

MEXICO ACCORDING
TO QUETZALCOATL:
AN ESSAY OF INTRA-HISTORY

The seal of *Utopia* stamped the history of Mexico from its colonial origins. Thomas More's *Utopia* was published at Louvain in 1516, three years before Cortez disembarked on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and twenty years later Vasco de Quiroga, the first bishop of Michoacan, attempted to realise Utopia in his diocese. When, in the first years of the last century, the learned traveler Alexander de Humboldt made investigations which resulted in *A Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, he was able to verify the Indians' continuance of the country of the "venerable Vasco" (*tata Vasco*).¹ Besides a hagiographic legend (one could cite a great many of them) and besides an equally significant regional tradition, the historian establishes that the

Translated by Dene Leopold.

¹ Alexandre de Humboldt, *Essai politique sur le Royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne*, Paris, 1811, volume II, p. 306.

utopian aspirations and Messianic hope had been permanent characteristics of the national conscience of Mexico throughout its formation.

Originally, two factors had a decisive importance: the receptivity of Mexican polytheism and the millenarian faith of the first evangelizers. The Indians received the evangelical message as the stunning confirmation of their own eschatological restlessness, at least initially. Later the populations would revolt at the coming of the Messianic reign of Quetzalcoatl, who came to sweep away the Spanish domination. Like ancient Roman polytheism, Mexican pantheism had been inclined to assimilate Christ, but Christian monotheism was of exclusive essence. The touching confrontation between the "Twelve" first Franciscans of New Spain and the Aztec priests remained in the future. The eradication of "idolatry" was undertaken, the *auto-da-fés* of idols and cult objects were organized, the native "sorcerers" (often of the Indian chiefs, such as those of Tezcoco and of Yanhuitlan) were burned. It was soon necessary to recognize the fact that almost all the Indian neophytes would have been liable to inquisitional persecution if they continued the ritual practices of their ancestral religion. In 1570, the date of the installation in Mexico of a Tribunal of the Inquisition (a function which until then was exercised by the archbishop), the inquisitional jurisdiction immediately separated the Indian population. Mexico, sheltered by this immunity, would seem to us in retrospect as a natural reserve of "savage" beliefs.

We may consider that, one half century after the Spanish conquest, the priests of the Mexican religion were nearly all dead. Of the Mexican nobility there remained only some individuals who were either assimilated by the new half-breed society or who fell under the plundering. The most elaborate religious tradition, of which Tezcoco had been the radiant fire, had been defaced. Under the influence of the "sorcerers" (the faith-healers who occasionally became political leaders) the popular mythical invention was able to develop its syncretic beliefs according to the deliverers' motivations. As in almost all societies under formal or disguised colonial tutelage, the economic exploitation and the political oppression permanently maintained in Mexico a climate of messianic exaltation. This did not arise so much from an aspiration toward the hereafter as from an attitude of despair in

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regard to the whole ameliorative reform. The authorities of the Vice-Royalty forcibly repressed the numerous Indian revolts which appeared in the course of three centuries of colonial life, but they did not always see that these agitations were the epiphenomena of a messianic aspiration latent everywhere. If the millenarian spirit of the first Franciscans, inspired by Joachim de Flore, had survived up to the first missionary generation, perhaps then we would have seen a new heresy born (similar to certain ones feared under Phillip II), a schism which would have served as spiritual support to a political secession. But once the archbishop Moya de Contreras arrived, the continuing eviction of the mendicant orders from their country of mission actually restored the Indians' spiritual liberty, two years after they had been displaced by the action of the Inquisitors. In many respects, what we witness is a renaissance of polytheism, hardly disguised, at the end of the sixteenth century.

The process of assimilation of Spanish Christianity by the religious Indian conscience (across a rather great regional diversity) presents a *facies* quite original yet very revealing. The analytic reinterpretations analogous to those given by Wilhelm Mühlmann for New Guinea² could be ascribed to Mexico in the first years following the Spanish conquest. For example, the mythological figures born from the symbiosis of an Apostle of Christ and a Mexican divinity are attested to by the minutes of the first inquisitional proceedings on the Indians, in 1536. The assimilation, in the spiritual literature of the Creoles, of the civilizing hero of ancient Mexico, Quetzalcoatl (the Plumed Serpent) with the apostle Saint Thomas, the supposed evangelizer of the New World, is only one preferred instance among many.³ That which one observes in the myths is no less true in the symbols (the identification of the Christian cross with the directional signal in the Mexican codexes) nor is it less true in the rites (tonsure, circumcision, fasting) which gave rise to the assimilated interpretations of the religious evangelizers. Reciprocally, despite repressive activities of the heterodoxy, Spanish Christianity lent itself to assimilation into the Mexicans' ancestral

² Wilhelm Mühlmann, *Messianismes révolutionnaires du Tiers Monde*, ed. Gallimard, Paris, 1968 (original ed., *Chiliasmus und Nativismus*, Berlin, 1961).

³ Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl et Guadalupe*, ed. Gallimard, Paris (to appear).

polytheism. The cult of saints was so long lived (on a popular devotional level) that it appeared to the Indians like a new polytheism. Where messianic hope was kept with its apocalyptic corollary it coincided with the conception of the Aztec Sons. Devotion to the Virgin Mary, so intense from the first moments of the Conquest, permitted the mother goddess of the Mexicans, Tonantzin, to be raised once more. The specific character of the popular Spanish devotions and of their propitiatory prayers was early mingled with the magic incantations used in indigenous Mexico. The Dominican Creole Mier summarized this situation, at the end of the eighteenth century, in a compact formula: "No one has ever been able to get out of the head of the Indians that their ancient religion was ours." ["Nadie ha podido jamás sacar a los Indios de la cabeza que su antigua religión fue la nuestra."]⁴

All of the anarchical beliefs which were developed in Mexico during the Spanish Conquest until well beyond the Independence were like the nourishing compost for a national religion, a religion which was initially maintained in the very indecisive limits of a Catholic and an imperial orthodoxism. The religious missionaries were the principal gardens of this sacred sediment until the second half of the eighteenth century. Then, the royal tendency of the Spanish monarchy resulted in the expulsion of the Order of Jesus and in the discipline of the religious orders. Once a crisis revealed the patriotic contents of the spiritual heritage, it was taken hold of by the parish priests of the countryside. It is indicative that a great proportion of the first leaders of the Independence movement, less than half a century later, was constituted by warrior-priests. Their irruption on the political scene of Latin America dates from 1810; the first to have a decisive role was called Hidalgo, the national Mexican hero. But, among a dozen others, the most representative was, without a doubt, Morelos, a man of the countrymen, supported by the enthusiasm of the peasants. References to the Glory, to the Genesis and to the Time to Come adorned the speeches and proclamations of the Liberators of Mexico. The charismatic aura which bathed the flashing career of the messiah Morelos and his

⁴ Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, *Memorias*, México, 1946, volume I, p. 42.

final martyrdom are the opportune product (in a national crisis which also causes a crisis in the religious conscience) of the spiritual climate of whose distinct traits we have shown the origins and components.

The War of Independence brought with it slaughterings, those bloody persuasions which sanctify the existence of a national goddess, no less bloodthirsty than the ancient guardian divinity of the Aztecs, Huitzilopochtli. In order to elucidate the Mexican notion of the fatherland in its proper dynamic, we must go back further into the indigenous past. Mexico is a vast country which does not constitute a natural region; its lack of physical unity has for corollaries an orographic dispersion, a variety of climates and of soils and most particularly an ethnic diversity. The idea of the frontier as a symbol of the country (similar to "the blue line of Vosges" in the France of our fathers) would have to be alien since it only makes a belated appearance following the annexation of Texas by the United States. The only frontier of Mexico before the middle of the nineteenth century was its interior "Frontier," the fluctuating boundary between the serviceable colonized lands of Mexico and the territories of the Indian nomads. There was also a social frontier which separated the Creoles from the diverse castes (*castas*) of half-breeds, mulattos and Indians. The fact that these last, the Indians, were never completely obliterated, a fact which is impossible to trace on a map but one can read their displacement easily on demographic curves, is one of the last obstacles to a complete national integration.

For the standard religion, resistance to the fatherland took on a pluralistic form. The ladder of life of ancient Mexico was one of ethnic groups; each one maintained a mythical link with a guardian divinity. The evolution of the colonial New Spain towards its political emancipation and towards its integration as a nation consisted particularly in the progressive marginalization of the ethnic divinities to the advantage of the national neo-messiahs, who were in turn: Hidalgo, Morelos, Iturbide, Juárez, Pancho Villa, Lázaro Cárdenas. Who would think to deny that the shadow of this last, recently deceased, weighs on the political life of Mexico today?

Nevertheless, the most permanent image of the country of Mexico is an authentic guardian divinity, the Virgin Mary in her

image as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century she eclipsed the popular faith and by the middle of the eighteenth century she surpassed the church itself and all the competing images: the Virgin of Ocotlan, patron of the Tlaxcaltèc Indians, the Christ of Chalma, the Tépìc Cross, etc. The Virgin Mary chose Mexico as her terrestrial dwelling; she chose to be "Mexican Creole" ("*criolla mexicana*"). It was like a Creole resurgence over the Aztec domination of the largest part of Mexico. The identification of the image of Tepeyac as the Woman of the Apocalypse, in the vision of John, gave an eschatological dimension to the national Mexican faith. The historic role of Mexico City as a center of immigration and as an object of fascination or as a testimonial image will be decisive for hastening the crystallization of a national sense. The emergence of a myth of the capital city prefigured, from the end of the sixteenth century, the decline of the old native cosmogonies whose scope went no further than ethnic groups. Still, it is necessary to remember that the ruling image of Mexico is first and foremost its supernatural blazon, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

In general, the great intermediaries between the messianic hope of the Indians and the millenarianism of the evangelizers, between the indigenous hero-gods and the saints of the Gospel, were the sanctuaries. Dismantling them would have been a task equal to the demolishing of the pyramids, to dissuade people from them would have been as difficult as changing the course of a river; thus, the religious Catholics encouraged the flux of the pilgrimages towards the sacred places of the autochthonous religions. In Mexico (and in the whole of America of the Andes) we see reflected the phenomena which have been observable, most notably, in Celtic Europe for a thousand years' duration. The pilgrimage of Tepeyac, maintaining a secular ambiguity around the worship of Guadalupe, identified by certain people as the Woman of the Apocalypse but for the Indians representing always the ancient mother goddess Tonantzin, has permitted the national Mexican conscience to develop under the mask of marial devotion dominant in Spain and in the Christian West. There is no doubt that the sacred polarization on Mount Tepeyac encouraged and allowed for the centrifugal unification of Mexico.

Of the other factors which facilitated the development of a

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national conscience, primary are the ambiguities of the Nahuatl language. This feature reinforces our conviction that Mexico must be defined more as a holy and spiritual space than as a geographical area or a cultural ambient. Mexico is the combination of geographic zones and of ethnic communities which have in common the worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Mexico City as an urban focus. Naturally, it is in the spiritual order which the ambiguity of certain Nahuatl words was especially enriching for the national conscience. *Tonantzin* designated "Our Mother": the mother of the gods and of man for the Aztecs, later serving as "Notre Dame," the Virgin Saint of the Christians. No less favorable for the revival of the Mexican polytheistic pantheon was the word *teotl*, designating both the gods and the deceased ancestors, whose posthumous influence (generally protective) was indiscernible from that of the gods. These gods themselves were often the deified historic heroes. The word *teotl* (*teules* in the works of the Spanish chroniclers) first served to name the Spanish conquerors, later it was applied to the evangelizers whom the popular native imagination canonized spontaneously, or to the bishops such as those of Puebla, Palafox. The history of the Mexican nation as lived by its actors and audiences outside of actual time, in a time derived from the economy of Salvation where they could all intervene simultaneously in a mythical scenario: Jesus Christ, Quetzalcoatl and the generals of the Mexican Revolution. All are the *teteo* (plural of *teotl*) whose lives of human action and whose posthumous destiny together contributed to the historic welfare of the Mexican super-ethnic issue of the integration *sub specie aeternitatis* of all the others. The human mind is stunned by historic rupture, as well as by religious ruptures which take the form of catastrophe (the Christian Apocalypse, the destruction of humanity at the end of each era or Aztec Sun). Due to the permanence of the polytheistic sanctuaries, more or less regulated by Christianity, and to the permanent revival of the pantheon of the *teotl* on the part of the modern political heroes, the continuity of Mexican history was assured. The substitutions and the reinterpretations of the beliefs borrowed from the dominating culture by the lesser cultures are basically the means of rescuing these dominated cultures. Let us recall that, according to the indigenous tradition, the Mexican defeat before the Conquerors could never be accepted by the

conscience of the vanquished, who called for a supernatural explanation. The evil spells of the sorcerers whom Moctezuma sent to dissuade Cortez and his men from marching on Mexico had been ineffective. The impotence of the conjurations had only been the result of the Mexicans' abandonment by their gods in anger. The revitalization of the great myths of the polytheistic past which then identified with the principal images of Iberian Christendom was a creation of the collective memory; it resulted in the reversal of the positions of dependence. Between the end of the sixteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century, the dialogue of the cultures centered about the question of the authenticity of the apparitions of Guadalupe-Tonantzin on Mount Tepeyac. It was a question of knowing, in the end, if the sacred pole of Iberian Christendom had emigrated or not from the sanctuary of Guadalupe in Extremadura towards that of Guadalupe of Mexico. Interpreted along the line of international relations, the question could have been formulated in these terms: "Which of the old Spain or the New Spain is the dominant nation of the imperial Iberian community?"

One of the most active myths as a national catalyst was that of the Indian past. From the demographic collapse of the Mexican Indian, brought about by the wreck of the Aztec empire after the Spanish Conquest, there followed from the beginning of the seventeenth century the image of an Indian of Utopia and of shepherds. This Creole creation was made possible by the disappearance of the Indian as a formidable military adversary and by the decline of the Aztec world as a socio-political community capable of rising again from its ashes. It was a phenomenon of assimilating the past that the new rulers of Mexico want to absolve the idolatric past of their new country. The vision of the Indian which they elaborated in an abundance of historic literature is inseparable from the signs of divine grace which Mexico had received since apostolic times, thanks to the evangelizing by the Apostle Saint Thomas, who was none other than Quetzalcoatl. His charisma had been confirmed for the Mexican people a few years after the Conquest in the person of a humble Indian neophyte, Juan Diego, witness to the apparition of Guadalupe-Tomantzin. This was the price for the entrance of Mexico into the Christian society of nations. In general we could say that a nation defines itself well more by the

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image which it manages to give of its past than by its inevitably vague vision of a liberated future. And the utopian function is as free in one case as in the other.

Yet, actually, the renewed favor which the theme of Quetzalcoatl enjoyed in the Mexican literature reveals that a sacred recharge of weakened or recently abandoned mythical images remains possible if the *moment* lends itself. Note all along that the divinisation of national heroes is the form preferred by the popular conscience. The cult rendered to the "young grandfather" (*joven abuelo*) Cuauhtémoc, the young nobleman who had tried (and failed) to drive Cortez and his companions from Mexico, along with those of Morelos, Juárez and Madero. The importance of relics for the development of such religious-civic cults is here demonstrated by the absurd: in the middle of the twentieth century (as so often in the European Middle Ages) one "invented" a skeleton of Cuauhtémoc. The affair consisted of a dubious discovery of human bones, providentially accompanied by a certificate of baptism (an impossible union of two cultures), this certificate signed by Fray Totibio Motolinia, one of the pioneers of the evangelization. The news, announced by the press fifteen years ago, had rather great reverberations. The Mexican government had to create an anthropological and historical commission (in which Paul Rivet took part) in order to denounce the fraud, if indeed it was that. The formal conclusions of the investigating commission established the inauthenticity of the supposed relics but, far from putting an end to the polemics, they only exacerbated them. The anthropologists, accused of anti-national spirit, were named traitors to the country. The patriotic Mexican religion had need of relics and (no more than their European counterparts or than others) it did not need to concern itself with their authenticity. The spectres of the Mexican past had not ceased to haunt the spirits; neither the progress of positive science, nor the anti-clerical persecutions had been able to make them vanish.

The contrary phenomenon occurred perhaps as well. As long as the church had managed to assume the supernatural, the mythical

⁵ The *Reforma* was a government of rationalist ideologists who had to face the French expedition sent by Napoleon III for the installation of Maximilian on the throne of Mexico.

Mexican imagination could be partially channeled in the direction of Judeo-Christian messianic hopes. But under the government of the "Reform,"⁵ when the positivism of Auguste Comte became the official ideology, the messianic hope underwent a change (at least on the part of the Creoles and the half-caste elite). The Kingdom to Come made place for the secular, scientific myth of Progress: a "constitutionalist" notion rose on to the horizon of the Mexican conscience. The role of mediator among the Aztecs which had been played by the old sages, whose long moral discourses had been collected in the *buehuetlatolli*,⁶ fell to the preachers in Spain; in the modern age it became the lot of the ideological politicians. The first names to come to mind are those of Gabino Barreda, Ignacino Ramírez and Juárez. One disregarded the fact that the successive political constitutions with which Mexico was endowed in the nineteenth century, these constitutions as perfect as they were inapplicable, were aimed at satisfying the national utopian aspirations which had been deceived by the anarchy and the tyranny which followed the Independence.

If instead of judging history we strove to understand it, it would seem that Mexico knew how to create, at first in the convents and then in the parliamentary assemblies, a series of mythical responses to the challenge of domineering Spain (likewise after the Independence since the Mexican conscience was haunted for a long time by the eventuality of a military reconquest). Whether one appreciates it or not, the emphatic eloquence of the Creole preachers of the eighteenth century was the first accomplished expression of what we could call a Mexican "counter-culture." This appellation astonished certain people since it is ordinarily applied to the Afro-American cultures, whose place in global society is more clearly marginal. But if we regard it closely, we see that the hard core of the Mexican culture was and remains what one tried to call, in imitation of Melville J. Herskovits: "the myth of the Indian past."⁷ The revaluation of the Pre-Columbian Indian in the Hispanic-Christian value system was the beginning to the reclaiming of Mexican Independ-

⁶ A. M. Garibay K., *Historia de la literatura náhuatl*, México, 1953, volume I, chapter VIII.

⁷ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 1941.

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ence. The exaltation of the Indian heritage is confounded today with the recovering of an original Mexican culture.

Nevertheless, the imitation of the Spanish model is evident, as well in the apologetic literature of Our Lady of Guadalupe, inspired by that of Guadalupe of Spain, as in the elaboration of the tradition of Saint Thomas-Quetzalcoatl, inspired by Saint James of Compostella. A chronological time-lag that extended from two to four centuries and the progress of critical rationalism in New Spain from the last third of the eighteenth century did not modify the scheme. Only in these two cases it is necessary to go back in time to the Judaic model of the Divine Covenant. The Spaniards' belief that the discovery in Galicia of suspect relics of the Apostle Saint James established their country as the new leader of Christianity was only an adaptation of the New Covenant from the Judaic notion of the People Elect in the Old Covenant. The Mexicans who in the course of their primitive trouble had transported their guardian idol, Huitzilopochtli, "as a new Ark of the Covenant" according to the expression of a sixteenth century Jesuit chronicler, later revived the messianic expectations of the Aztecs under the guise of Christian eschatology.

The resurgence in Hispanic America of the Calling of Abraham, conveyed to the New World by sixteenth century Spanish Christianity (anti-semitic but nevertheless strongly Hebraist), explains (in the appearance of a paradoxical fashion) the national devotion to Guadalupe. The identification of the "Creole" Virgin with the Woman of the Apocalypse recalls the Time Expectant, this theme like a wire conducting a study of the national conscience. The Mexican counter-culture implies both the imitation of the Hispanic model and the exaltation of the Indian past. Also, might not the parallel between Greek-Latin antiquity and the antiquities of Mexico have been the other face of the spiritual emancipation? The comparison between the Roman emperors and the Aztec sovereigns (*tlatoani*) established by the Creole Jesuit Clavijero in the eighteenth century was advantageous to these latter, the new heroes of a new *De Viris Illustribus*. The contemporary praises for the Virgin of Guadalupe, "rainbow of the two Spains," eclipsing the Virgin of Pilar of Saragossa, a subject dear to the Mexican preachers, conveys the same liberating aspiration. The affirmation of its actual existence by the Mexican

nation first took the form of a Copernican revolution with a reference to classical antiquity and with one to the Biblical tradition.

As a preliminary to the whole war of Independence, it was necessary to have halted the humiliation of a people "Christianized at the point of a lance" ["cristianos hechos a punta de lanza,"] according to the expression of the Spaniards (the detested *gachupines*). The only way opened was the demonstration that divine grace had been dispensed to the Indians with a lavishness equal to that which had benefitted the Spaniards. If Mexico had been evangelized for the first time in the apostolic times of Saint Thomas, known in the native tradition as Quetzalcoatl, and if on the other hand the vision of John of Patmos had not been only a prefiguration of the incarnation (sic) of the Virgin of Guadalupe of Mexico, then the face of the Hispanic world could have and would have changed. The ordinance (colonial) of political and economic dependence which tied New Spain to Spain by virtue of the Conquest and of evangelization proved to be deprived of a transcendent basis. The Mexican Creoles perceived it from the beginning of the seventeenth century and they displayed an historiographic and apologetic effort in keeping with the importance of the state. The thirst for dignity was the communal aspiration of Latin America in general; it survived the Independence, as this slogan of modern Argentina attests: "Perón keeps his word, Evita gives dignity" ["Perón cumple, Evita dignifica"]. With respect to Mexico, Alfonso Reyes evoked with his customary pertinence "the soul without passport" ["el alma sin pasaporte"] of the Mexican forebearers, but this passport was delivered to them at the heavenly embassy which was the sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe, at the doors of the capital.

Up to today the impassioned and anxious quest for national identity remained the principal subject for reflection of the best minds of Mexico. The names are too many to record here; let us mention some titles of revealing works: *The Profile of the Man and the Culture of Mexico* by the philosopher Samuel Ramos⁸ and *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by the poet Octavio Paz⁹ lead the literature dedicated to the subject. But the vast and varied work

⁸ Samuel Ramos, *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*, 1934.

⁹ Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, 1950.

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of Alfonso Reyes, the Creole Ulysses ["Ulises criollo"], reveals at every instance the search for "Mexicanity." And when, closer to us, Leopoldo Zea writes: "what is ours is only a desire, a possibility to be, a future" ["lo nuestro no es sino un anhelo, un llegar a ser, un Futuro"]¹⁰ he gives the actual evidence of the Utopian aspiration, which we have tried to show as the mode of existence of the national Mexican conscience since the sixteenth century. The brilliant essay of Pablo González Casanova, *A Utopia of America*,¹¹ which followed those above, expressly named the phenomenon. From "tata Vasco," the utopian bishop of Michoacan, which was the cradle of the heroes of the Independence, to "tata Nacho," the musician who captured the modern popular soul, Mexico has been the preferred dwelling of a creative spiritual liberty of utopias which Antonio Caso affirmed in 1906 as "une donnée immédiate de la conscience."¹² The historian can state that whether at the time of the Positivists or the Bergsonian or the Marxist, as at the time of Dilthey or of Scholasticism, the national Mexican conscience followed its creative utopian trajectory.

It is this which causes us to reconsider the relative importance of the intellectual modes which succeeded each other in Hispanic America since the Independence (even since the eighteenth century). Mexican intellectual life was profoundly marked by the influence of Descartes and Malebranche, then of the Philosophers (that of J. J. Rousseau in particular), later of the all powerful Auguste Comte, then after some thirty years the influence of the German philosophy (Scheler, Rickert, Cassirer and the school of Marburg, from Dilthey through Spranger) which was conveyed by the emigrating Spanish disciples of Ortega y Gasset to the first rank, of which we must name José Gaos. We must recall that all the ways had been opened to the eve of the Mexican Revolution by the group of the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, to which the name of Antonio Caso will remain attached above all others. Recognizing that, the proliferation of the methods of thought (*la problemática*) would seem to have been without important effect on the course of an underground evolution such as that of the

¹⁰ Leopoldo Zea, *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México*, 1944.

¹¹ Pablo González Casanova, *Una utopía de América*, 1953.

¹² Antonio Caso, inaugural dissertation, *Ateneo de la Juventud*, México 1906.

national conscience which in these conditions yielded to a spiritual and autonomous dynamic. The popular diction made use of a song which still builds the national glory on the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe: "Mexico has no equal" ["Como México, no hay dos."] This brilliantly confirms a continuity which escapes the influence of the *intelligentsia*. We recognize here the heritage of a Jesuit Creole preacher who in 1746 had hurled a defiance at Spain in proclaiming in the cathedral: "In this the Indian exceeds and goes beyond not only the people of Israel but all the nations of the world." ["En esto no sólo a Israel, a todas las naciones del mundo excede y se adelanta el Indiano."]¹³

The change resides in the fact that the reference to the Calling of Abraham ceased to be conscious, or at least explicit; but the affirmation of the Mexican people as the Chosen People lost none of its force. The popular notion of virility (*machismo*), so remarkably analysed by Octavio Paz, is without a doubt more directly tied to the conquering and military messianic hope of the Aztecs. The remains of a religious-national ideology with scriptural foundations fuse together for a new epic burst in the revolutionary atmosphere. The Mexican Revolution played the role in the collective conscience of a new mythical Orient, whose emergence tended to displace the ancient sacred pole of Mount Tepeyac, sanctuary of Guadalupe. Some sixty years later, at the time of the Positivist Reform of Juárez, Guadalupe still crystallized the national hopes identified with the cause of the Church; this is testified to by a popular poem (*corrido*):

Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Oh that the religion will win!
We have Protestants
And they corrupt the reason.

[Madre mía de Guadalupe
Que gane la religión!
Que protestants tenemos
y corrompen la razón.]¹⁴

¹³ B. F. de Ita y Parra, *El círculo del amor formado por la América septentrional, jurando a María Santísima en su Imagen de Guadalupe, la imagen del patrocinio de todo su reyno (...)*, Mexico, 1747 (Medina, *Imprenta an México*, no. 3837).

¹⁴ The Mexican *corrido* is a form of popular poetry comparable to the Spanish

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This couplet would call for an exegesis; retaining only that Reason and Religion were then synonymous in the spirit of the Mexicans and that the Positivist ideologists were qualified as "Protestants," a convenient designation for qualifying all the heretics! The Mexican Revolution, begun in 1910, was also a spiritual revolution, it was the first revolution in depth.

However, the acceleration of the rhythm of history which affects the modern world brought on in Latin America a second revolution. And since the success of the Cuban revolution only witnesses a competition between Mexico and Havana which in more than one way evokes the competition in the past centuries which opposed Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe to the Virgin of Pilar of Saragossa. In the concert of actual American nations, the letters of revolutionary nobility play *mutatis mutandis* a role analogous to that of the miracles, those "supernatural executions" (*executorias divinas*), in the colonial past. The question is whether Mexico ceased to be the sacred center of gravity for the new community of Havana, which was animated by a similar liberating faith. The decades to come will see the multiplication of the focuses of revolution on the American continent, a proliferation functionally analogous to that of the sanctuaries of the Virgin Mary at the end of the sixteenth century in the spiritual history of these unfinished nations. Equally procreative were the *teotl* the ancestral protectors such as the warrior priests who died in Columbia or in the northeast of Brazil and the primary leader Che Guevara. They were "deified" according to the process first observed with Quetzalcoatl in ancient Mexico. Tupac Amaru in colonial Peru, Getulio Vargas in modern Brazil and Eva Perón in a very "European" Argentina knew the same posthumous destiny. The saints are interchangeable from one historic epoch to another in the national religion of messianic and utopian character where emancipatory motivations and the aspiration for dignity are the constants.

If it is true, as claims one of the most profound psychologists, that: "the history of cultures amounts to the creation, the dogmatizing and the destruction of mythic images,"¹⁵ then Latin

"romance"; it comprises liberally arranged octosyllables, either rhymed or assonant. Just as the Spanish War saw the *romancero* reborn, so too the Mexican Revolution aroused a flowering of *corridos*.

¹⁵ Paul Diel, *La divinité*, Paris, 1949, p. 18.

America is going through a crisis. The question is really of the crisis of the Western world in general, where ancient myths have been abandoned before viable new myths have succeeded to replace them. Octavio Paz was able to write as well: "We are for the first time in our history contemporary to all mankind." ["Somos por primero vez en nuestra historia, contemporáneos de todos los hombres."] ¹⁶ If the national issues of the ancient Spanish and Portuguese possessions of America seemed more harshly attacked, it is partially because the objective possibilities of progress are there separated by an abyss of aspirations towards the messianic reign. We note further that the importance of the sacred in the social life of the American Indian societies, of the Hispanic world and of the groups of secondary European (Sephardic Jews) or African origin has always until today been relatively greater than in the overdeveloped countries of Western Europe. The coexistence of the residual beliefs of the autochthonous polytheisms, of a Christianity altered by four centuries' worth of beliefs of pagan origin, and of the Negro-African animism, truly of Cabbalism, promoted the appearance of syncretic myths. Their expansion results from the very variable proportion from one region to another of different magical-religious relations. The increasingly frequent shift of religious faith towards a political faith permits the anachronistic communion of the Inca Manco with Father Las Casas, Bolivar and with such syndical leaders as Carlos Prestes, all of whom Pablo Neruda brought together, disregarding all chronology, in his *Canto general*. ¹⁷

At the very limit where one is transported from historic time into messianic times, one finds oneself in an order of distinct truth. It is not very important whether the Messiah changes or has changed: in certain cases Jesus is still in command; we can see this in Colombia, in the Brazilian Northeast, in Guatemala, etc. Whether the revolutionary faith opposes itself to the Christian faith or whether it confuses itself with it, the historic period here loses its density. Also the analytical documents of economic and social history (the conjunctures, the long or short phases) have lost hold on this "intra-history" (*intra-historia*)

¹⁶ Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, p. 154.

¹⁷ Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, 1949.

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whose richness was ascertained by Umanuno.¹⁸ The rhythm of a history such as that which we enter upon here is derived from the economy of Salvation; if the historic salvation of the Iberian-American societies is substituted for Eternal Salvation, the passage of chronological time is analogous to the time of the Ultimate Revolution. It is therefore as a late avatar of Western Christianity that we must consider the actual state of countries of Latin America in general, if we want to discover things there other than merely the inherent agitations with the condition of countries "on the road to development," which is to say, "in the course of colonial exploitation." It is evidently not a matter of disregarding the economic and political factors, the strategic objectives, etc., but it is a matter of revealing the informal ties which, for centuries or occasionally for millennia, hold together the old structures and the recent conjunctures.

The dislocation of the West's Roman Empire, an occasion revived by Charlemagne, had been the great rupture of the Christian West; it brought about the centuries of wars between the princes and then between the nations of Europe. It is remarkable that the sceptre of the Holy Empire ended up in the hands of Charles V, who had been Charles I of Spain when a Spanish squire, Hernán Cortez, conquered Mexico. It all appears as if Charles V, restrained in his European expansion by the Bourbons and especially by "the Turks," had created a new Western Empire in the New World, where Mexico was (with Peru) the most beautiful jewel. Can one imagine that a political phenomenon of this importance, modifying in the past centuries the balance of powers, could have created the currents of migration, the commercial ways, could have opened the paths to the knowledge of the world and of man; can one believe that it could have been possible without any relation to faith? A renowned expert on the European Middle Ages, Marc Bloch, has already remarked that: "Historic deeds are not the essence of psychological facts."¹⁹ The great hope aroused by the discoveries of America takes on its true dimension only in the light of

¹⁸ Miguel de Unamuno, "En torno al casticismo," I, III (1895) (in *Essays*, Madrid, 1945, volume I pp. 40-49).

¹⁹ Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire (...)*, 1941, ed. A. Colin, Paris (third ed.) 1959, p. 101.

Christian eschatology. Mexico was born under the auspices of millenarianism. The New World appeared as a land of health for Catholic Europe which was menaced from without by the conquering Islam and from within by the progress of Lutheran and Calvinist heresies. For the persecuted Jews it has played the same role as the Promised Land, as well for the Calvinists. Since the eighteenth century the secularization of the ideals did not efface the sanction of messianic hope implanted in American soil by the first European occupants at the dawn of the sixteenth century.

It is still necessary to refer back more than a century into the past of the Christian West in order to grasp all the threads which gather the national mentalities of Latin American today. The failure of the crusade of Saint Louis, the last of the great crusades, opened the way of expansion towards the West. Since their ancestors had been able to reconquer the holy places of Palestine, the grandsons (*nietos*) of the crusades were going to found the New Jerusalem at the antipodes of Biblical Jerusalem. At the death of Saint Louis, the mythical Judeo-Christian East commenced a century-old revolution which (after situations such as that of Saint James at Compostella) should have ended in this *Ultima Thulé*, sung once by Alfonso Reyes. It is not by chance that during the seventeenth century the erudite Creole León Pinelo showed "with all geographic precision" ["con todo el rigor geográfico"]²⁰ that "Mexico is included in the center part of the globe which was the Orient for Moses when he was writing at Sinai" ["que México se incluye en el medio globo que era oriental a Moisés cuado escribía,"] so that the Earthly Paradise could have been situated in America. If the Mexican Vasconcelos, who was Minister of National Education in his country, prophesied in the twentieth century that the region of the Amazon would be the crest of a "cosmic race" ["la raza cósmica"] that would save humanity, it is because he was expressing in Nietzschean terms the heritage of the crusaders. Mexico had been presented by the enthusiastic Creoles of the past as the New Jerusalem; it owed the new coming of grace to the triumph of the *Mexican* Revolution. The adjective is

²⁰ Antonio de León Pinelo, *El Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo* (1650), published by Raúl Porras Barrenechea, Lima, 1943, volume I, p. 330.

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essential; it is significant that the principal argument opposed to the Cuban revolutionary propaganda of the decade of the sixties had been its "Cuban" character. The affirmation of the national Mexican character (the "mexicayotl" of the Aztecs) at first seemed, according to the Hegelian scheme, like a disqualification of the other national entities. The same attitude is met with again at the inter-American level, such as in Peru's choice for the initials A.P.R.A. (Alliance for the Revolution AMERICAN).

A history remains to be written which is neither full of facts (chronic or eventual history) nor which analyses causes (structural or other) but which is hermeneutic of the destiny of societies. The lax approaches of this "intra-history" do not appear (or appear seldom) at the level of demographic statistics, and in general the principal materials of history become classic. These documents are difficult to apprehend: *ex voto* souvenirs of old militants, testaments and, especially in Latin America, the heterogeneous manifestations which we designate as "folklore." If it is true, as wrote Roger Bastide, that: "all folklore is symbolic meditation between individuals and groups, and among the groups,"²¹ then the Mexican folklore reveals only what Alfonso Reyes called, with a term borrowed from romanticism, "the national soul" ["*el alma nacional*,"] and in regard to this, "The thread of life is formed by the real and by the imaginary" ["*porque de lo real y lo imaginario está tramada lo vida*."]²² The imaginary part (perhaps particularly to the extent where it is evasion) has been very large in Mexican life. Also the elucidation of the national history implies the complementary effort of studying the more elaborate forms of culture (books, frescoes, sermons, speeches); that is, those of the folklore. The intellectualized expression of the national conscience is often the poorest; the dancer's discourse with gestures in the ritual dances

²¹ Roger Bastide, "Etat actuel et perspective d'avenir des recherches afro-américaines," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, Volume LVIII, Paris, 1971, p. 26.

²² Alfonso Reyes, *La X en la frente*, México, 1952, (card to Antonio Mediz Bolio, 5 August 1922), pp. 87-88.

²³ Raymond Cantel, *L'exploitation d'un thème d'actualité dans la littérature populaire du "Nordeste": la mort du Président Getulio Vargas*, *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* (Séries arts et littératures), no. 1, 1968.

of "Saint James" is naturally much richer with symbolic content. The sacred songs (*contares*) elaborated in the bosom of the Indian or half-bred people imitating the hymns of the ancient Mexicans; the national-religious theater inspired originally by the edifying allegories taught by the evangelizing monks; the *ex votos* in their dramatic naivety: these are the documents of exceptional value for the "intra-historian." Alas, in America as in the rest of the world folklore is abased at an increasing rate, and in Mexico the false *ex votos* (shoddy tourist goods) have become more numerous than the real ones. Though still menaced by the extension of radio diffusion, the inspiration of the *corridos* would seem to promise a longer future, and the popular bards will become the best informants. The studies of R. Cantel on the *literatura de cordel*, in the Brazilian Northeast, have already given the results which respond to our hopes.²³

The course of the intra-history or, if preferred, of the psychological history of societies, is thus made of threads through a thousand years, such as we have here tried to put into light in the case of Mexico. The web as a whole is made by dances (*mitotes*), by hymns (*cantares*), by little songs or poems (*corridos*), by the *ex votos*, etc. The repertory needs urgently to be established, for in the very near future only erratic fragments will remain. Once we will have set up these catalogues (sound and photographic archives), there will remain the most arduous task of discovering the semantics. The proof that the language, otherwise indecipherable, of the national conscience is one and the same appears to us in the simple fact that the voice of the Indian embodied (biologically or not) in each Mexican, according to Alfonso Reyes, "the voice that comes from ancient suffering" ["una voz que viene del Fondo de nuestros dolores Pasados"]²⁴; this voice calls once again in Mexico of today for the return of Quetzalcoatl.

²⁴ A. Reyes, *La X en la frente*, p. 87.