Spanish Influence on Inca and Aztec Religion

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Abstract

The enclosed thesis examines the changes Inca and Aztec religion underwent as a result of Spanish colonization. Because both societies maintained an oral history, pre-colonial records exist only as recorded by non-natives after the arrival of Europeans. Hence, the information contained in said documents reflects a Western bias and does not provide an objective view of rites, rituals, beliefs, and customs. Gleaning accurate accounts of AmerIndian religion from these documents is difficult, if not impossible. Regardless, much can be learned from close scrutiny.

Two visible figures I have utilized in this study are Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca, a mestizo who was among the first to record Inca history, and Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, a Franciscan missionary who did the same concerning Aztec history. Additionally, secondary sources were employed. It is my hope that this thesis helps to demonstrate how European colonialism was fundamental in the permanent alteration of two of the greater cultures known on this planet. Furthermore, and perhaps more lamentably, the aforementioned colonization failed to even attempt preserve an objective, historical account of the indigenous people and their culture.

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When Western Europeans became aware of the large landmass that was to become known as the New World, the floodgates of jostling for position by these ambitious powers opened with the hope of expanding empire and furthering their wealth and glory. Among the most successful at gaining first a foothold and eventually control in this region were the Spanish. Their influence over Latin America was second to none. However, in order to achieve this lofty, if not dubious, status existing power structures had to be subdued and incorporated into the Spanish hierarchical definition.

The common catchphrase “God, gold, glory” is used to enumerate the motivations for Spanish and European expansion in the region. Yet different groups carried out these three interrelated forces with varying emphasis at different times. The glory of the homeland was fueled proportionately by the acquisition of wealth and the spread of one’s culture. However, in practical terms, glory was little sought outside of gold and god once a particular land had been claimed. Indeed, glory was more of a European issue between rival kingdoms attempting to satisfy their own population’s desire for some sense of worth and self-actualization. When one examines the conduct of the Spanish conquest and subsequent colonization of Latin America, little can be considered glorious outside of an elitist imperialist perspective.

God and gold were the driving forces of Spanish hopefuls in the New World. For the conquistadores and earliest colonists, it was exclusively the acquisition of wealth that pushed them. After the initial subjugation of the indigenous population, gold was forced to share its role of primary motivator with god. While the pursuit of material wealth was never extinguished, two powerful groups, the clergy and the ruling elite, used god as a means to organize and perpetuate Spanish culture and lifestyle.
After Spanish expeditions in the Caribbean Sea and Yucatan Peninsula, attention was turned further inland toward the Valley of Mexico. Situated at a high elevation between two mountain ranges, a group of AmerIndians known as the Aztecs had built an impressive empire that has been described by some as the New World’s equivalent of the Roman Empire. Spanish interest was directed toward the Aztecs after their initial meeting at the Spanish port town of Veracruz.

Spanish introduction to the Valley of Mexico was precipitated by their quest for wealth, most notably gold. Initial Spanish forays on the continent focused on the Maya, the dominant AmerIndians in the Yucatan. While contact with the Maya resulted in profitable trade for the Spanish, it could not prepare them for their encounter with an even greater empire to the north. In April 1519 Hernan Cortez reached Veracruz and soon after was met by four thousand Aztecs. Apparently the main purpose of this welcoming party was to garner information concerning the newcomers, rumor of whom had reached Moctezuma some time prior to their arrival at Veracruz. Gifts were exchanged, and the Spaniards received a measure of gold far surpassing what they had found in the Yucatan. It was this display of wealth through friendship that helped seal the Aztec’s doom.

The Aztec Empire was not unlike the great empires seen in Europe. A dominant group maintained hegemony over a variety of lands and people; this internal diversity necessarily meant various opposition factions existed within the Valley of Mexico. Cortez seized this opportunity to further his military position by lending aid to dissident tribes such as the Tlaxcalans and Totonacs. These allies and others provided the
Aztec history. Sahagun asked mainly about pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices, but also received much information concerning other aspects of Aztec culture and lifestyle. He compiled his findings into a set of volumes now referred to as the Florentine Codex. Sahagun also wrote A History of Ancient Mexico, which is similar in content to the Codex.

The religion of the Aztecs originated with the fusion of many AmerIndian groups. The Chichimecs were a bellicose people from the deserts north of the Valley of Mexico. About 1200 CE they forced their way southward and replaced the Toltecs as the ruling class. The Toltecs’ disappearance may have been due in part to the Chichimecs, although much evidence shows that their influence in the region had been waning for some time. After a period of turbulence, the most powerful group to emerge was the Mexica. The Mexica were almost certainly a blend of many AmerIndian groups including Toltec holdovers, Chichimeca invaders, nomadic peoples, and the indigenous population. When one speaks of the Aztecs, they are referring to a coalition group of AmerIndians, of whom the Mexica were the most dominant.

To better exert control over the Aztecs, the Spanish missionaries used techniques similar to those that would later be practiced in the viceroyalty of Peru. Aztecs were taught the Spanish religion, Roman Catholicism, in both their native tongue and Latin. Teachings were initially directed toward children as their development in a West European heritage was key to maintaining an indefinite influence over the people. This form of “elementary” school was successful enough to warrant the establishment of a college, Santa Cruz, in Tlateloco in 1536. The handpicked students of the college were well versed in Latin, Spanish, and, most importantly, Christian theology. Graduates
proved to be invaluable tools in the active proselytizing to and conversion of their fellow AmerIndians. Some missionaries even hoped that Santa Cruz could possibly function as a seminary for potential Aztec priests. However, this did not come to fruition as Aztec blending of Catholicism with their native religion deterred the missionaries from pursuing this course of action.

Sahagun realized that any attempt to reveal an accurate account of Aztec history required the Spaniards to speak Nahuatl, the dominant language in the area, fluently. Furthermore, he understood that Aztec students at Santa Cruz, being learned in Latin and Spanish, could assist in translating and gathering this information. In this manner, Sahagun was able to establish a network of somewhat bilingual, if not trilingual, Aztecs and Spaniards who could communicate with each other and elders in the community, gleaning anecdotal accounts. Sahagun even went so far as to compile a Nahuatl-Spanish dictionary to further clarify translations. In 1588 Sahagun was finally officially commissioned to study the native culture for the purpose of the “...indoctrination, the propagation and perpetuation of the Christianization of these natives of New Spain, and as a help to the workers and ministers who indoctrinate them,” something he had been doing for quite some time. This decree, originating from the royal court of Spain, clearly illustrates the primary goal for religion as conversion as opposed to assistance. Furthermore, it demonstrates how easily a religious spin could and would be applied to Aztec history.

In fact it was King Phillip II of Spain who ultimately confirmed Nahuatl as the primary language for conversion stating “The knowledge of the general language of the Indians is the most necessary means for the explanation and teaching of the Christian
With the aid of learned natives, Sahagun was able to use Nahuatl for two related goals: translation and dissemination of Christian theology and the recording of Aztec history. However, Sahagun sent historical information through his own European, Christian filter. Because of this, many religious concepts and practices were omitted or altered in his records.

Problems did arise when the Spanish missionaries tried to translate certain concepts into Nahuatl terms. For example, the concept of 'the Mother of God' in Christian theology closely resembles the Nahuatl term Tanantzin, who was an Aztec goddess. Some missionaries felt this equivocation was acceptable as it put Christianity in terms the Aztec could easily understand and, theoretically, adopt. The majority of missionaries including Sahagun, however, preferred the introduction of a new term, dios ynantzin. On one hand, a new term would necessarily prevent idolatry, as a connection between theologies would be more tenuous; on the other hand, introduction of new terms may serve to confuse the Aztecs and lessen the impact of the new religion.

Sahagun's primary goal as religious missionary far outweighed his pursuit of Aztec history for the sake of its preservation. In the prologues he wrote for each of the volumes of the Florentine Codex Sahagun often reiterates Biblical passages and other Christian doctrines expressing his confidence in the ability of Christianity to become the way of life in the New World. Despite his strong conviction in the eventual triumph of Christianity, Sahagun readily admits the long-standing presence of a lifestyle quite un-Christian. In his prologue to the first volume, Sahagun states:

'It is certainly a matter of great wonderment that, for so many centuries, our Lord God has concealed a forest of so many idolatrous peoples whose luxuriant fruits only the demon harvested and holds hoarded in the infernal fire.'
Nor can I believe that the church of God would not be successful where the synagogue of Satan has had so much success, in accordance with that [phrase] of St. Paul's: "Grace will abound where transgression abounded."

That these prologues were written after the compilation of the Codex is striking. Years of study of the Aztec civilization did little to change Sahagun’s ultimate perspective of the people: that they were a population desperately in need of Christian salvation above all else.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter in Sahagun’s volume on the gods is the thirteenth. Sahagun introduces this chapter as one “…which telleth of the … lesser, who were considered the very old gods.” Only one god is mentioned, the Turquoise Lord Xiuhtecutli, who is the god of fire. Although Xiuhtecutli appears to have diminished in importance over the course of many years, his enduring presence is a testament to the emphasis placed upon the value of fire. It seems likely that the earliest AmerIndians were wont to deify the spirit of fire, and with good reason, as fire is an invaluable resource and would have been extremely important to the preservation and expansion of early humans.

The religion of the Aztec was polytheistic. The foremost of the gods in their pantheon was Huitzilopochtli, a god of war and conquest. For all the reverence in which Huitzilopochtli was held, Sahagun does him perhaps the greatest disservice calling him “…only a common man. [He was] a sorcerer, an omen of evil; a madman, a deceiver…” Of all the gods Sahagun noted, Huitzilopochtli’s entry is the second shortest. Sahagun contends that many of the Aztec gods were merely common men who were held in such esteem during their lives that the Aztec deified them after death. Yet he realized this was not universally the case regarding their pantheon. As was the case
with many polytheistic faiths, deities often represented forces of nature or other universal events. These included a rain god (Tlaloc), a goddess of misery (Ciuacoatl), a goddess of food and drink (Chicome coati), and so on.

The Aztec, like the Inca, found the divine in many things. Sahagun states that items that were governed by a deity were often looked upon as somewhat holy as well. One such example relates to Tezcatzoncatl, the god of *pulque*, an Aztec wine. Sahagun records that, when intoxicated, the AmerIndian will blame his actions on the *pulque* and Tezcatzoncatl, shirking all responsibility for his own actions. Furthermore, Sahagun suggests that this disconnect between one's actions while drunk and accountability for those actions encourages one to become drunk when one is inclined to act against their better, sober judgement. As is the case with most of Sahagun's accounts and analyses, he summarizes by contrasting traditional Aztec practices with newly imposed Christian standards. His bias is evident as he closes this particular section “...it is necessary to impress them of their error[s]...”

Spanish missionaries saw the devil at work in many ways in what they perceived as a heathen culture. The Aztec were very aware of the powers their gods embodied. Additionally, they also realized when some of this power had been bestowed upon individuals. Those in the community who functioned as healers or sorcerers necessarily interacted with the supernatural on a regular basis for the purpose of healing the ill and injured. The Aztec knew that there were those in this line of work who could manipulate their wares for less than wholesome ends. In this way, the Aztec had their witches so to speak before Spanish arrival.
Sahagun expands upon this in the Codex. The *Malleus maleficarum* was seen as an authoritative account of the actions, behaviors, and characteristics of witches and witchcraft. This text, written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, certainly influenced Sahagun. He understood that there was a connection between the position of healer and the supernatural within Aztec culture. Hence, he contrasts a good physician from a witch, as it were. What he attributes to a good physician is close to what a healer would have practiced: the ability to cure certain illnesses with herbs and roots, healing through bleeding, the splinting of broken bones, and so on. However, description of a bad physician drives far beyond accusing one of mere quackery. Rather, poor physicians are in league with the devil. Here, Sahagun enumerates many actions a witch will perform such as lurid sexual practices with the devil, the creation of potions for the sickening and murder of others, and the practice of divination and deceit. Sahagun’s account certainly blends Spanish views of witchcraft with practices of Aztec healers which may have been considered evil. It is when he mentions the relation to the devil and the practice of telling fortunes and futures that Sahagun comes from a European perspective. Otherwise, his analysis may be factually based with only the negative connotations due to his background.

Other more active accounts of witchcraft are given concerning Aztec practices. Some reported that witches acted more directly under the devil’s service than what Sahagun suggests. It is contended that at birth some babies are sold or otherwise given to the devil to be used at his leisure. Working closely with the devil, these witches are in turn given dominion over a certain animal or indeed have the ability to transform into that animal. One account states “...it has happened that such a threatened Indian or Spaniard
has later had an encounter with some... animal in the field; and when the animal comes out of the encounter wounded or hurt, they later find the Indian who made the threat with the same wounds...”

Perhaps the most striking and telling similarity between the conduct of European and Aztec witches is their denial of witchcraft in front of figures of authority. Accused witches are completely recalcitrant when faced with such charges. As was the case with European witch-hunts, one’s proclamation of innocence usually carried little weight.

Like the Inca, the vast Aztec pantheon did not have a devil figure comparable to the one found in the Judeo-Christian heritage. This is not to suggest that the supernatural forces of vengeance and evil did not exist. Rather, Aztec gods functioned similarly to Inca gods in that their wrath was most often aroused when the people committed transgressions against right and appropriate behavior. The omnipresence of a supernatural power served as a great deterrence to committing acts of evil. This concept was not foreign to the Spanish as they too felt “...a need to do right in the sight of power, the divine being the ultimate power.”

Sahagun clearly saw the presence of the Judeo-Christian devil working in Aztec civilization. Like most Europeans, Sahagun believed the devil had a heavy and active hand in sustaining this pagan culture. It was this demonic affliction that inspired Sahagun to proselytize so intensively. Regardless of his narrow focus on conversion, one can hardly accuse Sahagun of being corruptible. Toward the end of his life, a more secular clergy began to arrive and “expand” the operation of the first missionaries. This was quite distasteful to Sahagun as he maintained the view “…that the friar evangelists who were still indispensable, were in fact more necessary than ever.”

By the late
1580’s the change in the Church’s religious conduct was apparent and permanent. The original model that primarily emphasized conversion was replaced with a “...metropolitan ecclesiastic model.” The evolution of religion in the Valley of Mexico had moved from purely religious motives to organizational and subduing motives.

Spanish influence on Aztec culture, religion, and lifestyle is apparent. As was the case with the imperialism of the time, little concern was given to the lives of the Aztec outside of their relationship in a subservient role to the ruling Europeans. This attitude was prevalent among the vast majority of Spanish colonists regardless of socio-economic status. Sahagun’s writings give us some insight into the civilization of the Aztec prior to Spanish arrival. However, they give us an equally vivid picture of the Eurocentric and self-directed motivations of the colonists. What Sahagun may have considered altruism, that is, his willingness to lead the Aztec out of darkness into light, was more a show of the inability of the Spanish to understand and tolerate a different culture.

The Aztec were not the only Native American group to be affected by the arrival of Spanish conquistadores. The group of AmerIndians commonly referred to as the Inca were also influenced by Spanish arrival in the New World. Comparison between Spanish conquest of these two cultures yields many similarities. One such similarity is the role of religion. As the Aztec were forced to learn and revere a new religion for the primary purpose of recasting their culture in a Western tradition, so too were the Inca subject to this forced transformation.

The history of religion and the devil in the pre-colonial Inca Empire is difficult to discern. Native Americans living in the Andes and Central America also operated
primarily through oral tradition. Hence, much of the culture and mythology surrounding these concepts have been permanently lost. Furthermore, the facts and theories that can be examined are viewed from no fewer than two differing perspectives. According to Fernando Cervantes, historians of the New World tend to fall into one of two categories: those who study devil culture as it was practiced by the popular culture and those who study it as it was practiced by the clergy and social elite.\textsuperscript{19} It seems that there has been some debate over which study offers a more accurate sense of religion and devilry in these civilizations. The best theories are those that take into account both aspects of Latin American culture. The clergy and elites were not sealed off from the commoners. Ergo, the most complete picture of Latin American religion can only be painted through diverse examinations of many socio-economic groups that cut across societal layers.

The bulk of resources available in this area of study refer to the Inca AmerIndians. Undoubtedly, the most traumatic event within Inca society was the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores. Given this singular event which so drastically and permanently changed Inca culture, religion, and lifestyle, it makes sense to try and establish the differences between pre-colonial Inca religion and the subsequent hybridization between traditional Inca views and a Judeo-Christian heritage.

The Inca maintained a rich oral tradition that passed down the bulk of their culture, religious practices, rites, and other ceremonies effectively. \textit{Quipu}, or a system of knots tied into a rope, was a form of record keeping employed by the Inca. However, the Inca primarily used \textit{quipu} to record agrarian data such as rainfall and temperature. Due to this dearth of written history, historians can only piece together Inca civilization through the discovery and analysis of artifacts and interpretation of the earliest Spanish
writings. Garcilaso de la Vega, El Inca was a mestizo born of noble descent early in the
days of Spanish colonialism in the New World. His voluminous work on the history of
the Inca is one of the earliest recorded accounts of Andean culture written by one who
was part American. Granted, Garcilaso presents many facets of Inca culture in a biased
light, but it is still an excellent source to begin the search for Inca religion.

Garcilaso immediately shows prejudice for the Inca heritage when describes the
pre-Inca AmerIndians who were indigenous to the region. He describes them as
"...Indians who were little better than tame beasts and others much worse than wild
beasts." Garcilaso continues to explain that the AmerIndians had many gods invested
in natural entities such as animals, plants, and valuable minerals. Apparently, every
family had their own gods. Garcilaso contends that this was due to the AmerIndian belief
that other people’s gods only helped the other people. Therefore, each clan needed its
own set of gods to keep watch over them. What is perhaps most interesting is the
comparison Garcilaso makes between these earlier AmerIndians and the Romans. On
one hand, he points out how they are similar in that both had over 30,000 gods. On the
other, he claims the Roman gods as superior because their main pantheon embodied
abstract concepts such as “Hope, Victory, Peace, and so on.” From Garcilaso’s initial
overview, two things stand out. The first is his preference for Inca culture over pre-Inca
AmerIndians (and subsequently his preference for Western culture over Inca) and the
second is the apparent lack of a devil in pre-Inca religion. Rather, pre-Inca religion
seems to be a form of animism not unlike that seen in early Europe and Asia which finds
the divine in things natural and places emphasis on the sustaining forces in life such as
the food-bearing sea and earth. Garcilaso's treatment of AmerIndian religions shows his European bias straightaway.

Garcilaso continues his study of Inca gods in his second book of the Royal Commentaries. In this section, he titles a chapter "The idolatry of the second period and its origin." In this chapter Garcilaso contends that Inca Manco Cápac, the primary figure in conquering and uniting the indigenous tribes, replaced the many AmerIndian gods with an androgynous god named Viracocha. Garcilaso's account of this event, which happened some 400-600 years prior to his recording, indicates that the AmerIndians readily accepted the Inca deity. What is most interesting about this portion of the recorded history is the apparent dispute between Garcilaso and his contemporary Spanish historians. Garcilaso vehemently contends that Viracocha is the only deity recognized by the Inca. While he admits that many natural phenomenon are viewed by the Inca as products of the god, he argues "...but they were not considered to be deities, as some of the Spanish historians say." Later, he says "On this point and on other similar ones the Spanish writers have no real authority for what they say..." in regard to the Spanish attributing certain titles and names to Inca gods. Given the weight of evidence that suggests that the Inca were in fact somewhat polytheistic, the argument can easily be made that Garcilaso was attempting to shed a better, more Christian-friendly light upon his Inca heritage by labeling the Inca as a monotheistic yet idolatrous people.

Often, Garcilaso gets so caught up in his attempt to defend the Inca his own beliefs as to the true Inca god become confused. He desperately wants to reveal one primary deity in the Inca pantheon that he can equate to the Judeo-Christian god. This is why Viracocha and other gods and goddesses such as Inti, the sun god, and Pachamama,
the corn mother goddess, are so frequently referenced. These deities were all very important in the polytheistic religion of the Inca and this does not easily equate to Spanish monotheism.

The devil does not appear in Garcilaso’s writings until shortly thereafter. In the subsequent chapter, Garcilaso again asserts that the Inca did know the one true god recognized by Christians. Garcilaso says that the Inca concept represented by the name Pachacámac is the same god as the one found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He elaborates on this point by breaking down the origin of the word. The word means “him who gives life to the universe” according to Garcilaso. He supports this with stories of the peasantry’s reactions to the mention of Pachacámac. According to Garcilaso, Pachacámac is highly venerated as an unseen god and created the Sun god Inti who in turn created the rest of the Inca world. Garcilaso believes that this is evidence that the Inca shared knowledge of the one true god, which happened to be the deity worshiped by the Spanish. In reality, it emphasizes the complications Garcilaso had in drawing parallels between the two different cultures.

In softening the idolatry of the Inca, Garcilaso uses the Judeo-Christian image of the devil to explain certain Inca behavior. Garcilaso accuses the Spaniards of mislabeling Pachacámac as the devil. He says that the Inca already have a devil called Cúpay and that their behavior upon hearing this name was one of disgust and disrespect, certainly more appropriate for a devil than a god. However, Garcilaso goes further and explains that in addition to the Spanish labeling error, the devil himself told many Inca that he (the devil) in fact was Pachacámac and all of the other deities that the Inca worshiped. Naturally, the deceived Inca would appear to be idolatrous devil worshipers in the eyes of
the Spaniards. In Garcilaso’s opinion, the diabolic attributes given to the Inca by the
Spaniards are the direct result of the devil afflicting both peoples with his illusions and
lies.

Garcilaso continues to give away his Judeo-Christian influence by calling the
devil “the father of lies.” Garcilaso’s contention that the devil spread misinformation that
furthered Inca idolatry fits in nicely with the Spanish assertion that idolatry was devil
worship. In effect, Garcilaso is admitting that the Inca are worshiping the devil but that
their motivation is born of the lies that the devil has spread. In this way, the Spanish are
not wrong in accusing the Inca of worshipping the devil. Furthermore, the Inca are not
wrong for doing so; they were merely tempted by the Judeo-Christian devil that the
Spanish knew so well. It was an honest mistake, one that could be reconciled through
Christian living.

Garcilaso’s writings evidence his belief in a Judeo-Christian devil. In keeping
with the personality of this devil, Garcilaso sees him as extremely active within the Inca
civilization. In fact, Garcilaso takes a Spanish stance when it comes to the activities of
the devil in the New World. One instance where Garcilaso again draws a fine line
between things Inca and things Spanish is with huaca. Garcilaso recognizes that huaca is
the name given to things “…worthy of adoration… because of their special superiority
over the common run of things…”25 However, in other places in the Royal
Commentaries, Garcilaso admonishes Inca panaqas, or the cults of the dead, as
susceptible to the whisperings of the devil. This was not an uncommon claim leveled by
Spanish colonials. The Inca believed that supernatural forces could adversely affect them
if huaca and ancestor worship were not taken care of properly. However, the Inca
viewed this as a sign of imbalance between natural, supernatural, and cultural forces. The Spanish saw diabolism inherent in the cults of the dead and believed that the devil was an active part of ill fate that accompanied improper handling of an ancestor’s *panaqa* and encouraged the Inca to worship *huaca*.

As stated earlier, Spanish colonization of the New World was based primarily on the slogan “God, gold, glory.” Simply put, the exploitation of the Inca for Spanish gain was the main focus of the conquistadores. Conversion of the heathen Inca to Roman Catholicism was a necessity within the viceroyalties. Garcilaso’s writings yield an excellent account of one of these conversions. Analysis of the selection leads me to believe that the account is more propaganda than historical accuracy, though. Garcilaso contends that on the very first day the Spaniards laid siege on Cuzco, an Inca kindly requested of Alonso Ruiz (apparently a soldier for the Spanish) that he “…teach me the new religion we are to observe.” The AmerIndian goes on to say that he “…desired to know the true religion of mankind, since… his own did not give the satisfaction his soul was seeking.” Less than a week after being baptized, the AmerIndian died a “content Christian.”

Studying the writings of Garcilaso, it should become manifestly evident that his personal vision of a devil is the same as the one brought by the Spanish to the New World. Garcilaso can only see the devil through Judeo-Christian eyes. The consequence of this is twofold. First, Garcilaso can not accurately and objectively record original Inca perceptions of a devil. Second, Garcilaso too often superimposes the Judeo-Christian devil over Inca deities whether they are devil-like or not. This seems to be true of most Spaniards during this time period, including Sahagun. The inability to recognize the
merits of Inca culture blinded the Spanish. Beyond that, it led them to label the Inca as “children of the Devil.” Garcilaso even records a speech by Fray Vicente Valverde, a Spanish member of the clergy, which iterates these sentiments:

...you shall give true obedience to the pope, the supreme pontiff, and receive and believe the faith of Jesus Christ, our God, and scorn and utterly repudiate the abominable superstition of your idols: by this act you shall learn how holy is our law and how false your own, invented by the Devil. If you refuse, know that you will be constrained with war, fire, and the sword, and all your idols shall be overthrown and we shall oblige you by the sword to abandon your false religion and to receive willy-nilly our Catholic faith...

The conquistadores often had this speech or similar ones administered to local AmerIndians before the commencement of their plunder. The speech opposed the indigenous religion against the invading one, and battle was to be the factor determining the superior. In terms of the Inca, Fray Valverde, at the behest of Francisco Pizarro, gave this speech to Atahualpa, the Inca ruler, at Cajamarca. Soon after, Atahualpa was captured for the dual purpose of proving Catholicism’s righteousness and collecting ransom.

If Garcilaso does not provide a complete and detailed account of Inca devil concepts, his information on witches is even more scant. Despite the lack of presence of witches in the Royal Commentaries, he does provide some account of acts performed by some Inca that would be construed by others as witchcraft. As Garcilaso writes about pre-Inca practices, he paints a picture of brute-like savages who engage in cannibalism and devil worship. Garcilaso continues by writing “...some took their daughters and mothers to wife and committed other even greater and graver sins, having much intercourse with the Devil whom they all served and held in high esteem.”

Garcilaso
also details the capture of rival AmerIndian groups and their subsequent sacrifice to the devil. Garcilaso's sources for this particular section come from his conversations with elders in the Inca royalty. It is here where we receive our first glimpse of Inca "witchcraft."

Spanish conquistadores were the first Europeans to recognize witchcraft in the New World. The concept of witchcraft, while not completely alien to the Inca, differed significantly between the cultures. Just as the Spanish brought their devil with them to the New World, so too did they bring along witchcraft and the inevitable witch-hunts that followed. Because the Inca were a barbaric and ignorant culture in Spanish minds, it was not difficult to find devil worship. Similarly, the influence of Kramer and Sprenger's *Malleus maleficarum* helped the Spanish find witchcraft in many Inca religious practices. The connection between witchcraft and devil worship had been firmly established in Europe. Certainly, this was a universal truth that spread across cultural boundaries. The presence of large numbers of Inca virgins at temples dedicated to Viracocha presented two alternative interpretations for the Spaniards. Some believed that these virgins served a religious function similar to that of Roman Catholic nuns. Those who held this view were the same people who tended to believe that the Inca revered the same god as the Spaniards. Others saw the virgins as witches who engaged in lurid sexual practices and devil worship. Those who believed this tended to be the same people who saw the Inca exclusively as children of the devil and idolatrous savages.

As was noted earlier, many Spaniards saw that the devil had been present in the New World for quite some time. Inca worship of trees, animals, and *huaca* was a testament to this. One point that was debated was whether one of Jesus' apostles had
made it to this area. Some such as Garcilaso believed that the apostle Bartholomew had indeed arrived and spread the message of Jesus of Nazareth. When one remembers where the Spaniards originally thought they were, this makes sense. The first explorers believed they had found India. Some Christian scriptures indicate that Bartholomew traveled to India as a missionary. This confusion led many to believe that there was Christian influence in this area. Other's believed there was no Christian influence in South America. Subsequently, Inca devil worship was not exactly heresy since they had no prior knowledge of Christian theology. Regardless, most Europeans agreed that Christian influence was weak in the area. The conversion of the Inca would serve two purposes. It would be saving their souls from eternal demonic torment and it would tear down the Inca culture and rebuild it in a Spanish model. This, in turn, would promote a social structure that resembled an organic hierarchy with the Spanish nobility functioning as the most vital elements.

The Spanish already had a working model for the destruction of religious practices that did not coincide with their own. In Europe, demonization was a very powerful and effective political tool. Labeling undesirables as witches immediately undermined the credibility of the accused. Furthermore, witchcraft invariably meant devil worship. The witch-hunt in the viceroyalty of Peru was performed in a manner similar to the witch-hunts conducted in Europe. Torture was frequently employed in eliciting confessions, leading questions were asked, neighbors were encouraged to report acts of witchcraft regardless of their accuracy, and a general atmosphere of terror was created. What exacerbated the Inca witch-hunt was the inherent difference in abstract construction of the devil and witchcraft and the language barrier. To the Spanish, this
was not a significant issue as they merely went about their business of gaining political, economic, and religious hegemony in the area. To the Inca, comprehension of what was going on was limited to a privileged, often elite, few.

Accusing Inca women of witchcraft was just one method of demonization employed by the Spaniards. The Spaniards had many presuppositions about the Inca that complicated their ability to enforce their imperial will. It is evident that many Spaniards believed that the Inca were “...fundamentally good and naturally predisposed to receive the Christian faith, but at the same time they expressed doubts about the intelligence of the Indians and their capacity for piety.”33 This view of the Inca left the Spanish with an interesting dilemma. What is the best way to not only convert these people, but also to keep them converted? This is where the employment of demonization of political and cultural enemies had such a huge impact on the way the Spaniards subdued the Inca. One significant problem posed by the demonization of certain Inca practices was determining which practices were truly diabolic and therefore seditious and which actions were harmless superstitions.

This was further complicated by the actions of the Inca. While much focus is given to the actions of the Spanish conquistadores and colonials, historians do not entirely ignore the actions of the Inca. Just as certain Spaniards acted in different manners, so too did the Inca handle colonization in different ways. Many Inca adopted an extreme behavior. Some either immediately acquiesced to Spanish rule while others organized fierce guerilla resistance. However, the majority of the Inca tried to blend their culture with the newly imposed Spanish colonial culture. Religiously speaking, this was a headache for the Spanish. Just as many Spaniards had a tendency to superimpose their
supernatural characters on Inca deities, many Inca blended their gods in with Christian
saints. A popular example is the parallel the Inca drew between Pachamama and the
Virgin Mary, a matriarch of sorts in the Catholic pantheon. This blending of traditions
old and new allowed the Inca to retain a portion of their religious culture while giving the
appearance of adopting Catholicism. For the Spanish, this was a form of idolatry difficult
to prove.

For as different as Inca and Spanish society were, the basic structure shared some
similarities. Most notable is the interlacing of religion and government. In fact, some in
the Spanish elite admired the orderly workings of the Inca body politic. They found that
the imperial religion was an efficient means of articulating authority, creating consensus
among the people, and of maintaining social order throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{34} It is
interesting to note how both societies operated similarly when conquering others. The
Inca leaders required all vanquished peoples to learn Inca language, religion, and pay
tribute to Cuzco. Similarly, the Spanish forced the Inca to learn Spanish religion, provide
labor, and had the elite learn the language. Because of these similarities, Spanish
conquest may have been aided by Inca familiarity with the process of subjugation.

The greatest problem with studying Inca culture is that most of the material
available for scrutiny today has gone through a powerful European filter.\textsuperscript{35} Often lost in
the scrutiny of these works is the basic view the Inca held of evil and the devil. Unlike
the European model where evil is the absence of good, the Inca believed that evil was
inextricably linked to good through a divine nature. Their entire concept of evil and
devilry was different than that of Spanish conquistadores. Elite colonists recognized that
the Inca had indeed attained a measure of proficiency in many areas such as philosophy,
astronomy, medicine, and agriculture. Unfortunately, fewer recognized the achievements and nature of Inca theology and religion.

Sahagun and Garcilaso have more in common than not. Both were members of the most elite classes operating in the New World. Garcilaso, although a mestizo, was of royal descent and Sahagun was one of the most visible and respected of the clergy. Their social status afforded them the ability to record and comment on AmerIndian history, culture, and religion. Their European bias prevented them from even approaching an analysis that could be considered objective. It is true that no one is without bias, but the blatant skewing of AmerIndian civilization is a testament to the hierarchical and patronizing nature of the social power structure employed in America. Of course, this analysis forces one to wonder how severely future historians will treat present attempts to reveal an objective historical account.

Sahagun was first and foremost a missionary. This role is very different from that of a friar, which he also was. His actions as a missionary necessarily involved the witnessing of his faith to others. Yet to call what he did “witnessing” is to soften the description of his actions. Sahagun, like many clergy both then and now, had very definite views on the nature, operation, and role of his religion in the scheme of life. His primary goal in Mexico, if not life, was to educate the AmerIndians of and impress upon them his view of Catholicism. His writings in the Codex and other books are cleaved to his worldview to the extent that Sahagun can not be entirely removed from his version of Aztec history.
Garcilaso tries very hard to follow standard Spanish customs while giving an account of the heritage he shares. Despite this, his respect for both cultures divides his academic focus. Examination of Royal Commentaries shows Garcilaso as he truly is: a mestizo who values both of his heritages but clearly prefers the Spanish side, even to the extent that it bastardizes his historical account of the Inca. Garcilaso’s motive for recording Inca history is a personal one, and it is this focus that helps narrow his writings into his European mindset.

Both men wanted to preserve some record the events that shaped these indigenous people. Certainly, some differences did exist. Firstly, Sahagun was not a mestizo like Garcilaso. The ramifications of this are not as striking as one may initially think as Garcilaso clearly emphasized his European training and heritage. Furthermore, Sahagun attempts to give the Aztec some leeway as Garcilaso does for the Inca. While both fall short of painting a truly AmerIndian perspective, their efforts in doing so are, for the most part, comparable. Secondly, the motives of the men differ in terms of emphasis and nature. Whereas Garcilaso very much wants to record the history of the Inca, he also places some emphasis on his attempt to soften the Spanish views of Inca barbarism. Sahagun’s endeavor to record the history of the Aztec more closely corresponds with Garcilaso’s attempt to change Spanish views. Sahagun’s primary goal is the religious conversion of the Aztec. Perhaps the most important connection that can be made between the two is the presence of European bias in reporting the events, actions, and attitudes of the AmerIndians. Certainly the work of both men went through these perverting social and academic filters of the time. A second criticism is that both men failed to take a longview when writing their histories. If their accounts had been written
as much for future generations as for current propaganda, perhaps it would have been easier for them to take a step outside of their own biased, Eurocentric tendencies.

Spanish influence on Aztec and Inca religion is an undeniable fact. The events that transformed their religions are interesting and often frustrating to study. Examination of the way in which the Judeo-Christian heritage erased, replaced, and otherwise undermined foreign cultures in the name of truth and righteousness provides historians with yet another example of Western European barbarism. The irony is not difficult to see. While hindsight may indeed be 20/20, the doctrine of cultural relativism is nothing new. Even people such as Fray Bernardino de Sahagun and Garcilaso de la Vega, El Inca who were clearly slanted in their worldview and thinking held some realization that cultures different are not necessarily cultures wrong. Despite the realization by some that these civilizations were not completely without merit, the vast majority of the colonists shared the view that their culture was superior.

Because the true and original religion of these AmerIndians is so difficult to ascertain, it is easy to lament the lack of academic pursuit made by Western colonists in the New World. In a perfect world, the primary focus for exploration and settlement would be academic and friendly, not self-interested. Most Spaniards arrived in the New World for the purpose of exploitation. A few arrived for the purpose of the preservation or advancement of their own culture. Unfortunately, the self-centered focus of the balance of colonists led to the deterioration of Aztec and Inca culture and the elimination of significant portions of their history. Included in these losses is much of the rich religion shared by the Aztec and Inca and those living under their influence.
1 Hassig, *Conquest*, p. 53.
4 de Sahagun, *Conquest*, p. IX.
5 de Sahagun, *Conquest*, p. XV.
7 de Sahagun, *Memorales*, p. 3.
8 de Sahagun, *Memorales*, pp. 5-6.
14 de Alarcon, *Superstitions*, p. 20, 47.
16 de Alarcon, *Superstitions*, p. 47.
19 Cervantes, *Devil*, p. 4.
23 de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries*, pp. 70-72.
27 de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries*, p. 750.
32 Cervantes, *Devil*, pp. 9-11.
33 Cervantes, *Devil*, p. 34.
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