

RELIGION

AND THE MEXICAN STATE

It is evident to anyone who is at all familiar with the documents and witnesses of the times that Aztec society at the time of the discovery of Mexico appears to be intensely religious, that all public and private life was invaded, so to speak, by rites and dominated by beliefs. But what exactly was the place of religion and its ministrants in the hierarchy of powers? To what degree was the priestly function interwoven with that of government and the administration of the city? Can the regime of ancient Mexico be described as a theocracy? To answer these questions, it is of no small use, first, to go back to the period preceding the foundation of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

THE AZTEC TRIBE DURING THE MIGRATION

The traditional history of the Mexicans shows us that the Aztec tribe, having left a point situated somewhere to the north—an island in the middle of a lake, called Aztlan—in the second

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half of the twelfth century, took about one and a half centuries to reach the center of Mexico and to install itself there in the midst of the lagunas and swamps of the central plateau.

One must not, of course, imagine this peregrination as an uninterrupted process of displacement. The tribe stopped in some places for a year, sometimes for several years, planted and harvested maize; on leaving the desert-like steppes of the north, it came in contact with the peoples of high civilization, the Tarasques of Michoacan, the Nahuatl of Tula and those of the lake-cities. It is, however, probable that during this phase of its history, the tribe's way of life did not change in any substantial way, any more than did its social and political organization.

The Aztecs of this archaic period are hardly to be distinguished from the mass of tribes called "chichimeques," or "barbarous," who populated the entire north of Mexico until the eighteenth century. These Chichimeques were somewhat, to the civilizations of central Mexico, what the Celts and Germans were to the Mediterranean cities of classical antiquity. The northern steppes played the part of a reservoir of peoples who poured into the center of the land as soon as the high civilizations weakened.

These barbaric peoples were characterized by their way of life: nomadic hunters and warriors, they only practised agriculture in the regions where they had learnt it through contact with the stationary Tarasques, Otomis or Nahuatl. Knowing nothing about weaving, they wore animal skins; they built huts occasionally, but took shelter mainly in caves. In addition to hunting, they gathered wild fruits (notably *mezquitl*, a spiny mimosa), roots, mushrooms, and collected all sorts of little animals or insects. Their religion did not involve agrarian rites, but gave the main place to the gods of the hunt and of war, most frequently identified with stars: the sun, Venus, the Milky Way. We know next to nothing of their social organization: we know only that they wandered in groups under the command of chiefs—some of whom, like the semi-mythical Xolotl, could occasionally extend their authority over an entire mass of tribes, at least as far as war and conquest were concerned.

The "barbarous Aztecs" (*azteca chichimeca*) of the migration were, then, only one tribe among others, wandering through the desolate solitudes of the "divine plain" (*teotlalli*: the cactus

steppes of the north). Later, after having become the heirs of the brilliant central Mexican civilizations and the masters of a vast empire, they retained their passion for combat; the cult of the gods of hunting and of the stars; the notion of a war chief commanding federated tribes—and even, in a more humble field, the taste for foods like wild plants (*quilitl*) and insects, although no longer forced to this by poverty.

The Aztec tribe in migration was composed of several divisions, for which we know only the recent name: *Calpulli*.

Knowing that this term designates a "group of houses," one must admit that it did not begin to be used until after the Aztecs were settled on the central plain, and converted to an urban life—or at the very least until after their first contacts with the stationary farmers. How many of these divisions were there? We know the names of seven ancient *calpulli*, and the native chronicler Tezozomoc counts fifteen. It seems that later this number increased considerably. Each division undoubtedly had its chief—the *calpullec* of the classic period—elected, or rather chosen, by the heads of families, and assisted by a council of elders.

But was there a unified tribal power bringing the divisions under a single head? The chronicles, the native manuscripts, mention chiefs and notables, but not a chief. The monarchy which was later to become so brilliant and powerful in Mexico had not yet appeared. Each division must have been autonomous under the command of its own chief and its own council. Perhaps representatives of the various divisions held council together on the occasion of important decisions, a prefiguration of the "great council" of the imperial period.

However the tribe, in its long migration, was guided. Decisions were made, orders were given: it was necessary to choose bivouacs, to fix the date of a new departure. At this level and for these purposes, there was certainly a sort of tribal government: it was that of the priests or rather, if we wish to identify with Aztec beliefs, it was the government of a god exercised by his delegates, the priests. Throughout this period, it is in effect Uitzilopochtli, the great sun god and warrior, incarnation of the noon sun and of resurrected warriors, who was considered to make the most important decisions and to make them known by the voice of the priests.

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The Aztec manuscripts, as for example the *Codex Azcatitlan*, show the priests in their role as “bearers of god” (*teomamaque*) during the “long march.” On their backs, held by the band across the forehead used by Mexican Indians of all times, is pictured a sack from which emerges the beak of a bird-fly, the *uitzilin*, symbol of Uitzilopochtli. Probably the Aztecs of the migrations did not make statues of stone. The image of the god had to be a sort of light doll made of twigs covered with material; perhaps the sacred sack contained only, under several layers of tissues, a few symbolic objects: the chronicler Pomar mentions, at the time of the Spanish conquest, sacred packages containing agave spines corresponding to Uitzilopochtli, or a mirror, symbol of Tezcatlipoca. These packages, which remind one of the *medicine-bundles* of the North American Indians, were known to the Aztecs by the name of *tlaquimilolli*. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the treasurer of the Mexican Church, responsible for enormous riches in land, buildings, vestments, furnishings, cult objects of all sorts, held the title of “lord of the *tlaquimilolli*.”

The *Codex Azcatitlan* shows us that two divinities were carried in this way by their priests during the migration: Uitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca. The latter, somber god of the nocturnal sky, of the shadows, of the night wind, was also the protector of young warriors. He was to become, in the sixteenth century, the invisible and all-powerful witness of all action and thoughts and confessions, and the protector of emperors. But during the archaic period he does not seem to have influenced the decisions of the tribe directly. On the other hand, Uitzilopochtli frequently intervened through his oracles. Most often by night, sometimes by day, his voice was heard; he called his priests, and gave them his orders.

It is known to be in this way that Tenochtitlan was founded—to become in less than two centuries the powerful capital, Mexico. A first oracle of the god had announced to the “elders” of the tribe that they would find somewhere “in the midst of cat-tails and reeds,” *intollihtic inacahtic*, in the swamps: a white willow, a white frog and a white fish (whiteness was connected with the name of Aztlan, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs). When the old men had found these signs, Uitzilopochtli called the priest Quauhcoatl during the night and

ordered him to search for a "cactus *tenochтли* on which an eagle will be joyously perched... It is there that our city, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, will be, there where the eagle cries, opens his wings and eats... there where the serpent is devoured."

Following Quauhcoatl, the Mexicans searched through the bushes of reeds and aquatic plants, until the moment when "at the opening of a cavern they saw the eagle perched on a cactus, devouring with great joy." And again the voice of Uitzilopochtli resounded, crying: "O Mexicans, it is here!"

From the few indications given by documents on this ancient period, it seems possible to deduce that the Aztecs' method of government was then a tribal democracy developing into a theocracy: for each division, an elected chief with his council; for the tribe as a whole the old men, or "elders" (*ueuetque*), guided by priests or priests themselves; at the summit, the god himself, governing through the oracles which he made known to his servants.

The term "theocracy" is applied here in a particularly exact sense, since the chief of the tribe is not a man but the god in person.

It is not impossible that Uitzilopochtli was originally a man, a priest perhaps, made divine at a later date and identified with one of the aspects of the sun: this would explain the strange affirmation of Aztec sources from Sahagun, according to whom Uitzilopochtli "*çan maceoalli, çantlacatl catca, naoalli, tetzauitl*"—"was only a plebeian, only a man (but also) a magician, a prodigy."

THE MONARCHY AND THE RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY IN MEXICO

At the time of the Spaniards' arrival in Mexico, the Aztec State proper and the confederated cities were governed by monarchs; the monarch of Mexico-Tenochtitlan was the most powerful. That which we call the Aztec "empire," more or less exactly, had been recently constituted, in less than a century, emerging thanks to the war and diplomacy of a confused situation where the whole center of the land was divided into many small independent States, in the manner of the Greek city-states. Each of these States presented the same governmental structure: a monarch, assisted

by one or sometimes several councils, and surrounded by dignitaries invested with military or administrative functions.

Before the arrival of the Aztecs, these city-states could be divided roughly speaking into two categories: on the one hand those that had survived the *debacle* of the Toltec civilization, such as Xochimilco and Colhuacan, and which had conserved the essential traditions of this culture; and on the other hand those founded by the conquering tribes from the north, such as Azcapotzalco and Texcoco. Among the former, the monarchic institution developed from the Toltec monarchy, in a tradition uninterrupted in principle, and reflected its legendary prestige; among the latter the monarchy bore witness to a process of "toltecization" of the barbarians, in contact with the traces of the preceding high civilization. In this respect the history of Texcoco is typical: founded by the Chichimeque chief Xolotl, the dynasty evolved in less than two hundred years with such speed that in the fifteenth century the king of Texcoco, Nezaualcoyotl, could be considered the most classic representative of Mexican civilization—and his city a sort of Athens of the new continent.

The Toltec concept of the monarchy was strongly colored by religion: was not the Toltec king par excellence, Quetzalcoatl, a high priest, a thaumaturge, a civilizing hero, indeed a god, the Plumed Serpent? Among the barbarians, on the other hand, the military aspect dominated: the king was the guide of the nomadic tribe, the warrior chief. The Mexican monarchy of the historic period seems to be a sort of compromise between these two concepts.

From the moment of their first contact with the evolved cultures of the central plateau, the Aztecs wished to imitate the states in whose midst they found themselves; they gave themselves a king, Uitziliuitl the Elder. This attempt ended tragically, with the crushing of the young monarchy and the death of Uitziliuitl. When the Aztecs decided to take up once more this abortive attempt, in 1375, they tried to "cover" themselves by invoking the great Toltec tradition: they chose as their sovereign Acamapichtli, whom somewhat complaisant genealogies connect with the dynasty of Colhuacan, itself reputed to descend from that of Tula, and so from Quetzalcoatl himself.

The Mexican emperor, at the height of Aztec civilization, is

a semi-divine personage surrounded with a religious halo. When he dies, his remains are incinerated clothed in the ornaments of Quetzalcoatl, so that he may join his illustrious ancestor in the beyond. His election (the emperor was elected by a "college" of military, civil and religious dignitaries) was considered to express the will of the gods, in particular the will of Tezcatlipoca. He swore to "defend the temple of Uitzilopochtli," and one of his principle missions consisted in enlarging and embellishing this temple and sacrificing prisoners there. Auitzotl, in 1487, himself presided at the inaugural ceremonies for the great *teocalli*, not without sacrificing in person a number of captives; Cortez and his *conquistadores* watched with horror as the emperor Motecuhzoma II officiated before a sanctuary whose walls were thick with human blood.

The sovereign took part in a number of religious ceremonies in the course of a year, and also in ritual dances by which believers "acquired merits in the eyes of the gods."

However, is it possible to say that the emperor himself was a priest, a member of the sacerdotal class, or rather of the sacerdotal sub-class which, together with civil and military dignitaries, made up the ruling class? One is forced to answer in the negative. The official titles are significant: he bore the title *tlatoani*, "the orator" (from *tlatoa*, to speak—a root which expresses also the idea of "commandment"), and the title of *tlacatecubtli*, "chief of warriors." He "spoke," that is to say, he expounded in council the decisions to be made, and he commanded the army. A political and military chief, he certainly had multiple ritual obligations—as does everyone in an intensely religious society; but he was not a priest himself.

Let us consider also his entourage: he has around him such military dignitaries as the *tlacateccatl* ("he who commands the warriors") and the *tlacochcalcatl* ("chief of the arms magazines"), or civil and administrative dignitaries such as the *ney calpixqui* ("grand major-domo," minister of finances); he actively directs the judicial hierarchy. But the two high priests of Mexico, one of Uitzilopochtli and one of Tlaloc¹, who rule jointly over the

¹ The religious organization of Mexico was the result of a compromise between the truly Aztec religion of Uitzilopochtli, sun god of warriors, and that

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Mexican Church, do not depend on him, any more than does the *Mexicatl teohuatzin*, a sort of vicar general. Without doubt these venerated personages (especially the first two, who have the title "plumed serpents") are counted among the highest members of the ruling class; often they are related to the sovereign. But they do not give him orders, and do not receive orders from him. Thus one can assert the existence of two parallel hierarchies: that of the State, which goes from the *tlatoani* to the *calpullec*, or chief of a local division; and that of the Church, which goes from the two high priests to the *quacuilli*, the local priest. It goes without saying that the emperor was not, if need be, without influence on the religious chiefs, and that the latter could undoubtedly advise the sovereign—all the more since he was always a believer and practicer of the faith. But it is certainly a matter of two separate hierarchies: the confusion of powers in the hands of the archaic "bearers of god" has disappeared.

One should nevertheless reflect an instant on the title and functions of a very important dignitary, a veritable vice-emperor, who plays a capital role next to the sovereign from the reign of Motecuhzoma I on (1440-1469). This is the *ciuacoatl*. His title means literally: "female serpent;" it is the name of one of the great mother-goddesses. Probably the Aztecs borrowed this institution from more ancient cities such as Xochimilco and Colhuacan; most likely in the beginning the *ciuacoatl* was merely the high priest of the goddess whose name he bore, according to Mexican usage. What is certain is that at the historic period the *ciuacoatl* was invested with civil, military and judicial functions, but not with religious functions.

If, then, the two hierarchies were parallel, one nonetheless observes institutional ties between them. A dignitary with the significant title of "priest-lord" (*tecubtlamacazqui*) was a permanent representative of the religious chiefs to the sovereign. On the other hand, priests of high rank made up part of the *Tlatocam*, the great council presided over by the emperor, or in his absence by the *ciuacoatl*; it was there that important decisions were shaped.

of Tlaloc, a very ancient divinity of rain and agriculture worshiped by the stationary peasants of the central valley. The two high priests had equal rank.

These priests were also members of the electoral college which designated the sovereign; here they were, however, a minority. Their voice could therefore be heard at the summit of the State, and surely with an authority founded on the extraordinary domination of religion over the spirit of the times.

LORDS AND PRIESTS

The preceding analysis shows us that there was a duality in the heart of the Aztec ruling class: on the one hand the military or civil dignitaries (with the Mexicans as with the Romans, the *cursus honorum* did not involve a formal separation between these two categories of functions; nonetheless, in Mexico even more than in Rome, the accent is on the warlike aspect); on the other hand, the priests. This duality is expressed by two terms: *tecubtli*, which we often translate "lord," designates the great military chiefs, the governors of cities and places, the sovereigns of confederate or conquered States, the elected chiefs of the *calpulli*; *tlamacazqui*, "priest," is applied to members of the sacerdotal hierarchy from the high priests down to the servants of the small local temples. In the supernatural world the majority of the gods, and notably those of heaven and hell, bear the title of *tecubili*; but Tlaloc, the old god of rain and vegetation, is called *tlamacazqui*.

Upon contact with the stationary civilizations of the high plateau, and with the Toltec tradition, the Aztecs had adopted the agrarian cults and gods. It is quite significant that, out of eighteen high feasts which marked the passing of the year at intervals of twenty days, four were consecrated to Tlaloc and the gods of rain, and five to the divinities of the earth and maize.² At the summit of the great *teocalli* of Mexico the two sanctuaries of Uitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, side by side on the same platform, dominated the holy city, symbolizing the juxtaposition of the two fundamental religions: that of the stars, the religion of sun-worshipping warriors, and that of the earth and water, the religion of peasants and stationary, civilized people.

In the crowded pantheon of early sixteenth-century Aztec re-

² Four were consecrated to astral gods, two of these to Uitzilopochtli.

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ligion—the Mexicans annexed foreign gods with the greatest ease: there was even a special temple for them, the *Coacalco*—four divine personalities stand out, so to speak, from the crowd. These four principle gods are divided into two groups: on the one hand Uitzilopochtli, god of the sun and divine protector of the State, and Tezcatlipoca, god of the nocturnal sky; on the other hand Tlaloc, the old pre-Aztec god of rain, and Quetzalcoatl, the Toltec god par excellence, inventor of the arts, of writing, of the divining calender. The two former gods were both warlike, come from the steppes of the north with their barbarian worshipers; and both played the role of “patrons” of the two military orders, that of the knights of the eagles (Uitzilopochtli) and that of the knights of the tigers (Tezcatlipoca). The two latter gods had been worshipped for centuries by the civilized peoples of the central plains. Tlaloc is not a warrior god but a peasant god; to those whom he distinguishes, he opens his own paradise, the *Tlalocan*, a blooming, well-watered garden where the blessed enjoy abundance and rest. (Warriors, in contrast, who have died for the glory of the sun, go to the heavens to be resurrected in the aura of the star.) As for Quetzalcoatl, a benevolent and peaceful god, they say that he always refused to initiate human sacrifices in his historical-mythical city of Tula; and he had been chased from his kingdom by none other than Tezcatlipoca. Mexican syncretism of the imperial period had reconciled these adversaries, or rather placed them together in the same complex of rites and beliefs, without reducing their essential duality.

Now this duality was affirmed in a field of greatest importance for the evolution of society and government: the field of education.

In effect, two systems of education coexisted in Mexico. In the *telpochcalli*, “houses of young people,” children and adolescents received an education that was essentially practical, oriented towards the life of the “average citizen” and towards war. The teachers themselves were already confirmed warriors, who attempted to inculcate the traditional civic and military virtues in their pupils. While they prepared themselves to equal the exploits of these monitors, the young people led a rather free and brilliant collective life. They sang and danced after sunset, and had young courtesans, the *auianime*, as companions.

The education dispensed by the priests in the higher colleges

annexed to the temples, and called *calmecac*, was very different. There, an austere and studious life prepared adolescents either for the life of a priest or for high duties in the State. Subjected to frequent fasts and hard labor, they studied the sacred books, the myths, the divining calendar, the history of their country. Self-discipline was cultivated, abnegation, devotion to the gods and to the public good. The pupils were also taught the art of oratory, poetry and good manners.

Each of these systems was patronized by a god. The *tel-pochcalli* came from Tezcatlipoca, among whose sacred titles was that of *Telpochtli*, "the young man," and *Yaotl*, "the warrior;" while the *calmecac* came from the peaceful Quetzalcoatl, protector of civilization, inventor of books and king-priest of Tula. A child who entered the *tel-pochcalli* was consecrated to Tezcatlipoca; one received at the *calmecac* was vowed to Quetzalcoatl.

Behind these two divine personalities are two opposing concepts of life and of the world—although they are combined in the heart of the same society. On one hand there is the ideal of the warriors, deriving from the ancient nomadic life of the barbarians: a happy youth devoted to pleasures and to combat, war, death for the Sun, a happy eternity in the luminous sky. On the other hand theirs is the priestly ideal of self-renunciation, abnegation in favor of the gods or the State, contemplative study—in short, the "Toltec" ideal of the high pre-Aztec civilizations. The key-word of the former is youth; the latter is inspired by old men whose word (*ueuetlatolli*: the word of old men, designates both the rules of morality and of good manners) is highly respected, and who sit in the councils.

It is certain that there was antagonism between the *tel-pochcalli* and the *calmecac*. We know that the students of the *tel-pochcalli* were reproached for their free way of life, their mistresses, their arrogant and presumptuous language. Once a year, during the sixteenth month, *Atemoztli*, the students of the two orders of teaching threw themselves at each other, playing tricks on each other, invading the establishments and destroying furnishings.

From what social categories did these students come, and what "careers" could they hope for? The organization of Mexican society presents a curious mixture of democracy and oligarchy. In principal, only young people belonging to the class of the *pilli* (sons

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of dignitaries) could enter the *calmecac*. When their education was completed, at the age of about twenty, they chose either the priesthood, and consequently celibacy, or marriage and the service of the State. Equally in principle, the sons of merchants, artisans or simple citizens entered the *telpochcalli*; they left it to get married and take up arms. But it is clear from the witnesses of the times that the *calmecac* was also open to at least some children of the merchant class (*pochteca*) and of the plebeians (*maceualtin*). Under what conditions, according to what choices, we do not know. But it is certain that a military career could carry a particularly distinguished warrior to the highest dignities, for example to one of the four high commands directly below the emperor, no matter what his origins; in the same manner, the high priests were chosen without regard to their family, and could perfectly well be sons of simple citizens. One may say that every free Aztec "had his marshal's baton in his knapsack," and also the possibility to arrive at the peak of the sacerdotal hierarchy. The native chronicles give many examples of warriors elevated to the rank of *tecubili* after a specific feat of arms, or even of simple peasants invested by the emperor with functions that made them enter into the ruling class.

THE EVOLUTION OF MORAL IDEAS AND OF VALUES

One could not understand this complex state of affairs, where different and indeed, opposing concepts of life coming from historically different cultures, balanced each other, if one did not go back in time to attempt to trace its evolution in the course of the two centuries which preceded the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

In the fourteenth century, and during a large part of the fifteenth, the influx of peoples from the north and the bloody battles between States—notably the battle-to-the-death between Azcapotzalco, governed by unscrupulous tyrants, and Texcoco and Mexico—maintained a climate of violence in Mexico. Intrigues, coups d'etat, usurpations, political assassinations, wars of conquest succeeded each other without interruption. The great men of this troubled time are above all the devoted warrior chiefs of great

anger,³ and of indomitable courage in the face of disproportionate trials: did not Nezauacoyotl, the king of Texcoco dethroned after the murder of his father, have to wander through the mountains and the deserts for years in perpetual danger of death? The ideal of this time, in spite of the process of "toltecization" which began in the thirteenth century, is still that of the barbarous and warlike nomads.

The Aztecs, as the latest comers, had to undergo vexations and extortion, pay tribute, and bow before such blows as the assassination of their second sovereign in 1428, before emerging as the dominant tribe and extending their leadership to immense territories. Until the end of the fifteenth century their battles did not cease, and the names of Itzcoatl, Axayacatl, Auitzotl and Tlacaehleltzin are the synonyms of violence and lust for power.

It is difficult to define the moment at which the evolution of deeds and customs deviated. As a people devoted to the service of the Sun, the Aztecs were sure that it was their cosmic duty to supply the star with the sacrificial blood that was his nourishment, without which the world would be annihilated. They had to carry the "sacred war" to its very end. And so they did not make the effort which would have been necessary, and without doubt possible, to annihilate the little State of Tlaxcala in the heart of their Empire: in this way they could take up fighting at regular intervals in order to deposit human hearts at the foot of the sanctuary of Uitzilopochtli. The whole ferocious and bloody aspect of Mexican civilization at this time is bound to a concept of the universe in which sacrificial blood is indispensable to the very life of the world and of humanity.

But simultaneously with this obligation, which explains the importance of the warrior's function in society and in the State, the enthusiasm of young people devoted to combat to the death for the gods, the high dignity of fighters and their chiefs—at the same time powerful causes are moving society in the opposite direction. The city is no longer menaced, but surrounded by a large pacified zone; it is in the heart of a country which the barbarians, solidly contained within the northern limits of the

³ The first Motecuhzoma, whose name means "he who is angry like a lord," had his own brother killed in a fit of fury.

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empire, no longer overrun. The development of public and private wealth, the growth of the merchant class, the growing refinements of their way of life: in short, the influence of the Toltec tradition symbolized by Quetzalcoatl brings with it a subtle but profound modification of the psychological climate and of the scale of values.

One is surprised, for example, on studying the official pronouncements at the enthronement of sovereigns, to find to what degree the accent is no longer on their warlike virtues, but rather on the benevolence which they must show their subjects, on the self-discipline which they must practice, on goodness, dignity and moderation. "You will sustain and care for this people like a child in the cradle... Be moderate in the exercise of your power, do not show either your teeth or your claws," this is the advice which the orators give the new emperor. He is compared to a tree, in whose shadow the multitudes find shelter. He is adjured never to act in anger. "Create in yourself the heart of an old man, grave and severe," he is told. "Do nothing, say nothing precipitously."

A whole series of edifying stories are handed down to us, all aiming at depicting the leaders as they should be: charitable, merciful, compassionate. The good emperor is he who bends down to misery, who does not hesitate to admit his mistakes, who fears the gods and listens patiently to reproaches. True or false, these anecdotes are significant: it is no longer a time in which force and violence are exclusively admired. The ideal of civilized life is moving away from that of the ferocious warriors of the preceding phase.

The moral precepts known under the name of "words of old men" go further, for in them one can find even condemnation of certain men of war, "great killers but unskilled at the tasks of governing." It is difficult not to see the reflection of the priestly teachings of the *calmecac* in such statements. And one begins to think that one of the reasons for the astonishing success of the *conquistadores* was that they found in their way not a brutally courageous statesman and warrior like Motecuhzoma I, but his heir, Motecuhzoma II: scrupulous and meditative, a studious pupil of the priestly college, very attentive to predictions, taking the

Spaniards who landed in Mexico for the representatives of Quetzalcoatl announced by ancient prophecies.

And so, from the primitive phase where what little tribal power existed was concentrated in the hands of the priests, to the period of the fall of Mexico, a complex evolution had taken place. Ancient Mexico was not a theocracy; but the influence of religion and of the priestly class, the heir of a high cultural tradition, was powerfully exercised. Combined with other economic and political causes, religion helped to modify profoundly the hierarchy of values recognized by a civilization divided by the duality of its origins. How would this duality have been reduced if the evolution of Mexican society could have continued? The collapse of their culture under the blows of Cortez and his companions has suddenly turned this page of universal history. That which is certain in any case is that the Aztecs, in strong contrast to the Incas, had the tendency to distinguish clearly between religion and politics, between the priestly and governmental functions. As faithful as they were, the governors were not priests, and the priests did not govern.