This study is concerned with that time period, particularly after the mid-1530s. The arrival of the Second Audiencia in 1535 and of Viceroy Mendoza in 1536 ended the violent turbulence of the immediate post-Conquest years. A stable colonial government looked favorably, at least for a while, on the friars' activities. The Franciscans' college for Indian youths, the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, opened in 1536 to provide young nobles with an education in theology and the liberal arts. The Franciscans Fray Toribio de Benavente, known by his Nahuatl nickname Motolinia ("the afflicted one"), Fray Andrés de Olmos, and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún conducted their ethnographic inquiries. The exquisite *Codex Mendoza* (1938), Cruz-Badiano herbal (Cruz 1964), and other manuscript

monuments of culture contact were produced. The New World's first book, a Nahuatl catechism, was printed in 1539 (Schwaller 1973). The worst of the earlier epidemics had passed, and the rate of indigenous population decline slowed considerably until the devastating plague of 1576–79. For forty years, dialogue flourished.

The friars found many ways to make Christianity appealing to the Nahuas. The physical setting of evangelization was the churchyard or *patio* (later called the *atrio*), a walled enclosure at the center of the community, laid out according to the four directions, often upon a raised platform built for the purpose. The arrangement was not unlike the traditional sacred centers; indeed, the same building materials were reused and in some cases the same spot was retained. The priest presided from an open chapel, an open-fronted chamber facing the *patio*, incorporated into the church-monastery structure at any of several locations. The Indians thus observed the rites from outdoors as they had watched their own priests perform atop temple-pyramids. (McAndrew 1965 discusses in detail these aspects of the friars' building program.)

Fray Diego Valadés (1579), to illustrate his *Rhetorica christiana*, created an idealized portrayal of Franciscans carrying out various ministrations to the Indians in a church *patio* (Fig. 3). This engraving summarizes Franciscan activities; Indians are shown receiving each of the sacraments (except ordination), learning doctrine, penitence, and how to confess. Through the use of pictures they are taught about the creation of the world and about "all things." Indian singers practice their art; other Indians participate in a funeral procession. Couples are examined prior to marriage and their names inscribed in the church records. At the four corners friars are shown giving separate education to girls, boys, women, and men. At the bottom center they settle a dispute. Along the side margins are shown sick people being carried to the church to confess. At the center the Franciscans, led by St. Francis himself, carry the Church to the New World. From the dove of the Holy Spirit radiate lines toward the peripheral scenes, indicating the inspirational source for all of these activities.

Catholicism's emphasis on images permitted an easy transition, since native deities revealed themselves in manifold and concrete forms. Religious dramas, written in Nahuatl and acted out by Indians, adapted the medieval mystery play to the native tradition of deity impersonation, by which ritual impersonators would put on a sacred being's identity by dressing in its attributes. The Indians were permitted to sing and dance for Christ and the saints much as they had for their traditional gods: the

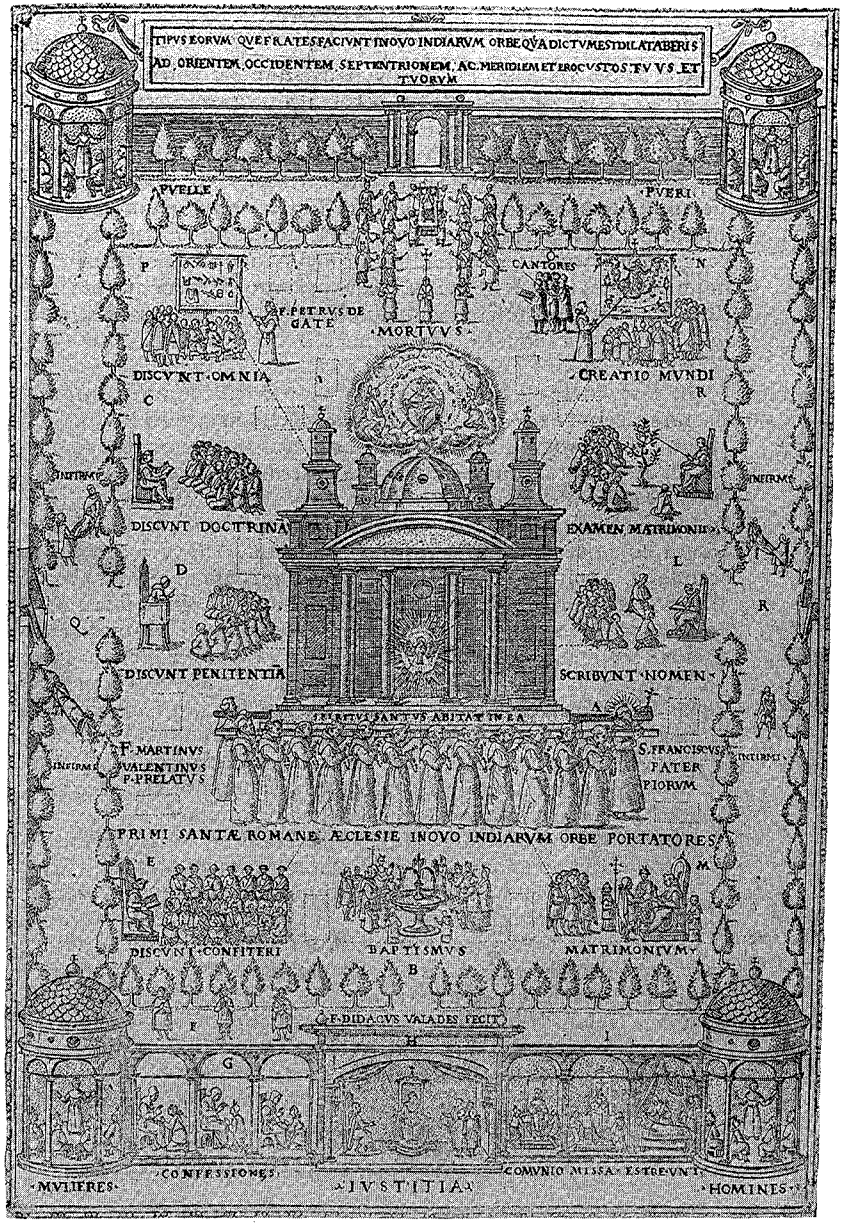

Figure 3. The idealized church patio, *engraved by Fray Diego Valadés for his* Rhetorica christiana *of 1579. (Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.)*

decision to incorporate these forms of worship into the Indian Church was a major breakthrough in attracting Indians to the faith. The friars used pictures as didactic devices (as shown in Valadés's engraving): woodcuts, paintings, and murals which adapted the native traditions of sacred picture books and architectural ornamentation to Christian themes. The friars' educational practices perpetuated the form of the indigenous schools, removing boys from their homes for a period of learning and ritual activity, while disrupting generational continuity. In their paternal role the friars usurped the native elders' authority as the repositories of wisdom (Trexler 1982). These many small continuities helped overcome and deny the major discontinuity.

The friars' ethnography was influenced by the goals of missionization. Much was missed or misinterpreted; European cultural categories were imposed haphazardly upon indigenous conceptual schemes. Aspects of native culture were sometimes redesigned as they were recorded, to make them acceptable for an Indo-Christian society (for example, Fray Francisco de las Navas's version of the native calendar; see Baudot 1983). In the prologue to his book on the virtues and vices of the people (Book X), Sahagún (1981:III, 97) states that his purpose is to help the preachers by "treating of the moral virtues according to the intelligence and practice and language that the people themselves have of them." But he structures the account according to his own categories of good and evil, asking his informants to describe a "good" and a "bad" version of each type of person (López Austin 1974:141). Stevenson (1968:102–3), following an earlier observation by Robertson (1959), links this organization to similar statements in the Franciscan Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, a popular medieval encyclopedia which influenced Sahagún's presentation of material. Such a treatment of the Nahuatl information was potentially very useful in developing manuals for confessors, but it was not something that Sahagún's informants would have generated spontaneously.

Though the friars' aim was to gain more insight into Nahua culture in order to evangelize more effectively (and also to preserve useful information), it was so difficult for them to perceive it except in their own culture's terms that the degree of understanding they were able to attain was severely limited. At the same time they simply recorded, or allowed their Nahua assistants to record, many things with little or no alteration—other than that imposed by acculturating informants and assistants. The result is a partially Christianized ethnography, corresponding to the partially Nahuatized Christianity that constituted the other side of the dialogue. All

of the texts are ambivalent to varying degrees, combining indigenous forms of discourse with forms introduced by the friars, interweaving native and imported voices so intricately that it can become very difficult to unravel them. The fallacy of forcing a strict separation between "native" and "European" texts is evident. Although it is possible to distinguish these texts according to the point of view they purport to represent, it should be kept in mind that each side was affected by continual feedback from the other.

In the friars' approach to language, an insistence on Latin grammatical categories was paralleled by a tendency to view vocabulary in European terms. They sought correspondence between their own and the Nahuatl words: their aim was translation, not linguistic investigation. A linguist would treat the Nahuatl words on their own terms, working within the language and seeking to establish the words' range of reference, denotative and connotative. A friar wanted to know if there was a Nahuatl word for "god," for "demon," and so forth. Whatever was available was shanghaied into serving Christian purposes. The friars laid claims to prudence in these matters, claims accepted by the "spiritual conquest" school of evangelization. McAndrew (1965:74), for example, states:

> Cautious translators did not risk paraphrasing the specifically Christian terms for any important Christian tenet for fear of accidental unorthodoxy or heresy; instead they took over the Spanish or Latin words into otherwise Náhuatl sentences.

The friars' actual usage belies this assertion. How could they explain anything except in Nahuatl, even where they did introduce foreign words? Also, the process of linguistic acculturation is such that nouns are borrowed more easily than verbs. In Mexico, Spanish verbs were not adopted into Nahuatl until after mid-century, and this usage coincided with the increased contact with Spaniards due to *repartimiento*—not with any effort by the missionaries (Karttunen 1982; Karttunen and Lockhart 1976). The Nahuatl catechistic texts contain Spanish and Latin nouns but only Nahuatl verbs. Thus, while the things of religion could come to have foreign names, the acts of religion did not.[4]

Indigenous understanding and acceptance of Christianity varied widely, such that Klor de Alva has been able to develop a typology of reactions (1982b). The average person was expected to know by heart the basic elements of Christian doctrine: the prayers *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, and *Salve Regina* in Nahuatl and Latin, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, Seven Mortal Sins, Works of Mercy, Cardinal and Theological Virtues, and so

forth, in Nahuatl.[5] Weekly attendance at mass, sermon, and adult catechism class was mandatory, with daily catechism classes for children. Yearly confession was required, but only individuals judged to have a good understanding of the faith were admitted to communion, the number varying at the individual priest's discretion. Couples were examined on their knowledge of doctrine before being permitted to marry. Boys of the noble class received a more intensive training at boarding schools created for them within the monasteries. People in outlying communities received less attention than those in communities where the friars had permanent establishments. Exposure to Christian teaching varied widely. While active resistance to Christianity was unusual among the Nahuas, limited education and the general problem of translation and reinterpretation were common obstacles in cases where people did not adopt more than the rudiments of the new religion.

In this study I am presuming a relatively high degree of exposure and understanding typical of the urban population or residents of towns with long-standing monasteries and linguistically skilled preachers. Rural dwellers may have had a somewhat different experience of Christianity, memorizing the required elements of doctrine and fulfilling the minimal obligations of participation without ever analyzing what they had learned or integrating it with their traditional patterns of thought. Because it is these rural Nahuas who avoided acculturation sufficiently that their present-day descendants still speak Nahuatl, comparisons between present-day Nahua culture and Christian teaching as presented here should be undertaken with caution. The educational program that I describe represents the best that the friars could do while working within the Nahuatl language. The average rural commoner may have learned much less; the highly acculturated, literate, Latin-speaking noble males raised in the friars' schools and college undoubtedly learned much more.

The large corpus of Nahuatl-language catechistic texts produced by the missionaries and their students is widely scattered throughout the world's libraries. There is as yet little bibliographic control over this material; various manuscripts and books known to have been produced have left no known copies. The most typical genres of the surviving texts are the *doctrina*, or catechism of varying length containing the material to which Indians were most widely exposed, the *sermonario*, or collection of sermons for Sundays and festivals, and the *confessionario*, or manual featuring questions to ask penitent Indians and other guidelines for ministering to them. Also represented are biblical readings for Sundays and festivals, and

a variety of more innovative texts: songs, meditations, dialogues, plays, and admonitions.

These texts are attributed to individual friars, but in reality they were joint products of the friars and their Nahua interpreters and scribes, who were responsible in large part for the wording of the Nahuatl texts. Although the friars supervised the process and edited the results, the collaboration with Nahuas was essential. The friars' "voice" in the catechistic texts is thus an ambivalent one; the "Christian" texts are to this extent already Nahua-Christian. They are treated here as "Christian" because they are the official vehicles for presenting Christianity to the Nahuas. Thus, they contrast with "ethnographic" texts which purport to speak for the Nahuas, regardless of how Christianized those Nahuas had become.

Only a small selection of the available texts were used in this study. They were selected on criteria of originality, reliability, typicality, and the influence of their authors. The texts are listed and described in the Appendix.

MORAL EDUCATION

Christian morality, as taught to the Nahuas, was defined according to the Ten Commandments and the Seven Mortal Sins, which were part of the basic doctrine that everyone was expected to memorize. Elaborating on these, the friars would list all the behaviors proscribed and prescribed by each. Each mortal sin had a whole brood of equally mortal offspring, named by medieval priests as they sought to classify every conceivable offense (Tentler 1977:135–38). The Commandments, coming straight from Moses, and the Seven Mortal Sins, coming by a roundabout route from Gnostic eschatology (Bloomfield 1952), classified morality differently but were integrated and extended to cover all thoughts and deeds the Church deemed unacceptable.

The friars sought to impress the truth of these doctrines upon their charges by the same appeals to authority and fear that they used in the rest of their teachings (see Borges 1960). The authority of God, the Bible, and traditional Old World practice superseded whatever authority the native elders claimed to have, for they were ignorant of truth and deceived by the Devil. Furthermore, if the new teachings were not accepted, the Nahuas would join their ancestors in eternal suffering after death. The lives and teachings of Christ and the saints were invoked as examples of proper moral behavior; the fate of sinners was described in vivid detail.

Missionary teaching practices went beyond rote memorization and simple insistence. The doctrinal texts preserve many efforts to persuade and cajole as well as to threaten and insist. The method used was straightforward: do this or you will be punished; do this because we (or God) say so. But the language used was Nahua moral rhetoric, which skillfully manipulated metaphors aimed at inducing desired behaviors while it promoted a coherent moral conception of the human universe. Indigenous morality was backed by the authority of the elders and ancestors, but it was also accordant with a whole ideology. However successful the friars were in setting themselves up as moral authorities, they still had to adapt their teaching to native thought.

The friars tended to think in moral absolutes. The late medieval view of the world divided its moral aspects unambiguously into "virtues" and "vices"; the former were associated with Christians who served God, the latter with pagans and others who served the Devil (Caro Baroja 1965:70). The friars' thinking reflected this pattern. Doubting not that the basic tenets of their own moral system were compatible with ultimate realities, they had a limited capacity for cultural relativism. Late in the sixteenth century, Jesuit probabilists challenged the Church's moral absolutism; among the early friars, though their own theology was in a state of flux relative to the rigidity of medieval scholasticism, certain basic assumptions were not openly questioned. The role of the Devil in human affairs, the universal applicability of the Christian concept of sin (whatever the individual theologian's interpretation of that concept), the use of good and evil as universal categories—these assumptions are implicit in the friars' writings. Many aspects of indigenous culture, even though alien to Europeans, could be perceived as appropriate to their cultural context, but not if they violated beliefs that the friars held to be self-evident truths. For example, the native marriage ceremony could be accepted as creating a legitimate union, but there could be no tolerance of polygyny: God's creation of the Adam-Eve pair established a sacred and inviolable precedent for monogamy.

These absolutist aspects of the friars' thought, rather than simply augmenting their intolerance, actually had a minimizing effect on their perception of cultural diversity, just as their search for synonyms limited their perception of linguistic nuances. On certain subjects, indigenous forms of thought could be right or wrong, good or bad, but they could not be simply different. If the Nahuas had a concept of sin, it meant that their ideology contained at least this element of God-given truth, even if in its

details it differed somewhat from the corresponding Christian concept. The friars could use the native term in their teaching without being overly concerned about how well it meshed with their own concept. Such an approach facilitated dialogue, for it permitted the friars to adopt the native categories while satisfying themselves that orthodoxy was being adequately upheld.

Hence, there was nothing to prevent their adoption of native usage, once they assured themselves that it was free of idolatry. They tended to avoid very elaborate figures of speech, which they could not fully understand and which might thus conceal unorthodox meanings, but simpler tropes which they thought they understood were accepted. Style varied from straightforward narrative to the highly metaphorical, depending on the linguistic capacities of individual friars and the writing skills of their Nahua assistants. Also, there was an interplay between the desire to write clearly and the desire to replicate the rhetorical style familiar to their audience. The tendency is toward simple narrative seasoned with the occasional trope, a writing style which Bierhorst (1985:47) dubs "missionary Nahuatl," noting the "suspicious ease" with which it translates into Spanish or English. In skilled hands, however, this writing bears the same elevated formality as the texts of indigenous rhetoric or *huehuetlatolli*[6] 'old men's speech' (for example, see Baudot 1982).

Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Mexico's first bishop and archbishop (and himself a Franciscan), in 1544 recommended simple, truthful writing without fancy rhetoric (Zumárraga 1928:78r); Sahagún (1583: prologue) expressed concern that idolatrous ideas might lurk behind poetic metaphors. The friars also recognized, however, that such metaphors might be used effectively in their preaching. Both Sahagún and Olmos made extensive records of the metaphors used in native oratory. Though there is considerable loss and reduction, various of these metaphors appear in their own and others' doctrinal writings. They must have found the tropes effective, for it would have been easier for them to compose or edit texts directly translated from Spanish or Latin. Native assistants may have shown a preference for writing that they considered stylistically appealing.

Even in direct translation, the Nahuatl words used had various denotative and connotative meanings alien to those of the terms they translated. Thus it was impossible to avoid the problem with which Zumárraga and Sahagún were concerned. When one examines even the closest parallels for Christian moral terms, parallels which the friars accepted without question, one sees the expression of indigenous concepts quite at odds

with the Christian purposes they are being forced to serve. Indigenous morality had a this-worldly rather than an other-worldly focus; its justification lay in the nature of life on earth rather than the pronouncements of a distant deity. It articulated not with a Christian world view but with basic pan-Mesoamerican religious concepts: a cosmos in delicate balance, the 260-day sacred calendar or *tonalpohualli*, capricious deities, and penitence aimed at earning favor rather than forgiveness for sins.

Basic to Christian morality was the concept of sin, which in turn was predicated on the dichotomy between good and evil, a force personified in the figure of the Devil. These concepts were alien to the Nahua mind, but the friars had no choice but to grasp the closest parallels they could find and set to work. For sin they substituted *tlatlacolli*; the acts classified as *tlatlacolli* were somewhat different under Christianity, but the nature of "sin" itself was made continuous with native thought. For the good-evil dichotomy they substituted various expressions of the Mesoamerican dialectic of order and chaos, structure and anti-structure. They elevated a category of indigenous sorcerer to the role of God's Adversary. Thus, native concepts were carried over into the most fundamental aspects of Christian moral teaching. These aspects of moral dialogue are explored below.

SIN AND DAMAGE

The friars' development of a Nahua-Christian morality rested upon their adoption of *tlatlacolli* as a synonym for sin, for the Spanish *pecado* and Latin *peccatum*. *Tlatlacolli* is the substantive form of the intransitive verb *tlatlacoa*, which in turn derives from the transitive verb *itlacoa*. *Itlacoa* means "to damage, spoil or harm"; with the impersonal object prefix *tla-*, it means "to damage things (or something)." Hence *tlatlacolli*'s most literal meaning is "something damaged." Related to *itlacoa* is the intransitive or reflexive verb *itlacahui* 'to go bad, become corrupt, spoil, injure oneself.' This word and its substantive form *itlacauhqui* were used widely in Christian contexts to refer to moral corruption.

These terms had quite a broad range of meaning, as an examination of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* and Fray Alonso de Molina's dictionary reveals. Any sort of error or misdeed could be labeled a *tlatlacolli*, from conscious moral transgressions to judicially defined crimes to accidental or unintentional damage.[7] A weaver who tangled her weaving, a feather worker who ruined feathers, a warrior who erred in battle, a singer who

failed to harmonize, a mouse gnawing garments, hail harming crops: these are all examples of *itlacoa*-type damage (Sahagún 1953–82:X, 52, 25; XIII, 53, 56; XI, 17; 1905–08:VI, 67). To offend someone was *teyolitlacoa*, 'to damage someone's heart.' Slaves were conceived of as damaged (López Austin 1980:I, 463); liberation from slavery was called a casting off of *tlatlacolli* (Molina 1970:I, 78r; II, 109r[8]). The most frequently mentioned *tlatlacolli* are sexual excesses, intoxication, and theft.

Anything displaced or off balance could be *itlacauhqui*, including a dislocated bone (Sahagún 1953–82:X, 153) or a woman in the later stages of pregnancy (Molina 1970:II, 43r). A rotten egg was *itlacauhqui* as well (Molina 1970:II, 43r). The cultural defects of non-Nahua groups were their *itlacauhqui* (Sahagún 1953–82:X, 178, 186, 189). A flaw in the weaving of a mantle was its *itlacauhqui* (Molina 1970:II, 37r). If a leader failed to perform his duties correctly his office *itlacâuh* (preterit of *itlacahui*; Sahagún 1905–08:VI, 134). Spoiled maize or other rotten foodstuffs was *itlacauhqui* (Molina 1970:I, 31r; Sahagún 1953–82:X, 66). Otherwise auspicious day-signs could have negative features mixed with them, causing them to go corrupt (*itlacauhtiuh*; Sahagún 1953–82:IV, 9).

To some extent these terms are simply descriptive, with many applications falling outside what one might at first glance designate as "moral." But Edel and Edel (1968:111) advise that apparently descriptive terms may contain elements of moral evaluation leading "directly into important aspects of moral structure and belief." Could damage, then, have served as a unifying moral principle in the same sense that sin did in medieval Christianity? It would seem less ethnocentric to begin by treating all these sorts of damage as a single native category with general moral implications rather than singling out moral from nonmoral uses. One notes an emphasis on effect rather than cause, on the outcome of the act—that something is damaged—rather than some element inherent in the act itself. All of these types of damage represent violations of structure or continuity, be it physical integrity, social norm, or psychological state. To behave immorally is to disrupt order, to promote decay over cohesion, randomness over continuity. Entropy is the essence of immorality. Conversely, the establishment and preservation of order is the primary moral obligation and motivation—what Ladd (1957:165) terms the "ground-motive" of the ethical system. Given these assumptions, those acts culturally defined as *tlatlacolli* can be argued against on the basis of the well-being not only of the individual but also the society and the entire cosmos.

Tlatlacolli may have occupied a position in Nahua ideology analogous

to that of sin in Christian, but the terms are not synonymous. Early sixteenth-century theology was in a state of flux between medieval formulations and the Counter-Reformation's reestablishment of orthodoxy. There were variant interpretations of the concept of sin—for example, in regard to the role of unintentional acts—but in composing their catechistic texts the friars tended to fall in line with traditional formulations which contrast strikingly with the Nahua concept. The extent to which the friars diverged from this perspective in more casual contexts is difficult to say, though their acceptance of native concepts might imply a certain tolerance for variant expressions.

In its standard medieval formulation, as defined by St. Ambrose, Christian sin is restricted to "a transgression of the divine law, and disobedience to the heavenly commandments" (Aquinas 1969:59). It is confined to voluntary acts: accidents do not count and under certain conditions ignorance can excuse. Ideas of harm and disorder are involved, but the harm results from the sin and is distinct from the sin itself, while disorder is not a result but a characteristic of the act (Aquinas 1969:81–85, 129). The Dominican *Doctrina cristiana* of 1548 defines *tlatlacolli* in terms of God's will (42r–42v):

> Yn tlatlaculli tiquitoa yn icoac ytla mochiua: anoço yn icoac ytla mitoa: i anoço yn icoac ytla molnamiq' ī aq̄lli in ayectli in amoquimoneq'ltia in toveytlatocauh in Dios:
>
> We say "sin" when something is done, or perhaps something is said, or perhaps something is thought, which is bad, wrong, which our great ruler God does not want.

If both the Christian and Nahua concepts are viewed in broad, cross-cultural terms, analogous aspects do emerge. Fürer-Haimendorf (1974: 554) distinguishes sin from the general field of moral transgression by stating that sin "is believed to bring about consequences damaging to the transgressor whether or not his conduct becomes public or attracts any social disapproval." Sin, along with guilt, has traditionally been associated with Western culture or with the great world religions, but Fürer-Haimendorf dissociates sin from any cultural-evolutionary scheme and treats it as an independently variable phenomenon. He defines four categories into which societies may be placed on the sole basis of the degree to which a sense of sin is present. The Nahuas most closely (though not perfectly) fit his second category:

> societies which recognize that certain human activities, such as breaches of taboos, do bring about an intervention of supernatural powers, but assume that any sanctions exercised by such powers are restricted to man's fortunes in this life, and do not affect his fate after death. (Fürer-Haimendorff 1974:554)

Christianity falls into his fourth category:

> societies which believe in a personal God or a number of deities acting as guardians of the moral order and rewarding or punishing man's activities in the hereafter. (Fürer-Haimendorff 1974:554)

According to this typology, the Nahuas had a partially developed sense of sin while their missionaries possessed it in its fullest expression, to the extent that it dominated their ideology.

In Nahua belief ritual breaches could bring on divine sanctions in the form of diseases (Aguirre Beltrán 1963:38–43). The most common breach was the breaking of fasts (which involved sexual as well as alimentary abstinence); the verb *itlacoa* was used in this context (for example, Sahagún 1953–82:III, 11). This belief was one of Preuss's arguments for asserting the presence of a sin concept in pre-Columbian religion (1903); Lanczkowski (1970:123) also includes ritual offenses along with more overtly moral ones in his explanation of *tlatlacolli*. Some immoral acts brought on misfortunes due less to divine punishment than to a form of possession by divine forces. But in both cases supernatural agents participate in human morality, in contrast to Fürer-Haimendorf's (1974:553–54) first category where such involvement is absent.

Thus, the *tlatlacolli* concept provided some common ground between Christian and Nahua belief. *Tlatlacolli* is sin, but not in the full extent of the Christian usage, and it has a range of meanings alien to Christianity; the concepts overlap but are not synonyms. The distinction between sanctions in this life and in the afterlife, as expressed in Fürer-Haimendorf's definitions, was of vital interest to the friars but was not used to distinguish sin from other types of misdeed.

A discussion of sin leads into a consideration of guilt and shame. Piers and Singer (1971) have refuted the classic distinction between "guilt cultures" (Western) and "shame cultures" (all others), noting that shame can be internalized, having much the same effect and appearance as guilt, and that cultures traditionally classified as "shame cultures" may in fact have a sense of guilt as well. Though psychologically distinct, guilt and shame do not constitute a very useful tool for classifying whole cultures. To cast Nahua-Christian contact in these terms would be a gross

over-simplification. Nevertheless, given the emphasis placed on these concepts in moral analysis, they may merit some attention.

Without delving too deeply into psychoanalytic concepts, shame may be characterized as deriving from a fear of contempt or, ultimately, of abandonment, while guilt derives from a fear of mutilation or annihilation (Piers and Singer 1971:29). This second type of fear certainly was present in the Nahua psyche—gods (like parents) could punish immoral acts by inflicting physical harm on the offender; on a grander scale, there was a constant fear of world annihilation. A sense of sin is evident in these contexts; perhaps a sense of guilt, or something approaching it, may be assumed. However, the need to please the capricious gods, to cajole and entertain them in order to keep their attention fixed on human welfare, was very strongly emphasized.

Christianity, with a personal deity who was vitally interested in human affairs, greatly emphasized guilt. Because of sin, everyone was guilty before God and merited annihilation. Penitence for sin, more a matter of public shaming in the early Church, had in the Middle Ages become a private affair between sinner and priest. Shame before the priest remained a desired element of penitence but guilt was more important. Sin was supposed to cause pain even if known only privately (Tentler 1977:128–30). However, such criteria do not easily distinguish guilt from internalized shame, especially for Europeans viewing Indians—people whose public behavior, let alone psychological makeup, was in many ways impenetrable. For present purposes, the idea of a basic psychological difference between Nahua and Christian mentality is rejected while noting that the sense of guilt, like that of sin, was relatively more central to Christian thought than to Nahua.

This shame-guilt question, despite its interest for anthropologists and psychoanalysts, did not trouble the friars. They adopted the Nahuatl term *pinahuiztli* as a synonym for shame (*vergüenza*), using it in the sense of public reprimand, which indeed seems an accurate interpretation. The verb form *pinahua* is often paired with the verb *ahua* 'to chide or reprimand.' *Pinahuiztli* has the meaning of timidity or bashfulness also. As an example of its usage in a seemingly non-ethical context, *pinahuizatl* 'shame-water' referred to a type of river which allegedly stopped flowing when people crossed it, as if shrinking from public scrutiny (Sahagún 1953–82:XI, 249). Although revelation of one's misdeeds would shame a person, *pinahuiztli* is not part of the *tlatlacolli* complex.

The friars did not confuse *pinahuiztli* with guilt. Nahuatl has no separate term for guilt—to the extent that such a concept was present it was subsumed within that of *tlatlacolli*. Rather than trying to develop a distinct concept of guilt, the friars worked within the existing system, translating *culpa* as *tlatlacolli*. The resulting identification of sin with guilt was compatible with Nahua thought but eliminated the cause-effect relation between the Christian ideas. *Mea culpa* became *notlatlacol* 'my damage,' the damage that I have done, whether to myself, to society, to God, or to cosmic order—ultimately it was all the same. The fear and uneasiness one may feel as a consequence of one's transgression inhere in the transgression itself, are part of the damage, the disturbed and disordered condition characteristic of all *tlatlacolli*. The friars concentrated on developing this fear and uneasiness into something more like their own sense of guilt by constantly stressing that one must feel pain and sorrow for one's *tlatlacolli*.

The friars' procedures must be understood in the context of contemporary theology, which took guilt more or less for granted while focusing more on the issue of attrition and contrition. Attrition is sorrow for sins stemming from fear of their consequences, accompanied by an intention not to sin again; contrition is a more sublime form of sorrow stemming from love of God and a desire not to offend him. Attrition can precede and evolve into contrition; it is a more primitive form. Attrition subsumed shame and to some extent guilt, since it covered fear of exposure and disgrace as well as fear of punishment by God (Lea 1968:II, 15).

These were important theological concepts because, after annual sacramental confession was declared mandatory in 1215, the Church had to explain why sorrow alone was insufficient to secure divine pardon. The attrition/contrition distinction was manipulated to this end. Contrition was declared essential to pardon. Since one could not be sure if one's sorrow was attrition or contrition, one could not rest assured of one's salvation. However, divine grace infused at the moment of the priest's absolution had the power to transform attrition into contrition, compensating for the penitent's imperfect sorrow. Absolution guaranteed salvation while sorrow alone did not. This view was endorsed by the Franciscan and Dominican orders. The Council of Trent, without overtly endorsing it, came close enough that subsequent theologians were justified in perpetuating it (Lea 1968:I, 102–3; II, 13–15; Tentler 1977:19–27).

The importance of sadness, more than of guilt, drew the friars' attention. Their teaching is a simplified version of contemporary doctrine. While contrition is preferred, attrition is not utterly rejected. The threat of punishment in hell, as well as shaming (whether public, before the con-

fessor, or before God), was a necessary tool for inducing moral conformity; the friars were hardly prepared to give that up in the interest of a more sublime spirituality. They encouraged people to reprimand and shame sinners. They strove to induce sorrow for sins, but without attempting to distinguish in Nahuatl between the two types of sorrow (let alone whether they derived from guilt or shame). *Tequipacholiztli* 'anguish, affliction' and *tlaocoyaliztli* 'sadness' are used interchangeably as synonyms for sadness or sorrow, translating such Spanish terms as *contrición*, *dolor*, *pena*, *aflicción*. Attrition receives little overt attention. After all, as long as the Indians were sad, priestly absolution would act to secure their pardon.

Fray Alonso de Escalona (n.d.:157v), the Franciscan author of an early set of sermons, teaches simply that if all the sins that sinners commit make them sad, and if they obey all the commandments (i.e., "sin no more"), they will gain eternal life. The Dominican catechism of 1548 gives remembrance of all sins, crying for them, and the intention not to sin again as prerequisites for confession without distinguishing motives for the crying phase (*Doctrina cristiana* 1944:97r–98r). Fray Domingo de la Anunciación's catechism (1565:34v), another Dominican work, states the necessity of sadness for sins without accounting for the origin or character of this sadness. Sahagún (1563:60v–61v) distinguishes "good sadness" from "bad sadness," but the contrast is between sadness for sins, for Christ's suffering, or from longing to see Christ, and sadness for worldly misfortune; he does not attempt an attrition/contrition distinction. In the *Apendiz* (1579b:14r) he contrasts "spiritual sadness" with "earthly sadness"; the former is contrition, but the latter is not necessarily attrition. Molina, in his *Confessionario mayor* (1569:13v–14r), comes closer to such a distinction, stating that the principal reason for confessing should be to please and honor God, not to escape hell, receive divine favor, or enjoy the glory of heaven. Here love of God is distinguished from fear and greed, but one type of sorrow is not distinguished from another. Where he speaks of sadness for sins, using *contrición* in Spanish and *tlatlacolnetequipacholiztli* 'sin anguish' in Nahuatl, he states that this sadness originates in fear of God and knowledge of sin (as contrition originates in attrition), but without designating this a distinct form of sadness (5r).

GOOD AND EVIL, ORDER AND CHAOS

Nahua and Christian alike dwelt at the center of a vibrant universe where struggles of cosmic scale acted themselves out. For Nahuas the basic

cosmic conflict was between order and chaos, for Christians between good and evil. Both cast light against darkness, life against death, wisdom against madness, restraint against excess. But only in Christianity was it conceived as a struggle between moral absolutes.

Because the Christian deity is omnipotent *and* benevolent, theodicy, or the defense of that benevolence in light of the existence of evil, is a difficult and unavoidable task for Christian theology (Russell 1981:16–17). The problem of evil involves Christianity in a basic contradiction with no solution; over the centuries the problem has been masked, though never really solved, by two interrelated but conflicting trends of thought. One is a flirtation with dualism within an over-arching monotheism; the other is the denial of evil's ontological status.

Exposure to dualist philosophies during Christianity's formative centuries left lasting effects. Persian Zoroastrianism had divided the cosmos into equal and opposite forces of light and darkness. Greek cosmic dualism of the Orphic and Platonic sects set spirit against matter. Jewish dualism, manifested especially in Essene and apocalyptic thought, involved a moral struggle between good and evil enacted for or in the human soul (Russell 1981:32–33). All of these oppositions became incorporated into Christianity. In the New Testament the figure of Satan, the power of darkness, appears as a counterprinciple to Christ, the power of light (Russell 1977:222). The Desert Fathers, founders of Christian monasticism and early formulaters of Christian doctrine, espoused a severe asceticism that debased the material and the fleshly while exalting the spiritual. This brand of matter-spirit dualism had little to do with Christ's teachings and much to do with the ascetic Hellenistic sects competing with Christianity for adherents (Bullough 1973:111; Dodds 1965:32–35). The moral struggle for the individual soul became a basic tenet of Christian doctrine, expressed in the belief in individual demons and guardian angels as well as afterlife beliefs.

However, mainstream Christian theology always asserted the superiority of God's power and his creations to the evil forces, leaving by the wayside fully dualist sects like Gnosticism and Manichaeanism. Christianity evolved as a "semidualist" religion, characterized by a dynamic and creative tension between monism and dualism (Russell 1977:228). The pendulum never stopped swinging: the various Catharist heresies of medieval times ascribed to so profound a matter-spirit dualism that they denied the Incarnation—their Christ would not have befouled himself in earthly flesh.

Scholastic theology, led by St. Thomas Aquinas and following St.

Augustine's example, devised an ill-fitting monist disguise for the matter-spirit dualism so inextricably entrenched in Christian thought. Morality was equated with ontology, such that the most real and the most good were the same. This scheme had its roots in Plato's idealism. A moral/ontological hierarchy ranged from God—pure spirit—down through angels, humans, and animals ranked according to intelligence, then plants, inanimate objects, gross unformed matter, to total nonbeing (Russell 1968:53–54). To ascribe only limited "reality" to matter and evil is patently absurd, but the scheme provided so useful a solution to so many problems that the scholastics preferred to devote their skilled logic to concealing its flaws rather than to devising something else. The equation of evil with matter was preserved, while both were deprived of their status as cosmic forces in opposition to spirit and good. Only one universal, eternal principle existed. God was Being itself, and all lesser forms of being derived from this single source. The challenge of dualist philosophy was explained away, and a weapon was forged against heretics.[9]

Corollary to this scheme is the privation theory of evil. Since all being is good, nothing can be evil in itself. Evil exists only in the absence of good, in the turning away from good and from God. Evil increases with distance from God. Goodness, divine harmony, is the natural state of the universe; evil disrupts that harmony not as an active force but as an absence of things or conditions which ought to be present. Disorder cannot exist as an active principle, since it is merely a negation of order. The origin of evil is the will. Ideally, all creatures should choose to turn toward God, but in order for there to be a choice the option of evil has to exist. Devils and sinners have turned away from good: they are evil in that they have chosen not to be good. Since this is their own choice, evil cannot be blamed on God (Aquinas 1969; Russell 1968, 1984).

Here the cosmic struggle is not an opposition of forces but the yearning of all creatures toward their Creator, toward the perfection of the ultimate Being. The existence of free will demands of humans that they make choices; the individual must struggle to choose the good against the influence of those who have not. Life is a battle, whether one inclines toward dualism or toward the scholastics' solution. Evil cannot be denied completely. Indeed, folk belief in the Devil waxed particularly strong at the end of the Middle Ages in spite of the scholastics' arguments (Russell 1984). Under one guise or another, Christians retained their belief in the cosmic opposition of good and evil.

Nahua cosmic dualism was not cast in terms of good and evil. Despite

the many dual aspects of Nahua thought, its theology was monist. A single divine principle—*teotl*—was responsible for the nature of the cosmos, negative aspects of it as well as beneficial ones. It was a polytheist monism: that is, the divine principle manifested itself in multiple forms, some ambivalent, some expressing opposite principles in their different manifestations (Russell 1977:251). More accurate would be Klor de Alva's term *teoyoism* (1979:7) (from *teoyotl*, the abstract form of *teotl*), since *teotl* could manifest itself in ritual objects, images, and human deity-impersonators—forms not necessarily consistent with the Western conception of deity.

Negative forces were not construed as enemies of goodness, nor as a turning away from good, but as essential, functional components of the cosmos. Disharmony was as necessary as harmony. Creative, ordering forces and destructive, chaotic forces were two sides of the same coin, each dependent upon the other for its functioning. There was no permanent structure, no ontological hierarchy or Great Chain of Being, but rather a process or a movement.

Order was temporary and incomplete, with chaotic forces dwelling at its interstices and peripheries. Order and chaos, structure and anti-structure, were subsumed within a larger pattern. Life came from death, creation from destruction. Unordered matter was the stuff of creation—it was not deprived of ontological status. Entropic forces eroded order, but they were themselves fertile and energizing, providing the substance for new establishments of order. This is the same sort of mythical chaos which Smith (1978:97), commenting on Eliade's work, describes as a chaos which is never overcome but "remains as a creative challenge, as a source of possibility and vitality over against, yet inextricably related to, order and the Sacred."

This is the dialectical dualism typical of Mesoamerican thought, as described by B. Tedlock (1982:42, 145–62) and D. Tedlock (1983:217; 1985:63). The opposites complement each other, existing within an overarching unity or synthesis. They cannot be reduced to an opposition between positive and negative. They contain elements of each other; thus, there is no need for mediation between them. The dualist philosophies that contributed to Christian theology posited no such synthesis; Christianity tended to assert unity by denying rather than incorporating the second element. This is an analytical dualism: dualities clash with each other. There can be mediators between them, but they cannot be resolved into a whole.

In the Nahua universe, how to align oneself with good and to avoid evil was not the basic problem of human existence. Rather, one had to

discover the proper balance between order and chaos. One had to establish and maintain the order, continuity, and stability necessary for social and cultural survival while capturing just enough fertilizing energy to ensure biological survival. Order had to be forcibly wrested from chaos and then paid for periodically through ritual sacrifices. Contact with chaos could not be severed since it was the source of life. Graulich (1983) views this cycle of debt and repayment in terms of sin and retribution. Zantwijk presents a valid criticism of this interpretation, suggesting that what Graulich sees as sin would be better described as "the basic Mesoamerican concept of the 'holy war,' the creative struggle, the essential Mesoamerican struggle for life. . . ." (Comments, in Graulich 1983:583). This universe is not structured in moral terms. Human moral codes provide essential guidelines for interacting with and enduring cosmic forces, but the forces themselves are not subject to these rules. What is good or bad for humans may be meaningless to the higher powers.

The friars' writings portray a universe divided between powers of good and evil, light and darkness. Images of warfare and struggle abound. The basic goodness of creation is asserted, but mainly as a foil for the corrupting forces that plague it. For example, Fray Domingo de la Anunciación teaches that God made the world good but, because of our sins, it is against us and makes war on us (1565:56r). This attitude reflects the friars' self-conception as crusaders bringing light to the pagans, battling against the pagan gods/demons. Their emphasis on celibacy and poverty correlated with a strong inclination toward matter-spirit dualism. Here they bear perhaps a closer resemblance to the Apostles and the Desert Fathers than to the scholastics who were their more immediate forebears. Evil flourishes in their world, though less as a force in itself than as personified in its many minions: the Devil, the flesh, worldliness, sin, and sinners. In their teachings, evil appears more in the concrete than in the abstract, more in the adjective than in the noun: evil beings rather than Evil itself.

While Nahuatl is replete with terms expressing disorder and decay, it has no word for evil in the abstract sense. Terms for good and bad, right and wrong exist but are relatively concrete. "Good" was usually translated as *cualli*, derived from the passive of the verb *cua* 'to eat.' A second term used to mean "good" or "right" was *yectli*, literally meaning something finished or completed (Andrews 1975:487). Their opposites are simply their negations: *acualli* and *ayectli*. These terms had moral implications in indigenous usage. Expressions such as *cualli inyollo* 'their hearts are good' and *yecnemilice* 'possessor of a righteous life' seem too common and too idiomatic to be Christian inventions. However, these terms, and their more abstract derivatives *cualiztli* and *yectiliztli* 'goodness,' (or *acualiztli* and *ayectiliztli* 'badness'), were not universal evaluative categories into which all phenomena could be placed. The friars treat them as if they were.

Wickedness or perversion was often translated by the term *tlahuelilocayotl*, or *tlahueliloc* for the wicked person or in an adjectival sense. This corresponds to the abstraction "evil" no better than *acualli* does. Its root, *tlahuelli*, means anger; the term denotes frenzy or raving madness—an uncontrolled, disorderly state of emotion—rather than badness itself.

The friars insisted on Christian categories of good and evil but ended up expressing them in terms of the order-disorder dialectic. This was the only way of making their value judgments meaningful to the Nahuas, yet it effectively "Nahuatized" what they were trying to say. By placing great emphasis on certain things, they could work on altering content—for example, the punishment of sinners after death—but they were still operating within what was essentially a Mesoamerican universe.

GODS, DEVILS, AND HUMAN OWLS

The friars accepted the indigenous concept of deity, *teotl*, as a term for their own deity and an adjective for "holy." They merely insisted that there was only one being, named Dios, or the three of the Trinity (a concept extremely difficult to explain in Nahuatl) to which the term applied. Epithets pertaining to the major indigenous deities, Tezcatlipoca in particular, were applied to the Christian God if they were compatible with his character: Ipalnemohuani 'He by Whom One Lives,' Tloque Nahuaque 'Possessor of the Near, Possessor of the Surrounding,' Ilhuicahua Tlalticpaque 'Possessor of Heaven, Possessor of Earth' (see Burkhart 1988). The terms *ángel* and *santo* were introduced to describe holy beings of lesser status to whom *teotl* could not properly be applied.

The indigenous deities did not, as a group, represent moral authority: there were tricksters, harlots, and drunkards as well as virtuous priests and benevolent grandmothers. The same being could incite immoral behavior and then afflict the wrongdoer. Deity, like creation itself, embodied order and disorder; the priestly culture-bearer Quetzalcoatl was forever challenged by the dissolute sorcerer Tezcatlipoca.

Christian teaching attempted to redefine *teotl* in terms of moral order while placing all the anti-structural aspects into the category of demon. Although the concept of *teotl* was adopted, all the individual beings who had been called by that term had to be stripped of their divine status. The friars, for whom devils were very real creatures, assumed that the indigenous deities were devils—not products of pagan ignorance but minions of the Prince of Darkness. And Tezcatlipoca was Lucifer himself (Burkhart 1988; Sahagún 1563:82r, 1579b:10v, 1953–82:I, 38; Weckmann 1984:I, 242).

Idolatry was occasionally explained in nondiabolic terms: for example, in Motolinia (1971:299), in Sahagún's appendix to his book on the gods (1953–82:I) and in Valadés (in Palomera 1962:226–27). The natives may have invented on their own the worship of images and the deification of natural objects, but even so these practices led to their enslavement by the Devil. The usual view, and one professed by Sahagún in other writings, attributed to Satan the origin of Nahua religion (Burkhart 1988; Klor de Alva 1982a; Sylvest 1975:48).

This diabology exercised a strong hold on the Europeans in Mexico. Olmos was so convinced of the Devil's presence among the Indians that he translated into Nahuatl Fray Martín de Castañega's 1527 treatise on superstition and sorcery, a text based on the notion of the diabolic pact (Baudot 1972, 1979, 1983:244). Devils are everywhere in Fray Juan de Grijalva's chronicle of the Augustinians (1624). Not only the friars held this view but also conquistadors and colonial officials. Díaz del Castillo (1956:78, 206) calls the native gods devils and Tezcatlipoca the god of hell. In the *Procesos de indios* (1912) and *Relaciones geográficas* (Paso y Troncoso 1905–06), the Nahua gods are routinely referred to as devils or demons.

The terms *diablo* and *demonio,* and the names Lucifer and Satan, were introduced. However, a Nahuatl term was needed as well, one which would indicate nondivine status, malicious character, and dangerous power. *Tlacatecolotl* was selected for this function in the 1530s if not earlier.[10] *Tlacatecolotl*, a compound of *tlacatl* and *tecolotl*, means "human owl." *Tecolotl* was a generic term for owl, and also referred specifically to the horned owl; the *Florentine Codex* describes its horns of feathers. The name was onomatopoeic; the owl's hoot was heard as "tecolo, tecolo, o, o" (Sahagún 1953–82:XI, 42). The term *tlacatecolotl* was not coined by the friars but referred to a particularly malevolent type of *nahualli,* or shape-changing shaman who took the form of an animal alter-ego during his or her trances. The *tlacatecolotl* inflicted sickness and death on people while

in the shape of a horned owl (López Austin 1967:87–88; Nicholson 1971:441–42).

Motolinia (1971:152), in his chapter on omens, describes the omen of the owl as the *tlacatecolotl*: a "man who goes about at night wailing or frightening [people], a fearful nocturnal man." According to Mendieta (1980:94), this phantasm was given the owl's name because the owl was an augury of evil. In Mesoamerica the owl is a bird of the underworld, emissary of the underworld deities (López Austin 1967:88; Tedlock 1985:158).

The *tlacatecolotl* was associated with the night, the underworld, sorcery, ghostly apparitions, human afflictions, even horns—all features of Christianity's Devil. And it was not a *teotl*. Of all indigenous concepts, this one was undoubtedly the best choice. It solved the major problem of dedeifying the native gods by identifying them with something which, though having superhuman powers, was essentially human. It played a small enough role in native ideology that it could take on new meanings more readily than something that was a major focus of attention. It also diminished the Devil into something less than the immortal Adversary—it better described someone who had a pact with that being. But since there was no intermediate, mediating category in Nahua thought between god and human, to parallel Christianity's good and fallen angels, the friars had to choose either a divine or a human being to represent both their Devil and the indigenous gods; apparently they preferred the latter option in the interest of discouraging idolatry.

In his *Historia* (1905–08:VII, 316; 1981:I, 334), Sahagún expresses the opinion that the term *tlacatecolotl* was used improperly for "devil" because it properly applied to a "necromancer or witch." Sahagún was concerned about the perpetuation of non-Christian beliefs. His stated opposition to the use of the name Tonantzin 'Our Revered Mother' for Mary has often been cited: the term was used for an indigenous mother goddess; Mary was better called *inantzin dios* 'God's revered mother' (1981:III, 352). However, in the doctrinal texts prepared by him and his students, the term *tlacatecolotl* is widely used, as is Tonantzin for Mary.[11]

The Nahuas accepted the term *tlacatecolotl*. In indigenous writings the native deities are frequently referred to as *tlatlacatecolo* (plural of *tlacatecolotl*) as well as *diablos* and *demonios*, just as native artists learned to depict them like Christian devils (see Fig. 4). In the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (1976:143, 164, 207, 226, 227), the deities Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca, Huit-

Figure 4. Four priests sacrifice a prisoner of war to "the gods," here represented by a European-style demon. Illustration in the Florentine Codex, *Book VIII, 34v. (Photo from Sahagún 1979.)*

zilopochtli, Itzcueye, and Camaxtli are all called *tlacatecolotl*. Chimalpahin (1889:25) calls Tezcatlipoca the great *tlacatecolotl* (implicitly identifying him as Lucifer).

Other titles were used on occasion. The Tzitzimime or Coleletin, female or androgynous numens of the western sky, the twilight, and the end of the world, were lesser deities of unpleasant character and monstrous appearance. The application of their names to the devils was sufficiently standardized that Molina (1970:I, 45r) includes them after *tlacatecolotl* in his gloss for *Diablo*. The idea of deities descending through the western sky into the underworld looked to Christian interpreters like the fall of the devils from heaven to hell; this reinforced the connection of the Tzitzimime and also gods of the underworld with the devils (*Codex Ríos*

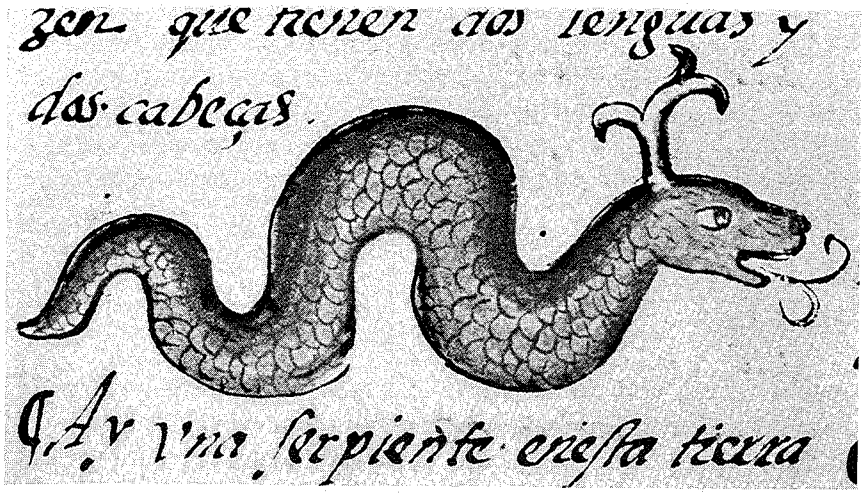

Figure 5. The mazacoatl. Illustration in the Florentine Codex, *Book XI, 82r. (Photo from Sahagún 1979.)*

1964: plates 3, 68; *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* 1964:4v, 18v; Weckmann 1984:I, 242).

The Devil was occasionally given descriptive names such as *mictlan cuetlachtli* 'the wolf of hell' who drives away Christian sheep (Sahagún 1563:58v); or *mictlan coatl* 'serpent of hell' (Cornyn and McAfee 1944:324; Escalona n.d.:157v, 233r, 235r). In the *Psalmodia christiana* the dragons vanquished by Saints Philip and Martha, and Lucifer's manifestation as the *draco* of Revelation 12:7 vanquished by Saint Michael, are all called *mazacoatl* 'deer serpent' (Sahagún 1583:79r–79v, 128r, 179v). This term describes a type of snake so named because it had horns like a deer's antlers. It was so large, according to the *Florentine Codex* description, that it could eat deer (Sahagún 1953–82:XI, 79).[12] Molina also attributes horns to it (Molina 1970:II, 50r). Sahagún's informants list three different types of *mazacoatl*; the third, a smaller variety, was used in an aphrodisiacal potion—it caused a man to ejaculate so much that he shriveled and died (Sahagún 1953–82:XI, 80). In appearance, this large horned creature was the closest thing to a dragon in Nahua animal taxonomy. The horns, the serpent identity, and the association with sexual excess were features appropriate to a Christian demon. Figure 5 reproduces the *Florentine Codex* illustration of the larger variety of *mazacoatl*.

Though the friars drew names for the devils from native ideology, in didactic art demons appear in forms consistent with medieval and early Renaissance art in Europe (Russell 1984; Weckmann 1984:I, 212–13): goat-like human-monsters with horns and tails, naked, sometimes female. They considered the (to them) horrid appearance of native deities an indication of their demonic nature, but these were guises of beings who really looked like ordinary devils.

SUMMARY

The Nahuas were the subjects of an intensive missionization program which aimed to transform their culture into a utopic Indian Kingdom of Christ. They all became Christians, at least nominally, but failed to yield so easily to the friars' attempt at cultural alchemy. In various ways, with or without the collusion of the friars, they managed to turn Christianity into something of their own.

The friars were obliged to accommodate their teachings to native thought categories to a greater degree than they—or their apologists—dared to admit, and even greater than they may have realized. The Indians' inability to become the model Christians their missionaries hoped for, a failure the latter attributed to the Devil's power or the Indians' weakness, was in part a result of poor communication. A significant portion of Christian doctrine was simply lost in translation.

The major obstacles to communication in the moral realm stemmed from a fundamental contrast between the monist, relatively amoral world view of the Nahuas and the dualist, morally charged world view of the missionaries. The Nahuas were not predisposed to accept good and evil as absolute principles, the material world as an evil place opposed to a morally positive spiritual plane, or the individual moral condition as the most important attribute of human beings. The friars viewed the Nahuas as being predisposed to Christianity because of the simplicity of their lifestyle, judging them by superficial attributes interpreted through a Christian screen and ignoring essential aspects of their thought system.

Terms chosen to express basic Christian moral concepts fostered continuity between traditional religion and the Nahuas' version of Christianity. The concept of *tlatlacolli*, or damage, usurped the place of sin, changing the latter concept from the cause of universal human guilt into a basic principle of the cosmic process. Good and evil were phrased metaphorically in terms of the principles of order and chaos, but, since the Nahuas did not view good and evil as universal principles, such phrasings lost this aspect of their metaphorical load and became references to reality as the Nahuas already conceptualized it. The Nahua concept of deity, *teotl*, was retained in its essence if not in its object; the Devil was diminished to the status of a sorcerer—superhuman but a poor rival for Europe's Lucifer.