

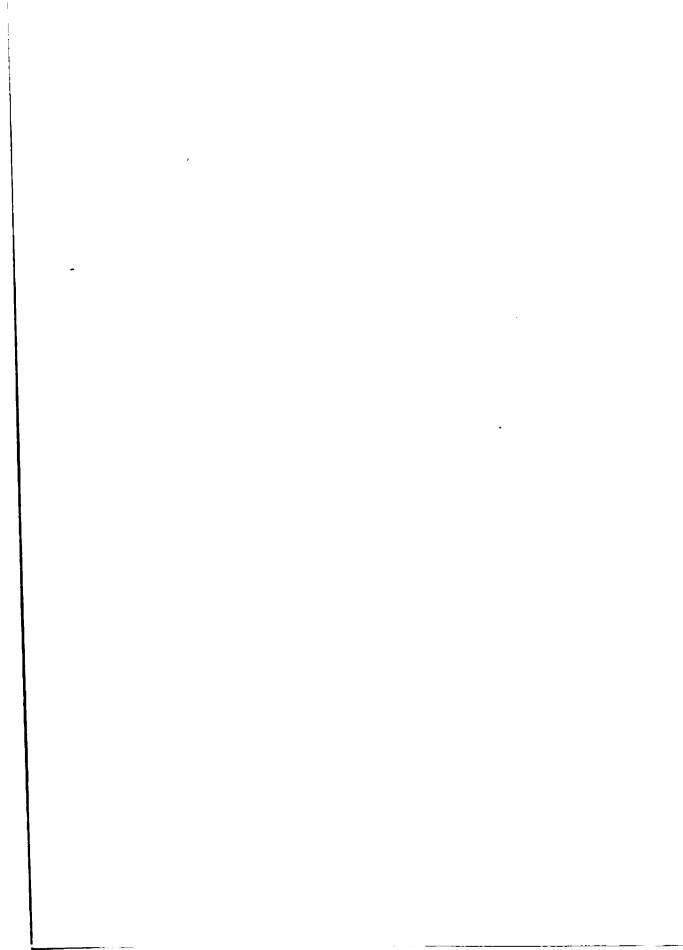
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WITCHCRAFT IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA

By

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INTRODUCTION

No detail of wizardry seems to have been unknown to these ancient magicians. There is the black witch ointment of noxious ingredients, the naked ride on brooms There is no gaiety in this side of the business; it ends in the suicide's rope and the war symbols. It proves that Evil as well as Good used much the same manifestations in ancient America as in Europe. It is in fact a subject which is better left alone by the wise student.¹

Notwithstanding the warning from Mr. Burland, this paper will trace the patterns and development of witchcraft in colonial Latin America. "Witchcraft" is used in a very limited sense, meaning only the idea of some supernatural power used exclusively for inflicting misfortune upon others of which man can become possessed.²

It is hoped that by comparing the colonial religious experience

¹Cottie Arthur Burland, Magic Books From Mexico (Harmondsworth England: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 9.

²Evans-Pritchard, in an Africa journal article (October, 1935), distinguishes between African bad magic (or sorcery) and witchcraft. He defines witchcraft as a 'psychic act', or an impossible and imaginary offence; sorcery, on the other hand, is a conscious and deliberate attempt to make magical potions with the intent of harming others. Several authors have suggested that this distinction should be carried through in investigations of witchcraft in other areas of the world. Indeed, some authors have suggested that the Spanish colonial influence confused and destroyed the belief in the separation of sorcerer and witch held by Africans and pre-Cortesian Indians. The evidence for this, however, is scanty.

of Indians and Negroes in Latin America new insights may be gained as to the source, adoption, and syncretism of witchcraft beliefs and practices. The primary focus of this study will be centered upon Mexico and Central America, but other areas and peoples are mentioned when pertinent. A general three-century span (1500-1800) will be used in order to facilitate comprehension of influences which New World witchcraft received, and trends which it later followed.

Illustrations of the confusion and amalgamation of witchcraft traditions in colonial Latin America are given by an emphasis upon, what has been assumed to be, three differing cultural beliefs. These are: Indian tonalism and nagualism; the European devil's pact; and the African, spiritual possession. All three beliefs became major elements in colonial wizardry.

A very strong and permeating tradition among Indians in the New World was (and is) a belief in the mystical relationship of a person with an animal. Tonalism means that an animal and a human exist separately, but are united by a common destiny. Every Indian had a tona, or an animal associated with his human self. If the animal were hurt, killed or of good health, then the Indian would be correspondingly hurt, killed or of good health; and vice versa. Nagualism is a different human-animal relationship. For it is the belief that an individual is able to transform or metamorphose himself into an animal. Not all Indians had a nagual. Generally, only a priest could lose his human form and acquire that of an animal. The metamorphosis was a manner by which the priest could request

some benevolent action from a god.³

The devil's pact is strictly of European origin. It was a means by which an individual could voluntarily make an agreement or contract with the devil in order to obtain supernatural powers.⁴

Spiritual possession is a part of African religious ceremonies. A priest, in asking for a favor from a god or in order to obtain powers of divination, would interpret the words and actions of an "initiate" who had fallen into a trance and state of "possession". The possession would be induced with the help of singing, dancing, and particular beatings of sacred drums.⁵

These three beliefs are thought of as more or less unique to the cultures mentioned. Yet, not only were all three to become confused in the New World and compounded with each other, but all were to obtain associations with witchcraft belief, thus creating a pattern of wizardry peculiar to Latin America. A suggested intermingling of these beliefs can be witnessed in the following accusations of witchcraft brought before the Inquisition in New Spain.

³ Gonzale Aguirre Beltrán, Medicina y magia: el proceso de aculturación en la estructura colonial (Mexico: Institute Nacional Indigenista, 1963), p. 99.

⁴ William Madsen, "Christo-Paganism: A Study of Mexican Religious Syncretism," Tulane Middle American Research Institute (New Orleans: Tulane University, Publication No. 19, 1960), p. 163.

⁵ G. Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., pp. 61-65. See also, Janheins Jahn, Muntu: The New African Culture, trans. Marjorie Grene (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 36-51.

An Indian, Martín Ucelo, was brought before the bishop and inquisitor Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga in 1536 because:

He has dealt much in wizardry and prophecy, and has turned himself into a tiger, lion, and dog and has shown and is showing to the natives of New Spain things against our faith and has said that he is immortal, and that he has spoken many times at night with the devil, and has done and said many other things against our Catholic faith, with great harm and impediment to the conversion of the natives.⁶

Nearly a century later a Negro slave was brought before the Inquisition for an incident in Pámuce province. Huastecan Indians had gathered for a ceremonial dance, complete with the traditional flowers, music and instruments used in honoring the god Paya. Several Negroes, mulattoes and mestizos were present and participating in the Indian dance. Among them was a Negro called Lucas Olola who:

Examining himself in the clothes of said Indians, used for said dance, feigned a swoon, and as such let himself fall, and was senseless for a long time, frothing at the mouth, and later got up with noticeable madness and said that his spirit had already come, . . . Selling said Indians into belief in his divinity, he cured them of their illnesses through sucking and burning okote pine, doing such that they do when they believe themselves to have, or truly have in their cures, a pact with the devil, and he made them believe that he saw and knew the person who was inflicting evil, causing them such illness, because this is certain and unfortunate, and one is able to affirm without doubt, that no Huastecan Indian, adult or child, dies without his death attributed to some Indian witch; and this said Negro said that he knew and saw who it was; . . . and all including the Negro threw out the

⁶ Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, tomo III, Procesos de indios idolatros y hechiceros (Mexico: 1912) as quoted by Julio Jimenez Rueda, Herejías y supersticiones en la Nueva España (Mexico: Imprenta universitaria, 1946), p. 200.

miserable Indians [the witches causing illness]; and their women, fearful they would be killed, were taken and enjoyed, and the sick were made to die by hatred of others, . . .⁷

The first case of the Indian, Martín Ucelo, indicates an amalgam of Indian nagualism with the European belief in direct communication with the devil. In the second, Lucas Olola, an African, became possessed by a spirit during an Indian religious ceremony. He believed that this made him divine and gave him the power of detecting witches who were causing harm and illness. The Indians, although there is no indication that an Indian curer or "witch-doctor" ever went into a state of possession⁸, believed themselves cured by machinations of the Negro slave.

Whether all purported practices of witchcraft which were described by the Inquisition actually did occur, does not concern us greatly. There exists some evidence to substantiate the reality of particular practices. But, the fact that there were people who confessed to acts of wizardry without force or torture, or leading questions by inquisitors, is that which is important. For this seems to suggest that the colonial Latin Americans believed in witchcraft, and that often their belief was strong enough to create and sustain an individual's participation (real or imaginary) in wizardry.

⁷Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación as quoted by G. Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

⁸G. Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 67.

To determine the sources and forces operative in making the Latin American climate conducive to such ideas of witchcraft, several belief systems will have to be examined and understood. These include the background of witchcraft and religion in 15th and 16th century Spain, pre-Cortesian America, and Africa before the slave trade.⁹ Historical factors concerning the methods of attempted conquest and conversion by the Spaniard must also be examined. And, finally, we must attempt to identify and follow particular patterns of witchcraft belief during the colonial period, and determine why they existed.

As it is not within the scope of this paper to examine all particular or individual features of the elements listed above, a necessarily brief over-view (obtained from contemporary sources when possible) must suffice. And major concern will be placed upon the expression of witchcraft--in particular, the confusion and amalgamation of beliefs such as tonalism and nagualism, the devil's pact, and spiritual possession--and its function among colonial Latin American peoples.

⁹Literature by contemporaries concerning 15th century Africa is extremely limited. Out of necessity this paper will have to assume certain pre-slave trade belief systems according to early descriptions of Negroes in the New World by Spanish writers (taking pains to watch for probable cultural bias), and by the ethnographic investigations of current anthropologists. Many authors have struggled against this lack of historical data, yet eminent scholars of the Negro in the New World (including Aguirre Beltrán, Arthur Ramos and Nina Rodríguez) continue to investigate and formulate hypotheses of an historical nature to be used in their acculturation studies. Given little alternative, and the fact that there is no proof to the contrary, we shall in this study utilize certain present assumptions of the Negro past, elaborated by various scholars.

SPANISH RELIGION AND WITCHCRAFT

On his second day in Tenochtitlan, Cortés visited the emperor Montezuma and, after formal greetings, tactlessly addressed his host on the evil of Aztec religion. Your gods are but devils and evil spirits, he said, and obviously powerless. I am grieved that so many souls shall be lost and sent to hell by your false idols.

We are Christians, believing in the one true God and Jesus Christ who suffered for our salvation. We pray to the cross as an emblem of that cross on which our Lord and Savior was crucified. By his death the whole human race was saved. He rose on the third day and was received in heaven. By him heaven, earth, sea, and every living creature was formed, and nothing existed but by his divine will.¹

And Spanish missionaries came to the New World, preaching the Christian belief in a single, omnipotent and invisible God. Their God tolerated no other gods and did not depend upon mortals for his existence. This God was perfect and a God of love, but was wrathful towards those who disobeyed his commandments or worshipped another.

The friars taught the children that the image of the woman was a figure of the Mother of God called Mary . . . and how He wished His mother to be honored and revered and that we should accept her as our advocate and mediator in order to reach God.²

¹Cortés to Montezuma as quoted from Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Verdadera Historia de la Conquista de México, 1568, trans. John Ingram Lockhart, The Memoirs of the Conquistador, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (2 vols.; London, 1844), I, 225.

²Madsen, op. cit., p. 127, quoting Motolonia.

Mary was not the only mediator, however. The Spaniards also placed images of saints throughout the churches in Latin America and preached about the miracles they performed. These saints were perfect, benevolent and loved beings, and interceded with God to obtain favors for men.

But if Spanish soldiers and friars brought Catholic dogma and doctrine to the New World, they as well transported their belief in witches--a familiar phenomenon to all Europeans. The Christian devil, the embodiment of all evil, had reached astonishing proportions by the time of the conquest. Throughout Europe a torrent of witchcraft practices was purportedly unleashed in the devil's name, and due to his power and influence.

Belief in, and legislation against, witchcraft (leaving out the Druidic religion or other ancient cults) appeared in Europe from at least the fourth century on. A decree attributed to an obscure Council of Ancyra in the year 314 says:

Some wicked women, reverting to Satan, and seduced by the illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and profess that they ride at night with Diana on certain beasts, with an innumerable company of women, passing over immense distances, obeying her commands . . .³

This illustrates the Church's early scepticism regarding the reality of witchcraft. Later beliefs tended to outweigh such caution, and instead of referring to wizardry as the product of mere "illusions", nearly everyone began to believe in the existence of witches. They

³ Julio Caro Baroja, Las Brujas y su Mundo (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1961), p. 98.

flew at night to their Sabbaths which were often located at cross-roads; they sometimes covered their bodies with ointments to help the flying procedure, or often used beasts for transportation; and witches made pacts with the devil, indulged in feasts, orgies and occasionally cannibalism. An open declaration of war against witches was called by the Church in 1484. At this date, "Pope Innocent VIII, 'a man of scandalous life', as a Catholic historian calls him, promulgated his bull Summis desiderantes . . ."⁴

In 15th and 16th century Spain, one supposes that belief in witchcraft was quite wide-spread due to the constancy of this theme (with both historical and imaginary roots) in novels and dramas of the period. A well-known figure of necromancy at the beginning of the XVI century was Doctor Eugenio Torralba who, immortalized by the words of Don Quijote, was lifted into the air by the devil, flew in twelve hours to Rome, came so close to the moon that he could have taken hold of it with his hand, and dared not look down to earth for fear of dizziness. Although brought before the Inquisition in 1528 after years of purported fantastic flights and mystical experiences, Torralba was only incarcerated for a few years.⁵ Román Ramírez, who became

⁴Geoffrey Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 23.

⁵Torralba is also an important personage in Carto Famoso, a poem by Luis Zapata, written in 1566.

References and further information for the literary works and authors mentioned can be found in Menéndez y Pelayo.. ..pp. 328-361; in Jimenez Rueda, op. cit., pp. ; Julio Caro Baroja, Las Brujas Y Su Mundo (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1961) pp. 217-220.

the hero of a comedy by Juan Ruíz de Alarcón, supposedly made a pact with the devil and exercised his power in doing evil as well as curing until caught and punished by the Inquisition of Toledo in 1600. El Crotalón, Cristóbal de Villalón's masterpiece, serves as a commentary of the witches of Navarra, even though classical reminiscences are mixed with the historical occurrences. And, Lope de Rueda wrote a Spanish drama, Armelina, in which the hero is a Moorish wizard.

Theological books and treatises on this subject were also plentiful at the time of the New World discovery. Francisco de Vitoria, called the Secrates of Spanish theology, discredited most necromancy, but admitted a magic, preter-natural. This magic proceeded not from natural causes or means, but from an immaterial power of the devil, and was founded on the devil's pact. Fr. Martín de Castañega wrote at length upon the witches of Navarra. And Benito Perer and Martín Río wrote on wizardry and its theological interpretation and meaning. But perhaps the most important work concerning Spanish witchcraft is the lavishly recorded opinions of Pedro Ciruelo, a Spanish clergyman of the 16th century. Menéndez y Pelayo says of him:

Instead of remonstrating with affected erudition the origins of superstitions arts or of losing himself in the intricacies and subtleties of scholastic questions, he does not remove for a moment his eyes from the practical question, and faithfully describes the state of witchcraft and of the occult sciences in his country at his time. . . .⁶

Ciruelo describes the Spanish belief in the devil's pact and the initiation processes into demonic cults:

⁶ Menéndez y Pelayo, Historia de los heterodoxos españoles (Argentina: Espansa-Calpe, 1951), p. 329.

For the invoking of the devil they use certain words and ceremonies, sacrifice bread and foods, incense with diverse herbs and perfume. Some call the devil tracing a circle on the ground; others in a flask full of water, or in a mirror, or in precious stones, or in the glimpses from fingernails. At times the devil appears in the figure of man, and the necromante sees him and speaks with him. . . . On other occasions he is present in the form of a dog, a cat, a wolf, lion, rooster; and for certain magic he signals inside the body of some man or animal, and lives and speaks in him, or moves the tongues of cadavers, or appears in dreams . . .

Many times the witches fall into stupors, from which they tell many secrets of science and art, some are taken as prophets.

In order to locate riches or to be fortunate in love they use written slips of paper . . . suspending them in their orchards, vineyards or forests . . .

Witches are mounted on he-goats, on brooms, or on a reed.⁷

Yet, the worst, says Ciruelo, are the witches who inflict infirmity upon others. It is certain, for Ciruelo, that some individuals have the "sad privilege of infecting others with their look", a phenomenon called mal de ojo.⁸

Not only was witchcraft the product of "delusions fostered by the Church", but it has been suggested that the Bible itself is full of witchcraft beliefs. 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus xxii, 18) was an oft-quoted verse used in justification of witches in Europe.⁹ Others telling of the condemnation of witchcraft

⁷Ibid., pp. 330-331, 333, 339.

⁸Ibid., p. 334. St. Thomas Aquinas had a firmly rooted conviction that the human eye is endowed, at times, with such power that by the strong imagination of the soul it can corrupt and poison the atmosphere, and weak bodies which fall within its range can remain dangerously affected.

⁹Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, p. 117.

include:

Dent. xviii. 1012. 'A witch . . . a consulter with familiar spirits, a wizard, are . . . an abomination unto the Lord . . .'

Lev. xx. 27. 'A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death.¹⁰

Frederick Kaigh writes a bit further, and asks how one who believes in the Bible could not help but believe in witchcraft.

Denial of witchcraft also entails a denial of religion, especially the Jewish and Christian faiths, which positively teem with warnings and instances. Witches, manifestations of the dead, transvection of corporal bodies, levitation, demonic possession, migration of familiars, exorcism, re-animation ('can these dead bones live'), lying and misleading by evil spirits, the battle of the shades, sorcery, blighting of crops, and all the familiar and unfamiliar processes of witchcraft, are scattered through almost every book of the Bible and the Talmud.

There is no doubt that Moses, who was no mythological being, . . . was steeped in witchcraft, and knew intimately all the tricks and sorceries of the wizards of his day and generation. . . . The whole story of the tricks he performed before Pharaoh, is--whatever may be said--a story of witchcraft

Moreover, the religious aspect makes or breaks on one thing. Did the devil actually take Jesus up the mountain and offer worldly power if He would become a witch ('fall down and worship me' being the sole addit to the witch fraternity), or is the whole thing a lie? . . .

If you decide that this passage is true, then, once and for all, compacts with the devil are true, the devil can manifest himself, and a fortiori the actuality of witchcraft is true.¹¹

Some evidence suggests that such things as witch-cults did

¹⁰ Greta Bloomhill, Witchcraft in Africa (Capetown: Howard Timmins, 1962), p. 77.

¹¹ Frederick Kaigh, Witchcraft and Magic of Africa (London: Richard Lesley and Co. Ltd., 1947), pp. 150-151.

physically appear in various places in Spain and Europe. The Inquisition of Calahorra punished twenty-nine women for crimes of witchcraft in 1507. Twenty years later in Navarre, fifty persons confessed to have dealt with the devil, represented to them as a strong youth, and also as a black he-goat. And they celebrated their pacts with him by dancing around his horns. The witches were whipped and jailed.¹²

Like occurrences, and probably more of them, were found elsewhere in Europe at this time. "It seems likely that Ewen's conclusion is correct. 'Delusions fostered by the Church, became the beliefs of the people. If the Devil existed, it was a small step to the supposition that personal acquaintance was possible and that agreements and liaisons could be made.'¹³ Aldous Huxley, in the study of the "black mass" in Europe states that the Church taught that witchcraft was a terrible and ubiquitous reality. Witchcraft died out by the beginning of the 18th century because, among other reasons, "almost nobody now bothered to repress it"

During 15th and 16th century Europe, the devil was often depicted as a "strong youth" or a virile and handsome male. From many accounts of witches' Sabbaths, and the role played therein by the devil, it appears a wide-spread belief that common sexual orgies took place at these meetings. Incubus and Succubus, European mythological figures who preyed upon sleeping women and men respectively, were the chief

¹²Ibid., pp. 345-346. See also Julio Caro Baroja, op. cit., pp. 213-216.

¹³Parrinder, op. cit., pp. 111.

¹⁴Aldous Huxley, The Devils of Loudun (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 128.

figures in these accounts. "Almost all the Theologians and learned philosophers are agreed, and it has been the experience of all times and all nations, that witches practice coition with demons, the men with Succubus devils and the women with Incubus devils."¹⁵

Most of the witches, however, were believed to have been women. Perhaps this was due to the position of women in European society. Some "confessed" witches might have sought some escape from male domination by their witch associations and nocturnal meanderings. Child mortality was high at this time. Mothers might have been accused, and have actually believed, that they were responsible for their children's deaths. Old women, who were often midwives, could easily fall under suspicion. Women who had outlived their husbands, were alone and childless--and therefore very possibly jealous of others more fortunate--received the brunt of hostilities and fears quite often.

Fr. James Sprenger, of the Order of Preachers, Inquisitors, co-authored with another German clergyman the text Malleus Maleficarum in 1484. This book, "one of the wickedest and most obscene books ever written" says Parrinder, claims to have solely eye-witness accounts of witchcraft, and explains why witches were generally female:

They are more credulous . . . more impressionable . . .
they have slippery tongues . . . more carnal than man
. . . they are prone to abjure their faith. . . . There
was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since
she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the

¹⁵Guazzo as quoted by Parrinder, op. cit., p. 67.

breast, which is bent contrary to man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.¹⁶

Upon initiation into the witches' cult, a member was supposed to have been given a mark by the devil. "All witches have a mark, some on the shoulder, some on the eyelid, some on the tongue or the lip, and others on the shameful parts; in short it is said that there is no witch who is not marked in some part of her body."¹⁷ Initiation into the cult also involved taking vows, renouncing Christianity and all of its saints and sacraments.¹⁸

Witches who were able to transform themselves into werewolves was an ancient European belief. Even as late as 1521, two men were tried in France, one of whom was said to have taught the other how to become a werewolf by rubbing his body with ointment. Both were burnt alive at Besançon.¹⁹

Whether nocturnal flights, Sabbaths, orgies and other witchcraft practices actually took place was a puzzling question for the European Church.

There appear to be authenticated instances of witches who fully believed themselves to have visited the sabbat, although there was ample evidence that they had not left their beds. One was so far gone in a trance . . . that she remained in it even when a lighted candle was applied to her feet by the officials who were watching her. When she came round, she insisted that she had been to the sabbat, and described what had taken place there.²⁰

¹⁶Sprenger as quoted by Parrinder, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁷Henry Boguet as quoted in Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, p. 69.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 20

²⁰Pennethorne Hughes, Witchcraft, p. 119.

This raised a theological problem for the Inquisitors. Could there be a wandering soul? Could the soul attend the witches' Sabbaths though the body be physically absent? At various times and places in Europe the answer varied from a forceful and affirmative "yes" to one of great hesitancy.

Ironically, Spain, which was the home of the Inquisition, appeared to take the mildest stand. A scepticism toward witchcraft still maintained a firm hold over several Spanish theologians. In 1610, the inquisitor Salazar Frias examined some 1,700 cases of alleged witchcraft practice. He submitted masses of evidence to the Suprema in 1613 in which he attempted to prove that witches were the subjects of delusions and that many confessions were extracted under torture. Though not all agreed with him, the Suprema followed his advice, and great care was taken in the examination of the accused.²¹ Spain, then, never saw hysterical witch-crises and mass burnings, as did other European countries.

But if Inquisitors were tolerant and generally enlightened, the majority of people in Spain still adhered strongly to a belief in witches. This appears evident in the literature of the times, and by the number of alleged cases investigated by Salazar Frias.

²¹Julio Caro Baroja, op. cit., pp. 263-268.

INDIAN RELIGION AND WITCHCRAFT

Could I have conjectured, Malinche, that you would use such reviling language as you have just done, I would certainly not have shown you my gods. In our eyes they are good divinities; they preserve our lives; give us nourishment, water and good harvests, healthy and growing weather, and victory whenever we pray for it. Therefore, we offer up prayers to them and make them sacrifices. I earnestly beg of you not to say another word to insult this profound veneration in which we hold these gods.¹

Latin American indigenous religions revolved around a calendar system in which a god or goddess presided over days of the week, weeks, and months. Most historians agree that it is unlikely that Indians believed in monotheism before the coming of the Spaniard. Although most Indians held a belief in a divine creator, he was by no means omnipotent, as the Christian God was believed to be.² "If . . . some of the greater minds had arrived at the thought of a supreme God, the masses were immersed in a religious system which had numerous gods, some greater, some lesser, whom they worshipped."³ The creator, his children, and other sundry gods constituted a divine pantheon which showed characteristics of malevolence, as well as benevolence, and depended upon men for survival. Men and gods lived

¹Montezuma to Cortés as quoted from Bernal Díaz del Castillo, op. cit., vol. I, p. 240.

²William Madsen, op. cit., p. 126.

³Charles S. Braden, Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 27.

in a relationship of mutual dependency. Men depended upon the gods for productive weather, food, health, and victory in battle—as is indicated by the quote from Montezuma previously quoted. The gods, in turn, depended upon men for sacrifices--agricultural or human--in order to sustain them.

The Indian pantheon of gods can, in some instances, be compared to the Catholic saints. Both were honored by worship and devotion, they were given offerings and processions, and served as village patrons. However, ...

The Catholic love of God and the saints had no parallel in the Aztec relationship between men and gods. Aztecs feared their gods but did not love them. Neither did they believe that their gods loved men in the fashion that the Christian God and saints were said to love men . . . Catholicism stressed the individual's need to save his own soul by honoring God and the saints, in contrast to Aztec emphasis on the community's need to obtain prosperity and victory by honoring pagan gods.⁴

Various parallels can be drawn between Catholic sacraments and Indian practices of baptism, confession, penance and communion. The Indian midwife generally baptised the new-born child; invoked a god with prayer saying: ". . . purify him from the filth he has taken from his parents, and let the water carry away the stains and dirt, and repair them, and clean away all impurity that is in him"; and gave the child the name of one of his ancestors.⁵ It was hoped that confession would cure illness sent by the gods, and free a man

⁴ Madsen, op. cit., p. 128.

⁵ Laurette Séjourné, Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico, trans. by Irene Nicholson (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 9.

from punishment for a crime. If the offense was grave, often the priest demanded a penance--a sacrifice, fasting, or a pricking of the body by sharp thorns or reeds. And communion consisted of eating dough images of gods, or the flesh of sacrificial victims. Other similarities between Catholic and indigenous beliefs included holy days and ceremonies, the symbol of the cross, revelation and creation stories, and sacrifice and crucifixion. Indeed, the comparisons are many, and it is not surprising that a Spanish clergyman would find such similarities to "heathen" beliefs revolting:

When the Indians read of the sacrifices under the old law of Abraham, and that God permitted such, they will take it as a defense of like sacrifices today. Reading of the wives of David and other practices . . . they will turn and apply the scripture to their own evil purpose . . . Only eight days ago, a priest who had recently visited the college told me that while there he was surrounded by some two hundred students who in talking with him asked such questions regarding the scriptures and the faith that he was amazed and stopped his ears. The school he said was a veritable hell, and the pupils disciples of Satan.⁶

A heritage of witchcraft beliefs was predominant among pre-Cortesian Indians. This is readily testified to by sequences in the surviving religious manuscripts of the Aztecs and by Sahagún's remarkable investigations.⁷

⁶Gerónimo de López, writing to the king October 20, 1541. As Quoted by Cuevas in Braden, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁷See especially Codex Borgia, Cospiano and Codex Laud, as described by Cottie Arthur Burland, Magic Books From Mexico (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1963); by Lewis Spence, The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico, Or the Arcane Secrets and Occult Lore of the Ancient Mexicans and Maya (Philadelphia: David McKay Co., [1926]); or Alfonso Caso, El Pueblo del Sol (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1962).

Unfortunately, Bishop Zumarraga was so horrified at the contents of Aztec religious manuscripts that he had most of them burned.

Bernardino de Sahagún utilized his own investigations and those of his Indian informants, carefully exacting material with most rigorous scientific approach, in order to compile his monumental Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España, 1566.

Texcatlipoca was the Aztec god of night and witches. The fact that he produced anguish, discord and evil as well as riches and honor is perhaps telling of Aztec society.⁸ For Aguirre Beltrán writes that the Aztec sorcerers' and doctors' practices differed not at all. It was only the goal to which the medicine or treatment was directed which varied. The intention was what, to Aztecs, made the difference between good medicine and bad medicine--or doctor or necromancer. Usually, however, illness or bad-luck was considered to be a punishment from the gods, or by lesser divinities or spirits.⁹ This is the case of the Ciuateteō (Haunting Mothers). These were dead women or "witches" who mourned for their children and were therefore vindictively disposed toward the offspring of others. According to Alfonso Caso, these dead mothers haunted the earth, especially cross-roads, at night and inflicted illness upon children.¹⁰

Misfortune and illness was attributed to another cause, however, by the majority of the New World Indians.

Punishment from the gods . . . also dominates among the Mayan and Zapotec peoples, only the names of the gods vary, but their ire and vengeance are the same. Nevertheless, among other ethnic groups whose culture has not reached the grade of complexity which characterizes the former ones, the causes, of illness are attributed to witchcraft.¹¹

⁸Madsen's (op. cit.) account taken from the Historia de las Mexicanos por sus Pinturas, secondary source based on a series of hieroglyphic paintings that have disappeared.

⁹Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁰Alfonso Caso, op. cit., p. 79; and Lewis Spence, op. cit., pp. 123-130.

¹¹Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 45.

To the majority of pre-Cortesian peoples in America, witchcraft was as real a phenomenon as it was to their European contemporaries. And the similarities between European and American witchcraft beliefs are rather astounding. Both cults are permeated with the witches' ability to fly at night, to harm people via magical incantations and to suck blood. Witches in America smeared themselves with an ointment resembling the "witch-butter" of European hags. Both engaged in wild dances and orgies, and haunted cross-roads. Like their European sisters, American witches were in the habit of intoxicating themselves with potent drugs in order to traverse great distances and to prophesy future events.¹² Mexican witches, so it appears from the representation of their patron diety Tlazolteotl, even carried the witch's broom of malinalli grass, and naked with peaked hat rode upon it through the air.¹³

There were, however, marked and important differences between the witchcraft cults. Spanish witches often connived with the devil in order to gain wealth and power. Indian witches were born to be poor all their lives. The mal de ojo was believed by the Spaniards to be a witch's way of inflicting harm upon another by a mere glance;

¹²The similarities of witchcraft practices were so great that some authors have gone so far as to hypothesize upon a common origin. Pennethorne Hughes' thesis is that "witchcraft was a widespread survival of palaeolithic emotive religion", Witchcraft (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 24. Lewis Spence's is more elaborate: "The witchcraft of Mexico drew its origin from two different areas: the Azilian area of Spain . . . and Shamanism of Siberia. From the former area it may have penetrated by way of one of the land bridges . . . whilst it would draw elements from the latter by way of Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands", Magic and Mysteries . . . , p. 142.

¹³Lewis Spence, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

there is no indication of such a concept among pre-Cortesian Indians.¹⁴

The Indian belief in magualism is probably due to several instances of historical syncretism between various Indian beliefs. Aguirre Beltrán believes it to have first been a concept of the Huastecans.¹⁵ They, because of their geographical setting, depended greatly upon rain for a successful harvest. One of their gods, the one holding the power and magic over rainfall, was named the Gran Nagual. When the Huastecans were overcome by the Aztecs, the latter incorporated the Gran Nagual into their pantheon of gods, and also named the priest living in the temple of this divinity nahualli or nagual. The god Gran Nagual took on many more names, and many forms under Aztec worship. One of his names became Tlacatecolotl, or the god of witches. Tlacatecolotl was known to transform himself into fierce animals in order to harm people, as were other lesser gods and mythological figures.¹⁶

The nagual came to have the attributes of natural divinity and acquired cleverness. This became incorporated into the Aztec calendar. Those who were born under the sign ce quiahuitl, rain, were to become necromantes, swindlers or witches.¹⁷ This becoming of a witch was quite different from the European belief. In Spain, one became a witch through a pact with the devil. Indians believed that those born under a certain calendar sign were destined at birth to possess the power of witchcraft.

¹⁴William Madsen, op. cit., p. 161.

¹⁵Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 100. Also see Madsen, p. 162.

Indian divinities were characterized by their power of metamorphosis, yet there appears to be no instances of human Indian witches who had this power of transfiguration.¹⁸ The mesoamerican mythology is full of episodes regarding gods transforming themselves into animals (Quetzalcoatl and the gods of Popol Vuh being the most significant), but it was not until the time of the conquest of Mexico that even nagual priests were believed to be able to metamorphose into a beast or bird.¹⁹

¹⁸ Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁹ Ibid.

AFRICAN RELIGION AND WITCHCRAFT

Writers and historians quarrel as to whether Africans conceived of a 'Supreme Being', and if so, whether they worshipped such a God. Two hundred and sixty years ago, William Bosman observed that West Africans "have a faint idea of the true God, and ascribe to him the attributes of Almighty . . . they believe he created the Universe, and therefore vastly prefer him before their idol-gods; but they do not pray to him or offer any sacrifices to him."¹

Whether Africans believed in a 'Supreme Being' or not, a variety of gods abounded in their religions. These African divinities were, as the Indian gods, personifications of natural forces. Some ancestors were, as well, worshipped or thought of as gods. The ancestral cult is an important and peculiar aspect of African religions. Belief in the continued influence of departed fathers of the family and tribe was exceedingly strong. Not all ancestors were worshipped, but they were still felt to be present; they watched over the family and were directly concerned with harvests and fertility.²

Human sacrifices were performed, but nearly always in connection with funeral and memorial ceremonies, or for harvests and fertility.

¹Quoted in Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion: Illustrated from the Beliefs and Practices of the Yoruba, Ewe, Akan, and Kindred Peoples (London: The Epworth Press, 1949), p. 19.

²Ibid., pp. 125-139.

If this were not done it was believed that the rain would not fall, nor the fields grow ripe. A strong mutual dependency between gods, ancestors and Africans was, therefore, the predominant meaning and cohesive force in African religions.³

There is eternal warfare between good and bad spirits, and the good spirits prevail only as he propitiates and pleases them. . . . Every illness or death or misfortune is therefore his own fault for neglecting the good spirits, or it is the action of an enemy or evil-minded person who is a witch . . .⁴

Investigations today concerning African religion suggest that certain forms of totemism appeared earlier in African religious history. However, unlike the Indian tonga, this totemism was generally a clan totem (like the myth of the leopard that was the emblem of the royal Fön clan), and the totem animal was said to protect members of its clan, warn them, and foretell the future.⁵

Witchcraft beliefs are thought to have been amazingly similar to both those of the Europeans and pre-Cortesian Indians. African witches held their meetings at night, and are generally believed to have flown to these locations (often cross-roads). They flew as nightjars, bats, owls, and fireflies, or sometimes flew along the fine cobwebs that are spun from bush to bush or house to house. Others

³ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴ Frederick Kaigh, Witchcraft and Magic of Africa (London: Richard Lesley and Co. Ltd., 1947), p. 35.

⁵ Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, pp. 187-194.

traveled on the backs of animals, especially owls, but also snakes, antelopes, and leopards.⁶ The Basuto believed that witches had powerful medicines to make them fly, or they had magic wands on which they rode after the manner of European witches on their broomsticks.⁷ The Yoruba believed that the wizard (Àjé) metamorphosed himself into an owl and then carried on his "mission of death".⁸

The "mission of death" was often that of vampirism. Witches were supposed to catch the life-soul, and at times act as vampires and suck the blood of their victims. Most of the victims supposed to have been killed or "eaten" by the witches were children, and people within their own clan. An African proverb is: "However sharp the mouth of a witch, she must eat on her side of the water and cannot cross it". This means she is restricted to her own blood-clan.⁹

Besides harming the life-soul by sucking blood, the witch could also:

Poison the earth beneath one's feet or to wither a child at her glance (maziso chena or white eyes), or the touch of her hand; she can induce such a deep sleep in her victim that without his knowing, she is able, like the European succuba, to have sex intercourse with him or rob him of all his possessions.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., pp. 42, 43, 135, 137, 138.

⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁸ A. B. Ellis, The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa (London: Chapman and Hall, 1d., 1894), pp. 116-117.

⁹ Rev. H. Debrunner, Witchcraft in Ghana: a study on the belief in destructive witches and its effect on the Akan tribes. (Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd., 1959), pp. 35-38. See also Barrie Reynolds, Magic, Divination and Witchcraft Among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In many parts of Africa only women were thought to be witches, and everywhere women were believed to be in the majority in witchcraft.

The fact that women are accused of witchcraft mainly or exclusively, shows a very deep-rooted sexual antagonism. This is not only true of modern Africa. The same applied to Europe in the late Middle Ages and in the 'enlightened' days of the Renaissance. In Europe, as we have seen, the great majority of the accused were women. The witch-finders were men, most of them celibates. Their morbid preoccupation with the subject of sexual orgies, of which they accused the women and themselves wrote in detail, is an interesting point in their psychology.¹¹

The witch-finders, or witch-doctors were in Africa, as in Europe, generally males. The sexual antagonism of which Mr. Parrinder speaks seems to have great relevance. Death of children could have been blamed upon wives or childless women by African men--as in Europe. Also, in African society marriage was usually exogamous--that is, the man married someone outside his own clan. Wives were strangers, then, to the household and looked upon with suspicion. Another possibility for antagonism and accusation of witchcraft was the factor of polygamy. Wives striving for their husband's favor could easily have accused each other of eating their life-souls and harming their children.¹²

African witches--unlike Indian witches designated so by birth, and unlike the European witches who made pacts with the devil--obtained their power through hereditary means or acquired it from someone who already had the power. Along the Gold Coast, witchcraft was only

¹¹Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, p. 192.

¹²Ibid., pp. 192-196.

hereditary on the mother's side. If a man wished to transmit his witchcraft to his child, he had to take a yet unborn child to a witch meeting.

He takes the child from the womb of the mother and puts it into his own belly and takes it with himself. Thus the child will later be born as a witch. The story is told of a woman who awoke at night and discovered that her fetus was away. Quickly she went to the anti-witchcraft doctor. On the next morning the man was found with the child in his belly.¹³

All Africans who arrived in the New World, however, were not solely the product of "traditional" African beliefs. The witchcraft and religious beliefs already mentioned could very well have been influenced by Mohammedan or Christian beliefs. Though relatively few Mohammedans came to Middle America, we cannot discount any Islamic influence, for there had been a long history of Muslim contact with Africans south of the Sahara. A gold trade had flourished since the days of the Roman and Byzantine Empires between the Mediterranean and Ghana. The Libyans (or Tuaregs) and Arabs, generally Muslims--although there is some evidence to suggest that the Tuaregs might once have been Christian--, developed this traffic across the desert.¹⁴ Mohammedan ascetics and rebels migrated into the Senegal coastal regions and into the western Sudan in the eleventh century.¹⁵ Ghana's foreign trade was enlarged by this time to include Senegalese salt, Sudanese cloth,

¹³Debrunner, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁴H. W. Bovell, The Golden Trade of the Moors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 50, 51, 52, 68.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 71-76.

and slaves, as well as gold.¹⁶ Mansa Musa came to the throne of Mali in 1307, and created a commercial and intellectual climate for an African empire. As a Muslim, he journeyed to Mecca by way of such a glittering caravan and entourage that he nearly ruined the Cairo gold market by putting so much gold into circulation.¹⁷ And Timbuktu, on the Niger River, developed by the 13th and 14th centuries a flourishing trade, which drew Mohammedan traders and scholars.¹⁸

Such an impact could not have helped but to spread Islamic religious beliefs and practices. The author of In the Wake of Da Gama tells of Spanish and Portuguese missionaries of the 15th and 16th centuries who had much to contend with.

Not only were most of the Moslems devout, and fiercely faithful to their creed, but there was among the natives a strong belief in witchcraft, fostered by witch-doctors from the "University" at Pemba, and the "College" in Zanzibar. . . .

Besides the learned Arab physicians, the native witch-doctors, able to heal or kill, and the charms and spells which everyone knew were infallible, there were dreadful supernatural perils. Ghosts called jinis lurked in the trees, in the sea, in the lakes, and in the bushes by the roadside.¹⁹

Islam was not the only possible influence upon African religions. As has already been mentioned, it is very likely that Tauregs, still prophesying particular Christian beliefs, penetrated into the Sudan and coastal regions. Jews, since the beginning of the Christian era, had

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 80-84.

¹⁷Daniel Chu and Elliott Skinner, A Glorious Age in Africa: The Story of Three Great African Empires (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1965), pp. 62-66.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 87-88.

¹⁹Genesta Mary Hamilton, In the Wake of Da Gama (New York: Skeffington, 1955), pp. 110-11.

spread far into the interior of Africa; and in the oases of the Sahara, Jewish communities preserved their identity for a long time.²⁰ And, in the 15th and 16th centuries, religious missionaries from Spain and Portugal were sent to Africa. A papal Letter of Indulgence was granted, covering all engaged, and commanding them "for the destruction and confusion of the Moors and the enemies of Christ, and for the exaltation of the Catholic faith."²¹

Most of these early Christian mission attempts were not sustained for long, however, and seemed to have just faded out.²² It has been suggested that Africans were not very receptive to a Christianity which was used for imperial and commercial ends.²³ There is even one story of an African chief who was stabbed by a "fiery-tempered Portuguese missionary".²⁴ This would be enough to doom any missionizing effort. Another problem presented itself also. Louis Bonilla speaks of the problems missionaries face in Africa today as being essentially those of the 16th and 17th century friars--the reluctance of the Africans to abandon their "magical conceptions"--for:

²⁰E. W. Bovell, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

²¹C. P. Groves, The Planting of Christianity in Africa (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), vol. I, p. 121.

²²Ibid., p. 130

²³J. C. deGraft-Johnson, African Glory: The Story of Vanishing Negro Civilizations (London: Watts and Co., 1954), p. 132. See also Ram Desai, Christianity in Africa as Seen by Africans (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1962), pp. 11-15.

²⁴Groves, op. cit., p. 126.

An Agustinian friar arrived on the Slave Coast in 1699, full of missionary zeal, and attempted to persuade the indigenes to change their morals and religion. He began to remonstrate before a chief warning him of hell and the devil, but to this the chief tranquilly replied that he did not consider himself better than his ancestors, and had therefore kept their same life and religion. If he was to be condemned to hell, he would at least be consoled by being burned with his ancestors.²⁵

Although the Christianization effort in Africa was of little consequence, it is feasible that some of the slaves brought to the New World had already been introduced to a few concepts involving the Christian God and, more important, the Christian devil. This would certainly be true of those first Christian Negroes who were brought to the New World from Spain.

The phenomenon which many authors have proclaimed to be of African origin, and which is a religious belief we will later discuss, is the act of spiritual possession. According to African dogma, the phenomenon has an easy explanation: the divinity descends to earth in order to communicate with the living. He, in the common expression, "mounts over one's head", and in the moment of possession the initiate to the religious ceremony eats, drinks, speaks and dances, prophesizes and denounces the sins of people, emits orders and answers questions. During this time the initiate is the only mouth-piece of the divinity, and his personality is substituted by the divine one. The priest at the ceremony has the duty of interpreting what is said by the initiate while under the trance. The drums, singing, dancing, rhythm, and

²⁵ Louis Bonilla, Historia de la Hechicería y de las Brujas (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1962), p. 235.

synchronization all play an important part.²⁶

²⁶A fine description of this can be found in Jahniens Jahn, Muntu, op. cit., and in Maya Deren, Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953).

CHRISTIANIZATION ATTEMPTS IN THE NEW WORLD

We have already seen, in European society, how attention focused upon wizardry by the Church actually furthered such beliefs and practices. We must now turn our attention to colonial Latin America in order to determine what role the Church might have played in the fostering and furthering of witchcraft beliefs in the New World. Witchcraft, however, is not just a product of theological dogmas and inquisitorial trials. It has been suggested by many authors that witchcraft beliefs are causally related to the frustrations and anxieties of particular societies.

Witchcraft beliefs enable a society to go on functioning in a given manner, fraught with conflicts and contradictions which the society is helpless to resolve; the witchcraft beliefs thus absolve the society from a task apparently too difficult for it, namely, some readjustment.¹

So, as we are examining the role of the Church in Latin America, let us also investigate the position of the Indian and Negro within the framework of colonial society.

Witchcraft was often a subject for Spanish writers early in the colonial period, and what was written is a tell-tale indication of the colonizers' frame of mind. The curate of Tequixquiac explained that

¹E. F. Nadel, "Witchcraft in Four African Societies: An Essay in Comparison," American Anthropologist, LIV (January-March, 1952), p. 29.

he had not dared to speak out against native witchcraft and sorcery because his survival depended upon his acceptance by the Indians²; Thomas Gage writes of the witch Marta de Carillo and of the many who "were much given to witchcraft, and by the power of the Devil did act strange things"³; Serna accused Indian witches, curers, and diviners of being the chief propagators of paganism in the 17th century⁴; and Ruiz de Alarcón and a host of others considered idolatry, not only as heresy but, as direct communication with the devil⁵.

In these documents of the early conquistadors and catechists, the early contact between the European devil and the indigenous religions becomes explicit. Not comprehending the new culture, the Spaniards identified the gods of the aboriginal religions with the Christian devil. All worship which was non-Christian was evil, an indication of the earthly workings of the devil. These pagans were "children of the darkness", and under the rule of Satan's empire.

²Charles Gibson, The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 116.

³Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World, ed. by J. Eric S. Thompson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 269-270.

⁴Jacinto de las Serna, "Manual de Ministros de Indios para el conocimiento de sus Idolatrias, y Extirpacion de ellas", Tratado de los idolatrias, supersticiones, dioses, ritos, hechicerias y otras costumbres gentiles de las razas aborigenes de Mexico, ed. by Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (2d ed.; México: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1892), p. 224.

⁵Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, "Tratado de las supersticiones de los naturales de Nueve España", Tratado de los idolatrias . . .; pp. 27-28.

"This land was a copy of hell, its inhabitants shouting at night, some calling upon the devil, some drunk . . ."⁶ A witch to the Spaniards, therefore, could be any Indian not baptized into the faith. Such an Indian would therefore be available for the imprint of Satan's thumb, and a pact made with him in the dead of night.

This attitude was completely in accordance with contemporary actions of the Spanish Church. The conquest of America occurred at the height of zealous Christian wars, and at the time of a changing Spanish attitude toward the Moors and Jews still residing in the Spanish peninsula. After much fighting and making-up, the centuries' long Reconquista took a final turn. Ferdinand and Isabella announced that expulsion was the answer to all those refusing to embrace the Christian faith in Spain. The formula was simple: convert or get out.

In the New World, Christendom was to be protected, exalted, and the faith around which everyone must gather. Moors and Jews were kept out. Only those Spaniards of "limpieza de sangre" were allowed to emigrate to America. Among the Indians, obscene idolatries and paganism had to be stamped out and replaced by the sign of the cross. This was not simply the preoccupation of the crown, but was also to be that of the conquistadors. The Requirimiento, a theological treatise explaining Catholicism and Alexander VI's donation, was read to the Indians by the conquistadors. This treatise ends with a war whoop:

⁶ Toribio de Benevente (Motolinia), History of the Indians of New Spain, Elizabeth Andros Foster, trans. and ed., (The Cortés Society, Documents and Narratives Concerning the Discovery and Conquest of Latin America; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950) p. 45.

But, if you do not do this and put impediments in the way, I swear to you that by God's help, I will come among you powerfully and make war upon you everywhere and in everyway that I can, and I will subject you to the yoke of obedience to the Church and their majesties.⁷

Missionary writings were full of the zeal for mission. God's favoritism seemed obviously directed toward the Spaniard, and toward his work in converting Satan's children. Thus we find in Mendieta's work:

It is not without mystery that in the same year Luther was born in Eisleben, a village in Saxony, Hernando Cortés was born in Medellín, a town in Spain; the former to upset the world and bring beneath the banner of Satan many of the faithful . . . ; and the latter to bring into the fold of the Church an infinite multitude of people who for years without end had been under the power of Satan, immersed in vice, and blinded with idolatry.⁸

Although there may have been controversy over the method of conversion, personified best perhaps by Sepúlveda and Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, there was little doubt as to the necessity of Indian conversion to the true faith. At the outset, some Spaniards (including the churchman, J. de Quevedo, Bishop of Darien) believed the Indians incapable of receiving Christianity. However, Alexander VI, the Pope who spanned the first years of discoveries, declared the Indians capable of embracing the Catholic faith. And, Pope Paul III decreed in 1537 that the Indians were descended from Adam and Eve; they were, therefore, human and their souls were entitled to the protection of the Church.⁹

⁷As quoted by Charles S. Braden, op. cit., p. 127.

⁸Gerónimo de Mendieta, Historia eclesiástica indiana (Mexico: Editorial Salvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1945), II, 12.

⁹Latourette, op. cit., p. 90.

Christianization of the indigenous people was not just a bestowed blessing; it became a must under decrees by the Spanish monarchs. In the attempts for Indian conversion, soldiers and missionaries demolished temples, smashed idols, displaced priests, and closed religious schools; it became the duty of the encomendero to provide for the indoctrination of his Indians; and, in short, practices varying from gentleness, advocated by de Las Casas, to force and cruelty were used to expound the Christian faith.

Negroes early entered into the colonial Latin American scene. In 1501 Nicholas Ovando, the Governor of Española, was advised to import Negroes born in Christian lands, and the first boatload arrived in 1511.¹⁰

These first Negroes came from Spain. Evidently, more solicitous for the salvation of the heathens than for the cry of economic necessity set up by the colonials, the Spanish sovereign decreed in 1501 that only Christian Negroes, born in Spain, could land in the Indies.¹¹ Negroes had resided in the Iberian peninsula for some time. As the result of a fray upon the coasts of Africa by Portuguese sailors, some Berbers were presented to Dom Henry the Navigator as spoils of war. For ransom, these captives offered the service of finding more serviceable slaves, and a bargain was struck.¹² In 1443 ten Negroes were delivered to replace the ransomed Moors, and by the end of the fifteenth century

¹⁰Tammenbaum, op. cit., p. 14.

¹¹Edmund B. D'Anvergne, Human Livestock (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1933), p. 26.

¹²Ibid., p. 18.

¹³Ibid.

there were large numbers of Negro slaves in both Portugal and Spain. In 1552 Negroes outnumbered whites in Lisbon, and Algarves was almost entirely populated by Negroes.¹⁴ Seville became a noted center for slave trade, and, according to Arthur Ramos, numerous Negro customs and institutions were to be found in Seville long before the slave trade in America developed.¹⁵

Jannes de Azurara described and defended, in his Chronicle of Guinea, Dom Henry's kidnapping as a means of saving heathen souls from perdition. "And truly, his hope was not vain, since as soon as they learned the language, with very little trouble, these people became Christians . . . as good and genuine Christians as if they had been descended from the generation first baptised under the dispensation of Christ."¹⁶

The first Spaniards in Latin America were overjoyed at the prospect of Indian slaves. Antonio Torres was sent back to Spain by Columbus with the report that "some of the cannibals, men and women, boys and girls, would be better than any other slaves once they abandoned their inhumanity." But Ferdinand and Isabella, not altogether pleased, charged Columbus firstly to convert the cannibals. Then, with the discovery of wealth, Indian deaths, and a belief in Indian feebleness, a demand for Negro labor went up. Negro slaves from the home country

¹⁴Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 43.

¹⁵Arthur Ramos, Las Culturas Negras en el Nuevo Mundo (México: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1943), p. 15.

¹⁶E. B. D'Auvergne, op. cit., p. 20.

seemed not enough, and Spanish adventurers pleaded for direct transport from Africa. These colonials were aided by demands from the clergy as well. Dominican and Hieronymite clergy claimed the work of one Negro was worth that of four Indians and advocated direct shipment from Guinea. Bartolomé de las Casas, the great protector of American Indians, suggested the use of more Negroes in order to ease the oppression of the indigenes. And in 1531 King Charles granted to a Flemish courtier the monopoly of importing four thousand slaves into the West Indies from Guinea. Thus began a trade, which, on his death-bed, Charles repented--too late.¹⁷

Indians and Negroes held equally deplorable, yet slightly dissimilar, economic and social positions in Latin America. The Indians, where they had been most numerous prior to the European conquest, generally constituted the working class. Bailey W. Diffie elaborates three different stages of forced labor through which the Indians passed by the end of the colonial period: the indios herrados, indios encomendados, and the mita or repartimiento.¹⁸ The first stage was that of slavery, and Indians were branded and treated much as the in-coming Negroes were to be. Under the encomienda system, Indians were forced to pay tribute (which of necessity became labor) to Spaniards, and this became nearly all but in name the same as chattel slavery. The mita or repartimiento was a system whereby Indians were distributed to private individuals to

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ Bailey W. Diffie, Latin-American Civilization: Colonial Period (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Sons, 1945), pp. 460-462.

work on specific tasks during a particular time allotment. Supposedly, by law, the Indians were to work solely on projects for the public good. However, theory and practice varied greatly and more often than not Indians worked for Spaniards desiring private profit. If conditions of Indians, during the three century colonial period, were bettered due to increasing legislation and ordinances for their protection, by 1800 the lot of the Indian was still a picture of "extreme misery".

Negroes generally remained in slavery throughout the colonial period, and their social position was considered to be lower than that of the Indian. Although manumission was legally possible, and did occur under a number of varying circumstances, a relatively small percentage of Negroes became free. It is estimated that perhaps ten per cent of the Negro population was "free" at the end of the colonial period. And even if free, numerous institutions in the colonies restricted his economic freedom--semi-serfdom and debt slavery being two such methods often entrapping both Indian and Negro.

The religious attitudes of the colonials towards Indians and Negroes varied only in degree. Again great gulfs separated theory and practice of religious institutions, and separated the few humanitarian and reforming clergymen from the majority of the Church and populace. If Indians and Negroes were considered human, their souls permitted to enter the Christian world, and supposedly equal to that of the white in the sight of God, they were nevertheless not recognized as gente de razón (rational folk), as were Spaniards, creoles and mestizos.¹⁹

¹⁹ C. H. Haring, The Spanish Empire in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 217.

The Church early insisted that masters bring their slaves to church to learn the doctrine and participate in the communion. In 1555, the assembled bishops in Mexico urged Spaniards to send Indians, and especially Negroes to church.²⁰ The Laws of the Indies, promulgated in 1680, devoted nearly the entire Book I to the necessary conversion of Indians, Negroes and mulattoes. But, for the Negroes there was no set program of conversion like there was instituted for the Indians. Little space in The Laws of the Indies was allotted to Negro religious instruction. Not until 1789 was a formal code dealing with the Negro slave promulgated by the Spanish king.²¹ Under this the owner was to instruct his slaves in the Christian faith, but this code, as recognized by the preamble itself, was merely a summary of traditional law. No new nor elaborate codes or cédulas were written affecting the religious position of the Negro in the New World. He was supposed to be baptized before leaving Africa, but this was not often carried out. And apparently there were few missionaries who gave themselves chiefly to the winning of Negro converts into the faith.²² An example of the Spanish neglect of Negro religious conversion might be the case cited by Latourette:

Presumably the Negro slaves who succeeded the Indians as labourers in the West Indies were slowly assimilated to a more or less nominal acquiescence in the faith of their masters. Now and then we catch glimpses of the

²⁰Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 63.

²¹Latourette, op. cit., p. 98. See Also Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 52.

²²C. P. Groves, op. cit., p. 125. Pedro Claver and Alfonso de Sandoval are two exceptions, Latourette, op. cit., p. 144.

process. In 1538 the Emperor Charles V ordered all who owned Negro slaves in the city of Santo Domingo to send them to church. As late as 1680 a diocesan synod in Cuba took cognizance of the fact that many Negro slaves were not baptized and decreed on pain of fine and excommunication that all who owned such slaves should see that they received the rite within two months and should have them instructed and baptized within six months after their purchase. From the Cuban action we may gather that the conversion of the Negroes was more slowly accomplished than that of the Indians . . . ²³

It was much questioned as to whether non-Spaniards should be allowed to enter the clergy. In 1555 the Mexican church council denied the Holy orders to mestizos, Indians and Negroes. A similar denial was issued later by church councils in Peru.²⁴ Indians and Negroes were generally thought of as not having the necessary aptitudes in order to join the ranks of the Church, and the Franciscans and Dominicans closed their doors to them. There were exceptions, but they were sparse indeed.

Not only did the Church not allow Indians or Negroes to take positions within the Church, but often the Church condoned and practiced slavery and slave trade on the assumption that it was better to enslave a man's body and save his soul from heathendom. In South America, monks raided Indian villages for Indians to add to the missions' labor force.²⁵ When the Jesuits were expelled from America in 1767, a large part of their property consisted of slaves; in Chile, alone, they owned at least one-fifth of the total Chilean slave population. A

²³Latourette, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁴Haring, op. cit., p. 216.

²⁵Diffie, op. cit., p. 464.

missionary in Venezuela hotly informed Baron Von Humboldt that the slave trade was necessary because of "the innate wickedness of the blacks, and the benefit they derived from their state of slavery among the Christians." Often, too, the priests acted as oppressors by exacting numerous fees from the Indians for Saints' days, for high mass, for burials and births. And Juan and Ulloa found that as oppressive as priests sometimes were, monks, and especially the mistresses of monks, proved yet worse.²⁶

By the end of the colonial period, social and economic divisions were as sharp as in the earlier days of conquest. Certain economic institutions had changed, but in practice the Indian was still subjected to the Spaniard, the Negro still in slavery, and both remaining in adject poverty.

The Indian theocratic state was toppled, the temples were destroyed, idols were sought out and demolished when found, and the priests could no longer perform their ancient function. The concept that man and gods lived in a relationship of mutual dependency was no longer a belief which Indians could adhere to through worship and sacrifices. Indeed, the Indians felt that their indigenous gods had betrayed them.²⁷

"No other people have ever felt so completely helpless as the Aztec nation felt at the appearance of the omens prophecies and warning that announced its fall."²⁸

²⁶Ibid., pp. 470-474.

²⁷One should specifically take notice of the theme of betrayal of Montezuma and Cuauhtemoc as described by Charles Braden, op. cit., pp. 76-124 et passim; and that so beautifully portrayed by Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 93.

²⁸Octavio Paz, ibid.

Yet, at the same time the Indians could not completely embrace the new Christian faith. Not only was it an imposed religion--often coming on the end of a sword or under the imposing hand of the *encomendero*--, but it is doubtful whether any religious concept can ever be communicated in its entirety to a differing culture.²⁹ Nor could the Indians ever hope for a Catholicism which would understand their ways and provide them with protection, for Indians were restricted from becoming priests or holding church offices.

The power of the white man's god was recognized through the very strength and success of the conquerors. Indians sent delegations to request missionary teaching, and thousands upon thousands were baptized according to missionary documents. "Some of them, perhaps even thousands, were baptized over and over again because they believed this pleased the Spaniards."³⁰ And it appears as though some Indians converted to Christianity with the hope that the Spaniards would protect them then from their enemies. "We hear of one tribe which accepted Christianity, but who renounced it when they found by sad experience that the Spaniards would not protect them against the attacks of pagan neighbors."³¹

The Church had generally neglected the Negro. Some had been Christianized in Spain, others were baptized in Africa or upon arrival

²⁹Ralph Linton, Acculturation In Seven American Indian Tribes (New York: D. Appleton - Century Company, Inc., 1940), pp. 463-520.

³⁰Diffie, p. 249.

³¹Hubert House Bancroft, History of Central America (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), II, 672-679.

in the New World by priests accompanying slave traders, but little effort was expended upon their religious instruction. Families, extended families and tribes were broken up by the slave trade. The mutual dependency between gods, ancestors, and Africans was a belief, therefore, difficult to maintain in the New World. René Ribeiro writes on the American experience which upset harmonious African religious and agricultural patterns:

The land was no longer closely connected with his ancestors; the germination of the seed was losing its significance it had with a previously coherent system in which it was equivalent to the man and united him intimately with the earth, as with a vibrant universe; the harvest was destined either for the mill or for replanting without discrimination of particular qualities or individualization as a gift of nature . . .³²

³²René Ribeiro, "Relations of the Negro with Christianity in Portuguese America", The America, Vol. XIV, No. 4, April, 1958, p. 455-456.

CHRISTIANIZATION AND WITCHCRAFT

The Spanish attempts at Christianization of the New World were received by the Indians and Negroes in generally two manners: one of hostility and the continued practice of indigenous worship, and one of acceptance to particular Christian beliefs and practices which were then adapted to the Indian or Negro culture. Hostility was perhaps most highly felt by the Indian priests whose power, influence and function were usurped by Spanish missionaries. However, both priests and worshippers were often incited to hatred and, at times, active militancy. Indian wars and revolts have been recorded by Munro S. Edmonson¹, and though seemingly few in number, many small-scale revolts and skirmishes occurred which were not enumerated by him. The numerous complaints and reports by Spaniards of continued Indian idolatry are too numerous to mention; and it is quite apparent that "underground" worship of the indigenous religions continued throughout the colonial period. Often times Indian militancy against the Spaniard illustrated a peculiar conglomeration of Indian and catholic religious beliefs. In the 1500s at Sotuta and Tecoh, children were tied to crosses, their hearts were torn out with obsidian blades, and all in the name of Jesus

¹Munro S. Edmonson, "Nativism, Syncretism and Anthropological Science," Nativism and Syncretism (Middle American Research Institute, Publication 19; New Orleans: Tulane University, 1960), 184-189.

Christ. An Indian named Sebastian Gómez believed himself to have been given the power by St. Peter to ordain priests and bishops. This, and the worship of a young Indian girl who claimed that the Virgin had appeared to her and told her to aid the Indians against approaching Spaniards (who were considered to be Jews coming to kill Christ), led to the Tzeltal revolt in Guatemala during the early 1700s.²

Negro uprisings have been noted by Melville Herskovits³; and it is also obvious by colonial reports that slaves continued to practice particular African rites. A Negro uprising took place in New Spain in 1537, causing such alarm that the viceroy Mendoza requested the suspension of slave importation from Africa.⁴ From the beginnings of slavery escapes were frequent, and these escapees sometimes formed organized groups--known in Brazil as quilombos--continuing to practice their African religions.⁵

Acceptance and "conversion" to Christianity was facilitated by a heritage of Indian religious eclecticism. Indigenous gods were not considered to be omnipotent, and the blame for defeats and misfortune was often put upon them. The courting of the conquerors' gods was a usual reaction in the attempt to gain greater favor and power. Christianity was also facilitated by the similarities between Catholic and

² Donald E. Thompson, "Maya Paganism and Christianity," Nativism and Syncretism, pp. 12-22; and Bancroft, op. cit., pp. 672-679.

³ Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), pp. 86-95.

⁴ C. H. Haring, op. cit., p. 121.

⁵ Arthur Ramos, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

indigenous beliefs. The symbol of the cross, fasting, holy days, and the miraculous appearance and communication of saints with commoners--all were immediately absorbed, yet confused with indigenous beliefs. Sahagún labels this Indian acceptance of Christianity as a "palliation of idolatry".⁶

Many Africans were "converted" by their early baptism by slave traders or soon after arriving in the New World. The usual pattern, however, was their neglected Christianization by priests and friars. Similar beliefs existed between Catholic and African religions, too, and those Negroes who received instruction and became Catholics were facilitated in their conversion by such similarities. Usually, however, the power of the white man's god was recognized through the very strength and success of the Spanish colonials. Recognition, yet not conversion in the strict sense of the word. What Jacinto de la Serna bemoans in 1656--"*los indios y los negros; vsaban, y vsan oy, estos conjuros, mezclando las cosas diuinas, y ceremonias de la Iglesia con sus supersticiones*"⁷--is representative of what nearly every Spanish missionary thought and wrote during the entire colonial period.

Witchcraft was early recorded in the conquest. But the writings concerning witchcraft practices were not those of eye-witness accounts, of which there seems to be a remarkable lack compared to the detailed descriptions of Indian practices by today's anthropologists.⁸ The

⁶L. Nicolau d'Oliver, "Comments on the Evangelization of the New World," The Americas (Vol. XIV, no. 4, April, 1958), p. 407.

⁷Jacinto de la Serna, op. cit., p. 224.

⁸Of special significance regarding witchcraft practices today are: Maud Oakes, The Two Crosses of Todos Santos: Survivals of Mayan Religious Ritual (Bollingen Series XXVII; New York: Pantheon Books, 1951); William Madsen, The Virgin's Children: Life in an Aztec Village Today (Austin:

lack of colonial recordings of wizardry practice may be due to several causes. With the force and violence often shown towards Indians worshipping idols and indulging in other indigenous practices, it would be possible that Indians felt their religious activity should be practiced secretly and kept from suspicious Spanish eyes. Then, too, witchcraft was illegal in the religious and ethical codes of the indigenous societies, making observations of such practices even more difficult. But perhaps the most obvious reason is simply that of familiarity. Indian witchcraft was not a cultural curiosity to be learned of and studied by the Europeans--it having so many similarities with its Spanish counterpart. Besides, the culture-bound Spaniard, senseless to the concepts of Indian nagualism and totemism, and to their entire ethical and moral code, could only see witches and Satans peering through non-Catholic practices.

Being schooled and tutored by such Catholics, the Indians grew confused. Practices hitherto of cultural and moral significance, became entangled with the Spanish concept of evil. This confusion and amalgamation of Indian and Spanish beliefs was advanced by the Spanish catechists themselves. Fray Pedro de Gante led a whole movement in initiating religious coalescence. He taught the Indians to honor Christian supernaturals with Aztec songs, dances and folk dramas. To describe and define the idea of hell and the devil to the Indians,

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University of Texas Press, 1960); L. C. Faron, Hawks of the Sun: Mapuche Morality and Its Ritual Attributes (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964); Oliver La Farge, Santa Bulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Indian Town (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947); and Charles M. Leslie, Now We Are Civilized: A Study of the World View of the Zapotec Indians of Mitla, Oaxaca (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960).

missionaries often used indigenous words and mythology. Xibalbay, the underworld of the Popol-Vuh, was attributed to being the same as hell. Kaxtock, the principal divinity of the Cakchiqueles, was labeled as the devil. "Nagual," originally an Aztec word designating the transformation of man into animal, became a part of Catholic terminology also. Through the processes of catechization the word "nagual" designated the devil, or an evil witch in intimate relation with the devil.⁹

With the conquest of the New World by the Spaniards, "nagual" took on a new meaning. It lost its socially productive attributes of a god of rain, and changed into primarily a force for evil.¹⁰ Although Indian gods and mythological figures representing the Gran Nagual were believed to have the power of metamorphosis, as mentioned earlier, only at the time of the conquest were Indians--specifically "nagual" priests--thought to be able to change themselves into animals. Even then, Montezuma, the principal chief and great Aztec priest, denied this power to Cortés, as did other priests. Nevertheless, over and over, during the colonial period, the Spanish chronicles referred to the "nagual" priests' power of transfiguration.¹¹

The existence of such "naguales"--pertaining to priests and seculars--, though rarely confessed to, was an undeniable belief all during the colonial period and from Independence to today.¹² La Serna,

⁹Gustavo Correa, "El Espíritu del Mal en Guatemala," Nativism and Syncretism, pp. 55-58.

¹⁰Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 99.

¹¹Ibid., p. 100.

¹²Ibid.

in the 17th century, speaks of a curer who transformed himself into a dog. And, according to the Inquisition of Querétaro, in 1621 an Indian daughter of the governor of Tlatelolco transformed herself into a dog.¹³

This change in the meaning of "nagual" was obviously a result of Spanish entrance into the New World, for the early Spaniards never understood the Indian belief. Sahagún, in describing the "nagual", called it a witch and gave it certain characteristics--like that of sucking on children--which did not appear in the report supplied to him by his Indian informants.¹⁴ Ruiz de Alarcón, using informants who were not Indians, confused his cited cases of "tonalismo" with what were really "naguales". Besides, he also attributed to the "tona" the making of a pact with the devil.¹⁵

The most dramatic element borrowed from Spanish witchcraft, and apparently new to the indigenous religions, was that of the "pactos". Spaniards thought that witches acquired their magical powers by willingly making pacts with the devil. Prior to the conquest, the Indians believed that children born under certain calendar signs were fated to become witches. Yet, at an early date the Indians seem to have adopted the devil's pact, for it is evidenced by Inquisitorial confessions, particularly of such Indians as Martín Ucele.¹⁶ And, in a book by Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar:

¹³ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 106, 107, 111.

¹⁶ See the Inquisitorial report of Martín Ucele mentioned in the introductory chapter, p. 4.

The Santa Oficio recognized in the Capitanía of Guatemala an exorbitant number of denunciations, information and procedures against witches. In Guatemala City alone they were presented with more than 85 cases of magic and witchcraft.¹⁷

Of all these cases, according to the author, at least 13 were persons who had a pact with the devil. One of the 13 to confess, Juan Nyder, described his initiation into the demonic cult:

We came together on a day which was Sunday and I and the masters entered the church before they had blessed the holy water, and there I renounced in front of Christ and the others my faith, of baptism and of the universal Church. Afterwards I presented homage to the Maestrillo that is, the devil.¹⁸

And there are at least some authors--Núñez de la Vega, Brinton, Charles Wisdom, Brasseur de Bourbourg and Foster, among others--who write of the possibility of a near-formal Indian association of witches who believed they were making "pacts" with the devil in order to bring about the destruction of the Spaniards.¹⁹ Even an indigenous Indian mythological figure, Juan No or Juan Noq, became a figure through which Indian witches were to make devils' pacts. Juan Noq also changed his appearance, to become represented as a ladino, in dress, speech and white skin.²⁰

The case of Negro witchcraft in the New World does not appear to be much different from that of the Indian. At every turn, the

¹⁷Gustavo Correa, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁹Ibid.; also see Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

²⁰Gustavo Correa, ibid., pp. 43, 75.

Spanish seemed to either entrench African witchcraft beliefs, or to look upon purely religious ceremonial actions as something arising out of pacts with the devil.

It is quite possible that Africans differentiated carefully between people they believed to be witches, and those they considered witch-doctors or curers. Certainly, today in Africa the two are quite distinct, or if a witch-doctor possesses some witchcraft power, it is only in order to be able to recognize witches.

The witch-doctor has a power like that of witches. By this power he recognizes those who are using witchcraft, and heals those who are bewitched. . . . Witches are supposed to be able to recognize one another, since they meet for their nocturnal meals. If a witch-doctor possess some of the witchcraft he too must be able to recognize witches. But just as a witch's power may be latent and not always active, so it may be with the doctor. In his normal frame of mind he may have difficulty in picking out the witches. But when he dances to the sound of the drums, and is dressed in all his magical array, then his dormant powers come to life. He may go into a trance and be able to name or point out those who are harming their neighbours.²¹

But in the New World the witch-doctor or curer was looked upon by the Spaniard as a witch. Case after case of hechicería, witchcraft, is cited in Inquisitorial reports, accusing African curers of having wicked intentions.²²

A strange thing occurs in the documents of the Santa Oficio. Devil's marks are cited as indication of a witch, but only among Negroes

²¹ Parrinder, Religion of West Africa, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

²² See the descriptions of Inquisitorial proceedings beginning on p. 280 in Aguirre Beltran's Medicina y Magia.

and mulattoes.²³ Evidently a number of Negroes and mulattoes had tattoos of the devil painted on their foot or shoulder. Although apparently not mentioned by other authors, this seems to be a case of acculturation. Africans sometimes bore marks indicating a tribal totem, or were submitted to scarification rites for clan and family identification, but there is no indication that this was used for purely personal identification, nor that it appeared as a sign for a witch. Some Africans believed that witches bore an internal mark on the life-soul which could be discovered by autopsy after death, but there is no case of external witch markings.²⁴

Nagualism, as the Spanish used it--the transformation of a witch into an animal--, is illustrated as a Negro belief by an Inquisitorial report directed against a witch-doctor from Veracruz. The Negro witch-doctor, Pedro Joseph, had treated someone suffering from an illness, and because he mixed certain ingredients (including blood and a cow's bone) as a cure, was called before the Inquisition for witchcraft. In the proceedings one discovers that Pedro Joseph believed the illness to have been caused by an angry Indian. Not receiving meat from a cow that had been recently purchased, the Indian turned himself into a fly, bit the purchaser of the cow, and caused him great sickness.²⁵ Whether Pedro Joseph's belief in the transfiguration of the witch was an African

²³ Ibid., note cases: 283.16; 356.II.334; 368.366; 636.4; 729.21; and 1116.5.

²⁴ Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, p. 142.

²⁵ Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., pp. 88-90.

belief, or one which he incorporated once in the New World, is difficult to determine. But it is likely that this belief, of whatever origin, was substantiated and strengthened through Indian and Spanish influence.

Throughout the 17th century a number of accusations were made in the Santa Oficio against Negroes and mulattoes who made pacts with the devil. These accused witches, according to the colonial Inquisition, signed demonic contracts and were initiated into the witch cult in much the same manner as was attributed to European witches. The initiation was fulfilled in gloomy caves, where the witches entered nude. Inside this infernal temple they celebrated their rites and despoiled rosaries and religious relics. By signing the devil's pact, the witch acquired the gift of being able to separate his soul and body at will and received the subtle mark of this strange servitude.²⁶

We have already seen, in the case of Lucas Olola, that the African religious belief in spiritual possession was changed somewhat in the contact with the New World. Possession of one's spirit by a god occurred in Africa as a ritual during a religious ceremony. An "initiate," in response to drum beats, singing and dancing, would fall into a trance during which he was supposed to receive the divinity's personality. His actions and words, while entranced, were interpreted by a priest. Lucas Olola, a Negro slave in the New World, fell into a state of possession during an Indian religious ceremony. His possession was that of the Indian god, not an African orisha, and he, himself, interpreted his trance and claimed clairvoyance in detecting Indian witches.

²⁶Ibid., p. 112.

This kind of spiritual possession, though without the drums and ceremony, appears to be quite like that claimed by exegetic Catholics in their state of "mystical ecstasy".²⁷ Or, perhaps more important, it resembled the "devil's trances" of Europe, described by "eye witnesses" to particular witches' Sabbaths.²⁸ And Mohammed was known to have fallen into a trance during his first revelation. As Mohammed was believed to be the epitome of the devil by many Spaniards, clergymen often emphasized his trances as an indication of his communication with the devil, or of his phoniness.

San Pedro Pascual referred to Muhammad as one possessed, and he let no opportunity go of drawing attention to a demonic element, or suggestion, in any Arabic account . . . and drew out still more fully the significance that he saw in what he thought of as self-induced fits.²⁹

Again, whatever the origin of Lucas Olola's actions while among the Huastecan Indians--be it African, Islamic, or Catholic--he could have obtained his ideas from the Spaniards, and they, in turn, looked upon his state of possession and witch-doctoring as essentially witchcraft.

²⁷ Aguirre Beltrán, op. cit., p. 72.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Norman Daniel, Islam and the West: The Making of an Image (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1958), p. 30.

WITCHCRAFT SYNCRETISM

If therefore the reader discovers in the course of the exposition that the mystery of African culture, the magical practices of medicine men, the demoniac possession of the Haitian Voodoo cult are not so mysterious after all, and can be interpreted according to a conception of the world intelligible to all men--if, in other words, the reader is led to human understanding instead of to enjoyable but meaningless thrills and shudders, he should not be disappointed: rather let him rejoice in recognizing rational behavior in the action of his fellow men.¹

Though our intention was not to enumerate all available evidence of confusion and amalgam in Negro, Indian, and Spanish witchcraft beliefs, what has been discussed up to this point suggests an approach to viewing all witchcraft beliefs and practices in colonial Latin America. We have focused our attention upon witchcraft beliefs of the Indians, Negro and Spaniard prior to their colonial American experience, and have witnessed a remarkable similarity. Three culture traits, one each from America, Africa and Spain, were then singled out for investigation. These beliefs--nagualism, spiritual possession, and the devil's pact--have previously been noted as essentially unique elements from each of the three cultures, and as becoming dominant factors in the witchcraft which developed in the New World. But let

¹Janheinz Jahn, op. cit., p. 19.

us reiterate briefly what has hitherto been suggested in this paper.

Nagualism, as a pre-Cortesian religious belief, was the ability of gods and mythological figures to metamorphose into animal forms. Not until the conquest does nagualism appear to be a transfiguration characteristic of particular priests. And, it seems that Indian witches, though obtaining their power by being born on a "nagual" calendar date, were not believed to have such metamorphical attributes.

In Africa, however, witches were believed to turn themselves into nightjars, owls, bats and other birds and animals, as a means of attending their nocturnal meetings undetected. In Europe, transformation of a witch to an animal was an ancient belief. As late as 1521, two men were tried in France, one of whom was said to have taught the other how to become a werewolf by rubbing his body with ointment.

Only by the conquest, then, and by Spanish (and possibly African) influence, did the Indian begin to believe in the transfiguration of witches. Even the term "nagual" changed meaning in several Indian languages through catechization, and came to the same thing as a devil or an evil witch.

Spiritual possession, as a traditional African concept, was the state of trance into which an initiate fell during a religious ceremony. During the trance the initiate became, in effect, the divine personality, and his words and actions were interpreted by the priest.

European witches were thought to have gone into trances during their celebrations and dances. Spiritual possession was also the way by which Catholics obtained their mystical ecstasies. Islamic religion spoke of Mohammad's revelation coming while in a state of trance.

Spanish clergymen generally interpreted this as indication of his demonic powers.

During the colonial epoch, then, spiritual possession by a Negro was considered in the eyes of the Spaniard as witchcraft. This was indicated earlier in the Inquisitorial case of Lucas Olola.

The devil's pact was a European belief. Witches obtained their supernatural powers through a contractual arrangement with the Christian devil. Initiation rites, elaborate secretive ceremonies, and a witches' cult were all a part of the devil's pact.

Both Indians and Negroes were brought before the New World Inquisition, being accused (or occasionally through self-accusation) of making pacts with the devil. The initiation ceremony described in the New World was very similar to that in Europe. And some authors suggest the possibility of witch cults in the New World.

What appears, therefore, in our investigation of supposedly unique culture traits introduced to the New World, is that no new or original witchcraft beliefs were introduced by Indians or Negroes. Religious beliefs held previously by these groups had, for the Spaniard, a resemblance to witchcraft as practiced and believed in Europe. Nagualism and spiritual possession, then, changed in their original meaning during the colonial period because of the Spaniard's conviction that these were devil-produced actions. Through their frenzy over Christianization, fighting the battle against heresy and the devil, loud preaching and loud teaching, the Spaniards actually furthered and increased the witchcraft beliefs and practices of Indians and Negroes. Even's conclusion does appear correct: "Delusions fostered by the

Church, became the beliefs of the people." Therefore, considerations of witchcraft in the New World should give little importance to the origin of the various beliefs. What needs to be stressed is that any belief--whether of witchcraft or of a purely religious nature--bearing the slightest resemblance to a European witchcraft practice, warranted suspicion in the eyes of the Spaniard and became confused with his concept of the Christian devil.

If Spaniards, over their frenzied battle against the devil, sponsored yet further beliefs in witchcraft, what prompted Indians and Negroes to accept these changes and innovations? Let us look again at the religious, social, and economic position of the Indian and Negro in colonial Latin America.

Confusion and contradiction permeated the religious scene. An Indian heritage of religious eclecticism permitted them to accept certain Christian elements which, more often than not, then became confused with indigenous worship. Pedro de la Gante's school of thought--religious coalescence--yet furthered this process. The functions of the indigenous priests were no longer tolerated by the Spaniards, and idols and temples were smashed. The mutual relationships between the gods and Indians could no longer be adhered to. Negroes were separated from tribal and family members, who were traditionally an integral part of his religious system. His association with, and dependence upon, ancestors and gods was a belief which was not permitted practice in the New World. Generally speaking, the Negro and Indian acceptance of the white man's god was sheerly one brought through the

recognition of his apparent power.¹

Indians and, to a lesser extent, Negroes, were the object of Spanish Christianization. They were said to be human, yet were denied the category of gente de raxon. They were taught, schooled and converted, but were not allowed to enter into the ranks of the Church. Therefore, there was little hope of a Catholicism which would understand the Indian or Negro culture and way of life. And clergymen instructed them in Christian morals yet lived, in many instances, immoral lives themselves.²

Spiritual possession was regarded as heresy and witchcraft, yet the priests spoke of Catholic mystical experiences. Idols were damned yet the Christians worshipped statues of saints.³ Polygamy was preached against, while Spanish clergymen were sometimes living with several women.

¹There were, of course, Africans and Indians who were converted to Christianity, and they became perhaps convinced that the Christian God was more powerful than all sorcerers or witches. "But as every missionary knows, African converts who stop believing in sorcerers and witches are few and far between. 'Habit is a full-grown mountain; hard to get over or pull down,' says a Congo proverb." There may have been exceptions, however, similar to our contemporary Ghanaian who says: "Witches? Man, that's for graybeards and the squares. In my crowd we dig Tom Paine, Einstein and Marx--mass action, technology and social significance." Jack Mendelsohn, God, Allah, and Juju: Religion in Africa Today (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), pp. 65, 67.

²Spanish seculars were by no means better. Braden comments on the contradiction between religious beliefs and actual practice: "'After the first baptism of Indians in the New World, the women were at once distributed among the chief officers. Doña Marina was given to Puertocarro, a cavalier, but when subsequently he returned to Spain, Cortés himself took her and had a son by her called Don Martín Cortés. Still later, Cortés perhaps having tired of her, she was given in turn to Juan Jaramillo . . .'" The utter naiveté with which the writers mention these, to us strange associations between religion and lax ideas regarding the relations of the sexes, is perhaps the best indication of the standards of the time." Braden, op. cit., p. 85.

³Although Pedro Joseph was brought before the Inquisition for, among other things, mixing a cow's bone in his "medicine", don José Carrillo was brought before the Inquisition for "not wishing to give adoration to the bones of a saint." Inquisition report 927.10, Acuirre Beltran, op. cit., p. 315.

The social and economic position of Indians and Negroes showed no less confusion, and was riddled with insufferable institutions. Indians, by law, were "free" individuals, nevertheless their position in colonial Latin America was essentially that of slavery. Negroes were slaves though, according to old Roman and Spanish law, they were human and their souls were free--small compensation. Their women were taken as wives or concubines by Spaniards, even though their numbers were pitifully small to begin with.⁴ Socially, economically and religiously, the Indian and Negro were pitted against a powerful, non-understanding and, at times, ruthless Spaniard.

In a static society,--so long as it stays truly static--the individual is safely dependent on a complicated social system which . . . usually includes not only living members of the group but dead ancestors and unborn posterity. The arrival of even one representative of a competitive society--immune from local forms of magic, blessed with a new magic of his own--threatens the peace of this . . . structure.⁵

Though Mannoni is speaking of an ideal static society, its implications are useful for our discussion. The arrival of the Spaniard was a

⁴"The Negro migration continued for so long a time because of the heavy mortality: 'almost half of the new imported Negroes die in the seasoning, nor does the polygamy which they use add much to the stocking of a plantation'; because in parts of the New World the Negro did not reproduce, and because men were more readily welcomed than women for the heavy labor. On the average, only one woman was imported for every three men. There were plantations in Cuba, for instance, that had as many as seventeen males to one female, and the females became common wives, prostitutes, incapable of bearing children or unwilling to do so." Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 35.

⁵O. Mannoni, Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), p. 10.

destructive threat to the social and economic structure of pre-Cortesian Indians. Likewise is the case of the Negro. Possible extinction of Indian and Negro culture appeared imminent, and a way of resisting such a process appeared to be the use of witchcraft. The "new magic" of the conquerors was adopted in the hope of gaining greater power. It was also a means, S. F. Nadel suggested, of enabling "a society to go on functioning in a given manner, fraught with conflicts and contradictions which the society is helpless to resolve."

Society suffers from neuroses as do individuals. To clear itself from guilt society looks about for scape-goats on which to lay its faults.⁶

Explanations for evil, illness, social and economic position, existence of the devil, and possibly the guilt feelings on the part of the Spaniards, were all heaped upon the colonial Latin American scapegoat--the witch. Thus, Spanish witchcraft beliefs were nurtured, and Indian and Negro beliefs adopted more powerful witch traits.

⁶ Parrinder, Religion of West Africa, p. 202.

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