
Contents

Illustrations ix

Foreword by Alfredo López Austin xvii

Acknowledgments xxvii

Chapter 1. Converting the Indians in Sixteenth-Century Central Mexico to Christianity 1

Arrival of the Franciscan Missionaries 5

Conversion and the Theory of “Cultural Fatigue” 18

Chapter 2. From Spiritual Conquest to Parish

Administration in Colonial Central Mexico 25

Partial Survival of the Ancient Calendar 31

Life in the Indian Parishes of Colonial Central Mexico 32

Chapter 3. A Trilingual, Traditionalist Indigenous

Area in the Sierra Norte de Puebla 37

Regional History 40

Three Languages with a Shared Totonac Substratum 48

Chapter 4. Introduction of Christianity in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	53
Chapter 5. Local Religious Crises in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries	63
Andrés Mixcoatl	63
Juan, Cacique of Matlatlán	67
Miguel del Águila, Cacique of Xicotepec	70
Pagan Festivals in Tutotepec	71
Gregorio Juan	74
Chapter 6. The Tutotepec Otomí Rebellion, 1766–1769	81
The Facts	81
Discussion and Interpretation	98
Chapter 7. Contemporary Traditions in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	129
Worship of Tutelary Mountains	130
Shrines and Sacred Constructions	135
Chapter 8. Sacred Drums, <i>Teponaztli</i>, and Idols from the Sierra Norte de Puebla	147
The <i>Huehuetl</i> , or Vertical Drum	147
The <i>Teponaztli</i> , or Female Drum	154
Ancient and Recent Idols in Shrines	173
Chapter 9. Traditional Indigenous Festivities in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	179
The Ancient Festival of San Juan Techachalco at Xicotepec	179
The Annual Festivity of the Tepetzintla Totonacs	185
Memories of Annual Festivities in Other Villages	198
Conclusions	203
Chapter 10. Elements and Accessories of Traditional Native Ceremonies	213
Oblations and Accompanying Rites	213
Prayers, Singing, Music, and Dancing	217
Ritual Idols and Figurines	220
Other Ritual Accessories	225
Chapter 11. Christian Festivities in the Villages of the Sierra Norte de Puebla	235
Annual Cycle of Christian Festivities	235
Saints' Feasts	240
Village Festivities	244
Pilgrimages	247
Dances in Village Christian Festivities	248
Principal Dances in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	250

Chapter 12. Dances That Originated in the Pre-Hispanic Period	255
Dance of the Volador	257
Dance of the Scarlet Macaws, or Guacamayas	280
Dance of the Green Woodpeckers, or Tejoneros	291
Chapter 13. Dances That Originated during the Colonial Period	325
Dance of the Moors and Christians	325
Dance of the Santiagueros, or the People of Saint James	327
Dance of the Tocatines	330
Dance of the Acatlazquis	333
Dance of the Negroes, or Negritos	337
Dance of the Old Men, or Huehues	343
Dance of Toreros, Dance of the Horsemen	346
Dances of Secondary Importance	347
Chapter 14. Holders of Indigenous Wisdom	351
The True Ancient Indigenous “Learned Men”	351
Rejection of Ancient Traditions	352
Current Holders of Traditional Indigenous Wisdom	361
Divinatory Use of Hallucinogenic Mushrooms	370
Chapter 15. Relics of the Mesoamerican Calendar in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	373
The Ancient Mesoamerican 260-Day Calendar	373
Remnants of the Ancient Mesoamerican Calendar	375
The Totonac 260-Day Calendar	381
A Comparison of the Divinatory Value of Totonac and Aztec Days	396
The Totonac 365-Day Calendar	397
Discussion of the Totonac and Aztec 18-Month Systems	402
Secular Ties between the Teotihuacanos and Totonacs	408
The Nahuatl Calendar in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	410
Chapter 16. Beliefs about the Formation and the End of the World	417
Ancient Mesoamerican Myths	417
Indigenous Traditions and the Sierra Norte de Puebla	421
Beliefs about the End of the World among Today’s Indians of the Sierra de Puebla	453
Semi-Christian Legends about the Formation of the World	454
Chapter 17. Cosmology: The World in the Eyes of the Indians of the Sierra de Puebla	461
General Conception of the World	461

The Heavens and the Stars	464
Indian Ideas Regarding the Earth	468
Indian Ideas about Fire, Water, and Air (or Wind)	472
Indigenous Ideas on Living Beings	476
Indigenous Thoughts on the Diversity of Humankind	479
Chapter 18. The Souls of Beings and Things	485
The Pre-Hispanic Idea of the Three Souls of Each Individual	485
Ancient Aztec Beliefs on the Fate of Souls after Death	487
Evolution of Indian Ideas on the Soul after the Spanish Conquest	489
Mexican Church's Stance on the Fate of the Indian's Soul	491
Indigenous Beliefs on the Soul in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	493
Beliefs on the Fate of Souls after Death	503
Beliefs in the Souls of Animals, Plants, and Things	511
Chapter 19. Supernatural Beings in the Beliefs and Religious Practices of Indians in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	513
Supernatural Beings in Hispanic-Christian Beliefs Adopted by the Indians	513
Supernatural Beings in Indigenous Beliefs in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	522
The God of Maize, Great Culture Hero of the Sierra de Puebla	536
Quetzalcoatl as Culture Hero in the Sierra, Precursor of Christ	538
Chapter 20. The Non-Syncretic Religion of the Last Nahuas of Central Mexico	545
Milpa Alta	548
Tepoztlán	552
Xochimilco	554
San Francisco Tecospa	554
Context of the Evangelization of Central Mexico	558
Conclusions	561
Chapter 21. Religious Syncretism among Today's Indians in the Sierra Norte de Puebla	563
<i>Bibliography</i>	573
<i>Index</i>	599

1

Converting the Indians in Sixteenth-Century Central Mexico to Christianity

Anyone interested in Mexico's religious problems must rely on classic works, one of the most important of which is Robert Ricard's indispensable book *La "conquête spirituelle" du Mexique*, first published in Paris in 1933 and in English as *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* in 1966. With great erudition the author examines the historical process through which the first missionaries devoted themselves to the task of converting the Indians of Mexico—particularly during the first half of the sixteenth century—based on extremely rich resources including manuscripts, architecture, sculpture, painting, engraving, and pictographs of the time. However, most texts were by missionaries, members of the secular clergy, and Spanish conquerors or administrators, while Native testimonies were few and later in date, written by a small number of Indians who had been fully converted and integrated into viceregal society, such as Chimalpahin or Ixtlilxóchitl.

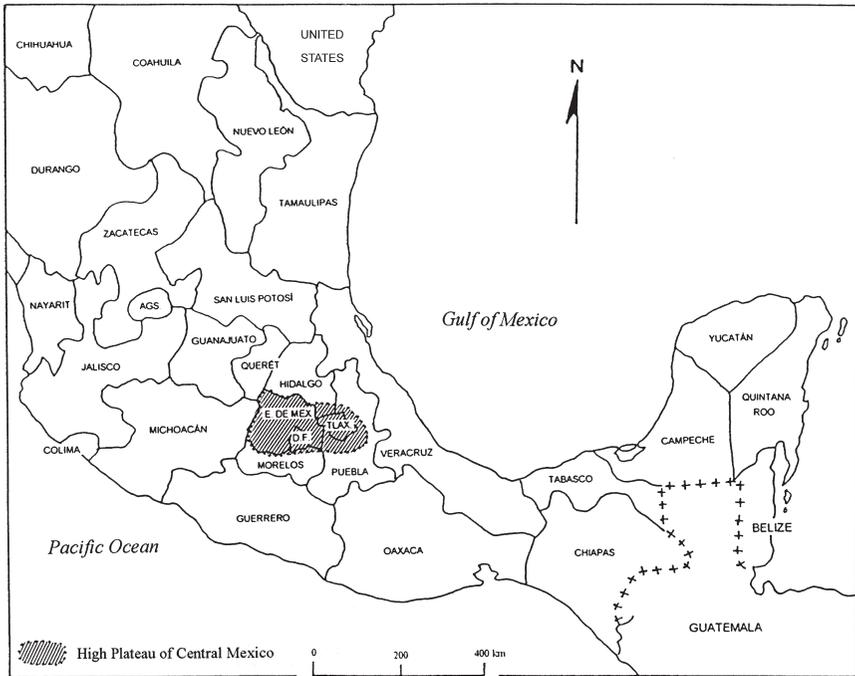
The Indian perspective on conversion to Christianity as such was not addressed by Ricard except briefly in his conclusions. The pagan point of view is mentioned only as part of an exchange between the chiefs and priests with

the missionaries. The discussion seems to have taken place in 1524, during the first days of evangelization. However, the edifying account of this meeting, in which the words the Indians uttered fill only a few pages, was written more than forty years after the exceptional event, once the vanquished seem to have had the right to express themselves freely (see Sahagún 1986).

Other, more recent works also speak of the complex evangelization process and go beyond earlier works. Unlike Ricard, the sources used in these works are mostly in Nahuatl. This use of sources in indigenous languages allows for a more intimate approximation of indigenous thought. A pioneering work in this regard is Louise M. Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (1989). Burkhart shows how indigenous groups, particularly Nahua groups after the Spanish conquest, reinterpreted their own culture and past in light of new, adverse conditions, as well as because of pressure applied by the Spaniards during colonization. Therefore, her work emphasizes the religious change from the Indians' perspective in terms of a dialogue with the friars and their culture in a creative synthesis. Through her work, Nahua culture became a process of analysis, a method that seized on experience, a dialectic in which the traditional features of Nahua culture adapted new content while at the same time that culture managed to maintain aspects of its original form. Burkhart achieves this by analyzing the interaction of Nahua people with Christianity, focusing on the missionaries' endeavor to introduce fundamental moral precepts into Nahua ideology, particularly the Christian notion of sin. Her work is based on a variety of documentary sources, such as doctrinal writings in Nahuatl written by the missionaries.

Another work that deals with the problem of conversion, also founded on Nahuatl sources, is James Lockhart's *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (1992). Lockhart's work is an excellent synthesis, analyzing the changes, survival, and adjustments made in all aspects of the Nahuatl world. Among other matters, he deals with the changes that arose among Nahua people during the evangelization phase. Therefore, he addresses aspects highly important to the study of post-conquest indigenous religions.

Lockhart convincingly shows that conversion after the conquest, particularly among the Nahuas, was a process of neither conversion nor resistance. In part, this was a result of Nahua patterns current at that time, which guaranteed the apparently swift success of the implantation of Spanish ways. The *altepetl* (from the Nahuatl words for water—*atl*—and mountain—*tepetl*), based on Nahua territorial and ideological structures, was fundamental for both political and religious organization. Lockhart observed that Spanish and indigenous patterns mutually reinforced each other. Thus, the Nahuas did not



Map 1.1. High Plateau of Central Mexico.

have a doctrinal problem with what the Spaniards introduced; in fact, they related to novelties in a pragmatic way as “things” they could make their own, based on criteria of familiarity, utilization, and availability. If Spanish ways were extremely different from known Nahuatl equivalents, at a given moment the Indians would have been unable to understand them or to see their utility, and in this sense, they would have resisted them. Through three centuries of Nahuatl documentary analysis, however, Lockhart observed that with the passage of time Nahuatl culture gradually shifted, in part to overcome some points of resistance.

These authors’ perspectives are important in this work, and they provide a reasonable historical context for cultural adjustments and survival, which we can see among Indian groups today in terms of their religions. Generally speaking, in the present work I shall examine the conversion of the Indians of Central Mexico, emphasizing the active role these Indians were able to play in the process, as well as how conversion affected them.

The Spanish military conquest of Mexico, which preceded the spiritual conquest, also had a religious dimension (Ricard 1933: 25–31). Hernán Cortés

was accompanied by a friar of the Mercedarian order, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, who despite his zeal was ineffective in converting the Indians. He preached to them through an interpreter, expounding the Christian doctrine as best he could. He sometimes had to take the edge off the religious ardor of Cortés, who strove to justify his conquest through spectacular displays of his fight against idolatry. At Cempoala, idols were brutally destroyed. An altar was set up with a cross and a statue of the Virgin, and the Totonacs were enjoined to respect it. In Tlaxcala, where the alliance was essential, the Indians' beliefs were attacked more subtly. In Mexico-Tenochtitlan, as soon as Cortés felt his position was secure, he took over a part of the Great Temple, installing a cross and an image of the Virgin.

Those were times of outright violence or negotiated alliances, not of persuasion. Many chiefs were baptized in Tlaxcala and Texcoco after receiving religious instruction, which must have been brief. All the Indian women allotted to the Spaniards and distributed among the conquerors were baptized immediately. The essential purpose of these actions was to show that resistance was impossible and would bring merciless repression but that better treatment could be ensured by aligning oneself with the conquerors.

The siege of Mexico-Tenochtitlan ended on August 13, 1521, when Cuauhtémoc was taken prisoner. The city was almost completely destroyed, but Cortés, who initially settled in Coyoacán, undertook its reconstruction and the building of substantial palaces for his captains and soldiers. Fray Motolinía (1858, 1: 18–19) reported that this enormous building venture lasted for many years and was one of the worst evils suffered by the Indians because they had to provide labor, materials, and tools but received no compensation in exchange.

As soon as Cortés became the master of this strategic region of Mexico, he proceeded to implement the *encomienda* system, which allowed him to consolidate his power by rewarding the soldiers who had fought under his command. Each Indian village or group of villages retained its traditional cacique but was placed under the authority of a Spanish *encomendero*, entrusted with ensuring the submission of the Indians and their conversion to Christianity. These *encomenderos* could freely demand tribute in kind as well as manual labor from the Indians without compensating them. In the first years of Spanish domination, when the conquests of the Huasteca and Oaxaca were completed, the conquerors abused their power and inspired terror among the Indians. These excesses resulted in a great deal of rancor and hatred of the conquerors. Nonetheless, the Indians learned to be submissive, seeing that those among them who resisted or tried to resist were mercilessly reduced to slavery and branded on the face with a red-hot iron.



Fig. 1.1. The twelve Franciscan “Apostles” of 1524. Fresco, Convent of Huejotzingo, Puebla.

ARRIVAL OF THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES

The first Franciscan missionaries, enthusiastic about the souls to be conquered, arrived in Mexico in 1523 almost unnoticed. Two of them were Flemish priests, and they left with Cortés for Honduras in 1524, losing their lives in the process. The third one, also Flemish, was the celebrated Fray Pedro de Gante, a member of a noble family who had remained a lay brother out of humility. He devoted his life to educating the Indians, with a particularly enlightened and effective zeal (Torre Villar 1973).

The twelve Franciscan “apostles” of the mission led by Fray Martín de Valencia disembarked in Veracruz in May 1524 and arrived in the city of Mexico on June 18 that same year. The Indians were extremely impressed by their poverty and by the fact that they had made the entire journey of more than 100 leagues on foot. Cortés gave them a respectful welcome in the presence of the greatest indigenous chiefs, who had been encouraged to obey and aid the newcomers. Among the twelve was Fray Toribio de Benavente, who adopted the Nahuatl name of Motolinía, “Poor One,” bestowed upon him by the Indians. He described the beginning of the Franciscan mission in full detail in his *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, which was not published until 1858.

Within the Franciscan order, Fray Martín de Valencia and his chosen companions had positioned themselves among the reformers led by Fray Juan de Guadalupe, who had succeeded in founding an independent province named San Gabriel in Extremadura. Their purpose was to return to the primitive rule of Saint Francis of Assisi and its ideal of absolute poverty. Exalted at the discovery of America, these reformers revived the medieval thinking of Joachim de Flore, according to which the imminent conversion of the last infidels, by unifying all of humanity under Christianity, would usher in the Millennial

Kingdom foretold by the Apocalypse. This kingdom would precede the end of the world and the Last Judgment (Baudot 1977: 80–83).

Fray Martín de Valencia lived these prophecies with particular intensity. While still in Spain, he had a vision of multitudes of souls striving to be baptized (Motolinía 1858, 1: 151; Bataillon 1952). This messianic spirit marked his evangelical work. So strong was his conviction that in 1532, at age fifty-eight, when he saw the Indians of Mexico joining the fold, he did not hesitate to attempt to cross the Pacific Ocean to bring the gospel to the countless people of China, who he believed were impatiently awaiting the call from God.

It is obvious that Fray Martín, following his arrival in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, made contact with Fray Pedro de Gante, who had been there for a year and become familiar with the country. The social situation, as it must have been made clear to Fray Martín, was far from ideal. However, this fact did not weaken his firm belief that the prophecies of the Apocalypse were taking place. Given his state of mind, it was evident to Fray Martín that Cortés was the man sent by Providence and destined by God to collaborate with the Franciscans in the conversion of the Indians. His captains, as *encomenderos*, also had an important role to play. This was true in spite of their vices and abuse, which in any case were to be found in all aristocracies, regardless of whether they were Indian.

The sole purpose these passionate missionaries pursued was to evangelize the Indians to create an ideal Christian world. To accomplish these goals, it was essential to create a world for the Indians directed by the Franciscans, separate from that of the Spaniards and their vices. Such an Indian world had to be preserved and could be isolated from the Spaniards through language barriers. Their customs, once purified of remaining pagan traces, were worthy of being known and studied. These customs contributed to the unique Indian identity they were accorded under God's will. The *encomienda* system was not incompatible with the dream of a Christianized Indian nation. In fact, this ideal nation could even be temporarily combined with the authority of the Spanish sovereign.

This idyllic dream presupposed the preliminary conversion of the Indians. One could expect that divine will ensured such conversion in advance. Conversion could be aided by the missionaries' actions and by the example they set in living in accordance with their virtues. One could also expect resistance inspired by the devil, who would be anxious to maintain his power. However, it would eventually be justified to call upon Cortés to represent the authority of the king of Spain against renegade Indians who might seek to oppose the well-being of souls beckoned by God.

Furthermore, in those times of uncontrolled violence, the personal convictions of individual Indians did not count. Everything rested upon the authority

of their chiefs. The missionaries realized this in Texcoco in June 1524, before they arrived in the city of Mexico. King Ixtlilxóchitl, who was totally devoted to the Spaniards, was immediately baptized by Fray Martín de Valencia, and Cortés was his godfather. But his mother, Tlacaxhuatzin, by birth a princess of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, refused to abandon her ancient gods and be baptized. Her son finally convinced her by threatening to have her burned alive. If one is to believe Ixtlilxóchitl (1985a, 1: 492), she was the first woman baptized in Mexico (or, more probably, the first highborn woman to be baptized).

Motolinía (1858, 1: 143), who witnessed these early years, reported that fifteen days after their arrival, Fray Martín de Valencia and his twelve companions met with the four Spanish priests who had arrived before them and with Fray Pedro de Gante to distribute tasks among themselves. The main centers of action chosen were Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Tlaxcala, and Huejotzingo. Franciscan monasteries were built in these cities. The missionaries devoted themselves to the study of the Nahuatl language. They initially preached through interpreters, but since few adults were convinced to convert, they began devoting their essential efforts to Christianizing a limited number of well-chosen children. The role of Cortés was essential. He gave strict orders to the principal chiefs and members of the indigenous nobility to entrust their sons to the Franciscans, who would provide them with a Christian education. This was an extremely authoritarian measure, which essentially prevented parents from educating their own children. A number of fathers were aware of these intentions and tried to keep their eldest sons at home and send one of the younger sons in their place. However, Cortés's will soon prevailed because of the immense fear he inspired, and these stratagems were thwarted (Mendieta 1980 [1971]: 217–219).

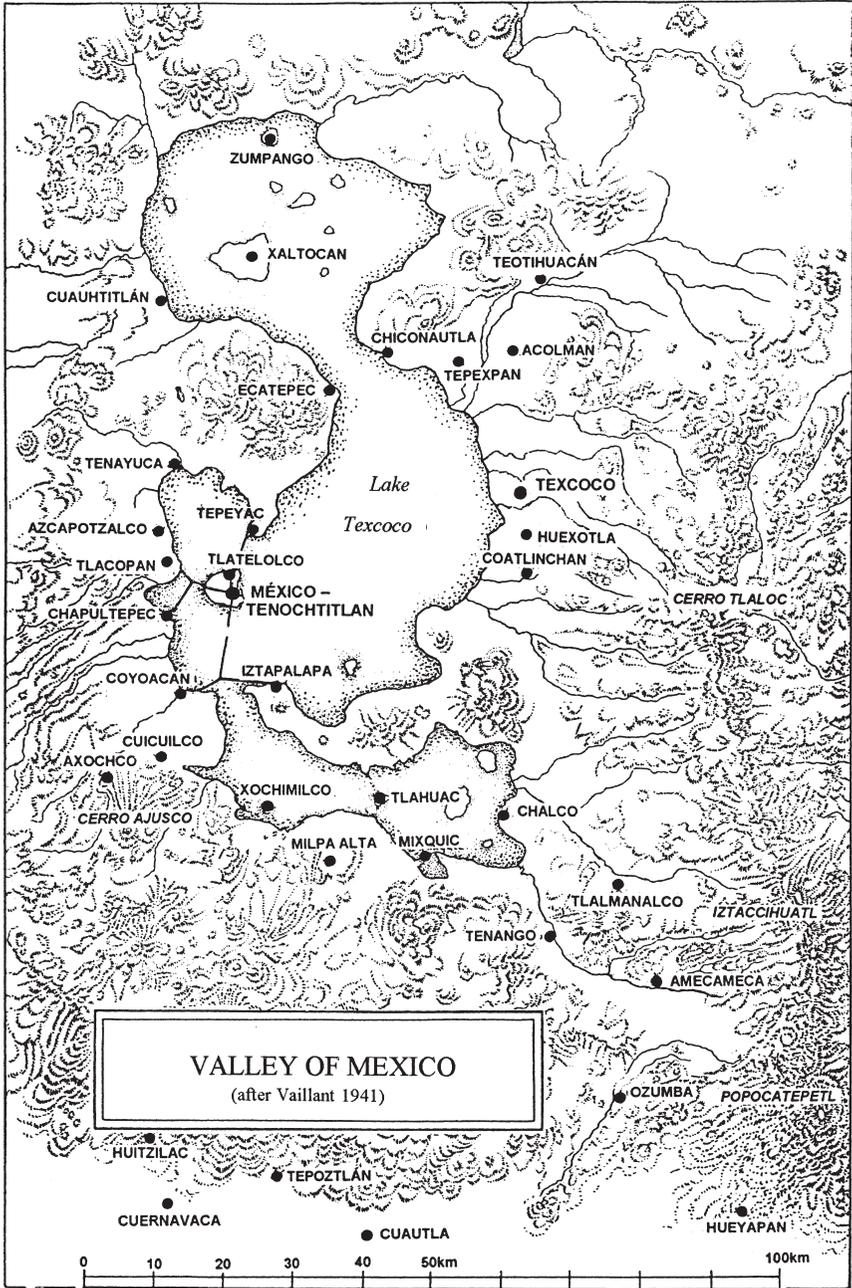
From the very beginning the missionaries, who did not yet speak Nahuatl, made an example of themselves by leading an ascetic lifestyle, which was shared by their young pupils. The children were soon won over by their teachers' moral and intellectual superiority and ardent apostolic convictions. They were taught to pray, and they received a Christian education, learning about Christ, the Virgin, the Otherworld, and Eternal Salvation. Later, the more talented children learned Spanish and were taught to read and write. These children, duly baptized, became the first true indigenous Christians of Mexico. Part of the evangelization endeavor was based on their zeal and strong convictions (Mendieta 1980 [1971]: 221, 225). At the same time, because most of them were sons of nobles and dignitaries, they were valuable sources of information about the Indian world. Undoubtedly, this manner of forcibly separating children from their parents created a painful conflict between generations within these Indian families. Motolinía (1858, 1: 225) added that an effort was also made to

educate the daughters of nobles and dignitaries. They were entrusted to devout Spanish ladies who taught them Christian doctrine and the art of embroidery. We lack precise dates, but one might guess that female education began relatively late, probably after 1530, and continued for about ten years.

It was undoubtedly during these first contacts that the famous religious controversy, discussed by Ricard (1933: 314), Jorge J. Klor de Alva (1982), and Miguel León-Portilla (1986), must have occurred. The controversy placed the Franciscan fathers in opposition to the greatest nobles of Mexico and some of their pagan priests. Motolinía does not speak of the controversy, but Sahagún (1986) wrote a detailed report on it in Nahuatl from recollections of elite Nahua informants, four decades after the fact.

A bloody episode, reported by Motolinía (1858, 1: 215–216) and Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 234–236), gives an idea of the speed—always from the friars’ perspective—with which Franciscan priests managed to convert the young sons of noble families they had trained. The incident, reported only in sources written by Franciscans, took place in Tlaxcala in 1524, within the first six months of the establishment of a monastery in that city. The missionaries were still learning Nahuatl, but they had succeeded in converting a good number of the noblemen’s sons. The latter consistently proclaimed their new faith in a city that was still completely pagan at the time.

One day the young men were gathered at the marketplace praying before a cross when they saw a pagan priest bearing the insignia of the God of *Octli* (pulque). The Indian entered the crowd and was surrounded by the respectful people. The spectators said to their converted children, “It is our god Ometochtli,” to which the young men responded that he was an impostor as well as a malevolent demon. When they approached the man, he told them he was truly their god Ometochtli, whose temple they had been wrong to desert and whose anger might soon be fatal to them. The youngsters responded that he was a vulgar demon of whom they had no fear and that he would die before them. One of the boys threw a stone, and the rest soon followed. The poor Indian, trying to escape, stumbled, fell, and was stoned to death. Neither the crowd nor the other pagan priests who were present dared intervene against these young sons of great noblemen, who everyone knew were Cortés’s protégés. The young neophytes returned to the Franciscan monastery, proud to have killed the devil with the help of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. To the missionaries, who reproached them through an interpreter for having committed murder, they responded that they had only killed a demon and that it was enough to go and see it to be convinced. The Franciscan priests went to the site and were probably disarmed when they saw the dead body dressed in the regalia of the pagan god. Motolinía added that the Indians could thus be



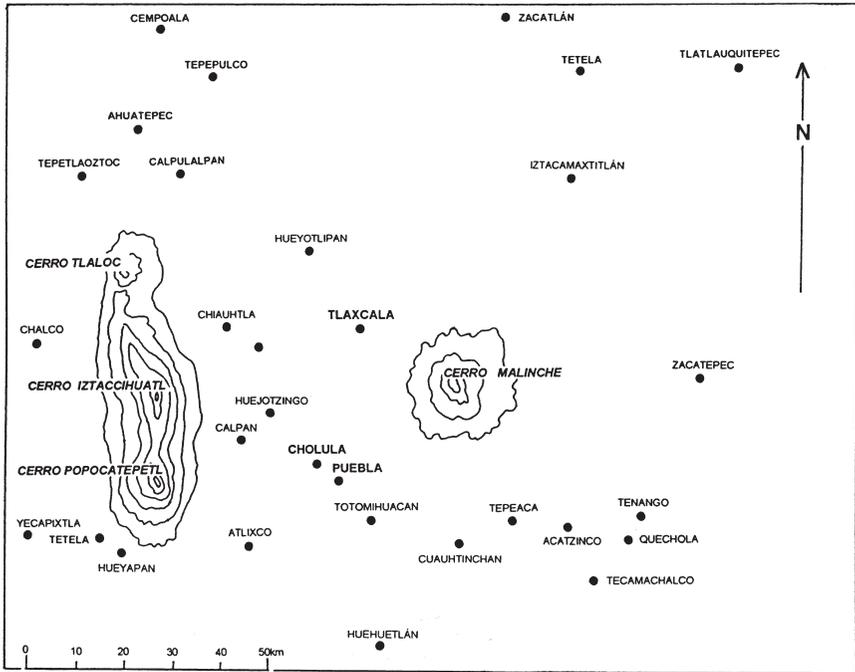
Map 1.2. Valley of Mexico. After Vaillant 1941.

convinced of the devil's impostures. Recall that these young, merciless, true believers came from families that only a few years earlier had regarded human sacrifice as a common practice.

Motolinía (1858, 1: 22) indicated that as of June 1524, the missionaries periodically went to the Indians neighborhood by neighborhood, preaching the Christian doctrine through interpreters. He added that they met with little success because the listeners found their preaching "tedious" and preferred to attend pagan ceremonies that were still held more or less secretly. The Indians of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, who were still suffering at the hands of the Spaniards and were close enough to observe their conduct, remained unmoved by the evangelization for five years (Motolinía 1858, 1: 101). Starting in 1524, the missionaries also decided to take the "good word" to neighboring places such as Coyoacán. Finally, they had some success in the region of the freshwater lagoons of Xochimilco and Tlahuac (Cuitlahuac). The preaching continued in Texcoco, by then the second largest population center in Mexico, as well as in Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo. Nevertheless, the Franciscans were able to keep abreast of public sentiment through their young converts, so they were aware of plans for a major revolt that inflamed the spirit of the Indians, or at least that of some of their leaders, during late 1524.

The moment was favorable because most of the conquistadors were away from Mexico. A good number had gone with Pedro de Alvarado to conquer Guatemala. Others were busy pillaging their *encomiendas* or had gone to exploit a recently discovered silver mine. Many more had just left with Cortés for Honduras. For several weeks, the only forces able to take up arms were cavalrymen and 200 troops from the infantry (Motolinía 1858, 1: 143). Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 229) added that the Spaniards were divided into many factions and that most were terrorized to the point that they no longer dared to leave the city. The missionaries set the example of self-possession and courage. The Indians soon perceived the weaknesses of those who dominated and exploited them. We can believe that a number of old warriors were eager to take revenge and to massacre the Spaniards who had subjected them to so much suffering. Nevertheless, they were still terrified of Cortés and waited to act until he was far away, on the road to Honduras.

Within the first six months of contact, the missionaries had begun to understand the Indians' state of mind. They realized that the people still believed in the supernatural powers of their ancient gods, especially those of the gods of war. Since 1521, Cortés had forbidden great public ceremonies that not long before had always ended with human sacrifice. Nonetheless, most of the former temples were still standing, and the Indians had repaired those damaged by the conquest. Pagan priests continued to conduct discreet ceremonies, often held



Map 1.3. Puebla-Tlaxcala highlands. After Davies 1968.

at night, which maintained the spirit of resistance (Motolinía 1858, 1: 25–26). The Franciscans understood that it was within the domain of religious beliefs and practice where they could undermine their adversaries' morale.

Cortés had been aware of the impending danger when he departed for Honduras. In fact, he had taken with him the three kings of the Aztec Confederation—Cuauhtémoc, Coanacoch, and Tetelepanquetzal—all of whom he later executed on suspicion of conspiracy. Just prior to his departure, the Franciscans found a way to meet with Cortés, and they obtained an order from him strictly forbidding idolatrous ceremonies, under threat of the harshest punishment (Mendieta 1980 [1971]: 227). The fear Cortés inspired undoubtedly ensured that his orders would be obeyed, at least in part.

The Franciscans felt the moment was decisive and that a strong response was necessary before a potentially devastating revolt broke out. The key was to weaken the pagan religious faith that sustained the Indians' spirit of resistance. Any action taken implied great risks, and the decision to act required much courage and trust in divine will. Sixteenth-century documents discovered by Zelia Nuttall (1911: 170–171) provide moving testimony of the profound

faith the ancient Aztec leaders had in their gods and in their temples (these sources were published in 1912; see González Obregón 1912). During the siege of Mexico by the Spaniards, while the battle raged in the area surrounding the Great Temple and after the death of Moctezuma, three Aztec sovereigns—including Cuauhtémoc and the king of Azcapotzalco—risked their lives by climbing to the top of the Huitzilopochtli pyramid to consult a divinatory mirror in the futile hope of finding the omen of a better destiny, which only the gods could have provided through a total, almost unthinkable miracle. Such faith had likely not entirely faded by 1524.

On the night of January 1, 1525, three missionaries, evidently assisted by a number of young neophytes, seized the tallest temple in the city of Texcoco and set it on fire after having chased out the occupants and destroyed the idols. The next morning, at the end of a Mass held in the same city, a sermon was preached condemning human sacrifice and specifying that, by orders from God and the king, whoever practiced such sacrifice would be punished as an example to the rest. Following this warning, no further incidents of human sacrifice were recorded, if we are to believe Fray Motolinía (1858, 1: 26), the only source of this information. One might be surprised by the ease with which such a dangerous action was undertaken when the Spaniards were still weak and some Indian leaders dreamed of a general uprising and the total massacre of their conquerors. Clearly, the Franciscans did not lack daring or skill.

The place for their actions was well chosen. Texcoco, which eventually sided with Cortés, had suffered less from the conquest than Mexico-Tenochtitlan had. The Spanish occupiers were less numerous and had no doubt been less oppressive there. The occupiers in Texcoco demanded the construction of fewer houses, and hatred against them was likely less intense. In addition, the Franciscans had worked extensively in Texcoco, and they must have had a rather large number of young, true-believing converts. Finally, the temples of Texcoco, which had initially remained intact or been restored by the Indians, were particularly imposing, and they must have created quite a spectacle on the night they were burned.

The plan to burn the temples was a well-kept secret. Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 229) reported that the surprise was complete and that the fire soon became uncontrollable. It seems the guardians of the temple and the people of the neighborhood were caught unaware and were unable to resist or to save the structures. Fear of terrible reprisals must have prevented open demonstrations of resistance. Once again it can be seen that in such conflicts, being on the offensive provided a critical advantage.

After the initial shock, no further resistance was possible. Similar fires were set in the temples of Mexico, Cuauhtitlán, Amecameca, Tlalmanalco, Tenango,

Huejotzingo, and Tlaxcala (Motolinía 1858, 1: 26; Chimalpahin 1889: 208). The *Relación de Tlaxcala. Relaciones geográficas* (1984, 4: cuadro 10) contains a drawing that depicts the burning of a temple in Tlaxcala and states only that the Indians felt great sadness. The dreams of an Indian revolt and massacre of the Spaniards soon vanished. Events proved that the missionaries were right in thinking their pagan adversaries would lose courage following their final military defeat and the total impotence of their gods, especially war gods such as Huitzilopochtli and Camaxtli, whose statues had been destroyed. Henceforth, the young converts could destroy the idols without encountering significant opposition, and they did so fairly often (Sahagún 1956, 3: 163).

Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 228) indicated that shortly after these events, some Spaniards claimed the Franciscans should not have been permitted to destroy the Indians' temples and religious materials because doing so could have fueled a revolt. Mendieta responded that the missionaries' courage and daring had reversed the situation, saved the Spaniards, and permitted the total destruction of idolatry, as reported by Motolinía.

Clearly, the Franciscans felt no regard for property rights because they believed they were fighting Satan and his instruments. In any event, their bloodless violence against the pagan temples was the last episode of the conquest of Mexico, begun in 1519. According to indigenous historical tradition, the destruction of a city culminated in setting fire to its temple, as illustrated in the first part of the *Codex Mendoza*. One is struck by the acumen of the small group of missionaries who, enlightened by contact with their young catechumens, were able to understand the indigenous mentality of the time and to act effectively to break their adversaries' spirit of resistance.

One can imagine the Indians' demoralized state. The city of Mexico, exhausted by its heroic fight, was practically destroyed. It now consisted of vast tracts of ruins that would be transformed by the construction of new houses for the conquerors. Other towns, such as Tlaxcala and Texcoco, had ended up joining Cortés and fighting by his side. They perceived the fall of Mexico-Tenochtitlan as their own downfall because it entailed the end of local religion as the cornerstone of their existence, as well as of their traditional life and culture. The killing, pillaging, and rape that took place during the conquest and the demands made by the first *encomenderos* led to the cultural and moral collapse of indigenous life.

During the conquest, Cortés and his men essentially dealt with indigenous dignitaries and nobles. These elites were virtually the only people who had attained a certain cultural level and authority and who possessed decision-making power. In those times, the large general populace, or *macehuales*, were uneducated and lived in almost total poverty. They depended entirely on their

nobles, whom they considered to be almost sacred. With regard to the women, it is assumed they were under the absolute authority of their fathers or their husbands. Those who were given to the Spaniards as slaves or concubines were baptized immediately. They offered no opposition and were treated as children.

In the early context of warfare and alliances, the first baptisms that took place, especially in Tlaxcala, must have been misunderstood by the Indian elite, who had been converted and who saw the rite solely as an act of allegiance. As a result, misunderstandings occurred that sometimes had tragic endings. From the perspective of the twelve Franciscan apostles, the rite of baptism meant not only the positive obligation of adopting Christianity but also the negative obligation of renouncing Satan, which implied rejecting all the beliefs and practices of traditional indigenous religion.

Mesoamerican religion was particularly syncretic, for it had developed over the centuries by incorporating aspects of different traditions. Acculturation occurred as a result of invasions and conquests but also sometimes peaceably through the dispersal of cultural elements regarded as prestigious. Under these circumstances, it seemed perfectly normal to adopt a new form of worship without abandoning preceding ones. The southwest region of the Sierra Norte de Puebla provided a typical example. The *Relación de Tetela* (*Relaciones geográficas* 1985, 5: 406) reported that the Indians of this village paid homage to Huitzilopochtli, a god that came to them from Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The new form of worship had undoubtedly been adopted shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards, when Tetela needed to make an alliance with Mexico to fight against Tlaxcala. However, this new form of worship did not exclude previously established ones. In villages subject to Tetela, the veneration of several divinities, such as Aztacoatl and Matlalcueitl, continued as before (*Relaciones geográficas* 1985, 5: 413, 421).

The Franciscan fathers adhered strictly to the renunciation of Satan. In their eyes, those who were baptized and continued to observe pagan rites were perjurers or had relapsed into old ways. Thus, in 1527, after Cortés returned from Honduras and gave his full support to the missionaries' firm action, the three great nobles of Tlaxcala who had fought side by side with the Spaniards were nevertheless sentenced to death on charges of idolatry (Gibson 1952: 34–37). Five other, apparently analogous cases, including one concerning a woman, were described in the *Relación de Tlaxcala* (*Relaciones geográficas* 1984, 4: láms. 12 and 14). Most of the executions took place by hanging, although two of the men were burned alive. Cortés succeeded in intimidating not only the people of Tlaxcala but populations far beyond as well. A scene from the *Codex de Xicotepec* (1995: lám. 23) seems to indicate that the cacique of Xicotepec, a remote village in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, learned about the executions for

paganism that had taken place in Tlaxcala in 1527. Understanding the danger, he was soon baptized. His death is shown in the following page, along with his Christian funeral.

The pagan sanctuaries were pillaged purportedly to destroy the idols, among which were often found images of Christ and the Virgin Mary given out earlier by the Spaniards. These images had also become objects of worship. In this regard, Motolinía (1858, 1: 26) remarked that the Indians, having no fewer than 100 gods, willingly accepted a few more.

Also during 1527, a family drama exploded in the mansion of a great nobleman of Tlaxcala named Acxotecatl, who was later hanged. Because that execution took place at about the same time as the three mentioned earlier, writers frequently and rather arbitrarily group the four cases together. However, Acxotecatl, about whom we have many details, seems to have been considered a special and much more serious case (Motolinía 1858, 1: 217–221). Acxotecatl was a powerful Tlaxcaltec dignitary who in 1519 had become Cortés's ally and companion. He fought by his side at Cholula and later in the conquest of Mexico. After that victory, Cortés offered him an image of the Virgin to which he became devoted. Acxotecatl kept the image as a sacred treasure, adorned it, and had dances and other ceremonies performed before it (Gibson 1952: 35). However, when Cortés ordered Acxotecatl to send his sons to the Franciscan fathers for a Christian education, he tried to keep the eldest, twelve or thirteen at the time, by his side. The missionaries heard about the boy from his siblings and demanded that he also be entrusted to them. He was baptized with the name Cristóbal and soon became a zealous Christian. He attempted to convert his father, mother, and the entire family, as well as their servants.

Acxotecatl had been baptized within the context of war waged at Cortés's side. Afterward, his devotion to the Virgin seemed to him compatible with the worship of his ancient gods. He was a stubborn, old authoritarian warrior who reigned over about sixty wives and concubines in his palace in Atlihuetzia. He was evidently unwilling to be directed by his thirteen-year-old son, a youth who had reneged on all the ancient traditions. Cristóbal, more enflamed than ever, began destroying the idols his father revered and breaking the great jars of pulque prepared at home for festivities, which were accompanied by ample drinking. Exasperated, Acxotecatl eventually listened to the suggestion of one of his wives, who advised him to make her own son his principal heir. Cristóbal and his mother were killed and buried secretly in a far-off place.

Because the siblings did not dare speak out, the matter might have rested there. However, a Spaniard he had despoiled soon accused Acxotecatl. The judicial process led to the discovery of the double killings. Acxotecatl was condemned to die, but he had so many friends and relatives that all the Spaniards

in the region had to gather to carry out his execution. He went to the gallows courageously, all the while expressing indignation at the Indian nobility of Tlaxcala that did not dare take up his defense. It was evident that he considered himself the victim of an unfair violation of the customs of his people and his noble caste. From his youth, it was evident to him that a son must, above all else, obey his father. Respect for a human life was less important than respect for traditions and paternal authority. His execution took place in 1528, while Cortés was in Spain.

In 1529, two years after Cristóbal's death, a Dominican father took two young pupils of the Tlaxcala Franciscans to Tepeaca to search Indian houses for idols and destroy them. One of these young men, baptized Antonio, was the eldest grandchild of Xicotencatl, the great nobleman who in 1519 had convinced the Tlaxcaltecs to ally with Cortés. Antonio must have had the authority and prestige that come naturally to sons of a great family. The other young man, named Juan, was his servant. After four days of entering the homes of Tepeaca Indians and taking idols on their own authority, the lads continued their work in two other villages in the region, Tecali and Coatlichán. Their reputation as iconoclasts had preceded them in the latter community, and, upon entering a house, they were bludgeoned to death. The killers threw the bodies down a ravine and attempted to conceal their crime, aided by the indigenous authorities of Coatlichán. However, the disappearance of a descendant of one of Tlaxcala's greatest dignitaries could not go unnoticed. The Spanish authorities captured and executed the two murderers, as well as the cacique and the principal authorities of Coatlichán (Motolinía 1858, 1: 224). In connection with this drama, in 1529, in the region of Tepeaca, Tecali, and Coatlichán, idols were still kept in the majority of homes.

The three child martyrs of Tlaxcala—Cristóbal, Antonio, and Juan—were beatified in 1990 by Pope John Paul II. The Mexican church celebrates their feast day each year on September 23.

At the beginning of 1529, the government of New Spain was left in the hands of the Primera Audiencia, which was presided over by Nuño de Guzmán and the head *oidores* (judges of the Audiencia, the court and governing body under the viceroy), Juan Ortiz de Matienzo and Diego Delgadillo. All were relentless enemies of Cortés, who was in Spain at the time. Nuño de Guzmán, the governor of Pánuco, had just depopulated the Huasteca by selling thousands of Indians as slaves to planters in the Antilles, and it was clear that he and the *oidores* had decided to exploit the Indians to the fullest.

At about the same time, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, a Franciscan priest whom the king had just named the first bishop of Mexico and "Protector of the Indians," arrived in New Spain. Unfortunately, Zumárraga had departed

from Spain without having been consecrated by the pope, which significantly limited his authority. When he attempted to investigate the Indians' complaints, he was instructed by the Primera Audiencia to limit himself to their spiritual development. The conflict became acute when Zumárraga attempted to defend the cause of the Indians of Huejotzingo. Guzmán imprisoned the indigenous dignitaries, mistreated some missionaries, and went so far as to threaten to hang the bishop for rebellion. At the beginning of 1530, after Guzmán had departed for Nueva Galicia, the excesses of the *oidores* were such that Zumárraga declared an interdiction against them. This led to a suspension of public religious ceremonies, which were not reinstated until after Easter. The *oidores* were excommunicated until the arrival of the Segunda Audiencia in early 1531 (Ricard 1933: 303–308).

What strikes me as particularly interesting is the generalized idea, held mainly by the Franciscans, of a supposed massive conversion of the Indians through baptism. The high estimates cited by the missionaries suggest that some friars employed a political strategy to demonstrate the success of their endeavor to the crown more than they do the reality of the indigenous conversion. It is difficult to believe that the extraordinary number of baptisms carried out by the friars corresponded to the true number of converts. The fact that the only support attesting to this massive introduction to Christian rites is found in religious sources speaks more of their desires than of a strict sense of the actual situation.

In the first two years after the arrival of the twelve Franciscans, 1524–1525, few Indians converted, and the missionaries were mostly occupied learning Nahuatl. In the third year, 1526, the Indians in Texcoco began to learn the Christian doctrine, and some were baptized. During that same year, or perhaps in 1527, missionaries arrived in Tepeapulco to the north of the province of Texcoco. In two days of preaching they managed to convince the Indians to destroy their idols and burn their temples themselves (Motolinía 1858, 1: 104–105).

After that, baptisms multiplied in different places with the exception of Mexico, where the Indians resisted conversion until 1529 (Motolinía 1858, 1: 101). From 1530 on, conversions spread rapidly, according to Franciscan accounts. After the children of noble families, the common people (the poor *macehuales*) were the next to become Christians.

Regarding the number of these conversions, a general figure is mentioned in a letter written by Zumárraga on June 12, 1531, to Franciscans gathering for a meeting of their general chapter. The Latin text, published by Joaquín García Icazbalceta (1947, 2: 300–308), states that the Franciscans had baptized over 250,000 persons by that time. However, the same text, translated into Spanish

by Mendieta in his *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (1980 [1971]: 637–638), speaks of over 1 million Indians having been baptized, a figure difficult to believe.

Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 266) offered a striking description of Indian multitudes eager to be baptized. He described the missionaries worn out from baptizing 5,000 or 6,000 men, women, and children each day. It was the realization of the millenarian dreams of Joachim de Flore. Thus, it is understandable that in 1533, Fray Martín de Valencia and some of his colleagues envisaged leaving New Spain, which in their eyes had already become Christian (Motolinía 1858, 1: 170; Mendieta 1980 [1971]: 588). They wished to go evangelize China. One can suppose they hoped thus to hasten the end of the world. They traveled to Tehuantepec, where Cortés had ordered boats to be built, but the boats were too poorly constructed to cross the immense Pacific Ocean, so the departure never took place.

Motolinía (1858, 1: 109) stated that in 1540 the Franciscans alone had baptized 6 million Indians. However, Motolinía (1858, 1: 229–233), as well as Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 267–269), also reported that these innumerable baptisms, administered hurriedly by the “twelve apostles” or other enthusiastic missionaries, were later criticized by other members of the church, such as the Dominicans, Augustinians, and secular priests. One of them went so far as to speak derisively of mass baptisms at which a sprinkler for the holy water was used (Mendieta 1980 [1971]: 257). It is evident that the speed with which the friars managed to accomplish a supposed conversion led to the simplification of rites and to a minimum of preliminary religious instruction. Motolinía (1858, 1: 112) explained that one began by gathering the children who were to be baptized with all the required formalities. Then the celebrant gave a sermon to the adults, describing what they should believe and what they should reject, as well as the rules for a Christian marriage. After this, each individual received the baptismal waters, accompanied by only the indispensable traditional rites. Sahagún himself, in his “Arte adivinatoria” (1954 [1585]), expressed reservations regarding these massive conversions.

CONVERSION AND THE THEORY OF “CULTURAL FATIGUE”

The extent of the movement that led the Indians of Central Mexico to become Christians drew the attention of contemporary ethnologists. This shift to Christianity could be seen as positive and could be attributed to divine grace; negatively, it could be viewed as the abandonment or rejection of ancient beliefs and pagan practices. Hugo Nutini (1997), a recognized expert on today’s Indians of Tlaxcala, published an article on this subject inspired by his friend and colleague, the late John Roberts. He proposed that the massive conversion of the

Indians of Mexico could have resulted from a case of cultural fatigue. That notion was developed by ethnologist Alfred Kroeber (1948: 403–405) to explain the case of Polynesians on the islands of Hawaii who in 1819, before the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries, suddenly discarded their ancient religion. Apparently the system of taboos had become extremely cumbersome, which led to rejection of the traditional religion. Kroeber cited the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century and French defeatism on the eve of World War II as other examples of cultural fatigue (or cultural staleness).

The case of the Hawaiian Islands is apparently quite different from that of Mexico because immediately after the Spanish conquest, the Indians did not seek to shed their ancient religion. Motolinía (1858, 1: 22–26) stated that at the time, the people helped to maintain or repair temples that had been damaged. They also supported, insofar as the Spaniards allowed, the priests who discreetly continued the ancient practice of worship. Were it not for the interdiction by Cortés, people would have continued to practice their great public ceremonies that normally included human sacrifice. The Franciscans understood that the survival of the ancient religion, and faith in the power of the ancient gods, were what kept the hope of a general revolt alive among the Indians. Hence, the Franciscans undertook drastic action, setting fire to the temples of Texcoco, Mexico, and later Tlaxcala. Nevertheless, there was always resistance, as shown by the fact that idols were still kept in most homes in the Tepeaca and Coatlichán regions. It must have been the same in many other places as well.

The smallpox epidemics of 1532 and 1548 had wiped out a significant part of the population, but afterward, life went on as usual, and people were able to harvest maize as before. The concepts and rules imposed in former times had lost most of their value. Therefore, perhaps the Indians of Central Mexico had undergone a sort of crisis of cultural fatigue, as discussed by Kroeber. Their material power was reduced, their spiritual universe had collapsed, and it became less difficult to rid themselves of the yoke of many divinities they no longer believed in. It is also possible that they were somewhat relieved to renounce human sacrifices associated with the incessant wars of bygone days. Nonetheless, in the new world they now inhabited, they felt oppressed and humiliated. They were at the mercy of the brutality of the Spanish *encomenderos* and also of the Primera Audiencia.

Plunged into material and moral distress, they eventually viewed Christianity as a viable solution. The Franciscan missionaries, although authoritarian, were at the same time somewhat fraternal. The Indians felt friendly hands were stretched out to them. After years of hesitation and much reticence, individuals gave way to conversion. It is also likely that among the Indians a vague hope

began to spread that by becoming Christians they would be able to improve and transcend their lot as pitilessly despised and exploited underlings.

One of the difficulties the missionaries had to overcome in their efforts to convert the Indians was the latter's hatred of the Spanish conquerors. The atrocities of the conquest had been followed by severe exploitation by the *encomenderos*. For around ten years, thousands of Indians were arbitrarily sold as slaves, branded on the face with red-hot irons, and deprived of their wives, children, and property. Motolinía, Zumárraga, and Vasco de Quiroga condemned some of the abuses before being denounced by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. But Indian hatred of the Spaniards, rarely mentioned in colonial texts, impressed the few Englishmen who were able to travel to New Spain, including Miles Philips sometime around 1575 (García Icazbalceta 1963, 5: 128) and Thomas Gage in the seventeenth century.

Marcelo Díaz de Salas and Luis Reyes García (1970) published an interesting and eloquent indigenous document in Nahuatl from 1531, the year of the alleged mass conversion of the Indians of Central Mexico. This text begins with an emotional description of the murders of kings and great nobles. It speaks of "supposedly Christian" Spaniards who sought to seize the Indians' gold and abuse their women. It mentions the construction of a church for the adoration of the "new God brought by the Castilians." The author states that it was better to be baptized than to be killed. He concludes that there was still hope that "the true God that rules over the heavens" may "save us from the people of Castile."

The avenging document would be of exceptional value had it in fact been written in 1531 as an expression of Indian sentiment. In fact, we only know of it in a Spanish translation made in 1770 to accompany territorial claims of the indigenous community of Axochco (Ajusco), not far from Mexico. Because of anachronisms, it is evident that this text is a product of the eighteenth century, a period in which the Indians of Central Mexico had been in the justifiable habit of producing dubious historical documents—such as *Títulos primordiales*, *Códices Techialoyan*, and others—to justify the centuries-long possession of their communal lands. The reader should not be misled by the few words of apparent pagan inspiration that seem to identify God with the sun "that moves above the heavens." This syncretic conception of God as the sun is widespread among many contemporary Christian Indians in Mexico, as we shall see later, and that was doubtless already so in 1770.

Even without the Axochco document, we can easily get an idea of the accumulated rancor and hatred among the Indians of the Valley of Mexico during and after the conquest. Under these tense psychological conditions, the Franciscans faced a difficult task in trying to explain to the Indians that the

Spaniards were their brothers in Jesus Christ who had come to convert them to a religion of peace, justice, and love. To make the vanquished understand that their defeat and enslavement had been the will of God, it was necessary to make them admit that they deserved the punishment they had received for their idolatry and especially for the immoral practice of human sacrifice.

The human sacrifices that revolted the Spaniards were severely repressed, and their repeated condemnation became a recurrent theme of missionary preaching. It seems many Indians suffered some remorse and even guilt over the practice. Human sacrifices were undoubtedly abandoned with some relief and were rapidly replaced by sacrifices of fowl. Animal sacrifice was first practiced surreptitiously in the Central Highlands and later quite openly in more remote regions. However, expressing direct anti-Spanish sentiment was dangerous and was accomplished through performance of the Dance of the Mecos. Northern Chichimecs, hunters and gatherers who refused to submit to Spanish authorities and to Christianity, were often compared to Dutch pirates (called Pichilingues) (Croft 1957: 321).

Starting in 1530, most of the Indians of Central Mexico changed the superficial appearance of some of their former practices, condemned by the missionaries as demonic. Many ceased to keep idols of their ancient gods in their homes. Henceforth, followers of the old religion kept their activities secret or dissimulated to protect themselves. Anyone who practiced pagan rites after being baptized was considered to have relapsed and ran the risk of harsh punishment. Among the cases of Indians brought before the Inquisition for having lapsed after being baptized, the most striking are those of Martín Ocelotl and his disciple Andrés Mixcoatl, natives of the Texcoco region. Richard E. Greenleaf (1962) provides information on several of these cases.

In 1536, Martín Ocelotl was a wealthy and respected elder, a native of the Chinantec country of what is today northern Oaxaca. He had practiced divination his entire life and claimed to have predicted the arrival of the Spaniards for Moctezuma. Although baptized in 1525, he continued to practice divination and pagan rites to make the rains come. He advised the Indians to preserve their ancient traditions and to stop listening to the Franciscans, whom he identified with *tzitzimitl*, or demons, and the end of the world. However, he knew how to defend himself and unflinchingly declared himself a good Christian who had been married in the church. His case was rather exceptional. The elderly pagan priest maintained solidarity with the traditional Tlaxcaltec world and apparently had accepted baptism solely to be prudent and as a momentary expediency (*Procesos de indios idólatras y hechiceros* 1912: 17–52). As punishment, he was exiled to Spain, and according to Mendieta (1980 [1971]: 109) the ship on which he sailed was lost at sea “near the port.” Mixcoatl was also a convert

who had turned back to paganism. However, because he carried out most of his activities in the mountains of Huauchinango, I shall discuss him later when speaking of that region.

It does not seem that Don Carlos Ometochtzin, son of the last king of Texcoco, represents a true case of surviving idolatry (see *Proceso inquisitorial del cacique de Tetzco* 1910). The judgment to condemn this cacique, who was burned alive in 1540 after a swift decision by the Inquisition, was criticized in Spain for excessive severity toward a new convert. It seems to have been an anachronistic trial based on rather suspicious indigenous testimonies (Ricard 1933: 321). Although he was a pupil of the missionaries, Don Carlos did not diligently attend Mass or express particular devotion to the sacraments. In fact, he imprudently insisted on his hereditary rights as successor to the kings of Texcoco, and in particular he criticized the more visible defects of New Spain's colonial lay and religious authorities. However, nothing in the judicial process leads one to believe he dreamed of returning to the human sacrifices of the past; he was only brought to trial as a propagator of doctrines or ideas considered heretical. He was not well defended by the counsel assigned to him and was not allowed to present any witnesses in his defense (*Proceso inquisitorial del cacique de Tetzco* 1910: 79). The proceedings in his case were much criticized in both Spain and Mexico, on religious and legal grounds. Shortly after this condemnation, on November 2, 1540, two royal decrees ordered that his property be given to his heirs. These decrees were issued to counteract rumors among the Indians that he had been condemned so his fortune could be confiscated (Carreño 1944: 159–161).

Notwithstanding such exceptional cases, the conversion of the Indians in Central Mexico to Christianity was generally for the missionaries, particularly the Franciscans, sincere and long-lasting. Furthermore, the loyalty of the newly converted was soon put to the test. In 1541, a great revolt flared up in New Galicia, a backwater that had been conquered late and with extreme brutality by Nuño de Guzmán. The rebels, who openly fought for a return to paganism and extermination of the Spaniards, found no support among the noble indigenous warriors of Central Mexico. On the contrary, the latter saw an opportunity to wage a final traditional war, with equal arms, against their rebel brethren: one of the last “flowery wars” for which they must have been nostalgic.

In the sixteenth century, multitudes of Indian peasants from Central Mexico and Oaxaca, led by their nobles and the missionaries, gave material proof of a faith aimed at outward appearances. Without compensation, they constructed and decorated a considerable number of often sumptuous churches and monasteries, particularly in the early years. These structures still stand as eloquent testimony to their country's transformation (Kubler 1948, 1: 134–140).

Finally, one can believe in the sincerity of many Indians who, in their wills, bequeathed their wealth to the church. Some even asked to be buried wearing the habit of Saint Francis of Assisi (León-Portilla 1984: 311–312). During most of the sixteenth century, the recently converted Indians of Central Mexico were the focus of an immense and persistent Christianization effort. The principal aspects of this considerable task have been well described by Ricard (1933), who discussed catechism, distribution of sacraments, organization of Christian villages, edifying plays, technical teaching, and so forth. This action was accomplished essentially by the three mendicant religious orders: Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian. It succeeded in profoundly transforming the human environment of these regions of temperate climate and easy communication, especially in privileged sectors such as the Valley of Mexico, Michoacán, and the Puebla-Tlaxcala highlands. However, the effort was often executed in a harsh, authoritarian fashion perceived as brutal, which sometimes provoked negative reactions, as pointed out by Sahagún (1956, 3: 164–165).

Christianization was more difficult in remote mountainous regions with harsh climates and precipitous terrain, such as the Sierra Norte de Puebla. First, the missionaries arrived belatedly and always in smaller numbers. Thus, no Augustinian monastery was built in an important village such as Huauchinango until 1543. For a long time, Xicotepec was only visited by priests, and the Augustinians did not construct a monastery there until the years 1571 to 1576. The Franciscans, because of a lack of missionaries, ended up abandoning all their monasteries in the Sierra Norte de Puebla in 1571, with the exception of one near the edge of the highlands in Zacatlán.

From the sixteenth century onward and in those remote regions, visible signs indicated that religious activities arising from pre-Hispanic traditions had survived. In Huauchinango in 1537, the Inquisition condemned a Nahuatl Indian named Mixcoatl from the Texcoco area for preaching against the church. He was also found guilty of organizing ceremonial offerings to the god Telpochtli-Tezcatlipoca in an effort to protect the harvests (*Procesos de indios idólatras y hechiceros* 1912: 53–78). In 1539, after being denounced by the Spaniards, the great missionary Fray Andrés de Olmos learned that the Totonacs of Matlatlán still celebrated the great Calcosot feast each year, which corresponds to the Aztec feast of Panquetzaliztli (Olmos 1912: 211, 214). In 1575, Augustinian missionaries removed the Nahuatl cacique of Xicotepec for making “heretical remarks,” the nature of which is unclear. This cacique must have had a very free spirit because he had either painted or had someone else paint a pictographic codex of a historical character. In this document, the Spanish conquest and the arrival of the first missionaries were systematically ignored (Stresser-

Péan 1995: 176–179). This omission would have been inconceivable during those same dates in the Valley of Mexico or the Puebla-Tlaxcala highlands.

Since the second half of the sixteenth century, authoritative sources such as Fray Diego Durán (1967, 1: 218) and even Sahagún (1954 [1585]: 383) denounced the surviving pagan traces among the practices of the Indians of Central Mexico—the Indians who received the most attention from the missionaries. Ricard (1933) mentioned this fact, but he correctly noted that it was not a matter of total opposition to colonial authorities, as was the case with the Cazcanes of Nueva Galicia, who openly sought the expulsion of the Spaniards and the reestablishment of the former pagan religion. In Central Mexico, sources from the period document more local survival of ancient beliefs and practices, essentially aimed at practical, agricultural, or medical purposes. In the seventeenth century, with the rise of highly acculturated Indians, one would speak not of paganism but rather of idolatrous superstitions. What Ricard fails to emphasize sufficiently is the essential difference between the global phenomenon of conversion to Christianity and the more or less partial survival of a pre-Hispanic indigenous mentality among Indian converts.

This shift in indigenous thinking implied non-European conceptions of space, time, and life after death. Converted or not, the Indians continued to hold a traditional view of the world as they knew and understood it. That view included a cosmos with multiple levels from zenith to nadir, its cardinal points, its various territorial or marine regions, its seasons, its meteorological phenomena, and so on. Converted or not, the Indians still had their traditional conception of time; the indigenous notion emanated from the Mesoamerican calendar, with its names and numbers for the days linked to the destiny of each human being. They divided their years into eighteen months of twenty days each, and centuries were fifty-two years long. Converted or not, the Indians continued to hold a complex view of the human soul. One part of the soul could temporarily abandon the body while the person was still alive. Another part was believed to travel to the underworld after death or to a particular destiny depending on the manner of death. Furthermore, for the Indians, there was no doubt that all things had a soul, including mountains, animals, plants, and tools. Serge Gruzinski has dealt brilliantly with the subject of the survival of idolatry (1988: 189–238), which I shall examine in the course of this book.