

# *Responding to the Requerimiento: Imagined First Encounters between Natives and Spaniards in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*

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**O**N DECEMBER 21, 1511, Fray Antonio de Montesinos preached a sermon on the island of Hispaniola in which he challenged the legality of the Spaniards' treatment of the island's Taíno population:

Tell me by what right and by what justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible servitude? By what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these peoples who lived calmly and peacefully in their own lands, where, with death and slaughter before unheard of, in endless numbers you have destroyed them? Why do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of the illnesses they incur and die of from the excessive labor you give them, or rather, why do you kill them, to secure and acquire gold every day?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Decid:¿Con qué derecho y con qué justicia tenéis en tan cruel y horrible servidumbre a estos indios? ¿Con qué autoridad habéis hecho tan detestables guerras a estas gentes, que estaban en sus tierras mansas y pacíficas donde tan infinitas de ellas, con muerte y estragos nunca oídos habéis consumido? ¿Cómo los tenéis tan opresos y fatigados, sin darles de comer ni curarlos en sus enfermedades en que, de los excesivos trabajos que les dais, incurren y se os mueren y, por mejor decir, los matáis por sacar y adquirir oro cada día?” Brading recounts the impact of this sermon on Bartolomé de Las Casas, who provided the sole source for the text quoted here. See D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State, 1492–1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59–60; and Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, ed. Agustín Millares Carlo, 3 vols. (1527–61; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951), 2:441–44.

The sermon was inflammatory because it was interpreted as questioning the Spanish Crown's *dominium* in the Americas—which meant the right to control and profit from their native populations. This legal vulnerability had already proved troublesome for Ferdinand the Catholic King: in 1493 the Papal Bulls of Donation had granted *sovereignty* (*imperium*) over America to the Castilian Crown, along with the duty to evangelize its peoples, but jurists and theologians could still not find a justification in natural law for the Spaniards' establishing settlements in recently discovered territories, let alone for taking possession of land and enslaving the original inhabitants. In order to support his Crown's claim to *dominium* in the New World, Ferdinand sought the rulings of two jurists, Matías de Paz, a canon lawyer, and Juan López de Palacios Rubios, a civil lawyer. Their reasoning rested on a demand that the peoples of the Americas should recognize the basis of Spain's authority, which was conferred by the Pope and ultimately by God, as creator of the world and of all peoples, including those of the New World. This demand was given legal form in a document drafted in 1513, now known as the *Requerimiento*.<sup>2</sup>

It is well known that the *Requerimiento* involved a number of contradictions.<sup>3</sup> In theory the declaration was in accord with the long-standing principle that if heathen peoples did not allow Christian missionaries into their territory, they were liable to be compelled to do so by a secular power and have war declared upon them. The "Requirement" was thus formulated by the Spaniards to provide due notification of this principle to the inhabitants of the New World, but many testimonies show that the conquistadors took little trouble to ensure that the Indians were in a position to hear it.<sup>4</sup> As well as the internal inconsistencies in the declaration itself, there are profound problems with the idea of interlingual and interethnic communication and contact entailed by the very conception of such a document.<sup>5</sup>

Even if its content had ever been successfully conveyed and understood, the wording of the *Requerimiento* makes it clear that the only response expected was to "acknowledge Spain's monarchy as representative of the Church and its Pope as rulers of the whole world and therefore of their territory." This was in effect an ultimatum. In that respect it might seem pointless to speculate about what any more nuanced Indian reply or reaction to such a discourse would have been. Yet the *Requerimiento* was not a simple declaration by fiat: the inhabitants of invaded territories were addressed in the second person (*vosotros*) and *asked*, however disingenuously, "to consider and . . . take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon its contents," which signals a level of involvement on their part. For all that the right to reply of those addressed was limited to a compliant yes (if they were to avoid brutal reprisals), the document's

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 30–56, provides a more detailed account of these developments. The reception of Bartolo of Sassoferrato's distinctions between *dominium* and *imperium* in Las Casas and the *De debellandis indis* (attributed to Vasco de Quiroga) is considered in Andrew Laird, "Bartolo da Sassoferrato and the Dominion of Native Americans: The *De debellandis indis* and Las Casas' *Apologia*," *Studi umanistici piceni* 29 (2009): 365–73.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 88–93; Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 87–99.

wording nonetheless projected those addressees as *interlocutors*: though by no means intended to foster dialogue, its rhetorics imply that initiation of such dialogue was hypothetically possible.

Such observations might seem to be of only philosophical interest, but the complex performative dynamics of the *Requerimiento* and the ways it at once presupposes and generates social hierarchies have been explored in depth by Paja Faudree, in an authoritative and suggestive survey accommodating speech act theory, the idea of reusable utterances, and consideration of “participant roles.”<sup>6</sup> Faudree draws attention to important considerations raised by the form and internal structure of the text, arguing that its pragmatic indeterminacy could render it adaptable to a variety of conditions and scenarios—while at the same time noting the lack of any extant account of native reactions to the *Requerimiento*.<sup>7</sup> Yet its expressions do resonate in the words ascribed to indigenous speakers in their first spoken exchanges with missionaries and conquistadors, as they are presented in some unusual sixteenth-century narratives of initial encounters between Spaniards and Indians in New Spain.

The focus of the discussion to follow will be on the constructed speeches of native leaders or representatives in three different testimonies for such encounters, which supposedly took place in the years following the conquest of Mexico, before the abolition of the *Requerimiento* in 1558. The first is included in a letter from a native *cacique* to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V; the second featured in the earliest known biography of Vasco de Quiroga, written by one of his associates. Both of those accounts are in Latin and are seldom read. The third to be considered is much better known—although it has been woefully, if not willfully, misinterpreted by some ethnohistorians: Fray Bernadino de Sahagún’s description of the discussions or debates (*coloquios*) in 1524 between the first Franciscan missionaries and the idolatrous priests of the “Aztecs,” or Mexica Nahuas. After surveying each of these testimonies (all reproduced in the Appendix below), the conclusion to this essay will identify features they have in common and suggest that the contradictions of the *Requerimiento* might have a more general significance for intercultural engagement.

## I

On December 1, 1552, Antonio Cortés Totoquiuhatzin, the native governor of Tlacopan in the Valley of Mexico, wrote to his “sacred Caesarean majesty” Charles V. The election of Cortés Totoquiuhatzin as *gobernador* of his town in 1550 by the viceroy of New Spain reestablished the authority of Tlacopan’s pre-Hispanic royal succession, thirty years after the writer’s father, Totoquiuhatzin, *tlatoani* or ruler of the polity, had died of smallpox in 1520.<sup>8</sup> In his letter to

<sup>6</sup> Paja Faudree, “How to Say Things with Wars: Performativity and Discursive Rupture in the *Requerimiento* of the Spanish Conquest,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (2012): 186. Faudree characterizes the *Requerimiento*’s rhetorical strategy as an attempt “to accomplish an action through speech while simultaneously establishing the communicative context on which the speech act depended,” citing other examples. A more recent instance of just such a complex performative might be the *Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces against Iraq* (October 2, 2002): while serving to legitimize military action, it avowedly “supported” and “encouraged” diplomatic efforts to enforce, through the UN, Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq. The lengthy and intricate text of the *Joint Resolution* was passed as public law only fourteen days later.

<sup>7</sup> Faudree, “How to Say Things with Wars,” 196n2.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, *Obras históricas*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 1997), 1:544 (*Historia de la nación chichimeca*, chap. 90), corroborates Cortés Totoquiuhatzin, *S[acre] C[atholice] C[aesaree] Majestati Antoníus Cortes Rector populi de tlacoban omnesq[ue] alij conciués humile seruitium impendunt* (1552), fol. 4 (excerpted in Appendix): “my father had died, by no means in battle, but of an illness.” Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of*

Charles V, don Antonio explained how his father had rejoiced at the first arrival of the Spaniards: he sent gifts to them and received them in Tlacopan “with open arms”; he sought to prevent his ally Montezuma from campaigning against them, and he later provided a safe haven for the Spaniards when they had to flee Tenochtitlán—the occasion that became known as the *Noche Triste*. The letter also presented the very words (*Haec sunt quidem verba*) with which the elder Totoquihuatzin had first welcomed Hernán Cortés. The *tlatoani* invited him to destroy the temple of his gods and to take from it anything he liked; he offered his own daughters as wives for the Spaniards; and he also asked for an alliance with Cortés to make war on the nations in Mexico that were hostile to him.

Chroniclers like Alvarado Tezozómoc or Chimalpahin provided detailed genealogies for Totoquihuatzin and his descendants, and there is no specific evidence that Totoquihuatzin actually had any daughters.<sup>9</sup> Some aspects of this generous welcome described in this letter resemble various accounts of Montezuma’s own confused reception of Hernán Cortés, including that given by Cortés himself—and Montezuma’s daughters *were* married to Spaniards.<sup>10</sup> The most prominent of them, Isabel de Montezuma, was the wife of Juan Cano, *encomendero* of Tlacopan—and the main purpose of don Antonio’s letter was in fact to complain that this couple were abusing the people of Tlacopan and improperly appropriating the town’s land and estates for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin would have been less than two years old when his father first received the Spaniards. His fictional version of that meeting was not based on any personal recollection or transmitted version of events: it was strategically crafted in order to win over the Emperor. The very start of the welcoming speech that was professedly addressed to Hernán Cortés by Totoquihuatzin the Elder shows this:

May your arrival with your army be most auspicious, and *may you know that we are prepared to serve you, and him in whose name you come. Along with my people I will worship the same god you praise...* In any case, you should know that I have no wish to wage war against you and your army, lest my people come to a bad end.<sup>12</sup>

This is close to being a concise expression of compliance with what was demanded by the *Requerimiento*, and the speaker’s pledge to serve the Captain and “him in whose name you come” at least shows familiarity with the Spanish protocols. In fact, the writer of this letter used his

*the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 171, implies he met a violent end (“Totoquihuatzin was killed in the conquest”) but does not specify a source.

<sup>9</sup> Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica mexicayotl*, ed. Adrián León (Mexico City: UNAM, 1998), 158, 168–70 [345–54] (a text decisively attributed to Chimalpahin in Susan Schroeder, “The Truth about the Crónica Mexicayotl,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 2 [2011]: 233–47); and Emma Pérez Rocha and Rafael Tena, *La nobleza indígena del centro de México* (Mexico City: INAH, 2000), 48–53.

<sup>10</sup> Restall (*Seven Myths*, 77–99) surveys sources for the meeting between Cortés and Montezuma. For Montezuma’s other descendants, see Gibson, *Aztecs under Spanish Rule*; and Donald E. Chipman, *Moctezuma’s Children: Aztec Royalty under Spanish Rule, 1520–1700* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> For a text, translation, and study of the Latin letter, see Andrew Laird, “Ethnohistory and Nahua Learning in Sixteenth-Century New Spain: The Latin Letter from Antonio Cortés Totoquihuatzin, Native Ruler of Tlacopan, to Charles V (1st December 1552),” in “The Role of Latin in the Early Modern World: Linguistic Identity and the Polity from Petrarch to the Habsburg Novelists,” ed. Trine Hass, Noreen Humble, and Marianne Pade, *Renaissanceforum* 10 (2016), <http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/oversigt.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Cortés Totoquihuatzin, *S[acre] C[atholice] C[aesaree] Majestati Antonius Cortes Rector populi de tlacoban omnes[ue] alij conciuus humile seruitium impendunt*, fol. 4 (excerpted in the Appendix).

Christian humanist education to the full to ingratiate himself with Charles V.<sup>13</sup> One telling example is the way don Antonio begins his narrative—by informing the Caesar of the Holy Roman Empire that his dominion in New Spain “was divided into three parts, Mexico, Tlacopan, and Texcoco,” in a way that recalled an opening used by the original Roman Caesar, Julius: “All Gaul was divided into three parts.”<sup>14</sup>

## II

The way in which a writer’s own cultural formation could determine his reconstruction of an opening dialogue between Indians and Spaniards is illustrated in a different way by the Franciscan humanist and missionary Fray Cristóbal Cabrera. During the 1530s Cabrera was in Michoacán, the western region of New Spain, assisting Bishop Vasco de Quiroga, who had been establishing his “hospital villages,” communities for native Mexicans that are widely thought to have been modeled on the blueprint of Thomas More’s *Utopia*.<sup>15</sup>

In his treatise, penned some fifty years later in Rome in 1582, Cabrera described an occasion on which Quiroga received a wild-looking tribe of Indians, who had come of their own accord to be baptized. There may be some historical basis for this: Bishop Quiroga himself reported to the Council of the Indies that “some noble and savage tribes [*vnas gentes bravas y siluestras*],” called Chichimecs, came freely to baptism.<sup>16</sup> The Chichimecs were classed by many other Franciscan chroniclers as *silvestres*, coming from the *silva*, or forest, and the name Chichimeca itself meant “wild nomad.”<sup>17</sup>

Cabrera then recounted how an interpreter from the group made an accomplished speech which so impressed Quiroga that he asked his companions, “Have you ever seen, I ask you,

<sup>13</sup> A reassessment of the motives for the Latin education of the native Mexican elites in the mid-1500s is given in Andrew Laird, “The Teaching of Latin to the Native Nobility in Mexico in the Mid-1500s: Contexts, Methods, and Results,” in *Latin and Greek as Second Languages from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jonathan Gnoza and William Brockliss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 118–35.

<sup>14</sup> Cortés Totoquiuhatzin, *S[acre] C[atholice] C[aesaree] Majestati Antonius Cortes Rector populi de tlacoban omnesq[ue] alij conciuus humile seruitium impendunt*, fol. 3: “has Indias antiquis in temporibus fuisse diuisas in tres partes nimirum Mexicum, Tlacubam, et Tetzcocum atque ex consequenti tres dominos seu rectores habuisse qui dominabantur aliorum populorum circumiacentium; Caesar, *De bello Gallico* [*Gallic Wars*] 1.1: Gallia est omnis diuisa in partes tres, quarum unam incolunt Belgae, alia Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur.”

<sup>15</sup> Fintan Benedict Warren, *Vasco de Quiroga and His Pueblo-Hospitals of Santa Fe* (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1963), 33–35. Quiroga’s acquaintance with More’s *Utopia* may not have extended far beyond knowledge of the work’s title: Andrew Laird, “The Classical Foundations of Utopia in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Lucian, Virgil, More and Erasmus in Vasco de Quiroga’s *Información en derecho* (1535),” *Comparatismes en Sorbonne: Les classiques aux Amériques* 6 (2015): 1–9.

<sup>16</sup> Vasco de Quiroga, “El Obispo de Michoacán al Consejo de Indias, 17 de febrero 1561,” *Archivo general de Indias, Audiencia de México*, leg. 374, fols. 9–10, in Leopoldo Campos, *Vasco de Quiroga y el arzobispado de Morelia* (Mexico City: Jus, 1965), 155–58.

<sup>17</sup> For Chichimecs as *silvestres*, see Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, vol. 11 (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 1974), 171 [10.29]; Motolinía [Fray Toribio de Benavente], *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman (Mexico City: Porrúa, 2001), 198–99 [3.5], 213 [3.7]; Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, ed. Miguel León-Portilla, 3 vols. (Mexico City: UNAM, 1977), 1:58–59 (bk. 1, chap. 15) (originally published as *Monarchia indiana* [Seville, 1615]); and Frances Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 48 on *chichimecātl*.

barbarian Ciceros, Quintilians, and Livys like this?”<sup>18</sup> In a summary of the native orator’s words that followed, we read that his people had hitherto lived in an uncivilized and barbarous state, without clothes, concerned only with feeding themselves on the raw flesh of animals as they found them, sleeping in the open, and knowing nothing of agriculture but relying only on archery, which they learned in infancy, “from the age when . . . fingernails are tender.”

Cabrera’s visual description of the barbarian throng of both sexes—heavily armed with bows and arrows, the men completely naked, the women “nude too, except for a kind of deer-skin loincloth”—and the native speaker’s characterization of his own people converged with what was attested by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: book 10 of the *Historia general* states that the Chichimecs lived in the open, slept in caves, fed only on the plants and animals they found in the wild, and taught archery to children as young as a year old.<sup>19</sup> The native’s characterization of his people also harmonized with ancient classical accounts of early human society: especially Cicero’s portrayal of mankind prior to the advent of rhetoric and the poet Ovid’s description of primeval human beings “living like wild animals” without houses or cultivation.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the Indians presented in Cabrera’s narrative—with their dependence on archery and aversion to agriculture—have an uncanny resemblance to the Fenni, the ancient Finns, as they were portrayed by the Roman historian Tacitus: “their only hope in arrows. . . . The common hunt sustains men and women alike; for the women keep them company everywhere.”<sup>21</sup> The name of the Fenni, like that of the Chichimecs, was derived from a word for “nomads” or “hunting folk.”<sup>22</sup> The two races had one further thing in common, of which Cabrera must have been aware: neither of them had any need for religion. According to Tacitus, the Finns were “secure against men and secure against gods,” while Motolinía remarked that the “Chichimecs . . . did not have idols”—an observation made in 1540, not long after the occasion Cabrera described would have taken place. Fray Juan Focher had also noted that the Chichimecs “worship neither God nor idols [*neque Deum neque idola colunt*],” and the *mestizo* chronicler Alva Ixtlilxóchitl would make the same observation in the 1600s.<sup>23</sup>

These convergences could illustrate what Peter Burke has called the “circularity” between descriptions of Indians in the New World and traditional accounts of barbarians in European

<sup>18</sup> Cristóbal Cabrera, *De solicitanda infidelium conversione, iuxta illud Evangelicum Lucae XIII, Compelle intrare . . .* (Rome, January 25, 1582), Vatican Library, cod. Vat. Lat. 5026, fol. 45v (excerpted in Appendix).

<sup>19</sup> Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 11:171–33 (*Historia general* 10.29).

<sup>20</sup> Ovid, *Fasti* 2.291–93, 2.296: “In that time the human race wandered in the lonely fields, consisting of nothing but brute strength and rude bodies. Woodland had been its home, grass its food, and leaves its bedding—and for a very long time no one had been known to anyone else.” Cabrera would have known Cicero, *De oratore* 1.33 and *De inventione* 1.2, quoted in the 1500s by Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión*, ed. Agustín Millares Carlo (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1942), 98–100 (*De unico vocationis modo* 5.10), and by Diego Valadés, *Retórica cristiana*, ed. Tarsicio Herrera Zapién, Julio Pimentel Álvarez, Alfonso Castro Pallares, and Esteban Palomares Chávez (Mexico City: FCE, 1989), 28 (*Praefatio* b3). See also Seneca, *Epistulae* 17.6, 90.16.

<sup>21</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 46 (excerpted in the Appendix).

<sup>22</sup> Elof Hellquist, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups, 1922), 137 (s.v. *finne*); and J. B. Rives, ed., *Tacitus, Germania* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 327.

<sup>23</sup> Motolinía, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, 4 [*Epístola proemial* 7]; Juan de Focher, *Itinerario del misionero en América*, ed. P. Antonio Eguiluz (Madrid: Librería General Victoriano Suárez, 1960), 348–49 [3.2]; and Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, *Obras históricas*, 1:289 (*Historia de los señores chichimecos hasta la venida de los españoles*, chap. 1).

antiquity.<sup>24</sup> Yet neither classical learning nor independent observation completely determined the image presented by Cabrera, whose Indian spokesman makes clear that his people actually *had* worshiped idols. If that had been so, such a practice would have set them in contrast to all the other Chichimecs as they were described in all other contemporary sources (as well as in contrast to Tacitus's Finns, whom this group otherwise resembled in most respects). The speaker representing these Indians is held to say that his people were now keen to be instructed in new beliefs and practices: in his reported words, they were ready to "both undertake, with a swift and ready spirit, and practice, with all their heart and strength, whatever things were to be believed, observed, and practiced that [the Bishop] might impart—with regard to the conduct of life, behavior, faith, divine worship, and true religion."<sup>25</sup> That is not dissimilar to the model response of those who had already recognized Spanish authority in their lands outlined in the *Requerimiento*:

They received and obeyed the priests whom Their Highnesses sent to preach to them and to teach them our Holy Faith; and all these, of their own free will, without any reward or condition, have become Christians.

The claim in the legal declaration of the *Requerimiento* that the inhabitants of Spain's newly found territories had been receiving instruction in the Christian faith "of their own free will" is a moot point. Conversely, Cabrera's treatise was advocating conversion by a form of "compulsion" that was purely pacifistic, following the principles of Erasmus. Thus, the full title of his treatise was *On Securing the Conversion of Unbelievers in Relation to the Phrase in Luke's Gospel Chapter 14, "Compel Them to Come In."* The details it provided about Quiroga's life were intended to show that unbelievers would be inclined or "compelled" to accept the Christian truth after "a kind and holy apostle of the gospel comes forward, one of such blameless life and inspiring example that he will by his goodness and generosity so draw others that they will be 'forced' into accepting Christ's law."<sup>26</sup>

Whatever Vasco de Quiroga's encounter with the Chichimecs may have been like in reality, the native's words in this episode were framed and fabricated to illustrate the results of successful missionary method. To this end Cabrera's portrayal of Quiroga himself also drew from classical sources: by encouraging the Indians to settle into *oppida*, the Latin term for his "hospital villages," Bishop Quiroga is made to resemble the *sapiens*, or sage, who, in Cicero's words, first enabled men "to turn from their previous customs to a different system of life" and who "collected into one place and assembled people . . . scattered over the fields and hidden in woodland dwellings."<sup>27</sup>

### III

Spanish chronicles from the 1500s tend to present indigenous populations as what the anthropologist Edwin Ardener termed "muted groups": Indians were rarely shown to speak, because little value was attached to their discourse and their perspective.<sup>28</sup> But a chapter from a partly surviving

<sup>24</sup> Peter Burke, "America and the Rewriting of World History," in *America in European Consciousness*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Cristóbal Cabrera, *De solicitanda infidelium conversione*, fol. 45v (excerpted in the Appendix).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 30, paraphrased in Ross Dealy, *The Politics of an Erasmian Lawyer, Vasco de Quiroga* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1976), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero, *De inventione* 1.2.

<sup>28</sup> Edwin Ardener, *The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays*, ed. Malcolm Chapman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 72–85.

work redacted in both Spanish and the Mexican language of Nahuatl by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in 1564 is often celebrated as an exception. The work is generally known as the *Coloquios*: its full title in English is *The Colloquies and Christian Learning, with Which the Twelve Friars of Saint Francis, Sent by Pope Adrian the Sixth and Emperor Charles the Fifth, Converted the Indians of New Spain, in the Mexican Language and in Spanish*. The chapter in question, chapter 7, presents what the Aztec religious leaders had to say in response to the Franciscan missionaries who came to convert them in 1524. The speech of the representative of the Mexican “priests of the idols,” or “satraps” as Sahagún alternately called them, is compelling and moving. After an elaborate and courteous introduction, the speaker makes his position clear (paragraphs A–B in Sahagún’s manuscript):

If we are to die, let us die; if we are to perish, let us perish; as in truth the gods died too. May you not be aggrieved, our lords.

B. You have told us that we do not know him, the one through whom we have existence and life, and who is Lord of heaven and earth. Likewise, you say those whom we worship are not gods. This way of speaking is very new and very shocking to us: we are horrified at such speech, because our forefathers, who engendered and ruled us, did not tell us such a thing.<sup>29</sup>

He then explains how ceremonies and sacrifice were ordained long ago; how the gods brought his people into being and provided the foods they eat and the rain that makes them grow. The gods inhabit the divine realm of Tlalocan, and their worship was instituted before recorded time, in a number of legendary sacred places. The speaker avers that to destroy these traditions would risk unsettling his people and incurring the wrath of the gods themselves. He ends by making clear that it is enough for his people to have lost political power: they would die before abandoning their beliefs as well.

This oration has for too long been revered as a rare expression of Mexican religious thought in the face of Christianity, and it was central to Miguel León-Portilla’s influential book *La filosofía náhuatl*, or *Aztec Thought and Culture*.<sup>30</sup> The French ethnohistorian Georges Baudot also considered this a unique occasion on which the defeated sages were given the chance to have their say.<sup>31</sup> That has led to particular scrutiny of the *Nahuatl* version of Sahagún’s bilingual manuscript—which has been directly translated into English by Jorge Klor de Alva and even back into

<sup>29</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana: Con el que los doce frailes de San Francisco, enviados por el Papa Adriano VI y por el Emperador Carlos V, convirtieron a los indios de la Nueva España* (Spanish text), in Christian Duverger, *La conversión de los indios de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 55–87 (excerpted in the Appendix).

<sup>30</sup> Miguel León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl* (Mexico: UNAM, 1956), 62–70, translated as *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963). Cf. J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “La historicidad de los Coloquios de Sahagún,” *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 15 (1982): 142–84; and Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 96–103. Even Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogues in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 8 and 49, implies that this part of the *Coloquios* conveys a Nahua perspective.

<sup>31</sup> Georges Baudot, review of *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*, by Bernardino de Sahagún, ed. Miguel León-Portilla, *Vuelta* 13, no. 1 (1987): 48–49: “El texto que aquí se publica es en cierta manera el último adiós de una cultura que no se resigna a morir pero que ve agonizar a sus dioses y entrar en gran crisis su antigua expresión. Son dos los capítulos, de los catorce que nos quedan de estos Coloquios, los únicos en los que los sabios vencidos tienen derecho a la palabra, a su palabra que está herida.”



Spanish by León-Portilla.<sup>32</sup> Yet Sahagún made perfectly clear in his prologue that the original text of the *Coloquios* was written in *Spanish*, well before he supervised preparation of a “suitable and polished” Nahuatl version.<sup>33</sup>

That artificially refined Nahuatl version was produced, not as an attempt to reconstruct whatever might have been said forty years before, but in order to furnish missionaries with idioms to implant or consolidate the Christian faith among their converts. The narrative of the early exchange between the Franciscans and the Mexica was not primarily meant to be historical. Its function was exemplary: to provide the kind of language and arguments preachers might need to deploy in their ministry. Colorful and powerful though it may be, the retort of the Mexica priest or “satrap” to the Franciscan missionaries was constructed to be a straw man. The priest began in the self-deprecatory style that characterized formal Nahuatl address (“We are not worthy ourselves, so low and dirty . . .”), but the rest of this monologue—whether read in Sahagún’s Spanish or in Sahagún’s Nahuatl—displays evidence of rhetorical artifice that is markedly European. Its *content* was a point-by-point retort to the Franciscans’ preceding arguments; its *structure* also conforms precisely to the standard *dispositio*, or “arrangement,” for an oration advocated in classical and Renaissance rhetorical theory:<sup>34</sup>

<i>Exordium</i>	Introduction
<i>Narratio</i>	Statement of Facts
<i>Partitio</i>	Division into Parts
<i>Confirmatio</i>	Proof of Speaker’s Argument
[ <i>Refutatio</i> ]	Rejection of Opponent’s Argument]
<i>Conclusio</i>	Conclusion

Here the introductory *exordium* leads into a *partitio* (labeled A in Sahagún’s manuscript), in which the speaker explains two or three arguments that will be advanced to counter what the Mexica have heard. That is in clear defiance of the friars’ assertion, made earlier in chapter 3, that no one will ever be able to contradict scripture. The *narratio*, labeled B, recapitulates the Franciscans’ claim that the Aztecs’ divinities are not gods and explains the speaker’s opposition

<sup>32</sup> J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “The Aztec-Spanish Dialogues of 1524,” *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 4, no. 2 (1980): 52–193; and Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana: Con el que los doce frailes de San Francisco, enviados por el papa Adriano VI y por el emperador Carlos V, convirtieron a los indios de la Nueva España* (Nahuatl text), ed. Miguel León-Portilla (Mexico City: UNAM Fundación de Investigaciones Sociales, 1986). An earlier, different translation of chap. 7 is incorporated in León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl*, 63–66. Mignolo (*Darker Side*, 97) refers to “the original in Nahuatl.”

<sup>33</sup> Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*: “esta doctrina con que aquellos doze apostólicos predicadores . . . a esta gente desta Nueva España comenzaron a conuertir a estado en papeles y memorias hasta este año de mil quinientos y sesenta y quatro, por que antes no vuo oportunidad de ponerse en orden ni conuertirse en lengua mexicana bien congrua y limada: la qual se boluió y limó en este Colegio de Santa Cruz del Tlatilulco este sobredicho año con los colegiales más habiles y entendidos en lengua mexicana y en la lengua latina.” (This doctrine with which those twelve apostolic preachers . . . began to convert the people of New Spain has lain in papers and records until the present year of 1564, because there was no opportunity before for it to be placed in order or converted into a form of Mexican that would be suitably congruent and polished. It was thus rendered and polished in this College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco in the above stated year by the collegians most adept and accomplished in the Mexican language and in Latin.)

<sup>34</sup> The major sources for *dispositio* in the Renaissance were Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1414a–1419b), *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (1.3.4–1.10), and Cicero (*De inventione* 1.9–109).

to it, invoking the authority of his ancestors and the beliefs they ordained. A *confirmatio* in C then sets out the attributes of the Mexican gods, describes where they reside, and lists in D several mythical locations in which their worship was initiated. That is in order to match and counter the Franciscans' earlier emphasis on the importance of the city of Rome for the Christian faith. The *refutatio* in E–F consists of a series of admonitions: it would be unwise to change laws of ancient standing; the gods might be provoked and the people rise up if their traditional beliefs are rejected; it is advisable to proceed slowly and calmly. These are appeals to act in ways that are respectively practical, safe, and prudent (corresponding to the classical topoi of *utile*, *tutum*, and *prudens* in European oratory). The appeals lead into G, the formal conclusion, with its appeal to honor (*honestum*), leaving no doubt about the priests' continued resolve to worship their gods.

Clinching proof that conscious rhetorical artistry is at work can be found in the sentence preceding this entire speech at the end of chapter 6:

one of the satraps got up and, *seeking the goodwill* [*captando la benevolencia*] of the Twelve, began to speak and he gave a long speech as follows.<sup>35</sup>

*Captatio benevolentiae* was the classical strategy of winning an audience's favor at the beginning of an oration—and it is interesting to see Sahagún's circumlocution for *captando la benevolencia* in his Nahuatl text: "he implored them [to excuse] the long speech."<sup>36</sup>

In sum, the Spanish text of the *Coloquios*, as Sahagún's prologue indicates, was produced *before* the Nahuatl version, which should in no way be fetishized as the original, and the speech of the Mexican priest of the idols in chapter 7 was, like the work of which it formed a part, structured on the principles of classical *European* rhetorical theory. The content of the Aztec's oration was in fact inspired by the reconstructed address of the Franciscans to which it was a point-by-point reply. In chapters 1–5 of book 1 the friars had offered a very potted history of the world from creation (much like that provided by the *Requerimiento*) and explained that they had come at the behest of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Because the Spaniards had conquered the Indians of New Spain, who were now the Emperor's vassals, Charles had asked the Pope to send Franciscans to convert them. The friars then outlined the authority and identity of the true God, the role of Christ, and the nature of his kingdom on earth in the form of the Holy Church at Rome. The nub of the Aztec priest's response to all that comes at the end of the speech:

we are all of one accord: that it is enough to have lost, that it is enough that they have taken power and royal jurisdiction from us; where our gods are concerned we would die before leaving their service and worship. That is our determination: do what you wish.

That could amount to an unenthusiastic recognition of the demands of the *Requerimiento*. The tidy distinction the Mexican speaker makes between secular power (*la potencia y jurisdicción real*)

<sup>35</sup> Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*, 71 (excerpted in the Appendix): "levantóse uno de los sátrapas, y capta[n]do la benevolencia a los Doce, comenzó a hablar una larga plática, según se sigue . . ."

<sup>36</sup> Klor de Alva ("Aztec-Spanish Dialogues of 1524," 116–17) thus transcribed and translated into English Sahagún's Nahuatl rendering of the Spanish sentence (see previous note) as "njmâ ce tlatatl ômoquetz in quequetzalcoa, qujmmotlapalhuj in teupixque, tlatlatlauhti, achi veyx ynjtlatol, inic qujrnmonâqujlili, inic quicuep tlatolli, q'to . . ." (Then one man, a feathered serpent, raised himself, he greeted them, the divine guardians, he implored, his speech was a little long, by which he responded to them, by which he returned the words, he said . . .)

and divine authority looks very European, and in any case we can be sure that his response was really a completely Franciscan invention.

#### IV: CONCLUSIONS

The sources briefly surveyed here offer highly embellished accounts of whatever actual interactions between indigenous Mexicans and Spaniards may have prompted them. The speeches of the native parties in these exchanges were not veridical but were contrived to serve the agenda of the respective texts in which they appeared. Don Antonio crafted the speech of Totoquihuatzin to Hernán Cortés in his letter to show that the polity he governed had always promoted the interests of Spain and the Church, ever since his father's first encounter with the Spaniards. The Chichimec spokesman's overture and the speech of the Mexica "priest of the idols" were both embedded in manuals for missionaries. The Chichimec's oration was an illustrative exemplum of the success of Quiroga's practice for inducing Indian converts to come forward of their own accord. While Cabrera explicitly attributed oratorical accomplishment to his native spokesman, Sahagún made the Mexica priest's speech a rhetorically structured response to the Franciscan missionaries, as a way of presenting the objections that adherents to traditional Mexican belief might raise to the Christian faith.

In all three cases the indigenous protagonists are presented as having had no prior contact with the Spaniards (although the involvement of translators was mentioned in the accounts given by Cabrera and Sahagún). Yet in all three cases the natives' speeches eerily conform to European discursive norms. And, as we have seen, in all three cases, elements of their speeches appear to evoke protocols of the *Requerimiento*. These evocations are unlikely to have been designed as specific references to it, but they highlight the feature of the *Requerimiento* emphasized at the beginning of this essay. It was a *speech act*, the pragmatics of which presupposed intercultural engagement, while the document's terms limited the conditions in which that engagement could take place by focusing solely on the expectations of the party initiating it.

That kind of "Catch-22" could hardly be avoided in the sources considered here either: Spanish missionaries or a thoroughly acculturated, Christianized Nahuatl like the younger Totoquihuatzin, who was born at the time of the conquest, could only ever understand the discourses of a very alien people in terms of their own epistemological horizons—and it has become obvious that what all these writers report is heavily colored by their Christian and classical humanist formation. It is worth bearing in mind that even the far less fanciful testimonies of native Mexicans so carefully collected in the 1500s by Andrés de Olmos, by Motolinía, and by Sahagún for his *Historia general* were framed and ultimately prompted by the schemas of confessional manuals and inquisitorial questionnaires, as well as by the taxonomies of classical authorities and medieval or Renaissance encyclopedias.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Angel María Garibay, *Historia de la literatura náhuatl*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1987), 2:566–71, noted the influence of Aristotle's *Historia animalium* and *Partes animalium* for Sahagún and also tabulated parallels between Sahagún's *Historia general* and Pliny's *Natural History*. Miguel León-Portilla, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist*, trans. Mauricio J. Mixco (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 34–35, draws attention to a 1540 index of Aristotle's works by the Abbot of Sahagún, Fray Francisco Ruiz. Robertson, León-Portilla, and Loera de la Llave show how medieval and Renaissance works, especially encyclopedias, were models for Sahagún: Donald Robertson, "The Sixteenth-Century Mexican Encyclopedia of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 9, no. 3 (1966): 617–27; Miguel León-Portilla, "De la oralidad de los códices a la *Historia general*: Transvase y estructuración de los textos allegados por fray Bernardino de Sahagún," *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 29 (1999): 65–141; and M. A. Loera de la Llave, "*Historia sive litterae*: Una

Questions about how far the discourses of other peoples are transformed, if not constituted, by the preoccupations of those who describe them have long been at the heart of interpretive anthropology.<sup>38</sup> Such questions have not brought ethnography to an end but have led to a constructive reflexivity as practitioners can address their own ethnicity, gender, class background, intellectual objectives, and so on in position statements that may well raise further issues—the extent to which anthropologists or ethnologists speak for their own culture can always be contested.<sup>39</sup> As an official position statement for imperial Spain, the *Requerimiento* was certainly contested by Spaniards who questioned exceptionalism and opposed the legitimization of war and coercion. But the reflexive significance the declaration has for *any* sixteenth-century Spanish sources about encounters with the Nahuas and other muted groups can be a salutary reminder to interrogate those sources accordingly and not to take them at face value, as it seems they sometimes have been. A

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biografía carolingia de Notker Balbulus, la historiografía desde la antigüedad y Fray Bernardino de Sahagún,” *Literatura mexicana* 5, no. 2 (1994): 301–33. Ríos Castaño also emphasizes Sahagún’s use of confessional and inquisitorial techniques: Victoria Ríos Castaño, *Translation as Conquest: Sahagún and “Universal History of the Things of New Spain”* (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2014). There is comparable insight on Olmos and Motolinía in Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization, 1520–1569* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995); and Nancy Joe Dyer, ed., *Fray Toribio de Benavente Motolinía: Memoriales* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). There are similar issues in linguistics and philosophy of language (the theory of “implicatures” in H. P. Grice, “Presupposition and Conversational Implicature,” in *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. P. Cole [New York: Academic Press, 1981], 183–198; “relevance theory” in Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Blackwell, 1995]) and in philosophical accounts of “mental events,” e.g., Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 222: “We could not begin to decode a man’s sayings if we could not make out his attitudes towards his sentences, such as holding, wishing or wanting them to be true. Beginning from these attitudes, we must work out a theory of what he means, thus simultaneously giving content to his attitudes and to his words. In our need to make him make sense, we will try for a theory that makes him consistent, a believer of truths, and a lover of the good (all by our own lights, it goes without saying).”

<sup>39</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

## APPENDIX: TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS OF SOURCES

I. ANTONIO CORTÉS [TOTOQUIHUATZIN], *S[acre] C[atholice] C[aesaree] Majestati Antonius Cortes Rector populi de tlacopan omnesq[ue] alij conciues humile seruitium impendunt* (Letter to Emperor Charles V, Tlacopan, December 1, 1552), Seville: Archivo general de Indias, Patronato 184, 45, fol. 4. Andrew Laird, “Ethnohistory and Nahuatl Learning in Sixteenth-Century New Spain: The Latin Letter from Antonio Cortés Totoquiuhuatzin, Native Ruler of Tlacopan, to Charles V (1st December 1552),” in “The Role of Latin in the Early Modern World: Linguistic Identity and the Polity from Petrarch to the Habsburg Novelists,” ed. Trine Hass, Noreen Humble, and Marianne Pade, *Renaissanceforum* 10 (2016), <http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/oversigt.htm>.

15. Reliquum significo omni subiectione et reuerentia ego tuus cliens humilis Anthonius Cortes meum patrem nomine totoquiuhuatzin fuisse presentem et rectorem huius tlacubae tempore belli hispanorum qui sciens hispanos tuos cum domino Marchione Del valle iam venisse gauissus est impendio et illis non nulla munera misit et accedentes ad hoc nostrum oppidum ob[u]iis manibus, vt dicitur, recepit et res necessarias eis affatim ministravit. Et sequentia verba Marchioni proposuit. 16. Prosperrime veneris cum tuo exercitu sciasque nos tibi et ei cuius nomine venis esse paratos ad serviendum: et quem adoras deum eundem colam cum toto meo populo: Ecce tibi fanum deorum meorum destrue et ingredere illud et quicquid in eo inuentum tibi placuerit accipe et vtere. Praeterea hic sunt filiae meae quas in vxores ducere possunt tui qui tecum veniunt vt e vobis nepotes et neptes nostras habeamus. Ceterum scias me nol[le] gerere bellum contra te et tuum exercitum, ne meus populus male pereat, sed quod magis volo est quoniam sunt multae gentes mihi inimicae nunquam a me expugnatae maximum mihi iuuamen fuerit si omnes nos debellemus. Haec sunt quidem verba, inuictissime imperator que meus pater proposuit Marchioni, nec credas hec omnia a veritate abhorrere cum hec tum hispani tum Jndi testentur. 17. his addo dictum meum patrem sepe prohibuisse Muntecuhtzomam mexici rectorem quo minus bellum gereret contra hispanos, tamen ipse mei patris admonitionem contemnens paravit bellum. Porro hispani fugientes mexicum transiverunt per hunc populum meum quibus quoniam cum illis inierat amicitiam rursus res necessarias victui largitus est et eos liberavit fame ingenti qua consumebantur vltiusque progressi sunt post quorum recessum meus pater fuit mortuus non quidem bello sed infirmitate quadam.

15. One remaining thing which I, your humble subject Antonio Cortés, should point out “in all submissiveness” [I Timothy 2:11] and reverence is that my father, Totoquiuhuatzin by name, had been chief and ruler of Tlacopan at the time of the war with the Spaniards. Knowing that your Spaniards had already come with their commander the Marquis del Valle, he greatly rejoiced, sent several gifts to them and, as they approached our town, he welcomed them, as the saying goes, “with open arms” [Jerome, *Epistles* 53.11], and provided all that they needed in abundance. He then proposed the following to the Marquis:

16. “May your arrival with your army be most auspicious, and may you know that we are prepared to serve you, and him in whose name you come. Along with my people I will worship the same god you praise. Here you have the shrine of my gods: destroy it, go in and take and make use of anything you find there that you like. Furthermore, here are my daughters—the men who have come with you can take them as wives, so that we may share grandsons and granddaughters. In any case, you should know that I have no wish to wage war against you and your army, lest my people come to a bad end. Rather what I want far more is—since there are many nations hostile to me which I have never managed to defeat—it would be a very great help if we could make war on them together.”

Those are the very words, invincible Emperor, which my father put to the Marquis and you should not think that any of these things which both Spaniards and Indians attest are inconsistent with the truth. 17. To that I add that my father was said often to have prevented Montezuma the ruler of Mexico from campaigning against the Spaniards, but in defiance of my father’s warning he nonetheless prepared for war. What is more, the Spaniards fleeing Mexico passed through this community of mine, which, as it had already entered into an alliance with them, again supplied them with all the things they needed to survive, and freed them from the severe hunger which was devastating them, and they made further advances. After their departure, my father had died, by no means in battle, but of an illness.

II. FRAY CRISTÓBAL CABRERA, *De solicitanda infidelium conversione, iuxta illud Evangelicum Lucae XIII, Compelle intrare...* (Rome, January 25, 1582), Vatican Library, cod. Vat. Lat. 5026, fols. 45–46.

quidam illorum interpres et orator ad Episcopum eam habuit orationem tanta facundia, sententiarumque grauitate plenam, ac disertam, animique et lingae promptitudine ac pronuntiatione, oratorioque schemate adeo ornatum, vt postquam ille suam vnus pro omnibus fecit, ac finit, Episcopus admirandus valde [fol. 45v] tunc ad alios praesentes meque conversus diceret, vidistisne unquam, rogo, similes Cicerones, Fabios ac Livios barbaros? Summa quidem orationis haec erat. Quod laudatissimi illius Praesulis celebri auditi fama commoti, de longinquis illi regionibus vna com uxoribus liberisque suis ad eum venerandum Christique baptismum suscipiendum libenter accederent. Mirandum autem non esse sic eos ad tantum Pontificem nudos, adeoque incultos ausos accedere, quippe quia patriis hucusque moribus inciuiliter barbariceque viuerint, nullumque hactenus rectoremque magistrumque, sicut aliae politiores gentes, habuerint, qui ipsos in vitae cultu, morumque conuersatione ac veraque religione instruxerit. Eamque ob causam nihil aliud illi per totum vitae decursum curarint, praeter quae ad victum pertinerent, pro nihilo ducentes vestitu, quaeritantes sibi cibum et potum vndecumque partium per agrorum, siluarum montiumque tractus et saltus vagantes, venantes feras, apros, vrsos, tigres, lupos, capreas, cervos, aliaque diuersa animantia, quorum crudis etiam carnibus et sanguinibus victitabant, fluuiorumque et fontium latices, lacuum aut lacunarum aquas bibebant: humi semper aestatis sub dio tempore cubitabant, vbicumque nox ipsos exciperet, vel in terrae cauernis, caucis, fossis, cryptis, et speluncis, hyemis praesertim temporibus, noctu quiescebant. Agriculturae prorsus ignari siue quod illi seipsos longe nobilioris conditionis reputarint, quam vt terram verterent, colendisque agris se deicerent; siue quia nihil penitus praeter sagittandi artem,

[fol. 46r] a teneris, vt aiunt, vnguiculis didicissent. Colebant autem illi, sicut aliae huismodi gentes, ydola seu factilia seu sculptilia. Coeterum humiliter aiebant se Episcopum piissimum comprecari, tum eam quam erga alios innumeros indos officiosissimam pietatem charitatemque exercuerat exercebatque semper, sibi ipsis etiam praestare communicare dignaretur; vt quae credenda seruandaque et exequenda circa vitae rationem, mores, fidem, diuinum cultum veramque religionem tradidisset, ea illi omnia, sicut ostendisset, prompto alacrique animo suscipientes, toto pectore proque viribus exequerentur.

A translator and orator among them made a speech with such great facility, full of weighty *sententiae* and accomplished in its promptness of thought and oral delivery, adorned with the use of oratorical figures to such a degree that, after this one man had made his address on behalf of them all, the Bishop [Vasco de Quiroga], powerfully impressed, then turned to me and others present to say, “Have you ever seen, I ask you, barbarian Ciceros, Quintilians, and Livys like this?” This then was the essence of his speech:

They had been moved by hearing about the renown of the prelate who was so highly praised, and they came from distant areas, together with their wives and children, to revere him and seek Christ’s baptism. He said that it should not be considered remarkable that they presumed to approach so great a priest in this manner, naked and in such a primitive condition, in that they had lived up to now by their ancestral customs in an uncivilized and barbarous state, and had so far had no ruler or instructor, like other more refined peoples, who could instruct them in life’s skills, in moral conduct, and in true religion. It was for this reason that throughout the whole course of their lives they had cared for nothing unless it had a bearing on their sustenance, they deemed clothing of no value, as they were constantly seeking their food and drink, from whatever place, as they wandered through the paths and passes or fields, woods, and mountains, hunting wild animals—boars, bears, tigers, wolves, goats, deer, and various other living things—on the raw bloody flesh of which they used to feed, and they drank from the springs of rivers and streams or the waters of lakes and lagoons: they always slept in the open on the ground during summer, and wherever night would come upon them, or else it was in the earth’s caverns, bowers, ditches, crypts, and caves, especially in the seasons of winter, that they took their nightly rest. And so they knew nothing of agriculture, whether it was because they deemed themselves of too noble a condition to turn the land and demean themselves by cultivating the fields, or because they learned nothing in any depth except the skill of archery, from the age when, as the saying goes, the fingernails are tender. In fact, like other peoples of this sort, they used to worship idols that were molded or sculpted. But they said they were humbly begging the most pious Bishop to deign to show and convey to them the very attentive piety and charity he had practiced and was still constantly practicing for the benefit of countless other Indians so that they could both undertake, with a swift and ready spirit, and practice, with all their heart and strength, whatever things were to be believed, observed, and practiced that he might impart—with regard to the conduct of life, behavior, faith, divine worship, and true religion—in the very way that he showed them.

- Compare CORNELIUS TACITUS, *Germania* 46 (first century CE):

Fennis mira feritas, foeda paupertas: non arma, non equi, non penates; victui herba, vestitui pelles, cubile humus: solae in sagittis spes, quas inopia ferri ossibus asperant. Idemque venatus viros pariter ac feminas alit; passim enim comitantur partemque praedae petunt. Nec aliud

infantibus ferarum imbriumque suffugium quam ut in aliquo ramorum nexu contegantur: huc redeunt iuvenes, hoc senum receptaculum. Sed beatius arbitrantur quam ingemere agris, inlab-orare domibus, suas alienasque fortunas spe metuque versare: securi adversus homines, securi adversus deos rem difficillimam adsecuti sunt, ut illis ne voto quidem opus esset.

The Fenni are of remarkable savagery and appalling poverty: no arms, no horses, no homes; for food, greenery; for clothing, skins; their bed, the earth; their only hope in arrows, which, lacking iron, they sharpen with bones. The common hunt sustains men and women alike; for the women keep them company everywhere and demand their part of the prey. Their young have no shelter from wild animals and the rains other than coverage provided by intertwined branches; a haven for the old to which those in their prime also return. But this they deem a more blessed existence than groaning at labor in the fields, toiling on houses, and trafficking with their own or others' fortunes in hope and fear. Secure against men and secure against gods, they have reached a state very difficult to attain so that they have no need even to wish for anything.

III. FRAY BERNARDINO SAHAGÚN, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana con que los doze frailes de San Francisco embiados por el Papa Adriano VI y por el Emperador Carlos V convertieron a los indios de la Nueva España* (1564); Christian Duverger, *La conversión de los indios de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 71–74.

Luego uno de los doze (con el interprete) los repitió todo lo que el dia antes abian dicho a los Senores. Desde lo uvieron oydo levantóse uno de los Satrapas y captado la benevolencia a los doze, comenzó a hablar y hizo una larga plática, según que se sigue.

Capítulo siete, en que se pone la respuesta que los Sátrapas dieron a los doze sobre la arriba dicho.

Señores nuestros, personas principales y de mucha estima, seáis muy bien venidos y llegados a nuestras tierras y pueblos. No somos dignos nosotros tan baxos y soezes de ver las caras de tan valerosas personas. Aos traydo Dios nuestro Señor para que nos rijáis; ignoramos que tal sea el lugar donde abeis venido y donde moran nuestros Señores y dioses, porque abéis venido por la mar entre las nubes y nieblas (camino que nunca supimos). Embiaos Dios entre nosotros por ojos, oydos y boca suya, el que es inuisible y espiritual en vosotros se nos muestra visible [fol. 36r] y oymos con nuestras orejas sus palabras, cuyos vicarios sóys. Emos oydo las palabras de aquel por cuya virtud bivimos y somos, las quales nos abéis traydo y con admiración emos oydo las palabras del Señor del mundo que por nuestro amor os a acá embiado y así mismo nos abéis traydo el libro de las celestiales y divinas palabras.

**A.** Pues, ¿qué podremos dezir en vuestra presencia, que palabras podremos endereçar a vuestras orejas que sean dignas de ser oydas de tales personas? Nosotros que somos como nada, personas soezes y de muy vaxa condición, y que por hierro nos a puesto nuestro Señor en las esquinas de su estrado y silla; pero no obstante esto con dos o tres razones responderemos y contradiremos las palabras de aquel que nos dio su ser, nuestro Señor por quien somos y bivimos. Por ventura provocaremos su yra contra nosotros y nos despeñaremos, y será lo que diremos causa de nuestra



perdición; por ventura ya nos desecha, pues ¿qué emos de hazer los que somos hombres baxos y mortales? Si muriéremos, muramos: si pereciéramos, perezcamos; que a la verdad los dioses también murieron. No recibáis pena, señores nuestros, por que con delicadeza y curiosidad queremos examinar los diuinos secretos, bien así como si con temeridad a hurto quisiésemos entreabrir el cofre de las riquezas para ver lo que está en el.

**B.** Auéisnos dicho que no conocemos a aquel por quien tenemos ser y vida y que es Señor de cielo y de la tierra. Ansí mismo dezis que los que adoramos no son dioses. Esta manera de hablar hácesenos muy nueva y esnos muy escandalosa; espantámonos de tal dezir como éste, porque los padres antepasados que nos engendraron y regieron no nos dixeron tal cosa; más antes ellos nos dexaron esta costumbre que tenemos de adorar nuestros dioses, y ellos los creyeron y adoraron todo el tiempo que biuieron sobre la tierra; ellos nos enseñaron de la manera que los abíamos de honrar; y todas las cerimonias y sacrificios que hazemos ellos nos los enseñaron; dexáronnos dicho que mediante éstos biuimos y somos y que éstos nos merecieron para que fuésemos suyos y los seruísemos en innumerables siglos antes que el sol començase a resplandecer ni a aver día; ellos dixeron que estos dioses que adoramos nos dan todas las cosas necesarias a nuestra vida corporal: el mayz, los frisoles, la chía etc.; a éstos demandamos la pluuiá para que se críen las cosas de la tierra.

**C.** Estos nuestros dioses poseen deleytes y riquezas grandes, todos los deleytes y riquezas son suyas; habitan en lugares muy deleytosos do siempre ay flores y verduras y grandes frescuras, (lugar no conocido ni sabido de los mortales que se llama Tlalocan), donde jamás ay hambre, pobreza ni enfermedad; ellos son los que dan las honrras, cauallerías, dignidades y reynos; el oro y la plata, plumajes, piedras preciosas.

**D.** No hay memoria del tiempo en que començaron a ser honrrados, adorados y estmados por ventura a un siglo o dos de que se haze a tiempo sin cuenta quien tiene memoria de cuándo ni como començaron aquellos célebres y sagrados lugares donde se hazian milagros y se dauan respuestas que se llaman tulan, vopalcalco, xuchatlapan, tamoancham, youallycham, teutiucan. Los habitadores destos lugares ya dichos se enseñorearon y reynaron en todo el mundo; estos dan honrra, fama nombrada, reynos y gloria y señorío.

**E.** Cosa de gran desatino y liuiandad sería destruir nosotros las antiquísimas leyes y costumbres que dexaron los primeros pobladores desta tierra, que fueron los chichimecas, los tulanos, los de colhua, los tepanecas, en la adoración, fe y seruicio de los sobre dichos en que emos nacido y nos emos criado, y a esto estamos habituados y los tenemos impresos en nuestros coraçones.

**F.** O señores nuestros y principales. Grande aduertencia deuéis tener en que no hagáis algo por donde alboroteys y hagáis hazer algún mal hecho a vuestros vasallos. ¿Cómo podrán dexar los pobres viejos y viejas aquello en que toda su vida se an criado; mirad que no incurramos en la yra de nuestros dioses; mirad que no se leuante contra nosotros la gente popular, si los dixéramos que no son dioses los que hasta aquí siempre an tenido por tales.

**G.** Conuiene con mucho acuerdo y muy despacio mirar este negocio, señores nuestros; nosotros no nos satisfacemos ni nos persuadimos de lo que nos han dicho ni entendemos ni damos crédito a lo que de nuestros dioses se nos a dicho. Pena os damos, señores y padres, en hablar desta manera; presentes están los senores que tienen el cargo de regir el reyno y repúblicas deste mundo; de una manera sentimos todos: que basta auer perdido, basta que nos an tomado la potencia y juridición real; en lo que toca a nuestros dioses antes moriremos que dexar su seruicio y adoración. Esta es nuestra determinación: haced lo que [fol. 37r] quisiéredes. Lo dicho basta en respuesta y contradicción de lo que nos abéis dicho: no tenemos más que dezir, señores nuestros.

Then one of the Twelve (with the translator) repeated to the satraps and priests everything they had said before to their lords. After they heard it, one of the satraps got up and, seeking the goodwill of the Twelve, began to speak and he gave a long speech as follows:

Chapter seven, which contains the reply given by the satraps to the Twelve on what was said above.

Our lords, leaders of great esteem, may you be very welcome having come to our lands and towns. We are not worthy ourselves, so low and dirty, to see the faces of such valorous people. Our Lord sent you here to rule us. We do not know where or from what place you have come, or where our lords and gods abide, because you have come by sea, among clouds and mists (a way we have never known). God sent you among us as eyes, hearers, and as his mouth. He who is invisible and spiritual shows himself as visible to us in you; and with our ears we hear his words, of which you are representatives. We have heard the words of him, through whom we live and exist, which you have brought, and in wonder we have heard the words of the Lord of the world, who for love of us has sent you here; and so indeed you have brought us the book of heavenly and divine words.

**A.** What can we say in your presence? What words can we direct to your ears that would be worth being heard from persons such as ourselves? We who are as nothing, dirty people of a very low condition, whom in error our Lord placed on the corner of his platform and his seat. Even so we offer a response, and with two or three arguments we shall counter the words about him who gave us his being, our Lord through whom we exist and live. Perhaps we will provoke his wrath against us and cast ourselves down, and what we say will be the cause of our ruin; perhaps he is already casting us aside, so what is there for us to do, as we are lowly humans and mortals? If we are to die, let us die; if we are to perish, let us perish; as in truth the gods died too. May you not be aggrieved, our lords.

**B.** You have told us that we do not know him, the one through whom we have existence and life, and who is Lord of heaven and earth. Likewise, you say those whom we worship are not gods. This way of speaking is very new and very shocking to us: we are horrified at such speech, because our forefathers, who engendered and ruled us, did not tell us such a thing. They left us this custom of having to worship our gods; they believed in them and worshiped them all the time they lived upon the earth; they taught us the ways we had to do [the gods] honor; they taught us all the ceremonies and sacrifices we make them: they told us that through them [the gods] we live and

exist and that these gods merited us so that we belonged to them and served them for countless centuries before the sun began to shine and before there was day; they said that those gods we worship give us all the things necessary for bodily life: maize, beans, *chia*, etc.; we ask them for rain, for the things of the earth to grow.

**C.** These gods of ours possess delights and great riches; all delights and riches are theirs; they live in very delightful places where all is always flowers, greenery, freshness (a place neither known nor familiar to mortals, which is called Tlalocan), where there is never hunger, poverty, or sickness; they are those who grant honors, chivalry, dignity and kingdoms, gold and silver, feathers, precious stones.

**D.** There is no memory of the time when they began to be honored, worshiped, and esteemed; perhaps it was a century or two after the time without reckoning [but] no one has a memory of when or how those famous sacred places began, where miracles were wrought and a response was given, and which are called Tula, Huapalcalco, Xuchatlapan, Tamoanchan, Yohualichan, Teotihuacan. The inhabitants of those places named were lords and rulers of all the world; they give honor, renowned fame, kingdoms, glory, and lordship.

**E.** It would be a matter of grave error and crassness to destroy the very ancient laws and customs that the first settlers of this earth left us—those who were the Chichimecs, those of Tula, the Tepanecs—the worship, faith, and service of the above-mentioned [gods] in which we are born and brought up, and we are habituated to this and we hold them impressed on our hearts.

**F.** O our lords and leaders. You must receive a grave warning not to do anything that might cause agitation or something very bad to be done to your vassals. How will poor old men and woman who have been raised this way all their lives be able to accept this? See that we do not incur the anger of our gods; see that the ordinary people do not rise up against us, if we were to tell them that those gods, which they have always held as such until now, are not gods.

**G.** Our lords, it is advisable to proceed slowly and calmly in this matter: we are not satisfied and we are not persuaded by what you have told us, nor do we understand or give credence to what has been said to us about our gods. We cause you pain, lords and fathers, to speak in this way: here present are lords who have the charge of ruling this kingdom and the republics of this world; we are all of one accord: that it is enough to have lost, that it is enough that they have taken power and royal jurisdiction from us; where our gods are concerned we would die before leaving their service and worship. That is our determination: do what you wish. Enough has been said in response and in contradiction of what you have told us. We have no more to say, our lords.