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Religious conversion in Tlaxcala, 1520-1550.

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN TLAXCALA, 1520-1550

A Thesis

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN TLAXCALA, 1520-1550

A thesis presented

by

Edmund C. Hands

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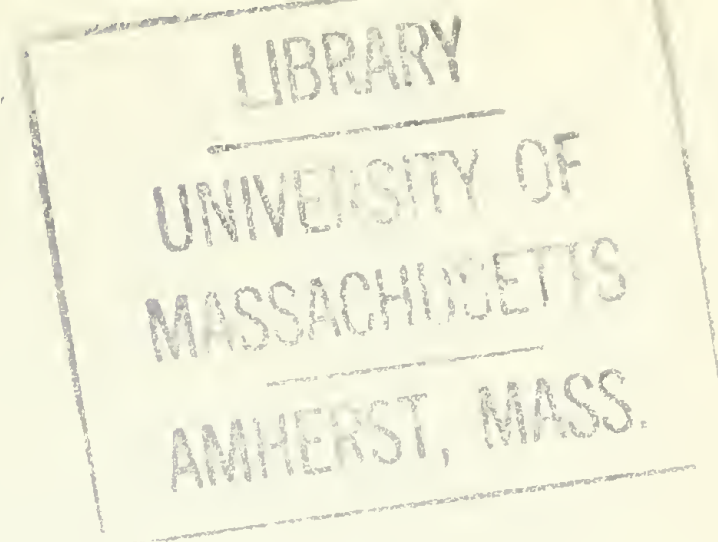


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of the Indian culture in the process of religious conversion in Mexico is still obscure. This obscurity has resulted from a tendency to study religious conversion on a nationwide scale rather than a regional level.¹ My study will focus on the social forces at work in the small province of Tlaxcala during the first half of the sixteenth century. The events of the conversion in the province will be examined with special reference to the social and political causes underlying the exceptionally rapid conversion. Special attention will be given to an analysis of the rise of syncretism. The final objective of this paper is to examine the problem of cross cultural comparisons of religious conversion.

The state of Tlaxcala is now the smallest in Mexico, but its present size belies the important role that it played in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. As allies of the Spaniards, the Tlaxcalans won a privileged position in the early colonial period. Tlaxcala also produced several native historians whose works are second only to those written by natives of the Central Valley. The Tlaxcalans also attracted the attention of several of the famous sixteenth century Spanish historians. Thus, Tlaxcala with its society relatively undamaged by the Spanish conquest and its wealth of documentation is an attractive area for historical study.

The eight hundred square miles of territory in the pre-conquest province was surrounded on all sides by the hostile Aztecs. The Aztecs were perennially at war with the outnumbered Tlaxcalans, and this struggle had a tremendous unifying effect on the Tlaxcalans. The Tlaxcalans, almost alone among the Indians of Mexico, had developed a strong sense of regional loyalty and cohesiveness which was maintained in the post-conquest period.² This patriotism was reinforced by the Tlaxcalan's alliance with the Spaniards and their mutual defeat of the Aztecs, but this alliance had even more substantial results. As a reward for their service against the Aztecs, Tlaxcalans were made subject directly to the crown instead of being divided as encomiendas by Cortés. This enabled the province to escape the exploitation of the early Spanish encomenderos, but more important, the province was allowed to form a strong Indian cabildo and maintain a large degree of local autonomy. Tlaxcala's favored position also led to taxes in kind which³ were substantially less than the average for New Spain.

Perhaps the most significant result of the Spanish alliance was the exclusion of Spanish settlers from the province for the first two decades after the conquest. Although both the Spanish and Indian governments did their best to enforce this policy permanently, the battle was apparently hopeless; and Spanish intrusion after 1540 became a major cause in the decline of Indian society. However, it was during these first twenty years that the major work of

religious conversion took place. Thus, during the conversion, the major examples of Spanish Christianity in Tlaxcala were the Franciscan friars.⁴ Because of the lack of Spanish intrusions in the early period, the Indian culture remained intact to a greater degree than in the Central Valley. This still cohesive culture was then confronted with one of the most dedicated elements of European Christianity, the Franciscans. It is this purity of contact with its general lack of extraneous influences which makes Tlaxcala perhaps the best area of study for the determination of the impact of religious conversion on the Indians.

CHAPTER II

PRE-CONQUEST TLAXCALA

The Tlaxcalans were a part of the same large migration which brought the Aztecs to the Valley of Mexico. Native legend stated that the Tlaxcalans were the sixth of seven Nahuatl tribes to leave Chicomoztoc, the mythical seven caves of origin.⁵ The Aztecs were the last of the primitive tribes to leave. The uncivilized Tlaxcalans migrated to the west bank of Lake Texcoco where they learned the rudiments of Central Mexican culture from their already established neighbors. After a period on the lake shore, the Tlaxcalans either left or were forced out of the Central Valley. The Tlaxcalans then went eastward to the valley which was to become their permanent home. Prescott believed that the Nahuatl Tlaxcalans arrived in that region during the twelfth century, but more modern evidence seems to point to a date in the early fourteenth century.⁶

Upon arrival the Tlaxcalans found that the region was already inhabited by primitive tribes of Otomi and Pinome speaking people. The Otomis maintained a simple hunting and gathering economy. Only after long contact with the Nahuatls did the Otomis turn to maize growing and building in adobe and stone. The arrival of the Tlaxcalans seems to have forced many Otomis to leave the area while the remainder became a "semisubject race...employed as workers and

soldiers by the dominant Tlaxcalan peoples!⁷ The main area of Otomi population was on the periphery of the province where they served as buffers against Aztec attacks.

The conquering Nahuatls established four ruling cities over a period of time. The first city was founded in the center of the province. The ruler of the new city then allowed his brother to found another city, and they divided the province between them. After three generations a "gen-⁸eral revolt" led to the founding of a third city. Another city was founded later with the arrival of a new wave of Nahuatl migrants. Clearly, there was a great deal of land available since a revolt resulted in the establishment of a new city instead of reform or revolution in the political system; and, at a later time, there was enough land for the peaceful entrance of new migrants. After the period of settlement, the natives turned the rich land of the region into the base for an extensive trade in maize. For a time the province was prosperous and peaceful. The lack of enemies and low ecological pressure was the cause of this prosperity, but, unlike the competitive world of the Central Valley the friendly environment of Tlaxcala provided little stimulus for the development of complex political⁹ institutions.

The prosperity of the region finally attracted the attention of its neighbors, and the Tlaxcalans were drawn into a series of wars culminating in a perennial struggle with

the Aztecs. At the time of the Spanish conquest the province was surrounded by nominally Aztec territory. The long period of hostilities caused some hardships among the poorer Indians since important staples such as salt and cotton could not be imported. The constant threat posed by the Aztecs led to an expansion of the military and perhaps to a tighter political structure.¹⁰

Little is known of the details of the Tlaxcalan socio-political structure, but the broad outlines are known. They indicate that elements of the egalitarian tribal system existed alongside some of the centralized institutions of a state.¹¹ Each of the four major cities had a separate ruling family, but a male member of that family could only inherit the chieftainship if the other three rulers agreed. If the rulers turned down the heir apparent, the succession then passed to another son whom the three chiefs could support. At all other times the rulers of the four cabeceras were sovereign within their own sectors although one ruler was apparently designated as head of state. For matters of war and foreign affairs the four rulers formed a council to make policy. The chief of state or a proxy acted as commander of the army and as chief diplomatic negotiator.¹² The power of the four ruling cities was not absolute, however. This is seen most clearly in the degree of autonomy granted to individual towns below the rank of the four cabeceras. Their independence was so great that some Tlaxcalan towns actual-

ly made a separate peace with the Spaniards.¹³

The great extent of local autonomy indicates that Tlaxcala had not developed the stronger political organization of the Aztecs, but, on the other hand, the apparent success of the complex four part division of the ruling hierarchy shows a high degree of political sophistication. This heterogeneity demonstrates that the political structure of Tlaxcala was in a transitional state when the Spanish arrived. The forms of Tlaxcalan social relations also reflect the transitional nature of the culture.

The people of the province were divided into three broad classes. The principales or nobles were the ruling class in the province. Below them were the maceguals who were generally farmers. Finally, the lowest group were the slaves. The total population of the region for the period from 1519 to 1540 has been estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000. In 1541 the Bishop of Tlaxcala stated that there were 3,300 principales living in the province, a ratio of one principale to about 80 maceguals; this figure is probably roughly accurate for the immediate pre-conquest period as well. When slavery was abolished in 1537, there were only 20,000 slaves in the province. By far the largest class in the province were the maceguals who made up about ninety-two per cent of the population in the period before the conquest.¹⁴

The noble class was divided into several groups whose

status ranged from the rulers of the four cabeceras down to the lowest nobles who held only a few maceguals as tributaries along with a relatively small amount of land. The nobles lived on estates farmed by Indians who were either part-time workers paying their tribute, resident sharecroppers, or slaves. The nobles also received tribute in a variety of goods from the maceguals. However, aside from political power, the chief benefit of being a *principale* "was a degree of personal luxury denied to commoners. Thus, even in periods of hardship and want occasioned by the Tlaxcalan-Aztec wars, it was possible for nobles to connive with the enemy and receive cloth, cacao, salt, gold, and other products"¹⁵

The status of the individual macegual was directly based on their relationship with various members of the nobility. This "relation between *principales* and lower class Indians was complex and variable, with landed estates, vassalage, renting, landownership, and dependence"¹⁶ This complexity stemmed from the fact that the Nahuatls of Tlaxcala apparently lacked the calpulli system which served as an organizing principle among the Aztecs.

Although there are many conflicting interpretations of the *calpulli*, a few facts are incontestable. The *calpulli* was a communal land-holding unit based on kinship relations which became an organizing unit for political and military control for the Aztecs. Title to land was held by the *cal-*

pulli which then divided it among the members to farm. Within the calpulli, some members had higher status than others. This fact made the calpulli a convenient unit upon which to base the Aztec army with the leaders in the calpulli serving as the leaders in the army. The calpulli system also insured the efficient collection of tribute. Thus, the calpulli was a conservative body which fixed and regulated social relations in an efficient manner.¹⁷

Among the Tlaxcalans the situation was very different. While Charles Gibson in Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century never openly states that the Tlaxcalans lacked the calpulli, several statements make this point implicitly. Perhaps the most significant fact uncovered by Gibson was that the individual Tlaxcalan could hold personal title to land.¹⁸ Also, on noble estates "There is no indication that the maceguals¹⁹ and principales were biologically related as in a kin group." These facts indicate that two of the basic props of the calpulli, corporate land-holding and close clan ties, were missing in Tlaxcala.²⁰ Finally, as another proof that the calpulli was absent in the province, the Tlaxcalan army was merely organized "in separate groups, each with its insignia and leader, but without a system of rank and file within the individual group."²¹ This system was completely different from the complex internal organization of the calpulli based Aztec army.

Unlike the Aztecs then, the Tlaxcalan society seems to

have been based on the individual rather than the corporate system of the calpulli. Without the organizational rudder of the Aztecs, Tlaxcalan society was more susceptible to rapid and complex social change. The trend of the socio-political system in the immediate pre-conquest period in Tlaxcala was towards a hierarchical type of organization, and the evidence previously cited indicates that the system was still in the process of change. The basically democratic structure of the army and of individual small land holdings seem to recall the essentially egalitarian structure of the nomadic tribe while the other land holding patterns such as sharecropping point towards a system where only the principales would hold title to land. The great amount of local autonomy also acted as a check on the centralizing tendencies of the four cabeceras.

Both the Tlaxcalan government and the social structure were closely intertwined, and both show that Tlaxcala was undergoing change when the Spanish arrived. The active, changing culture of Tlaxcala was bound to have a profound effect on the process of religious conversion. In turn, the introduction of an alien element such as a new religion would have a deep effect on the delicately balanced socio-political tensions in the province.

CHAPTER III

FRANCISCAN METHODS OF CONVERSION IN TLAXCALA

The Franciscan Order, after a successful history of preaching in Europe, was the first to receive the commission from the Pope to preach in Mexico. Armed with administrative and sacramental powers generally reserved for the secular clergy, the preaching orders were to be the vanguard of Catholicism in Mexico. The first few Franciscans arrived in 1522, but the most important early contingent arrived in 1524.²² Even before 1522, though, some significant preliminary work was done.

The earliest attempt to convert the Tlaxcalans occurred shortly after Cortés' victories over the armies of the province.²³ Cortés wanted to convert the Indians, and a suitable moment came when the chief principales offered their daughters in marriage to Cortés and his officers. Cortés was prepared to agree to the marriage only if the entire province accepted Christianity as its religion. Maxixcatzin, the leader of the province, vehemently declined stating that their gods were the gods of their forefathers and that they would take revenge on the Tlaxcalans if they deserted them for the Christian God. Quite clearly, military defeat had not convinced the Indian leader that the God of the invaders was more powerful than the traditional gods of the region. Since Cortés desperately needed Indian allies, he reluctantly agreed to tolerate a continu-

ance of the Indian religion in return for military support.

During the period between 1519 and 1524 Christianity was presented as an alternative to the traditional religion without much attempt to force conversion. Even in 1519 Christianity was tolerated by the Indians. The Indian leaders allowed Cortés to convert a temple into a shrine for the image of the Virgin and permitted mass to be said. Also in 1519 when some of Cortés' officers married Indian maidens, the girls were baptized. Gibson discounts native historians' attempts to prove the conversion of the chief principales in 1519, but there were certainly a number of individual baptisms during the conquest.²⁴ In this initial period it is clear that conversion was a casual and individual matter.

The course of Tlaxcalan conversion changed dramatically in 1524. In that year twelve Franciscan friars arrived at Vera Cruz. They boldly advertised their presence by walking the entire distance to Mexico City barefoot and poorly clad. Unused to seeing Spaniards so apparently poverty-stricken, the Indians thronged their route which eventually passed through Tlaxcala. While in the province, the friars paused to rest and observe the famous market day when the people of the province came to get supplies. The friars were astonished by the immensity of the crowd, and the Indians were attracted to the friars by curiosity. The friars, unable to speak the Indian languages, attempted to explain in sign language the purpose of their coming. This initial attempt

at communication was a moving experience for the friars who were greatly inspired by the Indians. After the exciting events of market day, the friars moved on to the capital where Cortés had called for a meeting with the leading Indians of the country. When the friars arrived in the capital an astonishing thing occurred as Cortés and his men fell to their knees before the poorly dressed friars. News of this occurrence spread rapidly causing speculation as to what manner of men could make the great Cortés fall to his knees. Thus, the friars were guaranteed an audience wherever²⁵ they went.

This initial Indian curiosity could have dissipated rapidly if the friars had been anything less than exceptional men. Two of the first to arrive in Tlaxcala to work were García de Cisneros, who was to become famous for founding the Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco, and Andrés de Córdova, a linguistic expert. The early colonial historian Toribio Motolinía was also among the first to preach in the province. Most important of all for the Tlaxcalan missionary enterprise²⁶ was Fray Martín de Valencia, the leader of the twelve.

The friars' prestige was further enhanced in Tlaxcala when Lorenzo Maxixcatzin, the son of the principale who led the province before the conquest, gave them one of his²⁷ buildings to serve as a temporary residence. The friars, in the eyes of the Tlaxcalans, were supported by Cortés, the hero who crushed the hated Aztecs, and by Lorenzo Maxix-

catzin, who represented at least part of the ancient power structure of the province. With this powerful support the work of conversion could begin in earnest.

An intensive training program for the principale chil-²⁸dren was the key to the Franciscan plan for conversion. The importance of this training program is indicated by the support given to it by Cortés. He ordered all Tlaxcalan nobles to put their sons under the tutelage of the friars with grave penalties for non-compliance. This measure was moderately successful, and soon the frairs had enough students to begin work.

The friars housed their pupils in the friary. This effectively limited the influence of the still essentially pagan culture on the children. Given this, plus the natural malleability of children, it is easy to see why their training advanced rapidly. Naturally, the curriculum of the school included quite a bit of Christian doctrine, but reading and writing of Latin and probably Spanish were also taught. The children, in the meantime, taught the friars the various Indian²⁹ tongues.

The children were overzealous converts. During the first year of the program, children from the school stoned a pagan priest to death. The next year, 1525, saw a more orderly expression of their new religious fervor. The children acted as interpreters for the friars, and they also gave the friars information concerning the continued practice of pagan rituals

in the province. In 1525 the students also participated in the first destruction of pagan idols and temples. Perhaps the most important role played by the students was their preaching of Christian ideas to their people. Several of these children actually preached Christianity outside Tlaxcala, and this was merely a reflection of the more substantial proselytizing done within the Province.³⁰

This key project of the conversion program was a resounding success. The generation of principales that had been tutored by the friars was the cornerstone of Tlaxcalan Christianity. They dominated the lay offices in the churches, for instance; and they were able to provide more concrete rewards for their training as well. Gibson wrote, "through the influence of the Indian noble class...the friars received their sustenance and were assured a steady income as well as a nearly inexhaustible supply of labor"³¹

Although the friars succeeded in producing a Christian noble class, this group of intensively trained Indians probably numbered only between 500 and 3500.³² This represented less than 2% of the total population. Even if this tiny minority dominated the power structure, they alone could not make the conversion program a complete success. The friars realized this, and while they were training the noble children, they also initiated a campaign to introduce Christianity to the masses.

The friars program to reach the masses was a three-

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step plan. The three steps of the process reflected the changing needs of the Indians as their exposure to Christianity increased. The first step was aimed at the pagan. The next step represented the transition from paganism to Christianity, and its culmination was the sacrament of baptism. The final stage was the continued implantation of Christian ideals aimed at creating the perfect Christian.

The most important part of the first step was the basic sermon. The friars had a pre-planned sermon which they preached at every new place they visited. The sermon was adaptable to changing needs, but the first section was invariable. In it, the friars explained the attributes of the Christian God in simple terms, and then they explained who the devil was. Finally, the friars asserted that God wanted all men to go to heaven while the devil wanted all men condemned to a vividly described hell. After these points were made, the friars could proceed in several directions. The assembled Indians could be instructed on the basic requirements necessary for salvation, or with a more advanced group, flaws in understanding of doctrine could be corrected. After the sermon, the friars generally held a discussion with the crowd.

The next step in Christianization came when the individual Indian decided to be baptized. Motolinia made it clear that in order to be baptized, the Indian had to have a basic knowledge of doctrine.³⁴ The Pater Noster and the

Ave María were the minimum requirements with some knowledge of other pieces of doctrine hoped for but not required.

Motolinía hinted that even a limited and hesitantly demonstrated knowledge on these points of doctrine was sufficient to get the Indian baptized. The Franciscan friars seemed to realize that baptism was only the first step towards true Christianization.

Baptism allowed the Indian to take part in all the celebrations of the Christian calendar. This was educational in itself, but the friars insured the gains of baptism by continually repeating their doctrines. The main pieces of doctrine introduced to the Indians were the Credo, the Salve, the ten commandments, the Ave María, and the Pater Noster. They were repeated after mass every third day, on Sundays, and on feast days. The period after mass also allowed the friars to correct mistakes in the Indians understanding of Christianity. At this time the Indians were exhorted to perfect their prayers by reciting at home.

At first, all this work was carried on by the friars through interpreters, but soon the friars were speaking the native tongues fluently. This was not enough, however; the Indians were bored by the early sermons. The friars had to use all their ingenuity to develop methods to make religious lessons interesting. The above mentioned prayers and doctrines were set to hymns and chanted to make learning easier. New hymns were written in the native languages explaining

Christianity. Sermons and lessons were translated into Nahuatl as the natives became literate. In some areas pictures were used to demonstrate Christian lessons.³⁵

In order to maintain the growth of Christianity, the friars had to organize large numbers of recently baptized Indians into manageable groups. The Indians themselves seem to have organized small groups of friends to learn the hymns and prayers taught by the friars. The friars seem to have encouraged this by allowing the groups to meet in the gardens around the church and chapels throughout the province. Meetings also took place in the people's homes. These informal groups were run by the Indians themselves with much joy and interest, but informal groups tend to be short-lived so a more enduring type of organization was³⁶ started.

The answer to the problem of enduring organizations was the confraternity or cofradía, an ancestor of the present Third Order of Saint Francis for the laity. There were at least two such groups in Tlaxcala. One was the Confraternity of the Cross to which all Christians belonged and the other was the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Incarnation. Both are among the earliest confraternities established in New³⁷ Spain. Both groups provided organized participation in various church activities. For instance, the Confraternity of Our Lady sponsored the feast of Corpus Christi. Members of this Confraternity acted in the religious play associated

with the festival while others marched in a procession to the church. The religious play, written in Nahuatl, allowed Indian actors and set designers to show off their talents while it spread a vivid Christian message. While other details of these early confraternities are lacking in my sources we may speculate that as in other later confraternities the Indians paid small sums to the organization for masses and festivals. Some of the later confraternities even offered plenary indulgence and special burial privileges to its members. Thus, the confraternities were a significant socio-religious organization which helped to implement and solidify the conversion program.

The two major facets of the conversion program were the education of the noble children and the large scale work with the masses. As the conversion program advanced, this missionary work passed gradually into the normal pastoral duties of a settled parish. However, there was another method used in the conversion which cannot be overlooked. This was the creation of incidents calculated to focus attention on the growth of Christianity. The man most responsible for these events was Martín de Valencia. He was the original leader of the twelve missionaries who arrived in 1524, and for three and a half years after 1527 he was head of the friary in Tlaxcala. It was during this period that Christianity emerged as the most powerful religion in the province.

As one of his first acts Martín de Valencia ordered the completion of a permanent residence for the friars in Tlaxcala to indicate that Christianity itself was to become a lasting part of provincial life. He also brought the Franciscans' assault on the idols and temples of the old religion to its logical culmination when he led the destruction of the principal shrine in the province on the summit of the mountain sacred to the goddess of rain. His most daring act took place in 1527 when he forced the arrest and execution of four important principales for idolatry. This act was unique in the history of the province, and it was a very significant warning to all those who wished to practice the ancient religion openly. The executions carried with them a grave threat of rebellion, and the Spaniards felt compelled to send a large force to Tlaxcala to prevent violence. No violence occurred, however, and after this point it was clear that Christianity was the dominant religion in the province.⁴⁰

While this conversion plan was a practical one, it completely ignored one of the most limiting factors in the whole conversion program: the high ratio of Indians to clergy. The conversion started in 1524 with three friars for 300,000 Tlaxcalans and for the Indians in an area several times larger than Tlaxcala. Even in 1569, when the Indian population to be served had declined to between 150,000 and 200,000, there were only fifteen religious in the province.⁴¹ The effects of this incredible situation are most clearly seen in Motolinía's

description of one visit to a town near Tlaxcala sometime before 1540:

On arriving in the town the friar found that there were more than thirty sick people to confess, two hundred couples to marry, many Indians to baptize, one deceased Indian to bury, and a sermon to preach... On that day the friar baptized fifteen hundred persons... And at one o'clock in the morning he had not yet finished the work. Nor is this the only priest to whom this has occurred.⁴²

The extremely high Indian to priest ratio weakened the program in the vital area of communications. This lack of communication was crucial due to the Franciscan's encouragement of early baptism. As we have seen the Indians' become official Christians through baptism when they had learned, even vaguely, a few of the basic doctrines of the Church. While this enabled many Indians to take part in the ceremonies of the Church, the small number of clergy could not effectively teach the new Christians purer doctrine. Even the very private and personal contract on the confessional was limited due to the pressure of numbers. The lack of close association with the majority of Indians seems to have produced a convert who maintained a thin veneer of the new religion over a personality which retained many pre-conquest traits. Moreover, this retention of ancient habits was unknown or at least under-

estimated by the majority of the early religious in New Spain because of the limited contact with the people.⁴³

Another factor obscuring the retention of pre-conquest traits was the close contact between the friars and the principales. In contrast to the masses, the Christian training of the nobles was on a person to person level. Thus, the Christianization of the nobility was the most complete. Judging by the individual case histories found in Motolinia, the friars tended to measure their success from the work done with the individual principale rather than that done with the masses of people.⁴⁴

Overall, the friars' program was based on sound principles.⁴⁵ Changing a whole society's religion is one of the most difficult types of cultural change to attempt. A group can see the practical benefits of improved agricultural methods, for instance, but the benefits of a new religion are hard to prove. Even military victory by the Spaniards, one of the most potent demonstrations of the power of a new god, could not convince the Indians to change their allegiance. The friars generally successful approach to this problem was based on the Franciscan experience in Europe and the example of the original disciples of Christ, and oddly enough their techniques anticipated many of the methods used by cultural innovators today.

Their initial appearance in Mexico began to build the base of support which they needed to begin their program.

Dressed as poorly as the poorest Indian, they eliminated with one stroke the class differences which separated the richly-clad Spanish soldiers from the maceguals. After Cortes and his men bowed before them, the friars inspired a certain awe among the Indians. Finally, the support of a part of the Indian government in Tlaxcala and of the Spanish in the capital completed the construction of a solid starting position.

. When the friars learned the native tongues, another important advance was made. At first, the friars had to rely on interpreters which was dangerous for several reasons. Any native interpreter is capable of distorting or changing completely the responses of the natives in order to please the cultural innovator, and unintentional distortion is even more common. Also, using an interpreter is time consuming and unnatural. By removing the interpreter, the friars gained a somewhat closer and more accurate picture of their potential converts.

The confraternities were crucial in reinforcing the ideals of the new belief by giving the Indians a chance to act on their new faith. Other projects such as building an Indian hospital and chapels also allowed the average Indian to aid his new faith, but the confraternities had the advantage of working in the same way psychologically as modern group therapy. Being in a group with other new Christians gave a feeling of confidence to the Indian and reduced the anxiety of cultural change. Clearly, the confraternities

were one of the most significant devices in the conversion program.

The use of the native language by the friars and the founding of the confraternities were sound psychological tactics used to gain the objective of rapid Christianization. These tactics had little long range effect on the society other than bringing about the desired change. However, the basic strategy for Christianization with its recognition of the social cleavage of the Indian society had a lasting effect. This basic plan with intensive training for the elite and broad, shallow training for the masses actually created two types of Christianity in the province. The Christianity practiced by the elite was relatively pure in the sense that it was close to its Spanish model, but the Christianity of the maceguals varied extensively from the Spanish norm.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM IN TLAXCALA

Simply studying the techniques by which the friars introduced Catholicism into Tlaxcala does not explain the relatively rapid success of religious conversion. One thing encouraging conversion was the many structural similarities between the established religion and Christianity. This similarity encouraged the blending of the two religions into a unified syncretic religion. A brief examination of this emerging syncretism is essential for an understanding of the social consequences of the conversion.

Both faiths shared many characteristics common to established religions. In general, these included a professional class of priests, specialized religious buildings, public rituals, and the use of images in ceremonies. These basic overt areas of commonality helped make it easier for many Indians to transfer their allegiance from one religion to the other. In addition there were remarkable similarities in several key sacraments. For example, infant baptism was practiced among the Nahuatl settlers in Mexico. The details of the baptismal rituals do not correspond exactly, but the main aspects are identical. In both, water was used to purify the infant of the sins of the parents, and baptism was also the time of name giving for the infant. Confession and absolution were also known among the Nahuatls, but here only the broad outline of the rituals was similar to the

Christian rites. The Indians confessed to a specialized priest who then gave them penances to perform. After this the Indian was granted absolution. Among the Nahuatl confession could be made only once in a lifetime; all sins committed after this confession could not be absolved. Therefore, the average Indian only confessed when he was on his deathbed. Some retraining was necessary to get the converted Indians to confess regularly, but, at least, the idea of confession was not completely alien to the Indian.

One of the principal deities of Tlaxcala was Matlalcueye, a Nahuatl water goddess known by various names throughout Mexico. She was especially revered in Tlaxcala where the highest summit in the province bore her name.⁴⁷ According to Motolinía, Matlalcueye meant "'blue chemise', blue being the color of the principal garment worn by the goddess."⁴⁸ Hubert Howe Bancroft concludes his description of this goddess by stating that "In her right hand she held as a sceptre a vessel in the shape of a cross or a monstrance of the Catholic Church."⁴⁹ Bancroft also noted the importance of Matlalcueye to the poor farmer; she was one of his principal deities because he depended on her gift of rain for sustenance. Her role would seem analous to the position of Mary in the mind of the European peasant.

It would seem probable that the incomplete religious education of the Indians caused them to see in the Virgin their ancient goddess. For example, the dominant color worn

by the goddess was blue, and she also held a cross-like object in her right hand. There are many pictures and statues of the Virgin in just such a pose, and blue is one of the commonest colors worn by images of the Virgin. These two factors, the similarity of images and their similar importance in society, would allow the Indians to transfer allegiance from Matlalcueye to Mary. This simple transfer would then set off a chain of associations which would mingle the attributes of Mary and Matlalcueye until the two would join to form a syncretic Mary combining pre-conquest water goddess with Christian saint. Apparently, this is precisely what happened. Gibson gives an example: in 1528 the image of Mary was carried in procession through the streets in a time of drought and supplicated for rain.⁵⁰ Although this ceremonial use of the Virgin's image may have also been current in Europe, the transference of the ceremony merely cemented the identification of Matlalcueye and Mary.

Another important stimulus to the growth of religious syncretism was the use of Indian curanderos by the friars. The curanderos were the doctors of ancient Mexico whose remedies were a blend of herbal remedies and magic. When the friars opened a hospital for the Indians in 1537, they permitted the curanderos to practice their skill because⁵¹ they recognized the efficacy of some of their cures. Whether the friars were unaware of the magic associated with the medicine or whether they chose to simply ignore it is unknown.

The significant thing is that the curandero flourished and has, in fact, survived to the present day. These curanderos preserved many folk-beliefs and kept them alive in the minds of all Indians.⁵²

The most striking example of the syncretic process, however, was the assimilation of the old religion's major feast by the Christian Easter celebration. Each year in pre-conquest times a feast was held in March to honor all the gods. Every fourth year this festival was expanded into the Great Feast. It was this celebration that was described to Motolinía by his Indian informants.⁵³

At the beginning of every fourth year, the oldest priest in the area proclaimed a year of god, and he asked all to do penance. He also ordered all non-believers to depart from the province. After five days the old priest led a procession to the summit of the highest mountain in the area where offerings were made to Matlalcueye and Camaxtli, the tutelary god of the Tlaxcalans. The priests then assembled at the temple of Camaxtli in one of the four cabeceras. Shortly after the procession to the mountain and one hundred and sixty days before the feast, the priest drew blood from their tongues to signify the beginning of their fast.

After eighty days, the priests announced that all the people in the province must fast. The people could eat only maize cakes without chili, take no baths and abstain from sexual intercourse. Meat was allowed only for those who

could catch game. Every twentieth day during the fast all devout people drew small sticks through their tongue as an act of penance. These sticks were then gathered up and offered to the gods in their temples along with paper, copal incense, and quail. During the fast the old priest preached in the various towns, and many devout people gave him blankets and other gifts.

Shortly before the eve of the feast, the priests painted their bodies and danced a whole day behind the principal temple. On the eve of the feast, the idols in the major temples were adorned. The priest then offered the idols robes and blankets. Finally they offered live animals to the idols. At midnight a priest kindled a new fire in the temple. The highest ranking warrior held captive was then sacrificed;⁵⁴ he was called the offspring of the sun. The feast day was marked by large scale human sacrifices in all the main temples. After the ceremonies, the principales ate the flesh of the sacrificial victims.

Two factors allowed the Indians to identify the Easter holiday with their ancient feast. First, both the Great Feast and, in most instances, Easter were celebrated in March. Next, the general structure of the ceremonial periods was the same. Each began with a strict fast followed by a week of preliminary ceremonies and finally the holiday. By a close examination of Motolinia's description of the Lenten and Holy Week activities of 1536,⁵⁵ we can see how many pre-Christian traits

were absorbed by the new religion.

For instance, the early practice of ritual blood-letting was carried over into Christian times. Motolinia noted the excessive zeal with which the Indians scourged themselves during Lent and on Holy Thursday. He added, as well, that many devout people abstained from sexual intercourse during Lent. This, of course, had also been forbidden during the fast before the Great Feast. Lenten fasting was also strictly observed by the Indian converts.

During Holy Week from Thursday to Saturday, the Indians brought offerings to lay before the altar upon which the Sacrament was exposed; but it was not until Saturday night that the crowds really became large. The offerings were varied, but the major portion consisted of embroidered blankets, copal incense, cooked food, live animals and hand-made crosses. Both the time of the greatest offering and the use of blankets and live animals is reminiscent of the final offering to the ancient idols.

The dominant motif of the offering blankets was the Christian cross. This and the hand-made crosses, while appropriate for Easter, showed a great deal of concern for the act of sacrifice. ⁵⁶ Exposure of the Sacrament on the altar must have also brought up memories of the past. The Indians had been taught that the Sacrament was the body of the Son of God and that the central mystery of Christianity was the sacrifice of a man to atone for sin. It would have been almost impossible for the

Indian not to remember the sacrifice of a man during the Great Feast who was then called an offspring of the Sun. Thus, it would seem that right at the heart of Christianity there was the possibility of a confusion of old and new religions which would ultimately produce a synthesis.

There were more correspondences between the old feast and Easter. A pre-dawn procession started Easter Sunday just as a night sacrifice started the day of the Great Feast. Dancing was also performed for both holidays. The friars who preached in the towns during Lent were given gifts much as the old priest received in the period before the Greast Feast. All these facts seem to represent beyond a doubt pre-Christian carry-overs, but we must not be misled into believing that no new European traits were added to the Indian's March celebration. Aside from the obvious differences such as the introduction of the Christian mass and the abolition of human sacrifice, some important little details had become Europeanized. Alms giving became an important activity during Lent, for example. Also, offerings of candles and candlesticks were placed alongside more traditional gifts during Holy Week.

Religious syncretism in Tlaxcala appears to be of essentially lower class origin. The maceguals did not accept an alien religion on its own terms, but instead, transformed it to make it fit their own inner needs. As the Easter celebration of 1536 demonstrates, this process progressed rapidly to produce a satisfying new religion. The success of this process is indicated by the continued loyalty of the Indian to the

Catholic Church and the continued use of syncretic forms
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down to the present day.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

In the two previous sections this study has focused on the techniques of religious conversion and the syncretic practices which resulted from the conversion. This section will examine the impact of the conversion on Tlaxcalan society and on some individuals within that society. The period after the conquest would have been a period of social change even without the introduction of Christianity due to early Spanish governmental policies, but the entrance of a new religion into Tlaxcala seems to have provided another stimulus to social change.

The principales of Tlaxcala benefited from the Spaniards' methods of indirect rule in the immediate post-conquest period. Under the Spaniard's rule, the Indian caciques "set tribute themselves and supervised collection; they regulated communal agriculture, corvéés, and tandas"⁵⁸ These powers were the traditional ones of the Indian elite, but after the conquest these powers often led to abuses where the rulers charged exorbitant tributes to enrich themselves directly or used their powers to extort land titles from the maceguals.⁵⁹ After 1530, the caciques power was increased with the establishment of Spanish style municipalities in Indian areas.

In Tlaxcala this meant the formation of a unique pro-

vincial government uniting the four cabeceras in one government. The four rulers of the cabeceras were made regidores for life. The remainder of the offices were filled by nobles⁶⁰ elected by 220 electors who were also principales.

Thus, under the new system the principales dominated the administrative and judicial processes in the province. The final result of this process of political Hispanization was that "while the cacicazgo...maintained its ancient coercive power over the macehualtin; it now did so behind a screen of Castilian⁶¹ juridical sanction!"

As shown earlier, the Tlaxcalan society was in transition when the Spaniards arrived with the Indian nobility attempting to solidify its position at the expense of the maceguals. The events of the post-conquest period facilitated the principales quest for absolute power by allowing them to increase their prerogatives under the guise of Spanish law. Thus, it would seem that the struggle between the classes had been won by the principales, but the entrance of Christianity into the province threatened the principales new position.

Among the Nahuatl the ancient religion had several⁶² political functions. It served as an instrument of terror and as a propaganda device to herald the power of the state. Most important, the ancient religion was used to advance the hierarchical social system favored by the nobility.

Among the Aztecs the Huitzilopochtli cult functioned as the

vehicle of social dominance and political sovereignty, and in Tlaxcala the cult of the tutelary god Camaxtli apparently had the same function.⁶³ Thus, it is only logical that the emergence of a new religion in the province presented the opportunity for a readjustment in the socio-political structure of the province.

Although the friars were content to work within the established social framework, Christianity's many implicit egalitarian aspects must have appealed to the masses. In fact, many aspects of the friar's early sermons were almost radical in the context of Tlaxcalan society. The universal fatherhood of God, a universal Original Sin, a universal

Last Judgment, the Franciscan emphasis on the virtues of poverty, and other points of doctrine all held implicitly democratic messages which posed an indirect threat to the hierarchical ideals of the nobility. If the maceguals could assert a dominant role in the new religion, it might then serve as a political lever to preserve their position against the encroachment of the nobility.

As the promise of both a more equitable life and eternal salvation attracted the poor to Christianity in droves, the principales faced a dilemma. The extinction of the old religion left the upper class without its theocratic prop, but if they accepted Christianity and allowed it to grow in Tlaxcala, it might get out of the friar's control and cause a social overturn. Short of armed resistance, however, there

was no real alternative to the acceptance of Christianity because the Spanish government was heartily supporting it. Most principales chose to limit the risk of the ideas of the new church by controlling it as much as possible. The principales even attempted to use Christianity in the role of the ancient cult as a base for noble pretensions.

Motolinía's use of many individual case histories to demonstrate the effects of Christianity in Tlaxcala provide us with a unique means of making a more detailed examination of the consequences of the conversion in the province. Motolinía's case histories never approached the scientific objectivity found in the studies of modern anthropologists so care must be taken in their interpretation. One of the most limiting factors in Motolinía's case studies was his pro-Christian attitude. Most of the individuals in his history show positive Christian virtues. Most non-Christians are presented unsympathetically. Clearly, our view of the society has been filtered through the eyes of a biased observer, and this makes it difficult to determine the size and importance of the various groups which Motolinía mentions. His bias could also have caused him to completely misinterpret the motives of the people he observed. However, on the whole, Motolinía is a rich and relatively accurate source

The story of the stoning of the Indian priest in 1524 or 1525 is Motolinía's most complete example of the response of the ancient religion to Christianity.⁶⁴ The native

priest dressed himself as the god Ometochtli, the popular god of pulque. He then went to the crowded marketplace of Tlaxcala. To impress the people with his power, the priest chewed obsidian knives. Claiming to be the god himself, he began a sermon chiding the people for deserting their old gods for Mary. A large crowd gathered to listen to him. By chance, some principal children who were being trained by the friars entered the market. The children learned from some members of the crowd that the god was giving a sermon. The children seemed to accept the idea that a supernatural being was speaking, but they decided it was a devil not a god. After a sharp exchange of words the boys began to stone the disguised man. He was finally killed proving to all present that he was not a god. The crowd in the marketplace had mixed reactions. Some were saddened, but most were simply astonished. When other Indians arrived on the scene, they wanted to hurt the children; but, apparently, the crowd would not allow it. Motolinía felt that this incident which took place very early in the conversion effort led many to become Christians, but the implications of the story go far beyond this.

Obviously, the native priest firmly believed in his religion; more than this it is impossible to say. Motolinía leaves the man's motivation in doubt. The priest could have been fighting to save his religion from motives of pure self-interest or altruism or a combination of both.

The possibility that the priest was part of a conspiracy against the new religion was not explored by Motolinía either. The significant factor in the story is not really dependent on the motivation of the priest, however. When the priest began to upbraid the group of Christian boys, he must have felt secure because he thought he could trust the non-Christian crowd for support. This was the fatal error of the priestly class in Tlaxcala.

Although many in the crowd were non-Christians who felt that the disguised priest was really a god, they did nothing to aid him when he was attacked by the boys. Apparently, even as the friars began their work, there was a rift between the native priests and the average Indian. As a re-examination of the Great Feast will show, the masses were excluded from participation in the major portion of the important rituals of their religion because the priests performed these duties.⁶⁵ Also, the maceguales supported the old religion by their tribute, and it is likely that a substantial part of the estimated two thousand sacrificial victims⁶⁶ per year came from the lower classes. It is apparent that awe and fear rather than spiritual satisfaction were the bonds which tied the maceguales to the ancient religion. The appearance of a new religion presented the Indians with an alternative, and the boys broke the bonds of fear when they demonstrated the weakness of the so-called god. To sum up, the non-Christians were divided between a

priestly class with its already diminishing noble supporters and a mass of people who were indifferent to the ancient creed which was so remote from their lives.

The extraordinarily rapid demise of the native priestly class can be explained by this basic split. The friars usurped the organizational part of the priests' role while the maceguals took many of their sacramental duties. In the Great Feast, for instance, only the native priests made offerings directly to the gods; and only the priests danced in celebration of the rituals. During the Christian Easter celebration, the ordinary Indian worshiper could do both these things. The proponents of the old religion had little to offer the populace so the Indian priests declined as a competitor for Christianity.⁶⁷

Some of the nobles, however, were reluctant to give up the old religion because it was a convenient base for their ruling pretensions. Martín de Valencia's execution of four principales indicates that the alliance of church and state lasted to at least 1527. Of the four, the story of Acxotecatl⁶⁸ is the most thoroughly documented. Acxotecatl was a prominent noble in the province who became a close friend of Cortés during the war against the Aztecs. In recognition of his services and his conversion to Christianity, Cortés gave Acxotecatl an image of the Virgin which he brought back to the province. For about four years before the coming of the friars, Acxotecatl was a leader

in the Christian movement, and his image of the Virgin became an important religious object for the entire province. When the friars arrived, however, they thought it was improper for a private person to have such a famous relic so they moved the Virgin to the friary.

Apparently, Acxotecatl felt his social leadership threatened by the friars so he reverted to the old religion worshipping idols which he kept in secret. His troubles began when he withheld the oldest of his four principle sons from the friars' school. Finally, the boy, Cristóbal, was discovered and sent to school where he became an ardent

Christian. Upon his return, Cristóbal ruined his father's preparations for a religious feast by shattering the idols of the gods. Urged on by one of his wives, Acxotecatl killed the boy and his mother. The crime was discovered, and Acxotecatl was convicted of murder and idolatry.

Acxotecatl's reversion to the old cult can be explained as an attempt to strengthen his social position in the area. As Robert Padden wrote of the same process among the Aztecs,

While the caciques attempted to use the new cult as they believed the old one had been employed, they soon found that such was impossible, essentially because Christianity failed to evoke popular terror. And so, why should not the cacicazgo, after a brief period of experimentation, tend to lapse back into older political-religious patterns

of thought and behaviour?

Seeking to secure his power, Acxotecatl used the pre-Christian religion because he could threaten those who disobeyed him with sacrifice. While this type of response to Christianity was fairly common outside Tlaxcala, the only other examples known in the province are the three principales executed with Acxotecatl.⁷⁰ Acxotecatl's methods of coercion were intolerable to the friars. His position lacked the flexibility needed to successfully resist Spanish culture, and because of this, other principales turned to less overt forms of domination.

The reasons behind the rapid conversion of these nobles has been discussed in regard to their need to control the church for socio-political reasons, and it is doubtful that the principales who were ruling at the time of the conquest ever went beyond this expediency in their acceptance of Christianity. On the other hand, the noble children who were trained by the friars seem to have embraced the new religion sincerely. No matter how large a role self-interest played in the acceptance of Christianity for some, many of the young principales would have willingly died for their new religion. This young, highly Christianized minority was pointed to with pride by the friars, but this group was small.

The vast majority of Christian converts came from among people such as those who passively watched the priest of

Ometochtli stoned to death. As we have seen the conversion of these common Indians led to the beginnings of a syncretic religion. Because of the syncretic nature of the new religion, there were only a few people who had problems adjusting to it. For those who did have problems adjusting, the inner conflicts engendered by the conversion seem to have found release in hallucinations. In some instances, the Indians thought they were being carried away to the Christian Hell only saving themselves when they promised to confess their sins. At other times, the Indians were accosted by one of the old gods and saved themselves when they called out the name of Jesus.⁷¹ Visions were fairly common in pre-conquest times especially just before the arrival of the Spaniards, another period of stress.⁷² Most probably seeing a vision was a culturally ingrained way of showing anxiety, or perhaps the hallucinations were related to the use of the sacred peyote mushroom.⁷³ Despite the inadequacies of Motolinía's descriptions of these events, it seems certain that a relatively small portion of the people were deeply wounded by the strains of adjusting to the new religion.

For the large majority of the people, both macoguale and principale, the social adjustment to Christianity was not radical, but simply the continuance of ancient processes. Without dismissing the sincerity of the principales' children, it is obvious that the conversion was hastened by the need

to control a force with potentially disruptive social implications. For the maceguales, Christianity had two significant roles. First, it filled a religious vacuum with an exciting series of rituals and the promise of a happy afterlife. Second, Christianity had the potential of functioning as a vehicle for asserting the maceguales' political and social position against the encroachments of the principales. Thus, both the maceguales and the principales could not separate Christianity from the traditional matrix of politics and social pretensions in which religion had always functioned. However, for a minority such as the principale Acxotecatl and the Indians who had visions, the conversion was a difficult thing to adjust to. Since for the majority of the population Christianity had obvious benefits, the minority was forced to adjust or die.

The initial period of conversion lasted from 1524 to about 1540 when the Catholic Church began to play the role of an established religion in the province. The decades after 1540 saw a sharp change in the course of Christianity within Tlaxcala. Although Christianity still remained a living faith in the province, the religious enthusiasm of the Indians declined after the dynamic evangelistic phase had passed. The cause of this decline is obscure, but again the causes seem to be rooted in the complex interaction of the two major classes within Tlaxcalan society.

The study of this change is by necessity more impres-

sionistic then the study of the conversion because most of the major accounts of Tlaxcalan Christianity relate to the years before 1550.⁷⁴ The major source for this study is Gibson's work which makes use of archival material unavailable to me. Yet even Gibson who believed that the decline was caused by the impossibility of maintaining the pace set in the early conversion period, is forced to document this change through an analysis of religious construction and "literary repetitions" by friars "unwilling to admit decline".⁷⁵ In themselves neither of these facts is particularly convincing, but taken with evidence from other areas such as the Central Valley where church attendance declined in the 1550's, the proof of a waning of religious enthusiasm is relatively sound.⁷⁶

It is really inaccurate to speak of a single peak of religious fervor in Tlaxcala because the evidence of church construction seems to indicate two fairly distinct peaks. The fervor of the maceguals appears to have reached a peak in the 1530's and early 1540's while that of the nobles reached its highest level in the 1550's or later. Speaking of the maceguals, Gibson writes "It is probable that from the point of view of mass Indian participation the open chapel rather than the enclosed church represented the period of greatest energy and zeal".⁷⁷ The three open chapels in the province, although difficult to date precisely, were apparently built during the 1530's and 1540's.⁷⁸ The peak of

enthusiasm for the nobles is closely related to the period of political dominance by the first generation of principales trained from youth by the friars. This enthusiasm was shown by the building of enclosed chapels and friaries throughout the province.

As we have seen earlier, Christianity served the maceguals as a spiritual refuge from a hostile world and as a potential means to assert his just place in society. The prime religious event after the initial conversion was the institutionalization of the Christian church, and it soon made it clear that Christianity would not function politically for the maceguals. This new role for the church was first announced by the building of three monasteries in the late 1520's and 1530's and by the assumption of routine duties by the friars. This tended to reduce the friars' already rather tenuous contact with the Indian masses. An even more significant concomitant to the founding of the monasteries was that the emerging young native aristocracy "would permit no subordinate Indian to hold religious office. Even cooks and gardeners, and janitors in the monastery were members of the Indian upper class" ⁷⁹ The association of church and Indian elite became fixed because the nobles provided the friars with food and construction ⁸⁰ labor by taxing the maceguals. Thus, the friars who arrived in the province as poor as the poorest Indian became to a degree the allies of the Indian elite; and the mace-

guales turned away from the church. The maceguales retained their new syncretic faith for the solace it gave.

The close association of the principales with the Christian movement after 1530 effectively neutralized the potentially disruptive social consequences of Christianity. In fact, although the new religion could not induce the fear of the old, the institutionalization of the church allowed the principales to use Christianity as a prop for the aristocracy's social pretensions. Another reason for the sustained fervor of the first generation of truly Christian principales was the sincere faith felt by these men which could find direct and satisfying expression through work at the monasteries or through supporting church construction in the cabildo. Of course, while these things were works of faith on the part of the principales, we must remember that maintenance of the established religion was also the traditional prerogative of the pre-conquest nobility.

Even during the lifetime of this first generation of educated Christian nobles, forces were emerging which would make Christianity only a small element in the lives of their children. In 1538, the first Spaniard illegally settled in Tlaxcala, and the decade of the 1540's saw more and more
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Spaniards moving into the area. Although as the century progressed Spanish settlement would drastically alter the economic structure of the province, it initially stimulated the Tlaxcalan cabildo to rise from relative obscurity in de-

fense of principale economic sovereignty within the province. The founding of the new Spanish-style city of Tlaxcala in 1539 also had profound implications for the future. As Indians moved to the city from all areas of the province, the economic and political balance within the province was altered.⁸² One final event of importance occurred in 1543. A royal order approved the removal of the Bishop of Tlaxcala to a permanent residence in the Spanish city of Puebla just outside the province, a move which hinted at closer Spanish control of events within Tlaxcala.⁸³ These three things are symbolic of the emergence of economic and political considerations which would replace religion as the central facts in Tlaxcalan life.

This shift from religious considerations to those of economics and politics provide us with the clearest evidence of the ongoing struggle between the maceguals and the elite. Some of the maceguals, after the failure of their hopes for a political Christianity, were quick to take advantage of the new conditions arising from the emergence of the Spanish money economy and the founding of the city of Tlaxcala. The new concentrations of population in the recently established city allowed some rich maceguals to pass themselves off as nobles. As early as 1550, the cabildo, the representative of the true nobles, appointed a man to eliminate this practice.⁸⁴ Even more ominous for the true principales was the introduction of nopal cultivation. A

parasitic insect of the nopal was used to make cochineal dye which found a lucrative market among the Spaniards. According to Gibson, "In 1551 and 1553 the Indian government ineffectively sought to prohibit nopal plantations, in the belief that common Indians were already acquiring too much money and were refusing to obey their principales!"⁸⁵ Quite clearly, there were maceguals willing to seize any opportunity to free themselves from the control of the principales. There is even evidence to support the belief that the maceguals turned to the Spanish settlers in the province for employment simply to escape the principales. For the second generation of nobles who began to come to power after the mid-century, the quiet, politically harmless church was no threat compared to the invasion of Spanish settlers or the imposition of closer royal control both of which promised to end principale dominance in Tlaxcala. The principales support for the church, in the face of these new challenges became only an echo of the fervor of their predecessors.

The causes of the religious decline were deeply rooted in the same social conflicts which produced the rapid conversion of the Indians. Initially, the maceguals had seized upon Christianity for psychological satisfaction and social equity, but they soon discovered that the new church, although it did not demand human sacrifice, needed workers and food just as the old religion did. They also learned

that despite the implicitly egalitarian message of Christianity it was closely aligned with the traditional rulers of the province. As for the principales, Christianity was recognized quite early as having socio-political implications just as the old religion had a political aspect.

The conversion of the principales was a response to the threat of social change within the province, and when this threat was supplanted by greater ones, Christianity became of secondary importance to the nobility.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Spanish conquest initiated a period of rapid cultural change in Tlaxcala. The first facet of Spanish culture to confront the Indian society was the Christian religion. This paper has analyzed the meeting of the new religion and the still vital Indian society. It has been shown that the conversion of the Tlaxcalans was only partially a radical break with the native past. Of course, the elimination of human sacrifice, the suppression of the native priestly class, and the proscription of many ancient ceremonies represented a sharp departure for the Indians. In many respects, however, the conversion simply called for subtle psychological adjustments as indicated in the section on the rise of syncretism. Finally, in some instances, the new religion represented a continuation of ancient socio-political traditions.

The pattern which emerges shows that the Tlaxcalan society absorbed the Christian religion by adapting it to fit traditional native concepts of religion. Where the religion could not be adapted, native society was forced to accept change. Individual reactions to Christianity were based on class distinctions, social tensions, and, to a lesser extent, on the psychological make-up of the individual. Both the personality structure of the individual and the class structure of the society were aspects of a more general entity, the Tlaxcalan culture. Although the Tlaxcalan culture

shared many traits with the closely related Aztecs, it was unique in several respects such as the lack of the calpulli system. The link between these unique aspects of Tlaxcalan culture and the relative ease of religious conversion has been amply demonstrated in these pages. Given this link between Indian culture and the conversion, it would be safe to speculate that there was not one single conversion of Mexico but many different ones varying with the diversity of Indian culture.

Oddly, a recognition of the importance of the diverse Indian cultures in the conversion is lacking in Ricard's classic study of the conversion. While in one sense this is excusable because Ricard is concentrating on the uniformities of the Spanish approach to conversion, in another sense it is a reflection of a bias which weakens his whole work. Seemingly, Ricard's acceptance of Christianity as the one true faith blinded him to the active role played by the Indians in their own conversion. The truth of Christianity is seen as the ultimate cause for the successful conversion of the Indians. As for the Indians themselves, Ricard cautions the reader not to "nurse illusions" about the Indian culture nor to "exaggerate its value and interest." Ricard's belief in the "somewhat childlike nature" of the Indian puts him in a position where it is difficult to view the Indians as anything more than passive observers of their own conversion.

The inadequacies of this position has been exposed in

later scholarly works of which one of the most interesting is the report made by Wigberto Jiménez Moreno to the Conference on the Evangelization of the Indians. In this paper, Jiménez Moreno raises questions concerning the social consequences of the conversion, the rise of syncretism, and the relationship of differences in Indian culture to changes in the events of the conversion.⁸⁹ A major portion of the paper is devoted to an analysis of the religious life of one town during the first half of the sixteenth century.⁹⁰ More studies of individual towns or small cohesive areas are needed because truly valid generalizations can not be made from the history of one town or even an area as large as Tlaxcala. Yet certain guideposts for further exploration can emerge from such limited studies.

The guideposts which emerge from the Tlaxcalan conversion indicate two important variables in the equation of religious conversions: the missionaries and the culture of the Indians. As one or both of these multifaceted variables diverged from the Tlaxcalan model, the history of the conversion would also vary from the Tlaxcalan pattern. Thus, the Tlaxcalan experience can provide a pattern for examinations of religious conversion in other areas.

In the course of this paper, the culture and conversion of the Central Valley has been mentioned briefly. The general outlines of this conversion follow the same pattern of rapid success and sharp decline as Tlaxcala.⁹¹ Within that basic pat-

tern, however, there are several striking differences which deserve further research.

For example, the earliest missionaries in the Central Valley were members of the same Franciscan group which converted the Tlaxcalans. Naturally, both the tactics and strategy of the early attempts at conversion were almost identical to those used in Tlaxcala. Shortly after these early conversion attempts friars from the Dominican and Augustinian orders as well as secular clergy came to the Central Valley to aid in the conversion. Around the mid-century jurisdictional disputes arose among the various orders. These disputes provided Indian caciques with an opportunity to gain political advantages by supporting one side against another. These disputes also caused open violence between differing factions of Indians.⁹² Both these reactions would seem to indicate that the Indians interpreted religion as possessing a political facet just as the Tlaxcalans did. In the regions around the lakes the religious orders were a source of disruption among the caciques rather than a prop for the aristocracy as in Tlaxcala.

Among the Indians cultural unity had been severely disturbed by the conquest which brought political destruction, pestilence, and economic dislocation. From the fragmentation caused by the conquest one might expect that the incidence of cultural shock would be much higher than in Tlaxcala and that this shock might lower the receptivity of the Indians to any

new ideas. It would seem from the record that a much larger group of Indians remained faithful to the old religions then⁹³ in Tlaxcala. Whether they withdrew into their ancient faith to avoid confrontation with new realities is another matter for further research.

It is apparent that both the missionaries and the culture of the Indians varied significantly enough from the Tlaxcalan pattern to produce changes in the history of the conversion. Perhaps the most significant cultural adaptation made by the friars in their attempt to inculcate Christianity in the hearts of the Aztecs was the inclusion of many communally based organizations and activities in their plans for the conversion. Gibson writes,

At point after point, interests of the Indian community were made to coincide with Christianity and were expressed in Christian terms---in finance, in fiestas and cults, in church buildings, in labor, in local histories, in images, in the new names of the towns, in *cofradías*, and in numerous other ways. Thus viewed, Christianity appears as a cohesive force, not always displacing but repeatedly implementing and abetting Indian preferences for communal⁹⁴ organization.

Thus, Christianity in the Central Valley served to lessen the impact of the more disruptive elements of Hispanic culture such as the *encomienda*. This is in sharp contrast to Tlaxcala where the active phase of the church came too early

to cushion the shock of civilian penetration after the mid-century.

The tantalizing similarities and contrasts between Tlaxcalan and Aztec conversions cry out for specific studies of small areas all over Mexico. The ecclesiastical unit called a doctrina would seem to be the ideal size for this study. A doctrina consisted of a large town with a church and surrounding smaller towns. In 1570 the average population of a doctrina was approximately 5,500.⁹⁵ If enough ecclesiastical records could be uncovered, studies of individual doctrinas would provide the most accurate picture of early religious history.⁹⁶

The history of the conversion of Peru is almost totally different from that of Tlaxcala. The methods used by the missionaries in the conversion were almost identical to the ones used in Mexico, but the reasons behind the Spanish conquest were different. According to George Kubler, in a brilliant essay in the Handbook of South American Indians,

The pressure of Spanish colonization upon Quechua society in the proto-Colonial Period [1532-1572] was chiefly economic and political. The student is repeatedly brought to wonder at the ineffectiveness or absence of religious and moral colonization... The situation is precisely the inverse of that which prevailed in Mexico before 1572, where the initial colonization was conducted chiefly

by the regular clergy, according to the philosoph-
ical dictates of a humanist evangelism.⁹⁷

Despite the co-operation of Pizarro and later Spanish authorities legitimate and illegitimate, the earliest missionaries were able to accomplish little due to the disruptions caused by civil war and the lack of personnel. Also, during the conquest mass baptisms of Indians occurred without instruction in doctrine.⁹⁸ Although Cortés desired something like this for the Tlaxcalans, mass baptism, which only debased the doctrines of Christianity, did not occur in Tlaxcala.

In the period between 1533 and 1548, the typical missionary merely wandered from place to place preaching the gospel. This was the same method employed by the famous Pedro de Gante in Mexico before the arrival of the twelve Franciscans, but it was hardly an efficient method of lasting Christianization. After the promulgation of the New Laws in 1542, the situation deteriorated because "The Indians understood the New Laws to signify that they were free from Spanish control, and they abandoned not only their Spanish encomenderos but their Spanish priests as well!"⁹⁹

The period between 1548 and 1570 seems to be a rather controversial one which deserves further study. Antonine Tibesar feels that during this time Christianity became relatively successful in Peru.¹⁰⁰ During this period the number and quality of clerical personnel increased as men were trans-

ferred from Mexico. Permanent settlements of religious were made among the Indians, and the work of conversion began in earnest. Tibesar seems to believe that Christianity was firmly established in Peru by 1570 although there were areas of continued paganism or shallow Christianity.

Kubler, on the other hand, dates the beginnings of effective Christianization from 1570.¹⁰¹ He believes that Peru only became truly Christian sometime after 1600. Perhaps the most telling argument for late Christianization is that before 1575 there is no record of Indian cofradías.¹⁰² As we have seen the cofradía had an important role in the conversion of the Tlaxcalans because it allowed the new Christian to act on their faith. The late development of the cofradía in Peru indicates that Christianity was not really internalized by the Indian until late in the sixteenth century.

Still the period between 1548 and 1570 is intriguing because during this time economic, social, and political changes produced a new type of Indian culture which was more susceptible to religious change. Indian migration helped create a large class of Indians with few ties to the old culture. These newly mobile Indians adapted more easily to Spanish culture, and they rapidly produced a new syncretism of Spanish secular culture before the serious work of Christian conversion began.¹⁰³ This was unlike the Tlaxcalan situation where the still cohesive Indian culture confronted Christianity and where aspects of the traditional culture aided con-

version. However, the new syncretic secular culture of the Indians must be understood in order to appreciate the later introduction of Christianity. Thus, the type of culture among the Indians again affected their acceptance of Christianity, and this makes the close study of the Indian culture imperative.

In conclusion, any study of cultural change is useful today in a world where all cultures interrelate and change each other constantly, but the religious conversion of the Tlaxcalans is especially important. It represents one of the first attempts of European civilization to impose its ideals upon an alien society. The lack of extraneous influences allows us to clearly see the clash of Christianity with the Tlaxcalan culture. This clash was a strong, dynamic struggle between two powerful forces, and it demonstrates that the culture of the converts was an important factor in the success of Christianization.

FOOTNOTES

1. The modern classic is Robert Ricard's, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, but even early chroniclers such as Motolinía and Mendieta covered all of New Spain.
2. Charles Gibson, Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century (New Haven, 1952), 26.
3. C. H. Haring, The Spanish Empire in America (New York, 1947), 264. The total maize tribute averaged one-fifth of a pesa to four-fifths of a peso per Tlaxcalan tributary at various points in the century. Later in the century the total of all taxes might have reached the minimum cited by Haring. See Gibson, Tlaxcala, 117-118, 176, 178.
4. There were also a few Spanish political officials, but even the corregidor did not establish a permanent residence in the province until 1545. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 68, 81-85.
5. Diego Duran, The History of the Indies of the New Spain (New York, 1964), 9, 348.
6. William Prescott, The Conquest of Mexico (New York, 1964), 228; Gibson, Tlaxcala, 5.
7. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 6.
8. Ibid., 3. See also Diego Muñoz Camargo, Historia de Tlaxcala (Mexico, 1892), 72, 81 ff., 89-90.
9. William T. Sanders and Barbara J. Price, Mesoamerica (New York, 1968), 69 ff..
10. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 7, 8, 10.

11. This was true to a lesser extent for the Aztecs. See G. C. Vaillant, Aztecs of Mexico (Baltimore, 1966), 122 f.n..
12. Muñoz Camargo, Historia, 87. See also Francisco Lopez de Gomara, Cortes: The Life of the Conqueror by his Secretary (Berkeley, 1965), 118.
13. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 10; Muñoz Camargo, Historia, 187.
14. There were many estimates of the Tlaxcalan population made throughout the century. See Gibson, Tlaxcala, 138-142. More modern estimates of Central Mexican population densities can be found in Sanders and Price, Mesoamerica, 153 ff.
15. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 12.
16. Ibid., 145.
17. The true nature of the calpulli is still a matter of discussion. For an early view see Alonso de Zorita, The Brief Relation of the Lords of New Spain (New York, 1963), 105-108. For a modern view see Sanders and Price, Mesoamerica, 153 ff..
18. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 145.
19. Ibid., 144.
20. Some of the tribute collectors in the post-conquest government bore the same names as the tribute collectors in the Aztec calpulli. This is not direct evidence of the existence of the calpulli because the offices "20-pixque" and "100-pixque" could also represent a simple numerical division of the populace for tribute purposes, or these offices could be of post-conquest origin. See Gibson, Tlaxcala, 119.
21. Ibid., 15.

22. Lesley Byrd Simpson, Many Mexicos (Berkeley, 1966), 74-75; Gibson, Tlaxcala, 33; Munoz Camargo, Historia, 241.
23. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España (Madrid, 1942), 249-250; Muñoz Camargo, Historia, 189 ff.. Muñoz Camargo gives the official Tlaxclan version of quick conversion of the four caciques which is not completely accurate. See Gibson, Tlaxcala, 30, 89 f..
24. Díaz del Castillo, Historia, 249-250; Gibson, Tlaxcala, 30, 33.
25. Gerónimo de Mendieta, Historia Eclesiástica Indiana (Mexico, 1945), II, 52-53.
26. Gibson, Tlaxcala 33, 39; Toribio de Motolinía, History of the Indians of New Spain (Washington, 1951), 228 ff.; Mendieta, Historia, 75 f.
27. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 33.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. There are records of two boys who were killed preaching outside the province. See Motolinía, History, 308-311.
31. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 40.
32. The high figures is approximately the total number of principales in the province. The low figure is the number enrolled in a Franciscan school in the province during the 1540's. See Gibson, Tlaxcala, 40.
33. Motolinía, History, 95, 103, 105, 177, 186, 208, 245-

246.

34. Ibid., 105, 187.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 52, 143.

37. Charles Gibson, The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule (Stanford, 1964), 127.

38. Ibid., 129.

39. Motolinía, History, 228-243; Gibson, Tlaxcala, 34-35.

40. Motolinía, History, 307-308.

41. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 51, 141.

42. Motolinía, History, 203.

43. R. C. Padden, The Hummingbird and the Hawk (New York, 1967), 241 ff.. Padden feels that in the early period only Zumarraga knew the great extent of pre-Christian survivals after the friar's initial campaign.

44. See, for instance, Motolinía, History, 301-308. Motolinía never goes into such specific details when he mentions the masses of newly baptized Christians.

45. Arthur Niehoff, A Casebook of Social Change (Chicago, 1966), 10-41.

46. Gibson, Aztecs, 100.

47. Motolinía, History, 316.

48. Ibid.

49. Hubert Howe Bancroft, Native Races (San Francisco, 1886), II, 369.

50. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 36.

51. Ibid., 39-40. Curanderos are still prevalent in Mexico. See, for example, Oscar Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village (Urbana, 1963), 106-107, 281.

52. For some Tlaxcalan folk beliefs, see Frederick Starr, "Notes upon the Ethnography of Southern Mexico", Proceedings of the Davenport Academy of Science, VIII, (1899-1900), 114-133.

53. Motolinía, History, 129-132. Mendieta, Historia, I, 112-113.

54. Motolinía states that a Tlaxcalan chief was sacrificed. I have followed Bancroft, Native Races, 312 ff..

55. Motolinía, History, 143-144, 146-148, 155-156; Toribio de Motolinía, Memoriales (Mexico, 1903), 96-99.

56. Gibson, Aztecs, 100.

57. Starr, "Notes", 116-118, 121-122.

58. Padden, Hummingbird and Hawk, 233.

59. Ibid., 234-235.

60. Bartolomé de Las Casas, Apologetica Historia Summaria (Mexico, 1967), 450-454; Gibson, Tlaxcala, 103-104.

61. Padden, Hummingbird and Hawk, 235.

62. Ibid., 2-13.

63. Muñoz Camargo, Historia, 58, 61-62, 64-65.

64. Motolinia, History, 301-303.

65. Ibid., 129-132.

66. S. F. Cook, "Human Sacrifice and Warfare as Factors in the Demography of Pre-Colonial Mexico", Human Biology, XVIII,

(May, 1946), 89.

67. However, the curanderos and rain makers remained as competitors for the priests. See Starr, "Notes", 121-122.

68. Motolinía, History, 301-303.

69. Padden, Hummingbird and Hawk, 240.

70. Ibid., 244.

71. Motolinía references to visions are numerous. See Motolinía, History, 198-199, 217-218. This last reference mentions that native priests actually attacked some Christian converts. In most instances, these occurrences were hallucinations.

72. Padden, Hummingbird and Hawk, 107-108.

73. Muñoz Camargo, Historia, 134.

74. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 29.

75. Ibid., 41.

76. Gibson, Aztecs, 111.

77. Gibson, Tlaxcala, 53.

78. Ibid., 54. All were "surely built", before 1555.

79. Ibid., 40.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 81-85.

82. Ibid., 125, 143.

83. Ibid., 55.

84. Ibid., 143.

85. Ibid., 149.

86. Robert Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico

(Berkeley, 1966), 33.

87. Ibid..

88. Ibid..

89. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, "The Indians of America and Christianity", The Americas, XIV, (April, 1958), 411 ff..

90. Ibid., 418-420.

91. Gibson, Aztecs, 11-112.

92. Ibid., 110-111.

93. Ibid., 101, 117.

94. Ibid., 135.

95. Ibid., 103.

96. For instance, Jiménez Moreno used records of the Inquisition. Jiménez Moreno, "Indians of America", 418.

97. George Kubler, "Colonial Quechua", Handbook of South America (New York, 1963), II, 343.

98. Ibid., 395.

99. Antonine Tibesar, Franciscan Beginning in Colonial Peru (Washington, 1953), 35-36, 42.

100. Ibid., 45-46.

101. Kubler, "Colonial Quechua", 349. 395-396.

102. Ibid., 404-405.

103. Ibid., 343-345.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Six sources form the backbone of my study of Tlaxcalan religious history. Among primary sources I found the works of Motolinía, Mendieta, and Muñoz Camargo indispensable. Three modern works by Gibson, Padden, and Ricard were also valuable.

The two works by Motolinía which are useful for the study of Tlaxcalan history are his Memoriales and his History of the Indians of New Spain. The Memoriales is incomplete and seem to be some sort of early version of the more complete History, but the earlier work does contain some material not found in the History. The History was completed about 1540, and it records events up to the previous year. Motolinía was an eye witness to many of the events which he describes. He also had easy access to other friars who had worked in other areas of Mexico. He also used native informants although he did not develop a system to check the accuracy of their information. Several of the weaknesses of Motolinía's work have been discussed in the text, but on the whole Motolinía was an accurate, if somewhat naive, observer. Within his limitations, Motolinía is a valuable source of anthropological data.

Mendieta arrived in Tlaxcala after the mid-century mark when Motolinía was head of the mission in the province. Thus, his work is similar in many respects to that of Motolinía. Many of the incidents he reports come from the works

of Motolinía, and he shares the same optimism about the success of the conversion. The value of his work comes from the biographical data which he provides about the early friars and from the information on church history after 1540 which supplements Motolinía.

Muñoz Camargo produced his history towards the end of the century after a long period of Tlaxcalan myth making. Thus, he continues the native traditions which stated that the Tlaxcalans quickly allied themselves with the Spaniards and that the Tlaxcalans quickly converted to Christianity. Evidence from Spanish sources such as Motolinía and Bernal Díaz reveal that these traditions were quite inaccurate. Also, Muñoz Camargo's work is flawed by inconsistencies in details and lapses in the preservation of the text. However, the work is valuable because it is one of the few sources for the pre-conquest history of the province. This appears to be relatively accurate in general because parts of it can be corroborated by other Indian historians and by Motolinía.

The main English source for this paper was Charles Gibson's Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century. This book was not only invaluable as a source; its extensive bibliography and excellent footnotes were the basis for my own research. The sections in this book on religious history are mainly straight forward documentation of the events with a relatively small amount of causal interpretation. The main

weakness in the work is his stress on the exploitative nature of Spanish rule. While this is relatively accurate, it does simplify a very complex situation and fails to examine the question of why the Indians allowed themselves to be exploited.

Robert Ricard's study, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, was examined at some length in the conclusion of this paper, but a word is needed here to bring out the strong points of of the work. Ricard's book is a sound history of the events of the conversion and an excellent study of the methods used by the friars. The best part of the book is Ricard's great understanding of the theological implications of the methods of evangelism. He ably explains the foundations of the baptismal controversy between the Dominicans and the Franciscans, for instance.

Finally, the most recent source used was R. C. Padden's, The Hummingbird and the Hawk. This is an intriguing attempt to examine the Aztec concept of sovereignty with special use of Indian sources. The work is important because it presents one of the rare satisfying explanation of Aztec political action. Although the work is suggestive, it lacks the depth and documentation of a fully developed work. It is, however, a controversial fount of new and exciting ideas for further research into the role of the Indian culture in early colonial period.

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