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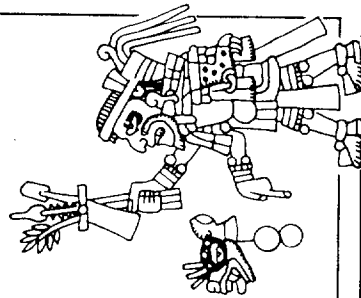
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# DOCTRINAL ASPECTS OF SAHAGUN'S COLLOQUIOS

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## INTRODUCTION

Sahagún the pioneer ethnographer cannot be fully separated from Sahagún the zealous missionary. The stated purpose of his *Historia general* was the education of fellow religious in order that they recognize idolatries (Sahagún 1938:I.5-6). He compiled a "doctrinal encyclopedia" meant to stand alongside the ethnographic encyclopedia. The traditional emphasis of Mesoamericanists on the ethnographic corpus and neglect of the doctrinal corpus has precluded a full understanding of this most fascinating and prolific of all the Franciscan missionaries.

In his ethnographic work, Sahagún presents Nahuatl culture to a European audience; in his catechistical writings he presents Christian religion to his indigenous proselytes. The same Nahuatl assistants, educated at the Colegio de Santa Cruz, assisted in both projects. Both were directed toward a Nahuatl-speaking audience, whether composed of friars or Indians. Unlike some of his colleagues, Sahagún produced no fully bilingual texts — the Spanish sections of the *Historia general* and also the *Colloquios* are primarily summaries of the Nahuatl texts. Parts of the *Historia general* seem intended to preserve useful information for the Nahuatl's own use. For example, the catalog of plant and animal taxonomy had little direct usefulness to Christian preaching. Likewise, some parts of the doctrinal corpus, such as the *Apéndice* (1579b), were ostensibly written for the eyes of priests alone. Some of the doctrinal texts contain ethnographic information and some Christian influence is evident in the ethnographic texts. Therefore, Sahagún's work cannot be neatly divided into the ethnographic and the catechistical. Taken as a whole, the friar's writings constitute a detailed and multifaceted record of Aztec culture and the early colonial social and religious milieu, the transition from pre-Conquest to colonial culture.

Indian influence permeates the doctrinal writings. Aside from Sahagún's reliance on native assistants, the very process of presenting Christian material in Nahuatl forced a recasting of Christian concepts according to Nahuatl categories. With their medieval world view and rigid moral absolutism, the friars, especially in the beginning, were insensitive to the nuances of language and classification. They sought synonyms, one-to-one correspondences between Nahuatl and Christian terms, and used whatever Nahuatl words they could find. Spanish or Latin terms were systematically introduced only when there was

nothing comparable in Nahuatl (for example, for the concept of "grace"). To borrow Dibble's term (1974), this had the effect of "Nahuatlizing" Christianity. Christianity as presented in Nahuatl was not quite the same thing as orthodox Christian doctrine. These subtle changes helped the Nahuas to align Christian teaching with their own religious and moral outlook. The end result was a Nahua version of Christianity that appeared satisfactorily orthodox to all but the most perspicacious observers.

Because Sahagún's work includes such a variety of texts both ethnographic and catechistical, it constitutes an excellent laboratory for analyzing the interactions between Nahua and European thought and the proselytization process. This interaction may be viewed, following Tedlock (1983:333-334), as a "dialogue" between the two cultures. The doctrinal texts in Nahuatl and other native languages stand at the "dialogical frontier" between Mesoamerican and European culture, where the two thought systems are joined most closely — though often forcibly — together. From the perspective of synthesizing ethnography with catechism and examining this "frontier" within the Sahaguntine corpus, the text known as the *Colloquios* is particularly interesting (published translations are Lehmann 1949 [German]; Klor de Alva 1980 [English]; León-Portilla 1986 [Spanish]; other important discussions are Garibay K. 1953-1954; León-Portilla 1963; Klor de Alva 1982a). This text was intended as the opening installment of the "doctrinal encyclopedia" (as reconstructed by Anderson 1983:109). It thus would have mediated between the *Historia general* and the other, more conventional, doctrinal texts (see Klor de Alva, next article). Its content reflects this intermediate position, combining Christian material with information on indigenous religion. As Dibble points out (1974:225), this is something that Sahagún rarely did.

The *Colloquios* text is also the only Sahaguntine document with an overtly dialogical format. Such a format was not in itself an innovation. Other friars wrote doctrinal texts in dialogical form (for example, Anunciación 1565; Gilberti 1559); Spanish models existed, such as Juan de Valdés' *Diálogo de doctrina christiana* of 1529 (1964). But in the *Colloquios* the dialogue is not between Christians more and less learned but between pagans and Christians, between the old culture and the new. The text models the intercultural dialogue inherent in the missionization process, depicting it as a dialogue between individuals — Aztec priests and nobles and the first Franciscan missionaries — in an actual, though idealized, historical setting. The missionary goal of reducing this dialogue to a Christian monologue is tidily achieved, but the very existence of overt dialogue sets the text apart.

Underlying the dialogue presented in the *Colloquios* is a collaboration between Sahagún's educated assistants, who did the actual composition, and four of Sahagún's elderly ethnographic informants, who provided the information on pre-Conquest religion. This represents an unusually high degree of Nahua participation in the text's production: Indians are allowed to speak for themselves both as Christians and as non-Christians. Nowhere else in the doctrinal corpus do Indians express themselves this openly.

The *Colloquios*, though written in 1564, attempts to re-create events of 1524. Klor de Alva (1982a) has shown that the text's content is comparable to other records of the earliest missionization. All other doctrinal texts are directed toward the audience of the time they were written. While the *Colloquios* was surely intended for use in the ongoing labors of missionization, its status as an idealization of a historical event strongly influenced its presentation of Christian material. Its fictional audience, the Indians of 1524, were of a spiritual condition quite distinct from that of their counterparts forty years later. In 1524, though idolaters all, the Indians were not held responsible for their sins because they had never been exposed to Christianity. It was only after their conversion that the Indians could be held personally accountable for their sins. In 1524 attention focused on persuading them to renounce their gods and accept baptism. Texts directed at later audiences emphasize the many ongoing obligations of the Christian: the constant battle against mortal sin, all of the things one must and must not do in order to be a good Christian. Christian life is presented as a perpetual struggle, not the instant happiness that in the *Colloquios* is to succeed baptism.

The following discussion compares the *Colloquios*' presentation of Christianity with that of other Sahaguntine texts, focusing upon the terminology used for basic Christian concepts and upon different versions of important mythic events. Sahagún's doctrinal works are catalogued by Anderson (1983), Chavero (1948), García Icazbalceta (1954), Jiménez Moreno (in Sahagún 1938), Nicolau d'Olwer (1952), and Nicolau d'Olwer and Cline (1973). Consulted for this study are the *Evangeliarium* (1858), the Ayer Collection *Sermonario* (1563), the *Exercicios quotidianos* (1574), the *Addiciones* and *Apéndice* to the *Postilla* (1579a, 1579b), the *Psalmodia christiana* (1583), the *Sermones en mexicano* (1588) and the so-called *Vocabulario trilingüe* (n.d.). Relevant sections of the *Historia general* and the *Arte Adivinatoria* (in Garibay K. 1953-1954) are also used.

## TERMINOLOGY

### *The Names of God*

In the *Colloquios* the Nahuatl term *teotl* is used almost as frequently as *dios* in reference to the Christian deity. The new god is distinguished from the many old ones by referring to him as the "sole" or "true" *teotl*. *Teotl* is usually paired with *tlatoani* (ruler, literally "speaker") to grant political authority to this deity. Only once does *dios* substitute for *teotl* as a generic term for "god": *nel dios*, "true god" (Klor de Alva 1980:37v, line 1277; all subsequent references to the *Colloquios* will give the folio and Klor de Alva's line number only). With this exception, "Dios" and "Jesu Christo" appear as names for this new *teotl* rather than as equivalent terms.

This use of *teotl* does not stem from an effort to present terminology comprehensible to an audience of 1524. Though Sahagún most frequently

refers to his deity as *totecuyo dios*, "our lord God," or simply "our lord," the term *teotl* occurs throughout the corpus. It is usually preceded by modifiers stressing uniqueness or paired with *dios* or *tlatoani*, or it may be paired with *oquichtli*, "man," to describe Christ's dual nature (as in *Colloquios* 32v, 545-546). Infrequently it occurs on its own. In the *Psalmódia christiana* the word of the *teotl* descends upon one who is baptized (Sahagún 1583:1v); the Christ-child is described as *teutl piltzintli*, "god, little child" (Sahagún 1583:28v). Ricard asserts that the missionaries avoided the term *teotl* in order to prevent confusion of Christian and indigenous deities (1947:146). Sahagún's frequent use of the term belies this assertion.

*Dios* as a generic term for "god" is more frequent in other texts but by no means supersedes the use of *teotl*. Examples include: *nelli dios*, "true god" (Sahagún 1574:26v, 1579b:1v, 1858:204, 284, 305); *çan ce dios çan ce teutl*, "only one god, only one god" (Sahagún 1574:26v); and *çan vel ce dios, ce tlatoani*, "only really one god, one ruler" (Sahagún 1583:204r).

*Dios* is never introduced into Nahuatl to refer to indigenous deities, only to the Christian one. Sahagún's Spanish texts describe them as *diosex* but in the Nahuatl texts they are always *teteo* or "devils."

The friars admired the Nahuas' profound religiosity, accepting that they had a concept of deity even though they applied it to the wrong objects. Therefore, the borrowing of epithets belonging to individual Nahuatl deities is more surprising than their adoption of the *teotl* concept. In the *Colloquios* the native priests and the friars refer to their respective deities as *ipalnemohuani*, "he by whom one lives," *tlouque nahuaque*, "possessor of the near, possessor of the surrounding," and *ilhuicahua tlalticpaque*, "possessor of heaven, possessor of earth." In the *Florentine Codex*, these terms are used to refer to Tezcatlipoca (Sahagún 1950-1982:III, VI).

These epithets imply universality, omnipotence and human dependence, and thus were easily applied to the Christian deity. The *Colloquios*' usage is not atypical, for Sahagún used these terms in other texts even though he was undoubtedly cognizant of their application to Tezcatlipoca. All three are found in the *Psalmódia christiana*. *Tlouque nahuaque* and *ipalnemohuani* are used frequently in the *Ejercicios quotidianos*. Both of these appear in the Nahuatl-Latin vocabulary appended to the *Evangeliarium* (Sahagún 1858:541, 460). *Ipalnemohuani* is used in the two sets of sermons, the refutation of idolatry in the first book of the *Florentine Codex* and the *Addiciones*. *Tlouque nahuaque* appears in the *Sermones* (Sahagún 1588:60r).

In the *Apéndice*, *tlouque nahuaque* is used several times to refer to Tezcatlipoca but not to the Christian god. The context is a refutation of the indigenous school system, the god who patronized this system being contrasted with his Christian successor. Here the Christian god is not called *teotl* but strictly *dios*: Sahagún seems to be making a conscious effort to distinguish between the two. However, he uses *ipalnemohuani* for both. In the *Arte Adivinatoria* as well, Sahagún accepts *ipalnemohuani* for the Christian god at the same time he uses it as a name for Tezcatlipoca (in García Icazbalceta 1954:385).

Though the *Apéndice* is a late text, and one in which Sahagún shows a special concern with the survival of pre-Conquest beliefs, there is no clear temporal development in his usage of the epithets. The *Sermonario*, which predates the *Colloquios* (it was written in the 1540s and only revised in 1563), is fairly conservative in its usage. The *Ejercicios quotidianos* of 1574 is very liberal, and even includes references to *tlacatl totecuayo*, "the person, our lord," an epithet which in the *Colloquios* is confined to the speeches of the native priests. Usage appears to vary with the character of the text, the *Colloquios* not falling in with early texts but with the more creative genres such as the songs of the *Psalmódia christiana* and the meditations of the *Ejercicios*, while sermons and biblical excerpts, as well as refutations of idolatry, display a more conservative tendency. This variation could reflect the degree to which Sahagún's native participants contributed to the texts, since they are known to have written the *Colloquios* and it is likely that they made a larger contribution to other inventive texts than to texts more confined to Old World formulas.

#### The Devils

The friars in the *Colloquios* strive to persuade their audience that those whom they consider gods are actually devils. To this end, an account of the creation of the angels, Lucifer's rebellion, and the fall of the bad angels is included. The Spanish term *diablos*, Nahuatlized as *diablome* or *diablosme*, is used throughout. The absence of the term *tlacatecolotl*, "human horned owl" (a type of malicious, shape-changing sorcerer and the standard Nahuatl translation for devil), is striking.

Klor de Alva (1982a:171) suggests two possible explanations for the avoidance of *tlacatecolotl*: the records of the original dialogues may have specified the use of *diablo*, *tlacatecolotl* not yet having been adopted in 1524; or, Sahagún may have objected to the use of *tlacatecolotl*, as he does in the *Historia general* (1938:1:324), since it applies properly to a "necromancer or witch." This objection appears also in the corresponding place in the *Memoriales en tres columnas* (Sahagún 1905-1907:7:316), a draft of sections of the *Historia general* written in Tlatelolco in 1563-1565 and thus contemporary with the *Colloquios* (Nicolau d'Oliver 1952:57).

However, in his doctrinal writings as a whole Sahagún makes free use of *tlacatecolotl*. The *Evangeliarium* relies on *tlacatecolotl*, with *diablo* used only once (Sahagún 1858:84, in Matt. 25:41, referring to the devil in hell). Its Nahuatl-Latin vocabulary equates "devil" with *tlacatecolotl* (Sahagún 1858:517). The sermons use both terms, with *tlacatecolotl* the more common choice (Sahagún 1563, 1588). The *Evangeliarium* was contemporary with the original composition of the sermons in 1540 or in the 1540s (Chavero 1948:31; García Icazbalceta 1954:336; Nicolau d'Oliver 1952:40). These are Sahagún's earliest surviving doctrinal writings. Whatever the situation in 1524, by 1540 the use of *tlacatecolotl* was quite standard.

Two Nahuatl religious dramas believed to date to the 1530s, the *Juicio Final* and the *Sacrificio de Isaac*, do not contain the term *tlacatecolotl* (Horcasitas

1974). This may reflect the same early usage that the *Colloquios* attempts to preserve. However, Andrés de Olmos's compilation of Nahuatl rhetorical orations, recorded between 1533 and 1539, does make use of the term (Baudot 1983:227; Bautista 1600).

In Sahagún's later texts free use is still made of *tlacatecolotl*. The trilingual vocabulary equates *demonio* and *diablo* with *tlacatecolotl* (Sahagún n.d.:56v, 63v). The *Psalmódia christiana* uses both but, as in the sermons, *tlacatecolotl* is more common. The terms occur with about equal frequency in the *Exercicios* and the *Addiciones*. In all of these texts they appear interchangeably, with no regard to context.

The *Colloquios*' usage may have something to do with the text's purpose in refuting idolatry. In other texts directed toward this end, the *Apéndice* and the appendix to Book I of the *Florentine Codex*, *diablo* takes precedence over *tlacatecolotl*. In neither text, however, is *tlacatecolotl* avoided entirely. A combination of a desire to place indigenous deities in the proper Christian category and a desire to replicate the earliest usage may account for the *Colloquios*' avoidance of *tlacatecolotl*.

In Sahagún's mind, Tezcatlipoca and Lucifer were one and the same. In the *Sermonario* he describes the *vei tlacatecolotl y lucifer y anqjitoayoiaya tezcatlipuca*, "the great tlacatecolotl, Lucifer, whom you used to call Tezcatlipoca" (Sahagún 1563:82r). The *Florentine Codex* refutation of idolatry contains: *Jin tlauelilloc tezcatlipuca, ticmai ca iehoatl in lucifer, in vei diablo*, "this wicked Tezcatlipoca, we know that he is Lucifer, the great devil" (Sahagún 1950-1982:I:38). The *Apéndice* identifies Lucifer with Titlacahuan, "We are his Slaves," one of Tezcatlipoca's names (Sahagún 1579b:10v).

This identification is not made in the *Colloquios*. While the mutilated status of the text precludes the making of definitive statements about the original content, the most likely context for such an identification would be the accounts of Lucifer's rebellion and his deceptions of the people on earth. Tezcatlipoca is used in the *Colloquios* where a single Nahuatl deity is chosen for contrast with the Christian god (for example, 30v, 437-444). Since Tezcatlipoca is presented as the major Nahuatl god, and since all Nahuatl gods are denounced as devils with Lucifer as their chief, an implicit identification of the two may be inferred.

However, since Tezcatlipoca's epithets are frequently applied to the Christian deity, a certain ambiguity about Tezcatlipoca's status emerges. He is the closest Nahuatl parallel for the new god. The audience may more easily understand the new god by thinking of him in comparison to Tezcatlipoca. By allowing a subtle identification between the two, rather than damning Tezcatlipoca outright as Lucifer himself, the friars in the *Colloquios* (and perhaps its historical models) ease the transition from old to new. The direct identification of Lucifer with Tezcatlipoca was appropriate to later audiences who were already familiar with Christianity and were supposed to have left indigenous religion behind.

### Heaven, Hell, and Paradise

The customary terms for heaven in the Nahuatl doctrinal literature are *ilhuicac*, "in heaven" or "in the sky," and *ilhuicatl itic*, "within heaven" or "within the sky." The *Colloquios* follows this pattern. It does, however, specify the abode of the Christian deity and his angels as *Cielo Empyreo* (37v, 1360; 38v, 1448). This is uncommon, but it does occur in the *Psalmódia christiana* in a description of Christ's home and its angelic inhabitants (Sahagún 1583:87v), and in the *Apéndice*'s account of Lucifer's fall (Sahagún 1579b:9v, 10v).

Perhaps the early missionaries actually would have used such a term to distinguish the Christian heaven from the skies in general. Once their converts became accustomed to Christianity's special attitude toward heaven, the Spanish term became superfluous. But since the only other occurrences of the term are in similar contexts, it may be that the authors are simply trying to create as full and impressive a description of heaven as possible without concern for the original dialogues. This seems to be the reason for their inclusion in chapter 12 of the angelic hierarchy which, as Klor de Alva notes (1982a:173), would have had little relevance to the dialogues of 1524.

The *Colloquios*' application of *micltlan* to the Christian hell is customary in Sahagún's writings. While he occasionally introduced the Spanish term *infierno* in later texts (such as the *Addiciones* and *Apéndice*), his general practice was to distinguish this afterworld from the Nahuatl's less dreadful abode of the dead by describing in gory detail the torments that awaited unfortunate sinners there. Yet there is little of such description accompanying the use of *micltlan* in the *Colloquios*. The devils are cast into *tlayoaitan, tlathiyoutloyan*, "the place of darkness, the place of torment" (38v, 1450-1451) but *micltlan* is not even used in this context. The Nahuatl are threatened with destruction, not with hell, if they fail to abandon their gods (36v, 1157-1159). This plays upon the fears that characterized indigenous religion: the Nahuatl's cosmos was in constant danger of destruction but they had no concept of punishment after death for misdeeds. Instilling them with this concept was an important focus of the friars' teaching. But the *Colloquios*, designed to attract to baptism people with no prior knowledge of Christianity, emphasizes concerns that were important to such people. Once they were baptized, teaching could focus on the fear of hell. This is a good example of how the *Colloquios* mediates between indigenous culture and Christianity.

*Parayso terrenal*, "terrestrial paradise," is introduced in the *Colloquios* for the Garden of Eden (90v, 1823). This is Sahagún's standard way of referring to that place. The closest counterpart in indigenous thought was Tlalocan, the paradise of the rain god Tlaloc (see Anderson, this volume). In the *Colloquios* the *quetzalcoatl*, or high priest, describes this lush haven (35v, 983-992).

Sahagún compares these two paradises in his ethnographic works. A Spanish note in the *Memoriales con esculturas* refers to Tlalocatecutli as "the god of their terrestrial paradise" (Sahagún 1905-1907:6:194). Three of his marginal

notes in the *Memoriales en tres columnas* make similar observations (Sahagún 1905-1907:7:3, 200). The introduction to the prayer to Tlaloc in the *Florentine Codex* explains that this deity ruled Tlalocan, which they believed was like *parayso terrenal* (Sahagún 1950-1982:VI:35). The Spanish version of the *Historia general* (Sahagún 1938:I:17) and the *Arte Adivinatoria* (in García Icazbalceta 1954:386) repeat this association.

Such overt comparisons are avoided in the Nahuatl doctrinal texts: *parayso terrenal* is never explained by referring to Tlalocan. The *Colloquios* is consistent with this practice, since it does not draw a direct parallel between the two places. However, the fact that both are mentioned, and in somewhat similar terms (for example, the fertility of both is stressed—35v, 987; 40v, 1829-1832), distinguishes the *Colloquios* from other doctrinal texts. Here again, the *Colloquios* mediates between the two cultures, illuminating the “dialogical frontier.”

#### The Soul

The *Colloquios*' account of Adam's creation pairs the Spanish and Latin word for soul, *anima*, with *teyollitia*, literally, “that which causes people to come to life” (40v, 1807-1808). This is one of three Nahua soul concepts. The others are the *tonalli*, the day sign or personal fate, and *ihiyotl*, “breath” (López Austin 1980:1:223-262). The *teyollitia* (or *teyollia*), seated in the heart, was apparently the soul that remained intact after death and passed to the afterlife (López Austin 1980:1:252-253). Thus it most closely parallels the Christian concept.

The *Evangelium* Nahuatl-Latin vocabulary includes *teyollitia* with the gloss *anima* (Sahagún 1858:515). The student(s) who prepared the “trilingual vocabulary” rendered “soul by which we live” as *tonalli*. This, however, is highly unusual. Sahagún's general avoidance of this term was prudent, given its implications of predestination and its links to the ritual calendar. But throughout his writings Sahagún tended to avoid *teyollitia* as well and to rely on *anima*; in this case he clearly doubted the aptness of Nahuatl terminology. For the *Colloquios*, to facilitate dialogue, a parallel was drawn with a term the 1524 audience would have understood.

The fact that the *Colloquios* refers to the soul in only one context, and this a mythical rather than a moral context, further distinguishes the *Colloquios* from other texts. When addressing audiences well enough indoctrinated to understand the term, the condition and fate of the individual soul become major foci for concern.

#### THEMES

The choice of words reveals much about the process of Nahuatlizing Christianity, but a deeper understanding may be gained by examining the choices of subject matter and the way in which chosen themes are developed. The following discussion focuses upon five of the Christian themes presented

in the *Colloquios*: the rebellion of Lucifer, the fall of Adam and Eve, the story of Cain and Abel, Noah's flood, and the Tower of Babel. The *Colloquios*' treatment of these themes is compared with parallel material in other Sahaguntine texts.

#### Lucifer

An account of Lucifer's rebellion and fall is included in chapter 10 of the *Colloquios* in order to explain the origin of the Nahua gods. The angels were created and their chief, Lucifer, surpassed them; he therefore esteemed himself and became presumptuous, *yc omopouh yc outlama* (37v, 1386). He wanted to become equal to God. Many followed him, but St. Michael challenged him and the angels divided into opposing camps. Fortified by God, Michael was victorious; the bad angels were banished to “the place of darkness, the place of torment” and became devils.

The fullest parallel account is found in the *Apéndice* (Sahagún 1579b:9v-10r). Its purpose there is to explain the origin of the gods as a preliminary to a refutation of the schools dedicated to serving those gods. It is longer but very similar to the *Colloquios* version. However, there is a greater emphasis on pride. Lucifer became haughty and proud, *ohailama ocuecuenot*, and his followers supported him because of self-esteem, *nepohualiztica*. The whole group became *tlatlacatecolo* because of their presumption, *ymmatlamaiz*. God strengthened St. Michael with his grace, a concept unfamiliar to the 1524 audience and omitted from the *Colloquios* account.

In his second sermon for the third Sunday after Pentecost, Sahagún gives even more emphasis to pride (1563:71v): Lucifer became the chief of the angels, but he esteemed himself, *omopouh*; because of his self-esteem he scorned our Lord. Many other angels also esteemed themselves; thus they all sinned and became *tlatlacatecolo*. In the sermon for St. Stephen's day, Lucifer desired God's honor and praise and wanted to be his equal. God became angry and cast him out; he and his companions became *tlatlacatecolo* (Sahagún 1563:96v).

The bad angels' self-esteem and disobedience, *in innepaoliz, yn jmatellac-amatiliz*, cause their fall in the *Addiciones* (Sahagún 1579a:5v). The *Psalmodia christiana*'s songs for St. Michael's day describe Lucifer's revolt: *auh nepohualiztica itzincoc oeoac in totecuo Dios, ic vei iautiolt omuchiuh*, “but with self-esteem he rose before our lord God; therefore a great war occurred” (Sahagún 1583:179v). In this context the emphasis is on St. Michael and the good angels, and the text is in a narrative rather than a homiletic style, but even so Lucifer's self-esteem is mentioned as the reason for his uprising.

In Sahagún's *Sermones* of 1588 (a manuscript that duplicates the 1563 sermons through the fourth Sunday after Epiphany—folio 30—and then diverges completely) a sermon about God's anger states: *Auh çan cepe yn otlatlaco niman oquimotelchiuli yn toteo*, “But just once [Lucifer] sinned, then our lord despised him” (1588:50v). Here the simple fact that Lucifer sinned leads to his fall; no more details are necessary.

In these versions idolatry is no longer the prime concern that it was at the beginning of the evangelization movement. Lucifer's fall moves from being an explanation of the devils' origin to being a moral example used to demonstrate the consequences of sin. Instilling a Christian sense of sin into Nahua converts was a difficult, if not impossible, task for the friars. The Nahuas' closest parallel concept, *tlatlacalli*, referred to any act that damaged physical, moral, social, or cosmic order regardless of the doer's intentions and with no threat of punishment after death. While the friars used *tlatlacalli* and its verb form *tlatlacoa* to translate "sin," it should be kept in mind that the Nahuas probably understood these terms to refer to something somewhat different. The doctrinal texts in general pay much more attention to sin than does the *Colloquios*. While the friars believed the Indians to be much more susceptible to sins of the flesh than to spiritual sins like pride, pride's status as the first and worst of the seven mortal sins ensured it an important place in their preaching. Lucifer's fall was a useful example of the consequences of this sin.

#### *Adam and Eve*

Chapter 14 of the *Colloquios* describes events from Genesis with the devil as prime antagonist. Klor de Alva (1982a:174) notes that this demonologic perspective would have been frowned upon later in the sixteenth century, after the Tridentine reforms had been adopted. However, he refrains from speculating on whether this presentation represents ideas still current in 1564 or is a reconstruction of the 1524 usage. A comparison of this material with corresponding passages in other texts may clarify the issue.

In the *Colloquios* the devils, after their expulsion from heaven, are very envious of the favor God shows to his new human creations. Lucifer goes to *parayso terrenal* and provokes Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (41v, 1901-1911). God is greatly angered and expels them from paradise, making them mortal and forcing them to live on earth among the ravines, mountains, and plains. This account is stripped to its essentials—Lucifer does not appear in serpent guise, Eve is not tempted separately from Adam. The full moral reason for abstaining from the fruit is not explained to them; they are punished simply for their disobedience. Their act is not termed original sin. The emphasis is on Lucifer's deception and its sad consequences rather than on the guilt of Adam and Eve.

The devil, acting out of envy, is the protagonist in the *Apéndice* account, a continuation of its account of Lucifer's fall (Sahagún 1579b:10v). As in the *Colloquios*, no explanation is given for the fruit's prohibition. However, the devil first deceives Eve rather than both together. Like the *Colloquios*, this text is concerned with the origin of Nahua gods and thus concentrates more on the devil's role than on the moral aspects of Adam and Eve's behavior. It does state that they sinned, *otlatlacoque*, and became Lucifer's slaves because of their sin, *yn ipampa yn intlatlacol*. In the *Colloquios* the devil goes to provoke them to sin, *quintlatlacoluitlaltiz* (41v, 1904), but the term is not applied to their act. According to the *Apéndice*, Adam and Eve may be saved if they do

penance. This element is of necessity omitted from the *Colloquios* because conversion, not simply penance, is required for the Indians to be rescued from Lucifer's grasp. The devil then goes about harming things on earth, his first act being the establishment of idolatry, the "considering of things as god(s)" or *tlateoquitliti*. Original sin is mentioned elsewhere in this text but nowhere in the *Colloquios*; the latter text mentions only the "original righteousness," *justicia original*, which God takes away after the couple's transgression (41v, 1929).

One other example of demonic responsibility occurs in the 1588 *Sermones* (Sahagún 1588:93r). A sermon describing how Lucifer, because of his self-esteem, divides things that should be whole, attributes to him the division between body and soul brought about by the fall of Adam and Eve.

These versions contrast with a nondiabolic one in the *Addiciones* (Sahagún 1579a:6r). People are created good, to live happily in terrestrial paradise and never die, but because of their disobedience "our first father" and "our first mother," Adam and Eve, lose their good fortune and fall into God's anger. All of their children suffer the same fate. In order that people may regain what they lost because of this sin, God sends the savior.

Similar moralistic explanations may be found in the sermons. A sermon for the first Sunday after Christmas describes the original excellence of Adam and Eve, in whose hearts is placed original righteousness. But when they sinned, they lost God's grace and they destroyed all of us, their children. Because of this all are born in sin, for which the cure is baptism (Sahagún 1563:12v, 1588:18r). An Ash Wednesday sermon tells how the first father and mother did not take care of themselves but just dishonored themselves and offended *totecuryo*, "our lord"; therefore, he scorned them and placed them among the four-footed animals (Sahagún 1563:29r). A sermon written for the Passion (Sahagún 1563:48r) blames earthly afflictions, and suffering in *mitltlan*, upon "our first father's, Adam's, sin and all of our sins and wickedness." However, further on original sin is attributed to the great *tlacatecolotl*, Lucifer. The *Sermones'* homily on God's wrath simply refers to the couple's sinful act: *Auh in iquac otlatlacoque*, "but when they sinned," the Lord cast them out to this place where we live today, among the beasts and the birds, a place that causes one to weep (Sahagún 1588:50v).

Five other accounts found in the sermons show varying degrees of demonic and moral emphases. For the second Sunday in Advent the evil that Christ was sent to save people from is explained (Sahagún 1563:3r, 1588:4r). The *tlacatecolotl* tempted and deceived Adam and Eve so that they ate the fruit from which they were ordered to abstain. Thus they angered and offended God and fell into the *tlacatecolotl's* hands, losing God's grace and light. They lost paradise, a loss described with the term *oquimixcavalitique*, "they lost it through negligence," implying some degree of responsibility on their own part. They fell into sin and they—not the devils—cast all of us, their children, into it.

Also in the context of explaining Christ's salvation of people is a version in

contexts there is inconsistency regarding whether sin is the cause of enslavement by the devil or the devil is the cause of the fall into sin. The Nahuas are given both interpretations and left to draw their own conclusions. The *Colloquios* presents a view more in line with Nahua ideology, to which deception by a trickster figure would not have seemed an alien concept. The heavy emphasis on sin characteristic of other texts reflects a more orthodox Christian view, but even here the difference between Nahua and Christian ideas of "sin" would have allowed some degree of reinterpretation along native lines.

The preceding examples contrast with an exceptionally detailed account, closely paralleling that of Genesis, given in the *Psalmodia christiana* for *septuagesima* (seventieth day before Easter, Sahagún 1583:32v-35r). The songs for this day are titled *tlaculcuicatl* or "sad song" (a transcription and translation of the *tlaculcuicatl* is in Burkhardt 1986). The focus of the text is human sin and the suffering it has caused throughout human history. The Eden segment includes God's creation of the tree of knowledge and his warning to Adam. The *tlacatecolotl* enters the wily serpent, which is described as having a human face and voice. Wrapped around the tree of knowledge, the serpent speaks to Eve. By telling her that the fruit will make them like gods, with knowledge of good and bad, he persuades her to eat it and to give it to Adam. Then God descends and Adam attempts to hide from him but is discovered and shamed. He blames Eve and she blames the serpent. God curses the *tlacatecolotl*-serpent and metes out punishments to the humans.

Here, as in the Bible (Gen. 3:13), Eve blames the serpent but this does not serve her as an excuse. The Nahuas, like all Catholics, were taught not to blame the devil for their sins. Sahagún lists all the ways the *tlacatecolotl* tries to ruin confession, one way being: *techeuitlavilitia inic çan tetch tictlamizque, inic çan tiquitozque onechitzlacavj in tlacatecolul*, "he provokes us so that we just accuse people, so that we just say 'the *tlacatecolotl* deceived me'" (1563:37r). This was a common warning, appearing for example in Molina's bilingual *Confessionario mayor* (1972:12v) and in Zumárraga's Spanish *Regla cristiana breve* of 1547 (1951:117). This further illuminates the relatively amoral character of the *Colloquios* with its emphasis on demonic responsibility.

The serpent's appearance here reflects the text's faithfulness to its Genesis prototype and shows that this aspect of the myth was taught to the Nahuas. The lavishly staged reenactment of the fall of Adam and Eve performed in Tlaxcala in 1539, as described by Motolinía (1941:95), included the speaking serpent's role along with Eve's attempt to blame it for her act. In the Dominican *Doctrina cristiana* of 1548, the deceiving demon dons a serpent disguise, though it is not ascribed human characteristics (1944:35r).

Bonnell (1917) identifies the snake with human face as an innovation of the late medieval mystery plays. From here the motif passed into art, flourishing in both media through the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Transplanted to Mexico, the motif survives in the sixteenth-century Indian mural paintings at Cuicteco, Michoacán, and Actopan and Santa María Xoxoteco, Hidalgo, all Augustinian establishments (the latter two examples are published in Arrigas

which the *tlacatecolotl*, very envious, deceives Adam and Eve. They sin and become the *tlacatecolotl*'s slaves (Sahagún 1563:71v). The St. Stephen's day sermon states that Adam and Eve desired to be equal to God and were therefore punished. The *tlacatecolotl* told our first mother that she would equal God if she ate the fruit. She ate it and provoked her husband to eat it too. Thus they sinned and were punished (Sahagún 1563:96v). A sermon describing Christ as the "good shepherd" equates people with sheep driven away by the wolf of *mitlani* after the *tlacatecolotl* deceived "our first father." People were very confused by sin and idolatry; as in the *Apéndice*, idolatry here begins after the fall of Adam and Eve (Sahagún 1563:58v). A version from the *Sermones* asserts: *Auh in çihuatl oquiltaco yn innavatil quitztlacauj y tlacate [sic]*, "But the woman broke their command, the *tlacatecolotl* deceived her" (Sahagún 1588:54v).

These versions differ from the *Colloquios* in their emphasis on sin, that is, on the moral as well as the temporal aspects of Adam and Eve's behavior. They explain the origin of humanity's sinful nature which the good Christian must counteract through the sacraments, especially baptism, and through leading a good life. In this respect these accounts resemble contemporary material printed in Mexico in Spanish, and thus not directed specifically toward Indians. Sin alone causes the fall in, for example, Zumárraga's 1547 *Regla cristiana breve* (1951:53) and his 1544 reprint of Gerson's *Tripartito* (1949:3v).

The accounts vary as to the role of the *tlacatecolotl* and whether the responsibility is Eve's, Adam's, or shared by both. In the first case it is an issue of human as opposed to demonic responsibility; in the second, a matter of the relative moral quality of the sexes. While the misogynistic strain in Christian theology has tended to lay the brunt of the blame on Eve, a shared responsibility was essential to the friars' teachings taken as a whole. Mary, the perfect woman, reversed Eve's sin while Christ, the New Man, did the same for Adam. The tree of Eden and the cross were often compared. The fact that Eve's role is not consistently stressed is therefore not surprising; Sahagún's Christ-centered Franciscan theology made Adam's role important. Since the sacred world of the Nahuas was somewhat less patriarchal than that of the Christians, with major Nahua deities having both male and female aspects, balanced gender roles were compatible with the indigenous world view.

As in the *Colloquios*, an authoritarian explanation for the fruit's prohibition dominates: God forbids it without explaining why. In one instance Eve accepts the fruit in order to be like God and know good and bad, but in the others they are simply deceived into disobedience. However, this was not unusual in religious writings circulating at the time. Gerson's *Tripartito* blames the fall simply upon the sin of disobedience (1949:3v). The desire to be like God and simple disobedience are both sins of pride—the distinction may not have appeared very significant to the late medieval mind-set of the period.

Clearly, variant explanations of the fall were permitted to coexist. When the indigenous gods are being refuted, the devil's role is emphasized. In other



H. 1979:illus. 8, 39). Possible staging as a mystery play may well have been considered for the *Psalmódia christiana* version since this book was written for the Nahuas' religious celebrations, which sometimes included theatrical productions. Or, the author(s) may have been influenced by productions such as that at Tlaxcala. The Dominican *Doctrina*, produced for preaching, not dramatizing, had no need for a humanized snake.

The rare appearance of serpents in the Sahagunine writings may reflect an effort to emphasize the devil's role over that of a mere reptile. The *Psalmódia christiana* account is careful to specify that the *tlacatecolotl* deceives Eve, as this is not mentioned in Genesis. Since snakes were important in indigenous religion, often in a beneficent way, there may have been some conscious attempt to prevent the identification of Lucifer with a serpentine deity.

The Cihuacoatl who haunted Tenochtitlan on the eve of the Conquest is portrayed in Book VIII of the *Florentine Codex* as a snake with a woman's head (Sahagún 1950-1982:VIII:chap. 6). While this makes perfect sense as a glyph for "woman-snake," it may also be noted that the human-headed serpent in contemporary art was customarily shown as female (Bonnell 1917). The surviving Mexican murals follow this pattern. Indians exposed to the motif could easily have identified the two figures even though no friar ever made such an identification.

#### *Cain and Abel*

The *Colloquios* includes the tale of Abel's murder by his brother as a further example of the devil's deceptions and to explain the origin of the worship of idols (41v, 1963-1986). The *diablo* deceived Cain, so that he killed Abel. He by Whom One Lives therefore despised Cain and afflicted him with great suffering. Cain and his wife went to live apart from Adam, and their children became the first idolaters.

The sermon about the devil's dividing of things that should be whole likewise blames Lucifer for the discord between Cain and Abel and gives no other reason for it (Sahagún 1588:93r). This text also agrees with the *Colloquios* regarding the beginning of idolatry.

A version from the 1563 sermons presents a very different picture. Because of Abel's good heart, our Lord was pleased with him and cherished him. Therefore Cain, envious and angry, killed his brother. Our Lord became very angry with him and pursued him (presumably away from Adam). Thus he fell into the *tlacatecolotl*'s hands, committed many sins, and went to *mictlan* when he died (Sahagún 1563:86r). The passage is part of a moral lesson warning against concerning oneself with other people's affairs. Cain acts as a morally free agent; his act places him under the *tlacatecolotl*'s power but the devil does not directly induce him to act in this way. Idolatry is not specified as one of Cain's many transgressions.

#### *The Flood*

In the *Colloquios* the devils confuse Adam's children, causing them to intermarry with Cain's idolatrous descendants (41v, 1999-2005). Intermixing with the daughters of idolaters is denounced in the *Apéndice*, in the context of an argument against lust (Sahagún 1579b:3v), lust being the usual explanation for the Flood. The *Colloquios* account bears a tinge of idolatry as well, as befits a text concerned with early evangelization. This offense angered the *señor teotl* so that with a great flood he decimated all the people in the world save Noah, his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law. They, along with the rest of God's creations, escaped in a great wooden chest (41v, 2006-2025).

The *Apéndice* attributes the Flood to lust, rendered in Nahuatl as *tlaelpaquititli*, "foul pleasure," which is said to greatly anger the Lord. There is no mention of devils (Sahagún 1579b:3v). Zumárraga's Spanish *Regla christiana breve* also blames the Flood on lust (1951:161).

Unspecified sins, with no diabolic participation, are the cause in three other accounts. A sermon warns sinners that they will suffer the same fate as the sinners when the world was flooded: they had gone about devoting themselves to sin, and the Lord therefore killed them underwater (Sahagún 1563:2r, 1588:2v). Here Noah is not even mentioned. A second sermon refers to the great sins that the people on earth had gone about doing, for which the Lord punished them by destroying all the people and all the animals and plants, saving only eight people (Sahagún 1588:50v-51r).

The *Psalmódia christiana*'s *tlacuilcuicatl* follows its Adam and Eve tale with a similarly detailed account of the Flood (Sahagún 1583:35v-38v). As the human population increased, many sins were committed. The people's stench and rotteness, in *imijaca*, in *impala[m]ca*, the pollution associated in Nahuatl thought with the commission of immoral acts, rose all the way to heaven. The Lord despised people because of their sins and regretted having created them. Noah alone was of good heart; God ordered him to build a great wooden chest or boat and to load it with his wife, sons, daughters-in-law, and all the animals, two by two. Thus they were saved.

#### *The Tower of Babel*

In the *Colloquios* the devils incite the postdiluvian people, who still speak one language, to build a high mountain in order to ascend to heaven. This offends He by Whom One Lives and he punishes the people by dividing the language (41v, 2029-2054). The sermon about the divisions caused by Lucifer furnishes one other example of demonic responsibility. There was once only one language, but when the devil divided things because of his self-esteem, this unity was destroyed and the many languages spoken today originated (Sahagún 1588:93r). Like the *Colloquios*, since this text focuses on the devil, it uses him as an explanatory agent.

Two accounts from the *Psalmódia christiana* follow the more general pattern of blaming catastrophes on human error. As in the *Colloquios*, in one the

Tower is described as a mountain (*tepetl*). Sixteenth-century chroniclers compared or even identified the great pyramid at Cholula, the *tlachihualtepetl* or "manufactured mountain," with the Tower of Babel (*Codex Ríos* 1964:18-21; Durán 1967:I:166; Motolinia 1941:75-76; Mendieta 1870:86-87). These accounts of the Tower seem to agree with this association.

The songs for St. Matthew's day attribute this event to sin, specifically pride (Sahagún 1583:176r-176v). The people agreed to build a very high mountain where they would save themselves if the world were again deluged. But God became angry, since the people, through their self-esteem, wanted to defend themselves from him. Therefore, he multiplied their language and each group became the possessor of a god; thus, idolatry began. The difference in purpose is explained by the *Colloquios*' omission of God's promise to Noah. Klor de Alva suggests that this was omitted to support the friar's threat that God would destroy the Indians if they failed to convert (1982a:175). Why the people in the *Colloquios* should desire to ascend to heaven is left unexplained.

Here the origin of idolatry is postdiluvian, in contrast to the *Colloquios* and the sermon about Cain and Abel cited above. One of the Adam and Eve texts also stated that idolatry began after their fall, implying an antediluvian origin (Sahagún 1563:58v). This ambiguity about idolatry is partly inherent in the concept itself and its Nahuatl counterpart *tlateotiliztli*, "the considering of things as god(s)." The terms may be taken either in reference to idols, "things," or to anyone or anything other than God; thus they are "objective" in the sense of an idol being a created thing rather than a creator. Therefore, the worship of devils, not merely of inanimate objects, is idolatrous. The two practices were conceptually distinct and were believed to have originated at different times. Lucifer's rebellion, in which the other bad angels placed him above God, was an act of idolatry; the first human idolatry could have been either the worship of devils or of idols.

The friars distinguished between the worship of idols, as practiced by the Indians of the Caribbean islands, and the worship of devils—as such, or as depicted by idols—which characterized the mainland civilizations (Klor de Alva 1981b). However, they did not make this distinction consistently in their Nahuatl writings. In some texts Sahagún emphasized devils; in others, notably the appendix to Book I of the *Florentine Codex*, he emphasized images. The term *tlateotiliztli* implies worship of inanimate objects because of the objective prefix *tl-*, but it is applied also to the worship of devils, beings who in the friars' view were very much alive. Nor was the term very accurate for the Indians, who considered their deity-images to be animate beings. Confusion was the inevitable outcome.

The second account is from the *Psalmódia christiana's tlaucaulicatl* (Sahagún 1583:38v-39r). Here the Tower is a *viac calli, itoca Torre*, "long (or tall) house, its name is Tower." No explanation for the project and its termination, save that it offends God, is given, even though the preceding account of the Flood does include God's promise to Noah. The general context is one of lamentation for the effects of sin on human life; the summary that follows the

Babel episode emphasizes the role of sin in this event as well as in the Flood and the fall of Adam and Eve. The text assumes a fair degree of indoctrination into Christian moral concepts on the part of its audience, something never taken for granted in the *Colloquios*.

## CONCLUSION

Though only a few terms and a few themes have been discussed, these point out the special place of the *Colloquios* within the Sahaguntine corpus. They also show the considerable doctrinal variation that existed in the Nahuatl texts on Christianity. Was the fall of Adam and Eve the fault of the devil or was human choice involved? Was the Tower of Babel a building, a mountain, or a pyramid? Did idolatry begin with Lucifer, with Cain, or after the dividing of the languages? Is Tezcatlipoca God or Lucifer?

That so much variation appears within the texts written and/or sponsored by one man, who with his students' help was the most qualified to produce such material, indicates that the sixteenth-century Nahuas were not presented with a clear-cut version of Christian doctrine (see Klor de Alva 1983). Things became more standardized later on in accordance with the Tridentine reforms, but this did not occur early enough in New Spain to affect the work of Sahagún and his contemporaries. Such conflicting interpretations, combined with the hazards of translation, surely contributed to the lack of sincere acceptance and understanding of Christian doctrine so lamented by the missionaries.

Despite this general lack of consistency, the *Colloquios* occupies a discrete position in relation to the other texts. It does attempt to re-create what was or what should or would have been said in 1524. Thus there is an emphasis on idolatry and on the comparatively benevolent nature of the Christian deity, and little attention is paid to the concept of sin. Though Sahagún's work in general relies heavily on Nahuatl terminology, here there is a relatively greater reliance on Nahuatl to convey abstract meanings, as in the use of *tlouque nahuaque* and *teyollitia*. The *Colloquios* exemplifies the techniques used for conversion, here and there embellished with an elaborate literary-historical overlay.

Sahagún's other doctrinal texts are modeled much more closely on what would have been presented to a non-Indian audience. His earliest surviving doctrinal writings show that already by the 1540s the converts were expected to be able to think in terms of Christian morality. Thus they are given virtually literal translations from the Bible (the *Evangeliarium*) and fire-and-brimstone sermons berating them for sins of which idolatry is now one among many. God's benevolence is still emphasized, but he is an exacting deity. The Nahuas of 1524 were perceived as helpless children led astray by devils, an attitude reflected in the *Colloquios*. But by the 1540s the Indian Church had reached the age of reason. The Nahuas were now held responsible for the state of their souls. In texts from this period the characters in Genesis tend to bring on their problems through their own actions.

Yet the text which most closely parallels sections of the *Colloquios* is the *Apéndice*, written in 1579 in reaction to the threat of ongoing idolatry. The texts follow the full circle: from initial conversion, through full indoctrination with occasional warnings against idolatry, to the gradual realization that those warnings are not enough and it is necessary to refute idolatry all over again. Thus an appendix with that intent was added to the *Historia general's* book on the gods, probably for the "recopilación" of 1567-1569 as it does not appear in the earlier *Memoriales en tres columnas* draft (Sahagún 1905-1907:7). The *Apéndice* was added to the *Postilla* in 1579. The 1585 *Arte Adivinatoria* again denounced the old gods and accused the Nahuas of conspiring to perpetuate their worship (in García Icazbalceta 1954:382). In these later texts Sahagún speaks to and for the Indians. It is he, in his own voice, who describes the "old men's" teachings only to refute them. The "old men" are no longer given any opportunity to present their own case.

In 1564 Sahagún was still able to express optimism about the success of conversion (see Klor de Alva, next article). He states in the prologue to the *Colloquios* that the conversion of the Indians is a glorious act of God that he wants to record for future generations. This quixotic conception of the early missionary work persisted. In his *Relación* written in 1576 and inserted into Book X of the *Historia general's* Spanish version, he states that things would not have turned out so badly if missionary work had continued the way it had begun (Sahagún 1938:III:84). But here the emphasis is on the many failures he had witnessed, such as the attempt to create an Indian priesthood, and the continuation of idolatry. The tone is far from hopeful.

One landmark in the decline of the Franciscan mission was 1564. Mendieta, writing toward the end of the sixteenth century, chose the death of Viceroy don Luis de Velasco the Elder as the end of the "golden age" (*tiempo dorado*) of the Indian Church (1870:559). Velasco died in 1564. When the *Colloquios* was written the problems had already started and the optimism was fading. The *Colloquios*, by re-creating 1524, gave the Franciscans a final moment of glory. Aztec culture is described in terms that express a sense of order, nobility, and beauty, in contrast to the bleak fortunes of many Indians under the colonial yoke. The friars, in their turn, know exactly what to say in order to strike down the Indians' opposition in order to effect a sincere conversion. The *Colloquios* is nostalgic dramatization as well as historical reconstruction. Uniting Sahagún's ethnography with his propagation of the faith, it enshrines the Nahuatl-Christian dialogue that flourished under Franciscan patronage. It occupies a singular place in the bibliography of this most remarkable friar.

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## SAHAGÚN'S MISGUIDED INTRODUCTION TO ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE FAILURE OF THE COLLOQUIOS PROJECT

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### SAHAGÚN'S FIRST ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTER?

So little is known of Bernardino de Sahagún's life that hypotheses concerning his introduction to Nahuatl culture must be hedged with many qualifiers. A pioneer biographer of Sahagún, Joaquín García Icazbalceta (1954:328), relying on the information of Antonio de Herrera, argued that Sahagún traveled to the New World in the company of natives who may have served as his initial contact with the indigenous civilization of Central Mexico. Unfortunately, the Franciscan, who divulged little about his biography, is silent on the subject. More recently, Munro Edmonson (1974:3) suggested that the "question of his growing awareness of Aztec culture could probably be greatly illuminated by the examination of his [early] biblical translations and psalmody." This proposal is intriguing, and the systematic studies of these materials by Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles E. Dibble, Louise M. Burkhart (see, for instance, her article in this volume), and others, are very enlightening in this regard.

However, in the present essay I use a different approach that focuses on the confessional prose used by Sahagún to express his belief that, in general, the Christianization effort had failed. I do this in order to address two enigmas. One, what was the nature of the initial study of Central Mexican ethnography that Sahagún pursued as a necessary correlate to proselytizing? Two, why did he fail to publish the *Colloquios y doctrina christiana* manuscript though he had been granted the license to do so? I believe these two questions are related. In 1564 Sahagún edited his *Colloquios* text, depicting the initial Nahuatl-Franciscan contacts as analogous to his own first encounters with the native population. Then, having fully recognized how misguided his introduction to Nahuatl culture had been, he withdrew from the publisher the manuscript that (erroneously) described as successful the conversion efforts of the early missionaries. It is reasonable to interpret this act as an admission both of his early naiveté and of his belief that the Christianization movement may have been doomed from the start.

The work of Sahagún, as noted in my previous essay in this volume, is experimental and frequently (necessarily?) riddled with puzzles and contradictions. His *Colloquios* is no exception. As its lengthy title notes, the document is a record of the 1524 "dialogues and Christian doctrine by which the twelve friars of Saint Francis sent by Pope Adrian VI and the Emperor Charles V