1546–1558: Fray Martín de Hojacastro, O. F. M.
1563–1570: Fernando de Villagómez [secular].

BISHOPS OF OAXACA (ANTEQUERA)
1535–1555: Juan López de Zárate [secular].
1559–1579: Fray Bernardino de Alburquerque, O. P.

BISHOPS OF NEW GALICIA (GUADALAJARA)
1548–1552: Pedro Gómez Maraver [secular].
1559–1569: Fray Pedro de Ayala, O. F. M.
1571–1576: Francisco de Mendiola [secular].

Introduction

FOR easily understood reasons of clarity and simplicity I have entitled this book *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*. The subtitle, I hope, will remove any notion that I may have been too vague and too ambitious. In particular, it explains the geographic and chronological limits within which I have tried to keep myself. I have used the term "New Spain," not in its administrative sense, but in the meaning commonly given to it in the sixteenth century. The jurisdiction of the Audiencia of Mexico did not embrace all New Spain, for New Galicia, which has always been considered an integral part of it, had its own special and autonomous audiencia. Also, the province of Yucatan, with its dependency of Tabasco, although administratively a part of New Spain, in practice was treated as a distinct region and was willingly transferred to the Audiencia of Guatemala. In fact, it has always had its own history and personality; it has frequently rebelled against the governments of Mexico, and even today the states that make up the ancient Province of Yucatan (Yucatan proper, Campeche, and Tabasco) have their own way of life, very different from that of the rest of the country, their interests being directed principally toward the United States and Central America. The state of Chiapas has a similar history. Attached at times to the Audiencia of Mexico, at others to the Audiencia of Guatemala, it was never really

regarded as a part of New Spain, and in the nineteenth century was brought into the Mexican Republic only after a good deal of shifting back and forth. Like its neighboring states, Chiapas has always had a separate and very personal life.[1]

It is to be borne in mind, therefore, that the territory commonly designated as New Spain in the sixteenth century does not correspond exactly either to the jurisdiction of the Audiencia of Mexico or to the territory of the present Mexican Republic. In the period with which I am concerned, it is to be understood as including the whole of the archdiocese of Mexico and the dioceses of Tlaxcala-Puebla, Michoacán, New Galicia, and Antequera (Oaxaca)—roughly present-day Mexico, except the outlying states of the south (Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, and Yucatan), which form a special group in their geography and history, and so have been deliberately excluded from this study. Such considerations, moreover, seemed to me to impose easy and natural limits upon a work which for many reasons I have had to keep within a precise framework, that is, the country lying between the present northern frontier of Mexico and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which is where Central America really begins and is the gateway to a different world.

Its chronological limits have been fixed in a similar way by the nature of the facts. I have taken as my starting point the year 1523–1524. Hence, the work done since the landing of Cortés on the Mexican coast [in 1519] appears only as a prelude, subject to the hazards of the first military operations and unable to undertake the evangelization of the whole country. Although 1524 is the year of the arrival of the first mission of the Friars Minor, "the Twelve," the beginning of the Franciscan evangelization may be properly dated from 1523, when the famous Pedro de Gante, with two other religious, who died almost immediately, established himself in New Spain. The year 1523, therefore, marks the beginning of the period in the history of the Mexican Church traditionally known as "primitive," which ended in 1572 with the arrival of the first religious of the Company of Jesus. It rarely happens in history that one finds a chronological sequence so clearly and naturally delimited. During this period the conversion of Mexico was almost exclusively entrusted to the three so-called Mendicant Orders: the Franciscans (from 1523–1524),

the Dominicans (from 1526), and the Augustinians (from 1533). This one circumstance is enough to give the years 1523–1573 a unique character. The Jesuits brought a spirit of their own and their own preoccupations. The Company did not neglect the indigenous population, but it was to devote itself in New Spain especially to the education and spiritual strengthening of Creole society, which the Mendicants had somewhat neglected, and to the improvement of the secular clergy, whose level was very mediocre. In this sense the activity of the sons of St. Ignatius was to contribute to the progressive secularization of the Indian parishes, and consequently to the elimination of the primitive Orders, which were obliged to abandon their ministry and retire to their convents, or to undertake the conversion of remote pagan regions. It is therefore not arbitrary (insofar as divisions of this kind can be *not* arbitrary), to hold that the establishment of the Jesuits in 1572 brings one period to a close and opens another. It is interesting, moreover, to note that during this period the diocese of Mexico was governed by two Mendicant prelates: the Franciscan Fray Juan de Zumárraga (1528–1548), and the Dominican Fray Alonso de Montúfar (1553/4–1572). The year 1572 marked a further retreat for the Mendicant Orders, when a secular archbishop, Dr. Pedro Moya de Contreras, occupied the metropolitan see.

The reasons why I have selected this period of 1523–1572 in the religious history of Mexico, in preference to all others, are so easy to understand or to assume, even if one knows the history of the country only superficially, that it seems needless to elaborate upon them. In the first place, the sixteenth century is the fundamental period for the history and formation of post-Conquest Mexico. It is the period in which the clash of civilizations (which ethnographers love to talk about) occurred in the sharpest form, a period in which native American elements and imported Spanish traits are sometimes fused and sometimes juxtaposed, together giving Mexico its present personality. The sixteenth century contained in embryo the subsequent evolution of the country; it was to leave its strong imprint upon the following centuries, which in many respects were only the development, rarely corrected or impeded by the unpredictable reactions of men, of this epoch so extraordinarily pregnant with the future. In the second place, it is by long odds the most interesting period in which to

study missionary methodology. A great deal has been written about the California missions, possibly because their ruins are to be seen in the United States. They have become virtually a stereotype, probably owing to the tendency to give more importance to the romantic aspect of their abandonment than to their establishment and organization. In my opinion, indeed, the California mission is much less instructive than the Mexican mission of the sixteenth century, because the foundation and organization of a Church, which is the primordial aim of every mission, did not occur in California. California remained in the preparatory stage, whereas in New Spain one can follow almost the complete evolution. I say *almost* complete, because the evolution was interrupted before its indicated outcome, that is, the methodical training of a native clergy, the breeding ground of a native episcopacy. It is true, nevertheless, that during the years 1523–1572 the Mexican Church was founded and organized, and this in turn emphasizes the unity of the period I have selected. Then it was that the "spiritual conquest" of New Spain took place.

Who were the architects of this conquest? Who the founders and organizers of this Church? This conquest, this foundation, this organization, were essentially the work of the Mendicant Orders, and, if I may be permitted to insist upon it, the Mendicant Orders *as* Orders. It is a singular and most remarkable fact that the churches of Spanish America were founded by the Mendicant Orders independently of the episcopacy, whose authority broke against the pontifical privileges granted to the regular clergy.[2] Besides, the mediocrity of the secular clergy, in number and quality, deprived the bishops of the opportunity of engaging in apostolic activity distinct from that of the Mendicant Orders. Thus the role of the seculars in the work of conversion may be considered negligible, and the bishops, at least in their relations with the Indians, are in second place. There are, to be sure, illustrious exceptions, such as Vasco de Quiroga, who left an imperishable memory in Michoacán, and López de Zárate, who in his diocese of Oaxaca worked closely with the Dominicans. But the influence of a prelate like Zumárraga upon the evangelization of the country owes less to his rank and title than to his personality and to the excellent relations he always maintained with his

Order. Likewise, the difficulties that his successor, the Dominican Montúfar, was to experience with the regular clergy would doubtless have been more severe if the archbishop himself had not been a religious. I find nothing comparable to the organization of present-day missions, in which the bishops and their collaborators belong in general to a single institute, where, in spite of the inevitable internal tensions and jurisdictional conflicts that arise between the Ordinary and his regular superiors, there is a much closer identification between the activity of the apostolic vicar and that of the missionaries.

For all these reasons I have limited myself exclusively to the accomplishments of the Mendicant Orders, and especially to the methods they employed to found and organize a new Church. I have touched only in a subsidiary way the internal history of the three Orders and that of the secular clergy and the episcopacy, and then only so far as these questions concern the Christianization of the country and the methods used by the Mendicants, and serve to clarify and make them comprehensible. To put the matter briefly—what we are studying here is the methods of the three primitive Orders in the conversion of the natives and the foundation of the Mexican Church.

This book, therefore, does not claim to be a history of the Mexican Church in the sixteenth century. It will be useless to seek in it episodes such as the introduction of the printing press by Zumárraga and the founding of the University of Mexico, which are justly considered, especially the latter, as important facts in religious history, but which do not seem connected closely enough with the activity of the regular clergy and the evangelization of the Indians to be included here. Besides, that history has been written too recently by Father Mariano Cuevas [3] to allow one to think of rewriting it. Nevertheless, for the understanding of the present work, I think it will not be out of place to call to the reader's attention, briefly, the pattern within which the apostolic task of the Mendicant Orders was accomplished.

The arrival of the first [company of] Franciscans in 1524 occurred shortly before the establishment of the Mendicant hierarchy in Mexico. The diocese of Tlaxcala (Puebla) was founded in 1526, and at the end of

the following year the Franciscan Fray Juan de Zumárraga was nominated for the episcopal see of Mexico, although, to be sure, it was not formally constituted until 1530, and did not become metropolitan until 1548, just before the death of Zumárraga. The episcopal foundations speedily followed: the diocese of Antequera (Oaxaca), in 1534; the diocese of Michoacán, in 1536; the diocese of New Galicia, in 1548. Before 1572 the sees had only a small number of incumbents, who were often men of worth. I have already mentioned the two archbishops of Mexico. The diocese of Tlaxcala suffered the most vicissitudes. Its first bishop, the Dominican Fray Julián Garcés, who died in 1542, was not replaced by the Franciscan Fray Martín de Hojacastro until 1546. When the latter died, in 1558, his successor, the secular Fernando de Villagómez, was not appointed until 1563, and he died toward the end of 1570, leaving the see vacant until 1572. The dioceses of Oaxaca and Michoacán, like that of Mexico, had only two incumbents during the period with which I am concerned: for Oaxaca, Juan López de Zárate (1535–1555), and the Dominican Fray Bernardo de Alburquerque (1559–1579); for Michoacán, the famous Vasco de Quiroga (1537/8–1565), and Antonio Ruiz Morales (1567–1572), the latter then taking over the see of Tlaxcala. The bishops of New Galicia were, successively, Pedro Gómez Maraver, who died in 1552, the Franciscan Fray Pedro de Ayala (1559–1569), and Francisco Mendiola (1571–1576).

Parallel to the organization of the secular dioceses, the regular clergy was being organized. In 1525 the Franciscan establishment was a small custody attached to the Spanish Provincia de San Gabriel de Extremadura. In 1535 it was made an autonomous province, the Provincia del Santo Evangelio, and in 1565 the custody of Michoacán-Jalisco was separated from it and set up as the Provincia de S. Pedro y S. Pablo. The Dominican establishment, which at first was subordinate to the superior general of the Order, was later attached to the Provincia de la Santa Cruz of Santo Domingo, and in 1532 was elevated into the independent Provincia de Santiago. In the same fashion the Augustinian establishment, which at first was subordinate to the Provincia de Castilla, in 1545 became the autonomous Provincia del Santo Nombre de Jesús.

The double task implied in these various administrative arrangements

was completed by ecclesiastical conferences and synods, to whose decisions I shall frequently have occasion to refer. The first *junta eclesiástica*, sometimes called the first Mexican synod, was assembled in 1524. It included several secular priests and the Franciscans, who by this time were in Mexico. It limited itself to a few decisions concerning the administration of the sacraments, specifically baptism and penitence. The second *junta*, called in 1532, had a more general character and a wider field. It included the Franciscan and Dominican delegates, Bishop Zumárraga, and members of the Audiencia, and sent the Crown a number of suggestions about the political and social organization of New Spain. In 1537 there was a meeting of the bishops alone. Zumárraga, who had just consecrated Francisco Marroquín as bishop of Guatemala and Juan López de Zárate as bishop of Oaxaca, took advantage of their presence in Mexico to discuss with them various problems touching upon the evangelization of the country. The outcome of their meeting was a long letter to Charles V, in which they reviewed these problems, particularly the question of [organizing] Indian villages, the question of the secular clergy, the question of the position of the friars, and the persistence of paganism.

Two years later, in 1539, a general assembly included the bishops of Mexico, Oaxaca, and Michoacán, and a numerous representation from the three Orders. It was concerned above all with as definite a regulation as possible of the administration of baptism and marriage, which had given rise to difficulties and disagreements. Two more *juntas eclesiásticas* were called during the tenure of Zumárraga. That of 1544, ordered by the visitor Tello de Sandoval, had as its purpose the examination of the New Laws [of 1542] passed by the Crown following the agitation of Las Casas. That of 1546 is known only in a fragmentary way. Zumárraga's successor, Fray Alonso de Montúfar, convoked the first two Mexican synods, in 1555 and 1565. That of 1555 put under the presidency of the Metropolitan all bishops of New Spain (except New Galicia—its see was vacant), the Audiencia and the high [civil] officers of Mexico, the delegates of the diocesan chapters, and, in a general way, all ecclesiastics and religious who held offices or dignities. Their decisions fill ninety-three chapters and cover the whole life and organization of the Mexican Church. The synod

of 1565, conceived in the same fashion, proposed essentially to study the application in New Spain of the reform measures promulgated by the Council of Trent. Both set the pattern for the third synod, the date of which (1585) puts it outside the scope of this study. It was held during the episcopacy of Moya de Contreras and had an importance even greater than that of the first two.

I am not unaware of the inadequacies of the study I am offering the public. I believe, nevertheless, that I have some claim to the indulgence of the reader, if he will take into account the "deplorable conditions" (to adopt the unexaggerated words of Marcel Bataillon [4]) in which Hispanists and, I may add, Americanists work. In American studies one is perpetually frustrated by the extreme dispersion of the materials and publications, which frequently prevents the historians of one continent from knowing and using the researches undertaken in the other. In France the scarcity of works dedicated to the colonial history of Spanish America is perhaps attributable to such difficulties. With the exception of the now outdated thesis of Jules Humbert on *Les origines vénézuéliennes,* I have not seen any work of the order here offered.

French scholars, who have played such an important, one might say glorious, part in the study of indigenous civilizations, have almost completely neglected the history of Mexico during the Spanish domination. The three chapters that Father M. A. Roze, O. P., devotes to Mexico in his little book, *Les Dominicains en Amérique,* are less than mediocre. And it would be better to pass over in silence the lines in which a historian of the [Franciscan] Order has attempted to describe its apostolate in New Spain.[5] On the other hand, the account of the evangelization of Mexico, in *Les Dossiers de l'Action Missionaire,* by Father Pierre Charles, S. J., is remarkable, coming from the pen of a writer who is not, and does not claim to be, a specialist, and is, moreover, a Belgian; but it is only an extremely brief summary, in broad strokes and essential facts. In the United States, the active interest in the history of Spanish America that has been evident for some time, has produced no publication of real value in the religious history of Mexico in the sixteenth century. For reasons that I have stated elsewhere,[6] Charles Braden's

Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico is not in my opinion of such stature as to exempt me from publishing this essay of mine. The contributions of German scholars are more numerous. It would be unjust not to mention the work (necessarily obsolete, but, despite several omissions, very conscientious) of Friedrich Weber, in *Beiträge zur Charakteristik der älteren Geschichtsschreiber über Spanisch-America.*[7] The *Katholische Missionsgeschichte* of Abbé Joseph Schmidlin contains a good chapter on the Mexican mission. Some errors, to be sure, have crept in owing to insufficient documentation, but these weaknesses were inevitable in a manual dealing with such a vast subject.[8] Father Leonhard Lemmens' account, in his recent history of the Franciscan missions, is equally worthy of keeping,[9] for it happily completes the résumé, exact but somewhat outdated and much too brief, of Holzapfel's classic manual.[10] I should add that all these works, however worthy, are dominated by the monumental *Bibliotheca Missionum* of the late and lamented Father Robert Streit, O. M. I., the fruit of a life of toil, which I shall frequently cite.

With the exception of Father Streit's bibliography, it is only natural that the most important works are those of Spanish and Mexican scholars. Vicente Riva Palacio's paper, *Establecimiento y propagación del cristianismo en Nueva España,* doubtless deserves the oblivion into which it has fallen, and the thin brochure of Father Ramón García Muiños, *Primicias religiosas de América,* seems superficial and inadequate. Vicente de P. Andrade's amateurish *El Primer Estudio sobre los Conquistadores espirituales de la Nueva España, 1519–1531,* is based upon sources, but turns out to be hardly more than a catalogue. Finally, Father Pérez Arrilucea's articles on the Augustinians of Mexico merely summarize too frequently the chronicles of that Order.[11] I have already emphasized the importance of Father Cuevas' *Historia de la Iglesia en México,* an attempt at a sysnthesis, the faults of which should not be allowed to obscure its true usefulness. To it should be added the biography of Zumárraga by the great Mexican scholar Joaquín García Icazbalceta, which is still a fundamental study of the religious beginnings of New Spain. Finally, the bibliographical researches on the Franciscans of Mexico by the eminent director of the Archivo Ibero-Americano of Madrid, Father Atanasio

López, O. F. M., belong equally among the essential works that one must digest and consult. Specific references to them will occur later on in this book.

My debt is not only to books, or, more exactly, to their authors, but also to the men whose aid and encouragement have been singularly precious to me, given the disorganized state of Spanish American studies. First, I wish to express my gratitude to those who have gone from among us: the learned Augustinian bibliographer Father Gregorio de Santiago Vela, to whom I am indebted for many useful pieces of information; Luis Rubio y Moreno, who, while subdirector of the Archivo General de Indias at Seville, guided and counseled me with tireless devotion; especially the director of the École des Hautes Études Hispaniques, Pierre Paris, whose fruitful work it is not for me to praise, but whose friendly and paternal reception of me in Madrid made it possible for me to spend a number of unforgettable years in Spain in the company of Hispanists like my very dear friend Maurice Legendre. Also in Madrid I shall never forget what I owe to the suggestive observations of Carlos Pereyra, and to the learned conversation of Father Atanasio López, who knows everything there is to know about the history of the Franciscan Order. In Seville the friendly help of Cristóbal Bermúdez Plata, director of the Archives of the Indies and successor to Torres Lanzas, has been of the greatest value. And what can I say of my reception in the various Dominican and Augustinian houses in Madrid, the Escorial, Salamanca, and Almagro?

My welcome in Mexico was no less cordial, nor was the help I was given there less valuable. I find it impossible to mention here all those who outdid themselves to make my stay there so long ago agreeable and fruitful; but I should like to name, nevertheless, the revered secretary general of the Antonio Alzate Academy, Rafael Aguilar y Santillán; Ignacio del Villar Villamil, the most Parisian of Mexicans; my eminent colleagues of the University of Mexico, Ezequiel A. Chávez, Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas, and Pablo Martínez del Río; Dr. Ignacio Alcocer, my learned guide to Texcoco and Huejotla; Jean Balme and Albert Misrachi; Father Roustan, curé of the French parish of Mexico [City]; Bernard Vincent, director of the *Journal Français du Mexique;* and Gustave

Bellon, whose charming hospitality in Oaxaca I shall not forget. Most of the illustrations in this volume I owe to the generosity of José Benítez, acting director of the National Museum of Mexico, and his associate, Jorge Enciso, director of the Servicio de Monumentos Históricos. Luis González Obregón and Federico Gómez de Orozco, with unfailing kindness, gave me the run of their magnificent personal libraries and the benefit of their incomparable knowledge of Mexican colonial history. To all of them my profound gratitude.

Once again let me express my respectful thanks to Jean Gotteland, director general of Public Instruction, Beaux-Arts, and Antiquities of Morocco, for his promptness in granting me leave for my work in Mexico; to Jean Périer, French Minister to Mexico, and to his assistants, whose simple and cordial reception touched me deeply; to Henri Hauser, professor at the Sorbonne, who spared neither time nor trouble to help me; and to Marcel Mauss, to whom no discipline is foreign, and who kindly suggested useful corrections. Paul Rivet, not content with placing at my disposal all the resources of the Société des Americanistes in Paris, with opening wide the pages of the *Journal* for my earlier publications, with supporting and guiding me with his advice for many years, gave me the opportunity for my long residence in Mexico, indispensable for the writing of my book. He even altered his itinerary for a mission to Central America in order to present me to Mexican scientific circles, with the authority of his personality and works. I take this occasion to express my deep gratitude to him.

In Spain and Mexico I was given the freedom of various public libraries. The [faulty] organization of the book division of the National Library of Madrid, at the time I was using it (1922–1927), made it difficult for me to work there methodically.[12] On the other hand, the manuscript division, the division of rare books, and the overseas division (Biblioteca de Ultramar), were under a more flexible management and more favorable to scientific research. For their competent and courteous personnel I have nothing but praise. I may say the same of the library of the Centro de Estudios Históricos and the Academy of History in Madrid, and of the library of the Antonio Alzate Academy and the Geographical Society in Mexico. The rich library of the National

Museum of Archaeology, History, and Ethnography of Mexico was opened for me with a generosity and trust for which I am extremely grateful. There also I found the staff most competent, devoted, and unfailingly obliging. To all these collaborators, some of them humble and often unknown, my most sincere thanks. Finally, I am grateful to the Institute of Ethnology of the University of Paris, which saw fit to accept and publish my book.

ROBERT RICARD

June, 1932

I: THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

1 *First Contacts between Paganism and Christianity*

ALTHOUGH the methodical conversion of New Spain did not begin until after the arrival of the first Franciscan mission in 1524, it is known that before that date several isolated friars preached the good word to the pagans of Mexico. A glance at the work of these precursors will be of profit.

One cannot study the history of the evangelization of Mexico without giving emphasis to the religious preoccupations of the Conqueror Cortés. He was greedy, debauched, a politician without scruples, but he had his quixotic moments, for, despite his weaknesses, of which he later humbly repented, he had deep Christian convictions. He always carried on his person an image of the Virgin Mary, to whom he was strongly devoted; he prayed and heard Mass daily; and his standard bore these words: *Amici, sequamur crucem, et si nos fidem habemus, vere in hoc signo vincemus.*[1] He had another standard, on one side of which were the arms of Castile and León, on the other an image of the Holy Virgin.[2] His main ambition seems to have been to carve out a kind of autonomous fief for himself, theoretically subject to the King of Spain, but he could not admit the thought of ruling over pagans, and he always strove to pursue the religious conquest at the same time he pursued the political and military

conquest.[3] This is probably the only one of Velázquez' instructions that he obeyed. "You must," they ran,

> "bear in mind from the beginning that the first aim of your expedition is to serve God and spread the Christian Faith. You must not, therefore, permit any blasphemy or lewdness of any kind, and all who violate this injunction should be publicly admonished and punished. It has been said that crosses have been found in that country. Their significance must be ascertained. The religion of the natives, if they have one, must again be studied and a detailed account of it made. Finally, you must neglect no opportunity to spread the knowledge of the True Faith and the Church of God among those people who dwell in darkness." [4]

The instructions of Velázquez are only an expression of the desire manifested by the Pope [5] and the Spanish monarchs.[6] Cortés followed them virtually to the letter. No one was against blasphemers more than he, and he made it clear in his ordinances that the aim of the expedition was the uprooting of idolatry and the conversion of the natives to Christianity. If, he added, the war should be waged for any other purpose it would be an unjust war. This, assuredly, was not the feeling of many of his lieutenants and soldiers, whose habits were anything but exemplary, and by whom he was frequently overborne. But, if his orders were not always respected, it should not be forgotten that later on many of his companions entered religious orders. Among such were the hermit Gaspar Díez, whom Bishop Zumárraga had to admonish to lead a less austere life; Alonso Aguilar, who became a Dominican; Sindos de Portillo, who was "almost a saint"; Medina, Quintero, Burguillos, Escalante, and Lintorno, all of whom became Franciscans. Even so, this list made by Bernal Díaz may not be complete.[7]

If one can reproach Cortés, it is not for his laxness in the conversion of the natives, but, on the contrary, for having undertaken it hastily, without method, and for having forged ahead without pause. Following his landing at Ulúa, he had to be told at every step, by the Mercedarian Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, an excellent theologian and "a man of good sense," as Cervantes de Salazar rightly describes him,[8] to moderate his zeal and use more order and prudence. Father Cuevas, in his *History of the*

Church in Mexico,[9] stresses this contrast and, despite his admiration for Father Olmedo, is inclined to think that Cortés was right. The Conqueror, he says, was better acquainted with the temperament of the Indians, and was better able to handle them. Besides [he continues], the result proved the excellence of his procedure, because the natives committed few sacrileges and profanations. It must be noted, on the other hand, that we do not know what would have happened in many places where Father Olmedo dampened the inconsiderate ardor of Cortés. At the same time, I think Cortés expected too much of natives who were still idolators. One cannot demand of a pagan that "he renounce all at once all his chains, and to practice the Christian virtues, before receiving the means to do so." [10] However that may be, one may ask whether, in the cause of the [spiritual] conquest, the indirect approach, that is to say, the example provided by the Spaniards, the masses, ceremonies, and prayers in the presence of the Indians, would not have been more efficacious than fiery sermons, forced baptisms, and the violent destruction of temples and idols.[11]

Cortés and his companions arrived at Ulúa on Holy Thursday, April 21, 1519, and landed on Good Friday. A solemn Mass was celebrated on Easter Sunday. The Spaniards told their beads kneeling before a cross they had erected. Every day, at the sound of a bell, they recited the *Angelus* at the foot of the cross. The natives looked on in astonishment; some of them asked why the Spaniards humbled themselves before those two pieces of wood. Then, at the invitation of Cortés, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo explained the Christian doctrine to them, and his exposition seemed so detailed, even to the excellent Bernal Díaz, whose knowledge of doctrine was probably not precise, that he wrote that a good theologian could not have done better. [Father Olmedo] explained to them that they should not worship their wicked idols, and at the same time he explained the meaning of the cross: how Our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord and Creator of all men, had died on such a cross, how He had risen from the dead after three days, how He had then ascended into Heaven, and how He would call all men to judgment. He strove equally hard to show them the horror of human sacrifices and to persuade them to give them up.[12] That was all, but it sufficed, nevertheless, to establish contact. Fray Bartolomé

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"bear in mind from the beginning that the first aim of your expedition is to serve God and spread the Christian Faith. You must not, therefore, permit any blasphemy or lewdness of any kind, and all who violate this injunction should be publicly admonished and punished. It has been said that crosses have been found in that country. Their significance must be ascertained. The religion of the natives, if they have one, must again be studied and a detailed account of it made. Finally, you must neglect no opportunity to spread the knowledge of the True Faith and the Church of God among those people who dwell in darkness." [4]

The instructions of Velázquez are only an expression of the desire manifested by the Pope [5] and the Spanish monarchs.[6] Cortés followed them virtually to the letter. No one was against blasphemers more than he, and he made it clear in his ordinances that the aim of the expedition was the uprooting of idolatry and the conversion of the natives to Christianity. If, he added, the war should be waged for any other purpose it would be an unjust war. This, assuredly, was not the feeling of many of his lieutenants and soldiers, whose habits were anything but exemplary, and by whom he was frequently overborne. But, if his orders were not always respected, it should not be forgotten that later on many of his companions entered religious orders. Among such were the hermit Gaspar Díez, whom Bishop Zumárraga had to admonish to lead a less austere life; Alonso Aguilar, who became a Dominican; Sindos de Portillo, who was "almost a saint"; Medina, Quintero, Burguillos, Escalante, and Lintorno, all of whom became Franciscans. Even so, this list made by Bernal Díaz may not be complete.[7]

If one can reproach Cortés, it is not for his laxness in the conversion of the natives, but, on the contrary, for having undertaken it hastily, without method, and for having forged ahead without pause. Following his landing at Ulúa, he had to be told at every step, by the Mercedarian Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, an excellent theologian and "a man of good sense," as Cervantes de Salazar rightly describes him,[8] to moderate his zeal and use more order and prudence. Father Cuevas, in his *History of the*

Church in Mexico,[9] stresses this contrast and, despite his admiration for Father Olmedo, is inclined to think that Cortés was right. The Conqueror, he says, was better acquainted with the temperament of the Indians, and was better able to handle them. Besides [he continues], the result proved the excellence of his procedure, because the natives committed few sacrileges and profanations. It must be noted, on the other hand, that we do not know what would have happened in many places where Father Olmedo dampened the inconsiderate ardor of Cortés. At the same time, I think Cortés expected too much of natives who were still idolators. One cannot demand of a pagan that "he renounce all at once all his chains, and to practice the Christian virtues, before receiving the means to do so." [10] However that may be, one may ask whether, in the cause of the [spiritual] conquest, the indirect approach, that is to say, the example provided by the Spaniards, the masses, ceremonies, and prayers in the presence of the Indians, would not have been more efficacious than fiery sermons, forced baptisms, and the violent destruction of temples and idols.[11]

Cortés and his companions arrived at Ulúa on Holy Thursday, April 21, 1519, and landed on Good Friday. A solemn Mass was celebrated on Easter Sunday. The Spaniards told their beads kneeling before a cross they had erected. Every day, at the sound of a bell, they recited the *Angelus* at the foot of the cross. The natives looked on in astonishment; some of them asked why the Spaniards humbled themselves before those two pieces of wood. Then, at the invitation of Cortés, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo explained the Christian doctrine to them, and his exposition seemed so detailed, even to the excellent Bernal Díaz, whose knowledge of doctrine was probably not precise, that he wrote that a good theologian could not have done better. [Father Olmedo] explained to them that they should not worship their wicked idols, and at the same time he explained the meaning of the cross: how Our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord and Creator of all men, had died on such a cross, how He had risen from the dead after three days, how He had then ascended into Heaven, and how He would call all men to judgment. He strove equally hard to show them the horror of human sacrifices and to persuade them to give them up.[12] That was all, but it sufficed, nevertheless, to establish contact. Fray Bartolomé

did not have to intervene with Cortés, for the Conqueror was still uneasy in that strange land. But after Cempoala his action was more direct. In spite of Father Olmedo's appeal for moderation, he cast down idols;[13] as at Ulúa, he erected an altar, with a cross and an image of the Virgin Mary; a sermon was preached to the Indians; a Mass was said; the eight women given to the Spaniards were baptized;[14] and, before leaving, Cortés advised the lord of Cempoala, *el cacique gordo,* to look after the altar and the cross. Four pagan priests were forced to cut their long hair and remove their sacerdotal vestments, and Cortés charged them with the care of the Virgin's image. It should be added that he left an old soldier named Juan de Torres at Cempoala to be "a hermit there" and keep an eye on them. In another place Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo obliged the Conqueror to act with more prudence; he preached sermons against sodomy and human sacrifices, but he would not allow a cross to be raised. "It seems to me," he said, ". . . that in this village it is not yet time to let them have a cross, for they are bold and fearless, and, since they are vassals of Moctezuma, it is to be feared that they will burn it or commit some sacrilege. What they have been told will do them until they have a better knowledge of our Holy Faith."[15]

In Tlaxcala Cortés wanted the natives to renounce their idols and embrace the Christian religion out of hand. The Tlaxcalans firmly refused, and the affair might have ended badly except for the intervention of the Mercedarian, who advised Cortés to leave them alone until they were more seriously grounded in Christian doctrine. "It is not just," he said, "for us to convert them by force, and it would be useless for us to repeat what we did at Cempoala. Our warnings are enough." His advice was supported, moreover, by Pedro de Alvarado, Juan Velázquez de León, and Francisco de Lugo. Cortés yielded. Fray Bartolomé said Mass, preached a sermon, and the Indian women who had been given to the Spaniards were baptized according to custom. In Cholula also, Father Olmedo would not allow the removal of the idols.[16] It was over his objections and those of Juan Díaz, a secular priest who also accompanied the expedition, that crosses were erected at Cholula and Tlaxcala—such, at least, is the fanciful claim of Father [Diego Luis de] Motezuma, who may be accepted on this point.[17] But, wherever they passed, Fray

Bartolomé de Olmedo preached against sodomy and human sacrifices, and explained Christian doctrine to the natives, as, for example, at Jalacingo (in Vera Cruz, just below Tlaxcala), Chalco, Ixtapalapa, and Coyoacán.[18]

Even in Tenochtitlán itself, where the Spaniards arrived on November 7, 1519, one of the great preoccupations of Cortés was to convert Moctezuma—possibly so that he might be able to handle him more easily—and to institute public worship. Beginning with the first day, he summarized Christian doctrine to the "emperor," pronounced against human sacrifices, and told him of the coming of the missionaries. Moctezuma firmly refused to accept [any of this], resisted all his arguments, all the sermons of the Mercedarian, and the prattling of the page boy Orteguilla, for whom he had taken a liking.[19] He did not cease going to the temples and making human sacrifices in them,[20] and it seems very unlikely that he was ever baptized, even at the moment of his death.[21] Father Olmedo also opposed the construction of a church at Tenochtitlán, for Moctezuma did not yet seem disposed to allow it.[22] In fact, when Cortés asked for authorization to erect a cross on top of the temple and place an image of the Virgin in the sanctuary, to put the devil to flight, Moctezuma, deeply offended in his faith, refused point blank.[23] The Spaniards at least installed a chapel in their quarters and erected a cross outside. They heard Mass daily, up to the time the wine gave out.[24] Thereafter they had to content themselves with coming to pray before the altars and image. They did so, said Bernal Díaz, first because it was their duty, and also to give an example to Moctezuma and the other Indians. Moctezuma had, in fact, yielded: he allowed Cortés to place an altar, a cross, and an image of Our Lady in the great temple, apart from the idols. Father Olmedo chanted Mass, which was attended by Licenciado Juan Díaz and a large number of soldiers. Cortés ordered one of his men to keep watch over the altar and prevent the Indians from profaning it. Not satisfied with that, he finally took complete possession of the temple.[25] Later he had to leave to oppose Narváez, and the Aztecs during his absence attempted to remove the cross and the images. They were unsuccessful and were badly mauled.[26] Then followed the evacuation of Mexico City by the Spaniards (*la Noche Triste*), the retreat to Tlaxcala,

where the wounded were attended to and the army reorganized, and the slow and methodical reconquest of the capital undertaken. In spite of all these grave worries, the ardor of proselytizing was not extinguished, and Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo baptized the old cacique of Tlaxcala and the young lord of Texcoco.[27]

Thus, although he may not have been perhaps the first Catholic priest to see the country of Mexico,[28] the great precursor [of the Church] was Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, to whom one may give without reservation the name of the first apostle of New Spain. When he died, toward the end of 1524, mourning was universal. He was a holy man, as Cortés wrote to Licenciado [Alonso de] Zuazo, and the whole city wept for him; the Indians owed him their knowledge of the true God and their eternal salvation.[29] Licenciado Juan Díaz, the secular priest who participated in the whole expedition, played only a modest part. The Mercedarian Fray Juan de las Varillas,[30] the Franciscans Fray Pedro Melgarejo and Fray Diego Altamirano, who came to Mexico shortly after them, but before the end of the Conquest, did little, although they were unquestionably men of good will.[31] In 1523 they were followed by three other religious of the Franciscan Order, Flemings, two of whom were Johann van den Auwera and Johann Dekkers (known in the Spanish documents as Fray Juan de Aora and Fray Juan de Tecto), and a lay brother, Fray Pedro de Gante. The first two, shortly after their arrival, accompanied Cortés on the Honduras expedition and died during it.[32] Pedro de Gante spent the rest of his long life in Mexico. His work was very beautiful, but, working alone, it is probable that despite his apostolic ardor he was forced to operate without a definite plan, just as Father Olmedo could only sow a few grains here and there, without order or method. It was necessary, therefore, to organize the Christianization of the country.

Cortés soon recognized it. In his Fourth Letter to Charles V, dated at Mexico, October 15, 1524, he reminded the Emperor that he had emphasized the necessity of providing for the eternal health of the natives. "Every time I have written Your Majesty," he said in substance, "I have brought to your attention the attraction that Christianity seems to have for some of the natives of this land, and have begged you to send here some religious of good life and example; but, up to the present, only a few

have come, or none, so to speak, and, since their coming would be of very great usefulness, I beg Your Majesty to send them with as little delay as possible." Cortés insisted upon the need in New Spain for missionaries to convert the Indians. It would be necessary to found monasteries, which would be supported by a share of the tithes, the rest of which would be used for the maintenance of churches and their priests. The tithes would be collected by the fiscal and distributed by him to those interested. Cortés had once asked for bishops, but he had changed his mind. Only friars were needed; bishops and canons would cost too much, and they often set an unfortunate example, which would be fatal for the conversion of the Indians. Consequently, the King should ask the Pope to give the religious of St. Francis and St. Dominic the widest powers, so that they could administer the sacraments of ordination and confirmation.[33]

Meanwhile at the moment when Cortés was thus expressing himself, the famous mission of the Twelve had arrived, some months before, landing at San Juan de Ulúa on May 13 or 14, 1524. He evidently thought that twelve religious were hardly enough. The event was, nevertheless, of capital importance. Even leaving out of consideration the exceptional worth of the friars of this mission, the arrival of the Twelve meant the beginning of methodical evangelization. Hence, although I am interested in the collective work, rather than in the action of individuals, I shall list below the "Twelve Apostles," as tradition has named them, who arrived at Mexico [City] on June 17 or 18, 1524, and who belonged to the Order of the Friars Minor of the Observance: Fray Martín de Valencia, Fray Francisco de Soto, Fray Martín de Jesús (or de la Coruña), Fray Juan Suárez (or rather Juárez), Fray Antonio de Ciudad-Rodrigo, Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía), Fray García de Cisneros, Fray Luis de Fuensalida, Fray Juan de Ribas, Fray Francisco Jiménez, Fray Andrés de Córdoba, and Fray Juan de Palos.[34] Martín de Valencia was their superior; Fray Francisco Jiménez was ordained shortly after his arrival in New Spain; Fray Andrés de Córdoba and Fray Juan de Palos remained lay brothers.

For the rest, the arrival of the Twelve was the result of proceedings and negotiations that had been going on for a long time. Even before the final occupation of Tenochtitlán, two Franciscan friars (the Fleming Juan

Glapión and the Spaniard Fray Juan de los Angeles, whose family name was Quiñones) had offered themselves to work among the new subjects of the Crown of Castile. Pope Leo X, in his bull *Alias felicis,* of April 25, 1521, had authorized them to go to America. The year following, Adrian VI completed the dispositions of his predecessor in his bull *Exponi nobis feciste,* addressed to Charles V. In it he sent to the Franciscan religious and to those of the other Mendicant Orders his apostolic authority to do everything they might think necessary for the conversion of the Indians, wherever there were no bishops, or wherever the bishops should be two days' journey distant, except for those acts that required episcopal consecration. During these preliminaries, however, Father Glapión died,[35] and, in the general chapter meeting at Burgos in 1523, Father Francisco de los Angeles was elected general of his Order. It was no longer possible for him to think of going [on the mission], but he always held the evangelization of Mexico dear to his heart. He it was who organized the mission of the Twelve and selected Martín de Valencia to head it.[36]

The Dominicans arrived in Mexico probably on July 2, 1536.[37] They also numbered twelve. Eight of them came from Spain: the superior or *vicario*[38] Fray Tomás Ortiz, Fray Vicente de Santa Ana, Fray Diego de Sotomayor, Fray Pedro de Santa María, Fray Justo de Santo Domingo, Fray Pedro Zambrano, Fray Gonzalo Lucero (who at the time was a simple deacon), and the lay brother Fray Bartolomé de la Calzadilla. Fray Domingo de Betanzos, Fray Diego Ramírez, Fray Alonso de las Vírgenes, and the novice Fray Vicente de las Casas came from Española.[39] Their beginnings were unfortunate. Five religious, Fray Pedro de Santa María, Fray Justo de Santo Domingo, Fray Vicente de Santa Ana, Fray Diego de Sotomayor, and Fray Bartolomé de la Calzadilla, their health impaired by the voyage and the climate, died within the year; Fray Tomás Ortiz, Fray Pedro Zembrano, Fray Diego Ramírez, and Fray Alonso de las Vírgenes, in bad health, returned to Spain at the end of 1526.[40] Fray Domingo de Betanzos alone remained, with Fray Gonzalo Lucero and Fray Vicente de las Casas, both of whom had by this time professed, and so he thus deserves the title of founder of the Dominican province of Mexico, at the expense of Fray Tomás Ortiz. Besides, the departure of Fray Tomás Ortiz does not seem to have been a great loss. Judging by what we know of his

quarrels with Cortés,[41] this unquiet intriguer could only have set his religious upon a bad path.[42] In 1528, Fray Vicente de Santa María arrived with six companions, and from that time on the province had a normal development.[43]

The Augustinians, who were the last to arrive, landed at Vera Cruz on May 22, 1533, left for Mexico on the 27th, and arrived there on June 7. They numbered seven: Fray Francisco de la Cruz, Father Venerable, Fray Agustín de Gormaz (or de Coruña),[44] Fray Jerónimo Jiménez (or de San Esteban), Fray Juan de San Román, Fray Juan de Oseguera, Fray Alonso de Borja, and Fray Jorge de Avila. Father Venerable was the superior of the mission, which was to have included Fray Juan Bautista de Moya, unexpectedly detained in Spain.[45]

These beginnings were modest enough. There were too few workers for such an abundant harvest; but the number of missionaries, although too small for the population, increased rapidly: every year the vacancies caused by death and by returns to Spain were filled by a fresh contingent. As time went on, the missionaries were able partly to recruit their numbers in the field. Creole religious began to appear. In all Mexico, in 1559, the Franciscans had only eighty convents and 380 religious; the Dominicans, forty convents and 210 religious; the Augustinians, also forty convents and 212 religious.[46]

There was nothing in that country, however, except love of souls and, possibly, of adventure, to attract [missionaries]. Leaving to one side the long, painful, and dangerous voyage from Spain, from the moment of their landing at Vera Cruz, the newcomers were immersed by the warm and heavy humidity in a tepid bath; they were assailed by unknown terrors; if they climbed higher, they found, to be sure, a purer sky and a more caressing light, and an apparently more healthful environment, but one which, with its sudden and unsupportable cold spells, perfidious changes in temperature, and rarefied air, tired badly frayed nerves, and in the long run made every sustained effort arduous and brutally aggravated the mildest sicknesses. It should be borne in mind that the Valley of Puebla is 2,000 meters above the sea, that of Mexico, more than 2,200, and that of Toluca, more than 2,500. And the friars generally traveled on foot,

panting up over the rough mountain trails on the flanks of volcanoes. The innumerable streams (Motolinía counted twenty-five in ten kilometers), far from easing communications, were nothing but obstacles, for almost always the way was blocked by torrents, which at times forced the travelers to make interminable detours. If the missionary avoided this rough country, he only fell into the tropical forests or frightful deserts, where he ran the risk of dying of thirst. There were other enemies besides: insects, snakes, and ferocious beasts, not to mention the dangers of the road, where certain ill-subjected Indians could attack almost with impunity. For the population no longer seemed to encourage the religious and offer them the hope of an abundant harvest. The following is a summary glance at the nature of that population and the impression it made on the first apostles.

The Aztec empire, toward which the principal effort of the conquest was directed, and which occupied the essential part of what was later to become New Spain, extended from 15° to 20° N. Lat. Its northern limit was the [territory occupied by] the nomad Indians, grouped in the Spanish documents under the generic name of Chichimecas. To the northwest it reached the vicinity of Lake Chapala; to the west it touched the kingdom of Michoacán; to the southwest and south it extended to the Pacific, surrounding Michoacán; to the northeast and east it extended to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Pánuco River to the Alvarado, not including Cholula, Huejotzingo, and the republic of Tlaxcala, which were always at war with Tenochtitlán. These frontiers, however, were anything but fixed and precise, so it will perhaps be clearer and more realistic to say that the Aztec empire occupied, roughly speaking, the whole region between the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the south and a line running from the Coajuayana River [in Colima] to the Pánuco River in the north. But within this region Michoacán, the Huasteca, and a part of the Mixtec-Zapotec country [of Oaxaca] remained independent,[47] as well as Tlaxcala. Its organization was complex and very flexible. Along with regions conquered long ago and incorporated in properly Mexican territory, and governed by a lord named by Tenochtitlán, certain groups kept their political autonomy. The former were forced to receive the Aztec officers who had the duty of collecting taxes; the latter were obliged to pay only

an annual tribute.[48] This organization, which was precarious at best, did not survive the conquest, and affected the work of conversion only in so far as it contributed to spread the knowledge of the language of the empire, Nahuatl, throughout New Spain.

Linguistic varieties continued, however, to be very many, and we know how extremely important languages are in the evangelization of a country. I do not propose here to make a catalogue of the languages and dialects of New Spain, but only to sketch their essential traits. Nahuatl, the official language of the empire, extended far beyond the plateau of Anahuac, for it was spoken not only in the allied or subjugated states, but in Tlaxcala and in a part of the modern states of Jalisco, Colima, Nayarit, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, and Sinaloa.[49] Other languages were still very much alive: Huastec and Totonac on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico; in the west, Tarascan (in Michoacán, part of Guanajuato, Guerrero, and San Luis Potosí); the languages of independent territories (besides the Huasteca) were even more flourishing. The charms of Tarascan are frequently boasted of. These were the principal languages,[50] but there were many others, spoken by small numbers of people, such as Pirinda or Matlaltzinca, in the Valley of Toluca and at Charo (Michoacán);[51] Popoloca, spoken by some natives of the present states of Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca.[52] I shall mention a few others when I discuss the linguistic works of the missionaries.[53] Here I shall only remark that this linguistic multiplicity was a grave obstacle to preaching, and that it was fortunately lessened by the spread of Nahuatl as a second language. But the obstacle was still very great, because it was necessary to know at least five or six languages, not, of course, for every missionary, but for the Order in general, and because all these languages were extremely difficult.

At the time the Spaniards arrived in Mexico, Atzec society was divided into phratries,[54] which in turn were subdivided into twenty secondary local clans called *calpullis,* which had their private domains and governed themselves freely. They were the ordinary units of this society. All these groups were fused into a single one, the tribe of Mexico, to which the territory and the city belonged. Within the tribe, legislative and judicial functions were entrusted to a tribal council of twenty members represent-

ing the twenty clans. When all the members of the council were unable to reach an agreement, their difference was resolved by the great council, composed of all the chiefs of the city, which met every twenty-four days. The executive power was distributed among a large number of functionaries, the most important of whom were the *cihuacoatl* and the *tlacatecuhtli*. The former presided over the tribal council and was charged with carrying out its decisions; he was the head of the civil service and the police; he supervised the collection of taxes and tributes, and parceled out the land. At the same time he was the priest of the goddess Cihuacoatl, mother of Huitizlopochtli. This fact should be emphasized, for it shows how much the Mexican organization was penetrated by religion. The functions of the latter [the *tlacatecuhtli*], whom the Spaniards called the emperor or king, were first of all military; but little by little they had become more general, at least at the time of the Spanish conquest, when he appears as a kind of supreme head of the Aztec state. He it was who named the *cihuacoatl,* who was subordinate to him.

The command of the army devolved upon officers elected by the clan or tribe, since the clan was the basis of the military organiaztion. While the clan was the military and judicial unit, it was at the same time the territorial unit, or, possibly, the landholding unit. The tribal territory was divided into twenty clan territories, and into wards and neutral or common plots, such as the market, the temple, etc. In turn the tribal territory was divided into parcels, each of which was assigned to a married member of a clan, who was obliged to cultivate it or have it cultivated. If he died, or if the land was left fallow for two years, the parcel reverted to the clan. It goes without saying that there were exceptions to this rule. The functionaries who lacked the time to look after their parcels were supported by the public lands, which were tilled by what the people called *tlamaitl.*

The Mexican confederation, that is, the alliance composed of Tenochtitlán-Mexico, Tlacopan (Tacuba), and Texcoco, was therefore, writes Beuchat, "a military democracy, the organization of which depended upon clan rule, with land held in common," and at first the citizens formed a single class. But things turned out differently. Those who refused to marry or to cultivate the land were expelled from the clan and

deprived of their citizenship. They were reduced to working for wages. The Spaniards took them to be slaves, but they might enter the clan again, to which their children, if they had any, legally belonged. Craftsmen and merchants were also considered apart. But craftsmen did not constitute closed castes; they did not live in special districts, and their trades, at least in theory, were not hereditary. Merchants served also as explorers and spies; they made long journeys, sometimes dangerous ones, to barter their merchandise in distant regions, from which they brought back all kinds of information. Merchants and craftsmen did not cultivate their lands, but had to have them cultivated. Spanish writers also speak of a kind of aristocracy; but in reality there were no nobles, strictly speaking, among the Mexicans, other than the officers elected for life, and the citizens who by their excellence in war had won honorific titles. The error [of the Spanish writers] is, however, easily explained, for certain Mexicans, upon attaining puberty, submitted to an initiation that included very severe penances and thus won the title of *tecuhtin,* which was not a title of nobility, nor did it imply political power; but sons often followed in the steps of their fathers, and, besides, the chiefs and higher officers were almost always chosen from among the *tecuhtin,* or from among the warriors who had won honorific titles. In short, this was a kind of general staff, rather than a nobility.

It is noteworthy that Mexico, at the time of the Spanish conquest, was probably undergoing a social transformation. The great expeditions that had preceded [the Spanish conquest] had brought about an extraordinary prosperity. Besides, by this time the inheritance no longer reverted to the clan, but went directly to the children. Many families had thus become rich, while the functionaries for their part enriched themselves with the tributes of subjugated peoples. Thus family or private fortunes were created, along with the landed property of the clan.

Mexican laws were extremely severe. Homicide and adultery were punished by death; other crimes also, such as sacrilege, treason, theft of gold or silver, and rebellions against certain decisions of the clan. Drunkenness was tolerated during public festivals and among men of more than seventy. Otherwise, it was punished with great rigor. The Mexicans had an extraordinarily complicated calendar, but their system of

writing was still rudimentary. In the manuscripts dating from before and after the conquest, two elements must be distinguished: some of them are true illustrations, while others were written in glyphs. Their writing as a whole was ideographic, but the Aztecs had taken a step toward phonetic representation. "In order to render the syllables of the names of places or people," writes Beuchat, "they made use of images and objects having a similar name or sound, without attaching any value to the meaning of the sign chosen." The system corresponds exactly to our rebus writing. The Aztecs were not the only ones acquainted with writing, for there are Mixtec and Zapotec manuscripts dating from before the Spanish conquest.

Despite their development of urban industries, of which I shall speak more later on, the Aztecs were an agricultural people. They had four principal crops, which are still the basis of the Mexican diet: maize, from which they make *tortillas* and a kind of gruel called *atole;* beans (the inevitable *frijoles*); peppers (the classical *chili*); and the agave or *maguey,* which was used, as it is still used, to make the beverage called *octli,* or, more commonly, *pulque.* They were also great gardeners, in spite of which their technique of cultivation was not advanced. The Aztecs had no domestic animal capable of drawing a plow. They knew, therefore, only hoe agriculture, and their implements were very rudimentary: curved sticks for tracing furrows, wooden spades for turning the soil, and a kind of copper sickle for pruning trees. Fortunately, the soil was rich. They had only to let a piece of land lie fallow for a little while to restore its original fertility. The Mexicans also practiced irrigation. And alongside their cultivated fields they had gardens where they grew flowers and medicinal plants.[55]

Aztec civilization is, however, known to us mostly in its urban aspect. This is not the place to describe in detail the city of Tenochtitlán at the beginning of the Spanish occupation. The only thing I shall mention is that the Aztecs had two types of construction which survived the conquest: a house of cut stone, of a single rectangular room, its floor of *terre pisée,* the walls whitewashed; and a smaller house of adobes or rough stone cemented with clay. The temples were built upon quadrangular pyramids, oriented toward the four cardinal points. At one side of the

pyramid a stairway gave access to several terraces. Just as Spanish cities were built around a *plaza mayor,*[56] so the Mexican villages had a large square in the center about which were disposed the municipal buildings and the main temple. When the Spanish missionaries founded villages, they readily accepted this tradition, which was so like their own. Clothing was simple: for the men, a loincloth, and a blanket over the shoulders reaching to the knees, the ancestor of the modern *sarape;* for the women, a kind of long gown of coarse material, and a skirt. Warriors wore distinctive costumes, and civil chiefs had the right to wear special insignia. Ornamentation was more varied, for the Aztecs were skilled workers in feathers, gold, silver, copper, tin, and hard stones. During festivals they wore their best. Their basic diet was maize and beans; but they also consumed a great deal of cacao, which they brought from the hot country, and they ate meat. They drank fermented beverages, the best known of which is *pulque,* and they used tobacco. Their industrial arts were highly developed: fabrics of cotton, maguey and palmetto fiber, and of rabbit or hare fur; dyes extremely varied, their colors justly celebrated; stuffs, embroideries, and feather mosaics. Their ceramics had the same diversity; three types may be distinguished: vessels of light-colored clay, of a reddish yellow, mounted on legs; objects of unpolished baked clay, with ornament in relief; and vessels of different shapes representing human or animal figures. The decoration was at times in relief, at times painted. The painted design was at times geometric, at times of animal or human figures.[57] The stone sculptures, in the round or in relief, had attained a certain beauty by the time the Spaniards arrived.

Their religion was an extraordinarily rich polytheism, owing to the Aztecs' custom of adopting the divinities of conquered tribes. Along with their belief in the great gods, who controlled the principal forces of nature and the various forms of human activity—the listing of whom would have no interest [here]—it is apparent that in Mexico there was a survival of totemism, of the kind called *nagualism,* an individual totemism that allowed a man to believe himself in rapport with an animal or a natural object revealed to him in a dream. On the other hand, the distribution of deities according to districts is likely a survival of the clan religion. All acts in life were more or less religious, so that the Mexicans performed

innumerable ceremonies during their lifetime. Besides, their rites were often sanguinary, and certain gods, such as Huitzolopochtli, required the sacrifice of human victims. There was a numerous body of priests. Parallel to, or mingled with, the official cult, magic rites were extremely widespread.[58]

For fear of making these preliminaries too burdensome, I shall say only a few words about the non-Aztec populations. Among most of them one finds human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism. On the other hand, some of them, like the Totonacs,[59] and especially the Tarascans (one of the most interesting native groups of Mexico),[60] had reached an appreciable degree of civilization. The Zapotecs of the state of Oaxaca, whose civilization is akin to that of the Maya of Yucatan, can bear comparison with the inhabitants of the Central Plateau. They possessed a brilliant art, hieroglyphic writing, and a calendar, all of a rather individual character. The ruins at Monte Albán and Mitla, in their territory, are especially celebrated. Perhaps unique in America, they seem to have used the arch (at Monte Albán). The Zapotecs practiced cremation, and many of their funeral urns have been preserved. Cruciform tombs have also been discovered, and some fragments of pottery. In a general way, their religion seems to have been slightly different from that of the Aztecs. Their sacerdotal hierarchy was very simple: high priests, called "prophets" or "seers," and ordinary priests, [called] "the guardians of the gods" and "sacrificers." The clergy was recruited from among the sons of chieftains, who were given the appropriate training in a special college. The Zapotecs also were polytheists; they honored their gods by burning incense, sacrificing birds and animals, and by drawing blood from their tongues and ears. They practiced human sacrifice on certain occasions, but much more moderately than the Aztecs.[61]

Within this complex assemblage were there elements that might be used by the missionary without too much danger, either as a promise or as a lure for conversion? It is difficult to describe what the character of the natives was before the arrival of the Spaniards. Moreover, it must have varied from region to region, and we know how frail and teeming with errors these speculations about ethnic psychology are. The missionaries

themselves sometimes made sweeping judgments, which were mistaken in all directions. At times they erred from an excess of optimism; at others, with exaggeratedly somber colors. Besides, they disentangled only a few and very indistinct traits. Many of them reproached the Indians for their propensity to steal and lie (which arose from their timidity), and for letting themselves drift weakly into laziness, drunkenness, and even the most shameful passions of the flesh. They praised the Indians' docility, gentleness, courtesy, simplicity, patience, and skill in handicrafts.[62] But it seemed certain [to them] that the character of the natives of Mexico did not equal their intelligence. Their religion, indeed, appeared to be only a lot of rites and beliefs, unconnected with morality; and the rites themselves (human sacrifice, drunkenness, and ritual cannibalism) were too often sanguinary and immoral.

The Aztecs, nevertheless, did believe in eternal life.[63] To them the soul was immortal and, once having departed this world, continued to live, in heaven or in hell. But this eternal life was not a sanction: heaven was not a reward, nor hell a punishment. It mattered little how a man had lived on earth; what mattered was the circumstances of his death.[64] Could the preacher use other elements better than this belief? Evidently one must not attach any Christian meaning to rites and beliefs whose similarity to some Catholic rites or beliefs forcibly struck certain spirits.[65] The Aztecs were acquainted with the sign of the cross, which was a symbol of the four cardinal points and an attribute of the deities of rain and wind.[66] They believed, moreover, that their great god Huitzilopochtli had been born of a virgin, the goddess Teteo-inan.[67] Mendieta affirmed that they had a vague notion of the true God, for whom they had a special name. Indeed, they worshiped a kind of supreme deity, Ometeuctli, or Omeyotl.[68] Mexicanists, however, rarely agree on this point, and the principal result of their discussions is that at the present time it is impossible to form a precise idea of the Aztecs' concept of divinity.[69] Moreover, the Aztecs practiced communion under various guises, by one of which, the absorption of the heart of the victim which thus became one with the substance of the god,[70] it formed a part of ritualistic cannibalism. But it did have less sanguinary aspects. [For example], twice a year the Mexicans ate pastry images representing the god Huitzilopochtli.[71] It is

not clear, however, whether these images were mere symbols of the god, or became the god himself. Finally, the Aztecs practiced a kind of baptism and a kind of confession. These last two rites are most interesting.

It seems likely that this kind of baptism implied a more or less confused notion of original sin. When water (and *pulque,* adds Mendieta) was poured over the head of the newborn, the midwife said, among other things: "Whoever thou art, thou who art a harmful thing, leave him and go thy way; get thee far from him, for at this moment he begins a new life; he is reborn; he is purified again; our mother the water gives him form and engenders him anew." [72]

The matter of confession deserves a somewhat closer scrutiny, for it reveals, not only the essential differences between Mexican rites and Christian sacraments, which were apparently similar, but also the very peculiar notion that the Aztecs had of sin.[73] The Mexican confession seems to have had a moral significance, up to a point. Absolute candor was required in the avowal as well as in repentance. There must be no fear of telling the confessor everything, or of trusting to the mercy of the divinity he represented, according to Sahagún, who may have unconsciously Christianized this rite. Lying and willful omission were very grave errors. The confessor, moreover, was held to the most rigorous secrecy. It should be noted, however, that the Mexican confession formed part of temporal justice. For example, drunkenness was punished by death [in civil law], but the drunkard who confessed escaped the penalty and was subjected only to a religious penance. The same was true of adultery, which was considered to be a sin and a crime at the same time. If, on the other hand, it is inexact to say that one could confess only once in one's lifetime, it is true that temporal punishment was remitted only once. It was useless for the drunkard who succumbed again to his vice, to confess again, for he could not hope to escape the legal sanction. For faults that did not carry the death penalty, in practice it was to one's interest to confess as late as possible, which one could generally do only once. Besides, confession applied only to two kinds of sins: drunkenness and sexual irregularities, such as adultery and fornication. The confessor had, therefore, only to pardon sins of a physiological kind, those having to do with needs and functions of the body. This concept of confession resulted

in a purely material notion of sin. Sin was not a spiritual blemish that stained the soul, but was simply a kind of poison that had invaded the body through the exercise of a physiological function, and one eliminated it by the confession and by undergoing the imposed penance, which generally involved the letting of blood. For the rest, confession was known to others than the Aztecs: the Zapotecs and Totonacs practiced it also, as did the inhabitants of the Mistequilla, south of Vera Cruz. Among these last, confession does not seem to have concerned only the errors of the flesh.

The missionaries, nevertheless, seem to have neglected entirely to use the minute particle of truth which in their eyes the Aztecs might have held. Doubtless, that is to be regretted, but their attitude is easily explained. For one thing, the civilization they found in Mexico seemed inferior to them. Many Indians had not advanced to the same degree of civilization as the Aztecs; and about the Aztec civilization itself, which has been frequently described with overly brilliant colors, one must not nurse illusions. In the judgment of an objective specialist like Beuchat, although it represents one of the superior forms of American civilization, one should not exaggerate its value and interest. The religious, therefore, were not dazzled by the so-called marvels of Tenochtitlán. The spectacle seemed to them mediocre, often puerile, often cruel, and almost always sacrilegious. This baptism they found, this confession, this communion, far from seeming to them survivals or institutions heavy with hope and promise, gave them the impression of demoniacal parodies, from which they recoiled in horror.[74] In general, native civilization seemed too remote from truth for them to attempt to make use of the odds and ends [of agreement] that might be present in it. It should be added that the Aztecs were surrounded by scattered tribes that did not have the same religion at all. An adaptation of a dogmatic kind (not, of course, an adaptation of dogma, but an adaptation in its representation), would have run into some very serious practical difficulties. An extraordinarily numerous personnel would have been necessary for the training of strictly specialized missionaries. Now, it would have been impossible to push specialization indefinitely. It would have been necessary, for the needs of evangelization, for each religious to be capable of working effectively, if

not over the whole of Mexico, at least over its greater part. Their training, however serious it might be, could only be general. It will be seen that these considerations led the religious, while pushing their linguistic adaptation very far, to extend the use of the Nahuatl tongue, which was already the second language [of the country] before the conquest.

It may be objected that, along with a general adaptation, there might have been room for an adaptation of a dogmatic kind in the field itself. The missionary [in that event] would have received a general training in the study centers, so conceived as to permit him to proceed with this adaptation, once he was installed with his flock. But I believe that in such conditions adaptation would have been very dangerous and would have risked jeopardizing very vexatiously the unity of method, for the difficulty in such matters is precisely to reconcile diversity and flexibility with the necessary unity. Moreover, from the time the missionary took his post, he saw that almost all his time was taken up by his apostolic labors, and that he had hardly any leisure for a task that would demand patient observation and lengthy reflection. Nothing was more useful, nothing at times more indispensable, than that the missionary should adopt the language, the dress, and, so far as they were not contrary to Christianity, the customs of his neophytes. But adaptation of a dogmatic kind is a singularly more delicate instrument to manipulate. The discussions raised by the Malabar and Chinese rites demonstrate the prudence with which it must be approached. The missionaries of Mexico were aware that they could be led into dangerous compromises, especially at the beginning, when their knowledge of the country and its religion was still scanty; that they might breed confusions and erroneous notions in the spirits of the natives. In practice, certain religious, otherwise zealous and righteous, might be tempted more or less consciously to sacrifice the integrity of the dogma to their desire to swell the number of their neophytes. In their mind superficial resemblances were obstacles, rather than favorable elements.[75]

In this, perhaps, there was an excess of timidity, but it should be borne in mind that in the early days they were beginning the grand work of evangelization, one of the glories of the sixteenth century. In 1524 missionary work was still new; methods had not been fixed by experi-

ence; the missions of the beginning of Christianity and the late Middle Ages had been somewhat forgotten. So it is understandable that a solution was adopted which was doubtless too abrupt, which had the disadvantage of ignoring precious elements [in the native religion], but which did have the advantage of being simple and clear, and very likely avoided a great deal of groping. In time, assuredly, methods were perfected; but the missionaries would be caught up in their initial decision and carried along by the current. By 1570, the ditch that had been dug in the first years could no longer be filled.[76] It is worthy of note, as I shall have occasion to repeat, that there were always two clearly marked tendencies among the missionaries of New Spain, one favorable, the other hostile, to the natives, and that about 1570 a violent antinative reaction may be observed among the Franciscans. Today, after four centuries of missionary experience, we can be bolder,[77] but it would be wrong to reproach the evangelizers of the sixteenth century with having been less bold. The missionaries, the reader is reminded, came from a country that had always been particularly touchy about orthodoxy, one that had shown a profound horror of heresy,[78] one in which the Inquisition had gone farther than elsewhere, one in which a king, Philip II, who came to the throne during the spiritual conquest of New Spain, wished to be the champion of the true faith in the world. Finally, the period with which we are concerned coincided with the Counter Reformation in Europe; the Twelve Apostles landed in Mexico [only] four years before the condemnation and revolt of Luther; and the Council of Trent was sitting from 1545 to 1563. It is easy to see why the phobia about heresy that raged in Spain was exaggerated in America among the religious who were perpetually in contact with a pagan civilization. It was to have consequences of extreme gravity, for this state of the spirit was to be one of the causes of the failure of the Indian College of Tlatelolco, and eventually was to weigh heavily upon the history of the Church in Mexico.

All these reasons make it comprehensible why the missionaries insisted on presenting Christianity, not as a perfecting or a fulfilling of native religions, but as something entirely new, which meant an absolute and complete rupture with the whole past. Nevertheless, in whatever did not

impinge upon the domain of religion, either closely or remotely, they tried to continue the past; they respected [native] languages; they respected all the usages of current life which struck them as having no bearing [on religion]; they adapted their teaching to the temperament and aptitudes of the Indians; and they even went to the extreme of establishing sanctuaries upon the sites of pagan temples. Such were the convents of Huejotzingo and Huejotla,[79] and the sanctuary of Chalmita, near Ocuila [Mexico], the miraculous grotto of which is still today the object of a great pilgrimage. Further than this they did not venture, but deliberately avoided any accommodation, in ritual or dogma, and they stubbornly destroyed even certain usages that had little bearing on religion.[80] If they curtailed some baptismal ceremonies, they did so to gain time, because they were too few to baptize immense crowds. They did not do so for the same reason they had in the East Indies, where saliva and breath were regarded as excrement and aroused the utmost horror among the natives. The Aztecs had constantly engaged in religious ceremonies. The missionaries multiplied the ceremonies and instituted edifying plays; but, by so doing, they replaced—they did not continue, they did not develop [native ceremonies].

This is where one should seek the cause of their fury against certain native practices, against temples and idols, and against all manifestations of paganism—which many have failed to understand.[81] In particular, a large number of historians have sharply criticized the religious in general, and especially the first bishop of Mexico, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, for having destroyed Mexican antiquities. But the religious, as we have seen, truly believed that the Mexican Church could not be erected upon the ruins of the native religions.[82] They were few, and the pagans innumerable; they could not permit pagan ceremonies to be practiced beside the places where Christianity was being preached; they were forced to destroy the temples and expel the priests. In this they did no more than put into effect the instructions of the Crown, which prescribed most emphatically the extirpation of every manifestation of idolatry.[83] The destruction of idols was even more necessary, for they could be concealed, while a temple could not. With respect to saving a few temples and idols as souvenirs, as Cortés wished, that would have been next to madness, and to establish a museum would have been still more extravagant, for at that time an act of

this kind would have been considered a mark of respect and could only have fortified the Indians in their attachment to their old religion. Besides, to judge the question from within, it seems strange that a Catholic missionary should be attacked for preferring the establishment of the Church and the saving of souls, of which a single one would be infinitely precious to him, to the conservation of manuscripts and native sculptures.[84] Such an attitude is only a proof of logic and conscience. As Icazbalceta has justly remarked, a missionary is not an antiquarian. It is interesting that the missionaries are not reproached with having been mistaken in the method of evangelization they were obliged to adopt, but with their lack of respect for the rights of art and science. But, from the missionary's viewpoint, the primacy of spiritual things must be asserted, not merely for their bearing on policy; the rights of art and science must themselves yield before the soul's right to eternal life and the Church's right to a visible establishment. To put it more exactly, arts and science have [in the missionary's viewpoint] rights only so far as they do not endanger souls or compromise the foundation of the Church. It seems to me that the question has almost always been badly put, because those who ask it have not been sufficiently careful to phrase it as would the missionaries themselves. Meanwhile, it will perhaps be of use to bring things into their proper focus.

There is no doubt that the missionaries caused the disappearance of a great number of native antiquities.[85] In 1525 Fray Martín de la Coruña destroyed all temples and all idols of Tzintzuntzan, the holy city of Michoacán.[86] Pedro de Gante, in his letter of June 27, 1529, stated that one of the great preoccupations of his pupils was to cast down idols and destroy temples under his direction. He wrote again, on October 31, 1532, that for the past six years he had been busy, among other things, in destroying idols. Zumárraga, in his famous letter of June 12, 1531, wrote that he had destroyed more than five hundred temples and twenty thousand idols. Similar claims are made by Martín de Valencia and other religious, in a letter addressed to Charles V, of November 17, 1532. All this testimony is corroborated and completed—to mention only a few names—by the unquestioned texts of Motolinía, Sahagún, Durán, Mendieta, Dávila Padilla, and Burgoa,[87] who also wrote of the destruction of manuscripts. It is incontestable, therefore, that the religious destroyed a

large number of monuments and sculptures. In any case, however, the temples were doomed to certain destruction, for they also served as fortresses, and it would not have been wise to spare them in a country held by a handful of men. The Aztecs themselves, when they subjugated a tribe, were in the habit of burning their principal temples. These buildings, moreover, because of their plans, could not have been used for any other purpose, and uselessly occupied immense spaces, such as the great *teocalli* of Mexico, which had to be demolished to make way for the new city. Their destruction, besides, was neither as rapid nor as thoughtless as has been said. According to Motolinía, it began on January 1, 1525, and on November 30, 1537, the Mexican episcopate wrote to Charles V that the temples were not all destroyed, and it asked for permission to demolish those that remained, this for the purpose of extirpating idolatry once and for all. The Emperor replied that they should be demolished, but quietly, and that the stones should be used for building churches.[88]

Zumárraga has been accused of destroying in a gigantic bonfire the archives of Texcoco; but the archives of Texcoco had been destroyed in 1520, when the Tlaxcalans entered Texcoco with Cortés and burned the principal palaces.[89] For the rest, although the missionaries were implacable against temples and idols, they did not bother with manuscripts, at least in the beginning. Many of them had disappeared even before the arrival of the Spaniards; others were hidden or buried by their owners, who did not want to see them fall into the hands of the Europeans; that is to say, they were practically lost. Finally, at the time of the siege of Mexico, Cortés had to destroy almost the whole city, and many manuscripts disappeared at that time. This is not to say that the missionaries did not destroy manuscripts, but they did not do so either in quantity or systematically. Luckily, besides, they realized the interest that these documents might have. It has even happened that manuscripts, whose destruction had been charged to them, have later been recovered. Also, the *tonalamatl,* the 260-day calendar, which Sahagún wished to destroy, was preserved in the convent of San Francisco [of Mexico City].[90] All this should be borne in mind if one wishes to be just to the missionaries and to judge their intentions and acts sanely.

2 *Ethnographic and Linguistic Training of the Missionaries*

WHATEVER the newly arrived missionaries thought of native civilization, they were faced with the first necessity of a fruitful apostolate, that is, at least a summary knowledge of that civilization and of the languages that were the expression of it. Father Acosta wrote: "It is not only useful, but entirely necessary for Christians and teachers of the Law of Christ to know the errors and superstitions of the older people, in order to learn whether the Indians still practice them today, openly or secretly."[1] This necessity is behind the considerable and almost unique work of one of the great Franciscans of Mexico, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.

Bernardino de Ribeira,[2] whose name suggests a Galician or Portuguese origin, was born in the rugged Tierra de Campos (León) in the village of Sahagún (once celebrated for its Benedictine abbey, but now dismal and almost abandoned) in the last years of the fifteenth century or the first of the sixteenth. He began his studies at the University of Salamanca and took the Franciscan habit in the convent of that city. Following the common usage of his Order at that time, he adopted the name of his birthplace, of which he, with San Juan [de Sahagún], is one of the true glories. He went to Mexico in 1529 with nineteen other Franciscans,