

Christianity and the Pagan: Comparisons of Religious Dogma in Late Roman Antiquity and New World Spanish Colonialism

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Abstract

Historic and modern scholarship has shown that both early Medieval and Colonial Christianity promoted idealized interpretations of conversion and paganism. More specifically, theologians in these eras viewed groups outside of the idealized Christology as barbarous and irrational. One can argue that the Christian hierarchy in Late Roman Antiquity and the Spanish New World intentionally propagated eurocentric ideas of cultural supremacy in order to demonize pagan practices. The authors of this paper intend to explore the relationship between Christianity and paganism in both Late Roman Antiquity (c.a., A.D. 300-500) and the Spanish New World (A.D. 1450-1550.) This paper utilizes both historical research and the modern concepts of globalization and comparative history in order to demonstrate the calculated strategy of Christian conversion and pagan resistance that occurred during these periods. Utilizing a comparative examination of both periods, this paper attempts to demonstrate the manipulative tactics employed by both religious theologians and conquerors to promote the conversion of pagans to Christian ideals of "proper" society.

Introduction

Historically speaking, eurocentric interpretations of history have tended to promote a marginalized view of non-European peoples. Plagued by an engrained sense of cultural and religious superiority, both Late Antiquity and Colonial Christian theologians promoted idealized interpretations of the past. As a result, religious practices outside of the idyllic Christian, white, male, Northern European aristocracy were considered to be barbaric, pagan, and irrational. In essence, one can argue that scholars in these eras promoted biased interpretations of culture for the purpose of promoting religious supremacy and notions of "proper" religious, theological, and social customs. In recent years, medieval and Late Antiquity scholars, such as Jal Dastur C. Parvy, J.N.D. Kelly, A.V. Williams Jackson, Judith Herrin, and Richard Fletcher, have attempted to reconstruct the scholarship regarding pagan conversion to Christianity in the Late Roman period (c.a., A.D. 300-500). Similarly, with in the last fifty years, New World colonial scholars, such as Michael Coe, Matthew Restall, Elizabeth Brumfield, Inga Clendinnen, and Joan F. Cammarata, have created works to refute the religiously biased claims within the Spanish New World (A.D. 1450-1550.) Looking at both periods in conjunction, the authors of this paper attempt to illustrate the paralleling tactics used by religious theologians to manipulate, both physically and mentally, non-European peoples to conform to Northern European views of "proper" society.¹²

¹ **Note on Aztec Nomenclature:** When referring to "Aztecs" the authors of this paper are dealing only with examples from the pre-Columbian Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan. Aztec imperialism in the Mexican valley encouraged peripheral and conquered communities to incorporate their interpretations of life, religion, and society. This general movement towards religious hegemony encouraged complementary religious practices within the entire Aztec state. However, for purposes of historical and archaeological documentation, Tenochtitlan provides the most comprehensive account of pre-Columbian and colonial Aztec society. See Rhianna C. Rogers, "The Resilience of Aztec Women: A Case Study of Modern Aztec Myths," in *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* vol.1, no.2, June 2007, Online publication <http://scientificjournalsi.org/journals2007/j_of_hum4.htm>, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín, "Introduction," in *Aztecs*, ed. Warwick Bray (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002); Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

² **Note on Manichean Nomenclature:** Due to time and spatial constraints, the authors of this paper will refer only to the Gnostic sect of Manichaeism when discussing the transformation and reliance of Western European pre-Christian

In addition, the authors of this work also address the parallels between the uses of Late Roman and Colonial religious rhetoric to promote European ideals of conquest, colonialism, and Christian theology. Specifically looking at the biases of prominent documents used in Late Antiquity Roman scholarship (i.e., Augustine of Hippo, Origen, and Plotinus) and the rhetoric used by fifteenth and sixteenth century Spanish theologians (i.e., Aristotle, Erasmus, Thomas Aquinas, Bartolome de Las Casas, and Jose Acosta) the authors of this text will attempt to deconstruct the negative connotations in early religious dogma by placing non-Europeans³ (i.e., New World natives, Old World barbarians) into a more objective historical framework. By applying Christian theology to early Aztec and Gnostic scholarship, the authors of this document will address the central themes impacting the transformation of both social groups. First, in what way did the Late Antiquity Roman theologians demonize Manichean practices in order to promote their own religious interpretations? Second, how did fifteenth and sixteenth century Spanish Catholic rhetoric promote the transformation of Aztec culture and religion? Specifically, in both instances, the writers of this paper will attempt to address questions about the ramifications of European imperialism and colonization on the representation of non-Christian cultures in both New World and Old World contexts.

Focusing on Christianity's influence on the historically marginalized groups, a number of additional questions arise as to the context in which Christian and European mentalities influenced the religious practices of the Aztecs and Manicheans. First, to what extent did the influence of Christianity impact "pagan" religions and foster the transformation of non-European social and cultural customs? Second, in what way did loss of power in "pagan and barbaric" communities directly result from the influence of Roman and Spanish contact and Christian doctrine? Third, how did the acculturation of Christian ideologies make it easier for both groups to resist the destruction of their pagan practices? As these questions suggest, and as the writers of this article intend to argue, the acculturation of Christian theological constructs allowed for both the demonization of Old World and New World religious practices and the manipulation of Christianity through syncretism.

Therefore, the overall aim of this paper is to aid in the understanding of the above mentioned groups in the context of their own histories rather than in the biased histories previously associated with them. Discussing two specific eras in a comparative context will enable this text to contribute to an ongoing discussion of the importance of marginalized groups in a globalized framework.⁴ Thus, looking at the religious culmination of Spanish and Roman thought in both eras, the authors of this document will clarify the justifiable elements of societal domination dictated by European imperialistic tactics in order to discuss the transformation and resilience of marginalized groups. The next sections will articulate the biased historical framework traditionally surrounding both Medieval and Colonial Christian theological interpretations and the contexts in which they were constructed.

practices. It should be noted that scholars have illustrated that other Gnostic sects had similar experiences with Christianity (e.g. the Arians, Donotists, and the Nestorians.) However, due to the volume of literature needed to illustrate these points, these religious groups will not be discussed in this paper. In sum, the purpose of this study is to examine Western Rome and the Roman Catholic Church in the context of Christian interactions with Manichaeism. Therefore, all other discussions of cultural interactions with Manichaeism have been excluded (i.e., the spread of Manichaeism into the Eastern Orthodox Church.) As duly noted, the examination of Manichaeism and its role in Christianity deserves a more detailed study in the future. It is the goal of both authors of this text to explore those components of Manichaeism in a subsequent volume.

³ It is important to note that within Late Antiquity Rome (c.a., A.D.200-600), and prior to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire (c.a., A.D. 470), that people within this region were not viewed as Europeans. Based on the power of the empire and the prominence of the Roman Empire, people of this period considered themselves to be Roman. This is not to say that they did not define themselves as individual groups or cultures, rather their general affiliation resided with the dominant power of the time, that being the Romans. See Judith Herrin, The Formation of Christendom (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 19-20.

⁴ The comparative nature of this paper is centered on a globalized discussion of typically marginalized social groups. As the world continues to progress within an interconnected technological and globalized framework, comparative studies, such as this one, have the potential to shed light on the universal agents within various societies that can be used to overcome cultural, social, and religious prejudices (e.g., colonization, Hispanization, Christianization, conquest, and imperialism). It is under this pretense that the authors constructed this paper.

Manichaeism and its History within the Roman Empire

Manichaeism, begun by Mani (A.D., 215- 276), was a dualist religion that caused several problems for the Christian hierarchy in Late Antiquity Rome. Namely by offering an alternative to traditional Christianity, Manichaeism was able to effectively influence the creation of other Gnostic sects and the transformation of Christian practices in the Late Roman empire. In addition, this faith spanned several centuries and several geographic areas which increased its number of followers and its role as a perceived threat to traditional Christian conversion. Specifically, during the early stages of Christianity's development, Gnostic and pagan doctrines similar to Manichaeism were prevalent.⁵ Based on the tradition of manipulating Christian doctrine to fit Old World polytheistic beliefs, many religious sects, including the Manicheans, were allowed to continue in order to encourage a generalized conversion to Christianity. Resulting from their popularity, these unorthodox religions threatened the Roman Church by hindering the Church's ability to truly control the populace. According to religious historian, Jal Dastur C. Pavry,

It [Manichaeism] met with opposition of every kind at the hands of ... Christians in the West, from its appearance in the third century A.D. until the final extermination of the Albigenses [sic] in the thirteenth century.⁶

In essence, Manicheans and other Gnostic sects generalized religion and, in the process, undermined what the Church perceived as proper Christian and European religious practices.

More specifically, resulting from religious persecution in the Late Roman Empire, the early Church and its papacy allowed these dualistic and pluralistic beliefs to continue for the purpose of encouraging continual conversion to Christianity and to maintain its practice. Specifically under Emperor Diocletian (A.D., 243-306), Christians were relentlessly persecuted. As a result of this persecution, many Christian leaders were less concerned with Gnostic or pagan movements and focused more on religious sustainability and self preservation. In an attempt to survive the onslaught of Diocletian's discrimination and religious intolerance, many Christian followers both intentionally and unintentionally promoted pluralistic interpretations of their religion in order to maintain some forms of Christianity. However, much of this changed with the legalization of Christianity under Emperor Constantine (A.D., 306-316). Constantine's legalization of Christianity changed the situation considerably. Under his rule, Christians were given special roles in government, military, and in Roman religious affairs. As emperor, Constantine did not purposely persecute pagan culture or Gnostic sects; however, via his legalization of Christianity and the aforementioned benefits he bestowed upon Christians, Constantine's actions set a precedent that later rulers not only followed but also increased in later eras (i.e., the implementation of rewards relating to Christian conversion in the general populace.) This idea was further propagated under Emperor Theodosius (A.D., 379-395), when, Christianity became the official religion of the Empire in A.D., 381. It is at this point that Christian influence increased, which allowed for stronger presence in governmental and religious affairs. The efforts of both Constantine and Theodosius ultimately put the Christian religion in a position to not only establish an orthodox religious doctrine, but to enforce it within pagan and pluralistic Christian settings.⁷

In order to further understand the specific development of Manichaeism and its relationship to pluralistic, "pagan" interpretations of Christian doctrine, Mani's emergence as its founder must be discussed. Looking at the *Cologne Mani Codex*, Mani's family background was diverse; his

⁵ During the early period of Christian foundations, the Christian hierarchy did not make distinctions between many Gnostics sects and polytheistic traditions. Both religious ideologies presented a significant threat to the establishment of Christian control and, as such, both were viewed as equally formidable adversaries.

⁶ Jal Dastur C. Pavry, "Manichaeism—A Rival of Zoroastrianism and Christianity," in *The Journal of Religion* XVII, 2 (April, 1937): 166. (161-169)

⁷ Herrin, 21-22.

father was of Persian descent and his mother from the royal bloodline of the Arsacides.⁸ Historian Hans-J Klimkeit states:

From the beginning of his missionary activity, Mani, who himself was of royal Arsacid descent, attempted to win for his new religion not only people from a general public, but also [from] the mighty and the powerful.⁹

Based on his traditional non-Christian, Arsacid upbringing, Mani was pre-exposed to and educated under a pagan system. Born in Babylon, his education was largely influenced by his father and the pluralistic religious beliefs of the empire. As a result, Mani was very familiar with the practices of pagan priests and the beliefs of a pagan culture. This may account for the strong presence of the ascetic life in his subsequent Gnosticism. Based on his ancestral and educational background and his ties to pluralistic pagan beliefs, Mani's later conversion to and spread of pluralistic Christianity was able to appeal to various classes of society and to a mixture of belief systems. Resulting from his wide ranging appeal, his interpretation of Christian faith and his pluralistic ideas about religion gained wider acceptance in early Rome.

Mani's transformation into a Christian theologian began at a very young age and continued throughout his life. With his reception of his first Christian revelation at age thirteen, Mani began to rethink his interpretations of life and society. Although he did not begin significant missionary work until the age of twenty-four, Mani believed and also declared that he was the last messenger of God from the time of his first revelation.¹⁰ Almost at once, the hierarchy of the entrenched [dualist] faith in Persian territories (Zoroastrianism) recognized the threat posed by Mani's doctrines. Mani found that Zoroastrianism, as both a dualistic and pluralistic faith, was easily incorporated into his own doctrine, thus making conversion from one to the other relatively seamless. Within a year of its introduction and the ruling Persian hierarchical fear of mass conversions, Manichaeism was branded a heresy and Mani himself was exiled from Persian territories. For the next thirty years, Mani traveled to Chinese Turkestan and India, sharing his religious ideology and adapting it to fit with the Buddhist culture in Eastern territories. It was after these travels that Mani returned to Persia where he found the state ruled by a new reigning monarch, Bahram I (A.D., 273-276). Still fearing a mass conversion to Manichaeism, Bahram I reportedly had Mani beheaded.¹¹ Despite Mani's exile and later execution, Manichaeism persisted in Persia and also spread with great success in Eastern territories.

Possibly encouraged by Mani's untimely death, his religion continued to spread geographically, gain influence, and make religious converts. Many were attracted to the dualist aspect in this faith, as it provided a clear reason for the existence of both good and evil.¹² Judith Herrin argues:

A thoroughgoing and complete, consistent, and uncompromising dualism pervades Mani's entire system—a fantastic philosophy of nature in which the physical is not distinguished from the ethical. Mani's philosophy was thoroughly materialistic. He recognized two absolutes—the primeval and antagonistic principles of light and darkness, and of good and evil.¹³

Basically, the dualistic nature of Manichaeism enabled both Christians and pagans to rationalize the positive factors influencing their everyday lives. Herrin points out the emphasis of both the physical and ethical behaviors, two concepts which further illustrated the bond between the supernatural and natural worlds. This central theme permeated early Christianity (i.e., the concept

⁸ Gilles Quispel, "Transformation Through Vision in Jewish Gnosticism and the Cologne Mani Codex" In *Vigilliae Christianae*, 49, no.2 (1995): 189-191.

⁹ Hans-J Klimkeit, "Manichaean Kingship: Gnosis at Home in the World," in *Numen* 29 (1982): 17. (17-32)

¹⁰ Pavry, 162.

¹¹ Pavry, 162.

¹² Dualism is simply the belief in two gods, although worship of both is not required for a dualist ideology to be present.

¹³ Pavry, 163-164.

that human behaviors in the physical, earthly realm directly affected the rewards and repercussions in the spiritual realm) and, as such, many people began to believe that a comparison between Manichaeism and Christianity became necessary for uncovering the reality of religious truth. In the context of Rome, the earliest descriptions of Manichaeism originate in the fourth century A.D. and were written by Hegemonius, an early Christian theologian, who denounced Mani and his faith. Hegemonius argued "I have told you that this body of his is not of God but of Matter, and is itself Dankness and must needs be cast into Darkness."¹⁴ Hegemonius's reference to "this body of his," arguably refers to Mani and points to the conclusion that from this early date in Christian history, both Mani and his faith were labeled as evil, which somewhat foreshadowed the rise of orthodoxy in this era.

In spite of the attempts by the proto-orthodox Christian establishment to eradicate dualistic and pluralistic beliefs in Christianity, the Manichean faith continued to appeal to a great many people because of its diverse background and religious culture. One of the primary reasons why Manichaeism presented such a threat was its dualistic beliefs and its pluralistic incorporation of three different religions: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Although Mani's own lifespan and missionary work occurred prior to the time period specifically analyzed in this paper, his faith and influenced continued long after his death and helped promote the development of other heretical groups (i.e., Gnostic sects).¹⁵ Pavry asserts:

There was also a distinct Christian infusion of Gnostic doctrines [i.e., dualism] such as crept into primitive Christianity, as well as of essential features of the Neo-Platonic school of thought, which then swayed the philosophic circles at Alexandria and Athens and some schools of Asia Minor, and also prevailed in Mesopotamia.¹⁶

As a result of the expansive influence of Mani in both Roman and Asian contexts, this early "infusion" of faiths, increased the number of potential of Christian converts. Thus, both the general Roman public and early theologians were able to interpret Christian thought and, thus, were able to adapt various sects of Christianity into their own ideas of life and their afterlife. One such theologian who incorporated pluralistic interpretations of Christianity was Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (A.D., 354 – 430). Once a follower of Manichaeism and a later convert to Christianity, Augustine was able to manipulate traditional Christian doctrine into his own pluralistic and dualistic religious views. His later interactions with St. Ambrose (A.D., 340-397), Bishop of Milan, his unknowingly dualistic views of Christianity, and his pluralistic ideas stemming from his previous religious practice of Manichaeism enabled Augustine to perpetuate the creation of divergent interpretations of Christianity. These ideas coincided with his sense of religious authority and power and resulted in Augustine's inadvertent promotion of pagan practices, much to the dismay of the orthodox¹⁷ Church fathers of his time.¹⁸

Understandably, these same members of the Christian hierarchy were troubled by Mani's doctrines and Augustine's interpretation of Christianity. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (A.D., 315-386), was a prime example of this engrained sense of disdain found in the orthodox Christian hierarchy towards the Manicheans and followers of Augustine. In his work, *Catechetical Lectures*, he echoed other church fathers and theologians in the way he denounced Mani's belief system and pluralistic practices of Christianity. As Cyril wrote, "Truly, their doctrines are

¹⁴ A.V. Williams Jackson, "The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Manichaeism," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 45 (1925): 246-268, 253-254. (246-268)

¹⁵ John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 2nd edition, 13-14.

¹⁶ Pavry, 163.

¹⁷ It is important to note that in the context of this paper the terms "orthodox" or "orthodoxy" refer to the generally accepted dogma and religious ideology used during Late Roman Antiquity to advance both the Roman Catholic church and its teachings to both the Christian and secular world.

¹⁸ It should be noted that Augustine, although a well-known theologian at this time, received a great deal of criticism from many of his colleagues as a result of his severe and well publicized documentation of Gnostic practices. Although the works of Augustine received more substantial critical acclaim after his death, his influence during Late Antiquity is well documented. However, it was during the subsequent Medieval period where his ideas became even more influential.

ridiculous and full of condemnation and shame.”¹⁹ Other representatives of the church hierarchy, Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, Titus of Bostra, and Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, displayed similar aversions to Manichaeism and of Mani’s teachings. One could interpret the need for public Christian denouncement of Manichaeism and pluralistic interpretations of Christianity as evidence of a perceived threat to the Christian Church and its “proper” practice.²⁰ As Herrin states:

Another common problem was for Christian authorities everywhere was the survival of pagan practices, astrological predictions, and magic charms, which were regularly associated with “outsiders”—heretics, holy women, Jews, witches, druids, and sorcerers. Although these constituted more of a disciplinary than a doctrinal challenge, they frequently sprang from some lingering heretical movement or Manichean inspiration.²¹

Going against the traditional Christian mentality of the time in order to reunite the church, Augustine argued against the traditional orthodoxy and encouraged the growth of a universal Christian faith. Via his numerous writings on the subject of religion, his most influential being *Confessions*, *The Apocrypha*, and *City of God* (c.a. A.D., 410-426), Augustine was able to combine Greco-Roman philosophical beliefs with metaphysics and religious rhetoric to explain, for both Christians and pagans, the role of God in life and the afterlife. Based on his views and the pluralistic nature of his writings, Augustine’s interpretations continued to influence the use and manipulation of Christian doctrine to meet a generalized need for Christian conversion.

Although Christianity changed the integration of paganism from its earlier stages to the eventual public condemnation of all pagan thought, post-Christian legalization in Late Roman Antiquity allowed for the continued practice of religious pluralism. However, these practices were soon rectified by the consolidation of church power in the fourth century. Historian Richard Fletcher agrees, arguing the following:

After the imperial adhesion to Christianity under Constantine, never to be reversed except during the brief reign of Julian, the Christian community within the empire underwent phenomenal growth—which changed its character. Imperial patronage colossally increased the wealth and status of the churches. Privileges and exemptions granted to Christian clergy precipitated a stampede into the priesthood. ... The adherence of the establishment to Christianity in the course of the 4th century made more urgent than ever the task of converting the outsiders on whose labours the establishment rested: the huge majority who toiled in the countryside.²²

As evidenced by Fletcher, the practice of Christianity changed dramatically in the post-legalization period. As Roman Church authority was substantiated throughout Western Rome and as more traditional, orthodox interpretations were supported by the general public, pluralistic views of Christianity were demonized more and more by the Church. These changes foreshadowed both future governmental controls on religion and forced pagan religious conversions. As such, mentalities of Late Rome Antiquity helped propagate religious and social persecutions in order to promote proper cultural and social practices, ideas that continued well into the colonial Spanish era.

Aztec Religion and its History within the Spanish Colonial Context

Building on the ideas presented in the previous section, one of the most egregious examples of the use of Christian orthodoxy to manipulate pagan religious practices comes from the colonial Aztec state. With the fall of Granada in 1492, and Queen Isabella’s expulsion (or forced

¹⁹ Jackson, 255.

²⁰ Ibid, 255-257.

²¹ Herrin, 110.

²² Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 38.

conversion) of the Jewish population in the same year, Spain was left with the task of refocusing its crusading mindset. Implementing the expansionistic attitude that brought Spain territorial unity and wealth in the days of Moorish conquest, Spain set out to obtain wealth, spread Christianity, and implement proper European societal practices throughout the world. Columbus's "discovery" of the New World in 1492 provided Spain with hopes for once again securing wealth and power and increased political and religious status among their European counterparts. Deeming this expansion as a worldwide crusade to save the newly discovered non-Christian peoples,²³ Spain and Portugal, with the authority of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, divided the world between themselves to obtain wealth and spread Christian doctrines. As historian Sarah Cline stated, "The Spaniards' experiences attempting to convert Jews and Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula set the precedents for strategies utilized in the New World".²⁴ With the conquest, Spain began an evangelization campaign which transformed traditional native societal roles, ultimately constraining Aztec religion in colonial Spanish society.²⁵

The culmination of Spanish thought, and the justifiable elements of societal domination as dictated by European imperialistic tactics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, transformed the Aztecs into an economically exploitable society and created enterprises for Spanish social and religious domination.²⁶ To justify many of their actions, Spanish conquerors and theologians manipulated Christian ideologies in order to create institutions of control and exploitation, and to validate their claims towards Aztec wealth, territories, and peoples. Spanish imperialism, Aztec subjugation, and the dominating political and ideological institutions of the Spanish Indies all became justifiable under the Christian pretense of controlling pagan peoples.²⁷ As Charles Gibson explains:

Spanish imperialism sought to justify its acts by its Christian mission. The conquest was a Christian enterprise because it sought to destroy a pagan civilization...with the papal consignment of the New World to Spain, all aspects of Hispanic colonization became subject to a Christian interpretation and subordinated to a Christian function.²⁸

The extirpation of paganism, a central component of sixteenth-century Spanish policy, was central to the Hispanization and domination of the Aztec people. The process of Hispanization, along with the Christian goals of destroying barbarism and pagan practices in the Spanish Indies, recreated a pseudo-European lifestyle in Mesoamerica which altered traditional Aztec religion and promoted European ideas of proper religious practices.²⁹

In relation to Spanish ideological notions of superiority, Europeans, at this time, considered themselves to be more advanced with a more sophisticated social system. As a result, they considered the Aztecs inferior and their religious views as barbarous. More specifically, the semi-equitable relations as dictated by cosmic dualism³⁰, were, for the most part, eradicated with the

²³ Sarah Cline, "The Spiritual Conquest Reexamined: Baptism and Christian Marriage in the Early Sixteenth-Century Mexico," in *The Church in Colonial Latin America*, ed. John F. Schwaller (Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2000), 73-74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Rhianna C. Rogers, "The Spider Woman Rules No More?: The Transformation and Resilience of Aztec Female Roles," (Masters Thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2004), 124-143.

²⁶ Ignacio Bernal, *A History of Mexican Archaeology: The Vanished Civilizations of Middle America* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 19-34.

²⁷ Institutions of the *encomienda*, *corregimiento*, and *repartimiento* were the most significant controlling agents in Spanish political realm of the sixteenth century. See Charles Gibson's *The Aztec's Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (California: Stanford University Press, 1964), Chapters 4, 9. The importance of these institutions and their influence on the Indians will be explored further in subsequent papers. Many ideological theories influenced Spanish thought regarding the Aztecs: Aristotle's natural slavery, the idea of barbarians vs. civilized, Christian vs. pagan, rational vs. irrational, and reason vs. illogical thought.

²⁸ Gibson, 98.

²⁹ Rogers, 124-143.

³⁰ As stated in a previous article, "cosmic dualism is the idea that for society to work harmoniously, both males' and females' existences were complementary, both feeding off each other's reciprocity and paralleling values." See Rhianna C. Rogers, "The Resilience of Aztec Women: A Case Study of Modern Aztec Myths," in *The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* vol. 1, no. 2 (2007) < http://www.scientificjournals.org/journals2007/j_of_hum2.htm>: 2.

implementation of European notions of proper religious and social practices. Thus, the forced conversion to Christianity and the Spanish idealization of proper social and religious practices further limited Aztec abilities to practice their traditional religion in Spanish New World.

The destruction of Aztec religion was only compounded by the Muslim conquest of A.D. 711, followed by the Europeans' historic pursuit of imperial dominance and expansionism. Beginning in the eighth century, Muslims expanded into three-fourths of the Iberian Peninsula, subjecting much of future Spain and Portugal to Islamic rule. In an attempt to reestablish Christianity in the peninsula and rejoin Christian Europe, Spain began an eight-hundred-year crusade to reunite the Iberian Peninsula. Known as the *Reconquista* (A.D., 711-1492), the rulers of Spain and Portugal attempted to regain lands as well as expel the non-Christian Jews and Muslims. Mimicking the actions in Late Antiquity Rome, the advancing Christian kingdoms allowed for the continued practice of paganism, but by the close of the Middle Ages (A.D., 1400), Christianity came to dominate the ideological rhetoric of Spain, and, as such, it became intolerant of non-Christian peoples. With the consolidation of Christian power by the Reconquista and the reestablishment of the Holy Office of Inquisition in 1477, the majority of Europeans, with the exception of the intellectual elites, were unable to choose the information they learned. The complete domination of knowledge by the papal elite, as formulated by church politics, allowed selected clergy to censor information they considered unfit or not in line with their agendas, including documents portraying a strong, intelligent, and rational native, pagan culture. With the exception of the few who had the ability to attend medieval universities, most Europeans were left intentionally sheltered from various, non-Christian interpretations of historical fact; including those ideas related to Aztec roles in society. When labeled by the church as pagan³¹ and abominations to the Christian faith, non-Christian intellectual writings and literature were labeled as heresy.³² Combining the absence of non-Christian writings with European misperceptions of the unknown, the Church was able to manipulate European perceptions by discrediting the non-Christian world, ultimately enabling them to explain and justify the transformation of Aztec religion in the New World. Combining church limitations on social, religious, and political roles, along with its ability to effectively manipulate European thoughts about the world around them, the papacy was able to exclude alternate interpretations of religion and culture on the basis of preventing abominations against God and the irrational pagan religious practices.

In addition to the dominant European theological mentality of the time, the political and economic situation of Spain greatly influenced the treatment of New World peoples. At the root of Spain's imperialistic nature was the underlying mentality of conquest and control of pagans. Reconquista Spain revered military achievements and economic status achieved through conquest and expansionism in Christ's name. Justifying their militaristic exploits around the necessity to rid the world of anti-Christian cultures and beliefs, the European Middle Ages were riddled with various brutal attempts to expel paganism and non-patriarchal social structures. As a result, over the course of approximately 500 years, Christians took part in various crusades,³³ covering lands in both Europe and the Middle East, in hopes of destroying anything deemed as abominations to the holy word or seen as anti-Christian. Although not all religious crusades were militarily successful for other Europeans, the Reconquista succeeded in expelling the Muslims from the peninsula. More so than their European counterparts, Spain was able to take part in crusades that exposed Spaniards to justifications for destroying foreign cultural beliefs and societal practices for the purpose of Christianization, an ideal that was strongly utilized during the conquest of the Aztecs.

³¹ The only major exception to the open use of paganism in Christianity was the incorporation of Aristotle's works. Seen as the preeminent "pagan" scholar, medieval universities of the time incorporated his works into their core curricula as justifiable tools to explain the Christian universe.

³² Rogers, 124-143.

³³ Crusades in this context refers not only to the European Crusades that took place in the Holy Land and Europe between AD 1096 and 1208, but to the crusading mentality in general, which Europeans applied to campaigns in their own territories against non-Christians and against heretics.

As Christianity began to take hold, traditional Aztec religion and society were greatly reduced. In many instances, native religious roles were completely transformed or eradicated as a result of Spanish cultural norms and the Christian concept of sacrilege. One of the most significant blows to Aztec societal and religious roles in the colonial Mexican era was the deconstruction of the traditional Aztec belief of cosmic dualism. As Inga Clendinnen describes it, “[Aztecs believed that the reciprocal relationship between men and women and nature] were revealed not through differentiation, but through permutations and transformations, and spoke more clearly of their connection that opposition.”³⁴ With the introduction of dominant Christological beliefs in the religious, social, and political settings of the Spanish colonial world, cosmic duality, a central theme in Aztec understanding and thought, all but disappeared. As a result, Christianization and the process of Hispanization worked to diminished roles in the Aztec community, and decreased their importance in colonial Mexico.

An interesting comparison that can be made about both the Aztecs and Manicheans stems from the use and incorporation of the dualist concept. As mentioned in the previous section, Late Roman Christianity encouraged pluralism in religion and dualistic ideas in order to encourage a generalized Christian conversion. As a result, many people began to practice religious forms of duality through their combination of Manichean and Christian thought. Building on the religious ideologies created by their pagan predecessors, these people felt it essential that a reciprocal interpretation of life and the afterlife was included in their worldview in order to unite their vast empire and keep it functioning harmoniously. The same can be said for the pre-Columbian Aztec state. Stemming from a long history of incorporating pre-existing religions, the Aztecs believed that in order to run their vast empire effectively, they needed to employ a system of reciprocity that encouraged the formation of a harmonious community. In essence, pre-Columbian Aztec society believed that all life needed to be balanced. (i.e., night and day, man and nature, good and evil, the balance of four cardinal directions, and men and women) in order for their society to properly function. Within the coming of the Spanish this ideology was continued. Believing that life could not function without this balance and recognizing the need for Aztec support, the Spanish initially encouraged Aztec peoples to implement social and religious systems that involved this reciprocating system of balance. Similarly, the Manicheans embraced the notion of balance in the world around them. Manichaeism exemplified this concept of absolute cosmic dualism, in that light and darkness existed as coeternal, independent entities that must remain in their respective realms in order for the universe to properly function. As such, the permanent separation of light and darkness was the primary goal for any Manichean and at the heart of a functional society. In sum, cosmic dualism in both the Aztec and Manichean contexts illustrated the need for plurality in both their social and religious constructs. As the next section will illustrate, that need was ignored with the implementation of the Christian crusading mindset in both eras.

Pagan Religious Resistance: the Albigensian Crusades and Aztec Colonial Cosmology

As the previous section eluded to, a further link exists between the Manicheans and their Spanish counterparts with regard to the Crusading mentality. In early thirteenth century (A.D., 1208 - 1226), a heretical sect in Albigensia, France was systematically exterminated due to their unorthodox, pagan practices. Known as The Albigensian Crusades, these religious battles were used by the Church as the extirpation of blasphemous religious beliefs and the deviation of Albigensian Catholics from proper Christian doctrine.³⁵ What made this heretical sect particularly interesting in the context of this paper was its alleged strong ties to Manichean doctrine and its pluralistic views of Christianity. As previously mentioned by scholar Jal Pavy, the Catholic Church was not officially free from pluralistic and dualistic beliefs in Christian religious practices. In addition, Manichean influence and doctrine continued to spread during this time. However, as a result of this specific Crusade, the orthodox Catholic Church began to place restrictions on Christian doctrine. As a result of these forced conversions, other group of heretics and Gnostic sects began to emerge. One such group, known as the Cathars, followed a semi-dualist mindset.

³⁴ Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 77.

³⁵ Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusades* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), Preface & 26-27.

Although this heresy was not based on traditional Manichean thought, the Cathars came to be known as a new sect of Manicheans, suggesting they had created a new form of Christian religious idolatry. As such, the Church treated these heretics as infidels and persecuted them to the point of extinction.³⁶ However, new groups of heretics continued to emerge, illustrating a general resistance of complete religious domination.

In a similar regard, the Aztecs were able to retain certain aspects of other pre-Columbian systems of dualistic reciprocity in spite of Christian religious controls. Overtime, the Aztecs learned to manipulate various Christian and Spanish institutions in order to retain control over economic, political, and religious practices at the local level. As a result, the Aztecs were able to reinstate some of their traditional religious practices through the re-implementation of cosmic dualism. As Gibson states:

If Aztec society is to be thought of as a graduated complex of progressively more inclusive units, from the family and the calpolli (community) at one end to the total empire at the other (tlatoani- Indian government of the royal family), it becomes evident that conquest eliminated all the more comprehensive structures while it permitted the local and less comprehensive [religious] ones to survive.³⁷

As Gibson illustrates, the Aztecs were able to continue certain religious practices in the comforts of their own communities and away from the grasp of Christian authorities. Combining traditional Mesoamerican mythological beliefs with Catholic interpretations of the trinity, the saints, and the Virgin Mary, native inhabitants of Mexico were able to retain religious autonomy in a predominantly Christian state. For example, in spite of religious persecution of pagan practices the Aztecs were protagonists in the establishment of the cult and devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the native manifestation of the Virgin Mary, by the middle of the sixteenth century.³⁸ Combining characteristics of the Virgin with pre-Columbian characteristics of female deities, Our Lady of Guadalupe created a strong religious female role which native men and women could use to once again manifest devotion to a female intercessor and to continue practice of dualism within colonial religious worship.

The Manichean Ethos and Christian Dogma

As previously mentioned, a major selling point for non-Christians to take part in pagan, Gnostic religious practices was based on the inherent dualistic tendencies presented in this tradition. Generally speaking, people searching for answers to the complexities of life were drawn to the rationalizations presented in Manichean religious thought. Based on the pluralist principles present in Manichaeism, non-Christians were given a logical explanation for the presence of good and evil, one which explained both the philosophical justifications for dualistic tendencies in life and the spiritual explanations of the non-physical world. Stemming from the fact that the majority of the concepts in Christian doctrine were easily adapted to pagan traditions (i.e., the concept of salvation, the Trinity, and the concept of an all-powerful God), Manicheans were able to reasonably maneuver pluralistic views into a traditionally monotheistic context. However, in the eyes of the Manicheans, Christianity contained a major flaw, that is, the illogical rationalization of evil. Concepts like an omnipotent and benevolent God lacked an answer for the problem of evil. Believing that Christianity provided neither a justification nor an explanation for the existence of evil, Manicheans argued that the religion failed to provide a logical reason for the negative

³⁶ See C. Fitz and Simons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy*, (Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), 253-255. See Tobias Churton, *The Gnostics* (New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 1987) 69-69.

³⁷ Gibson, 403.

³⁸ The legend is based on apparitions seen by Indian Juan Diego of the Virgin in 1531 but not written about until 1648. Diego's vision of the Virgin appeared in a church at Tepeyac on a site that was previously a native temple dedicated to the mother goddess Tonatzin. The approximations on the year of the Virgin's appearance are therefore relative, and open to various interpretations. See Louise M. Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Colonial Nahuatl Literature* (New York: Institution for Mesoamerican Studies University of Albany, 2001), 1-9.

qualities present in society. This is not to say that Christianity did not contain representations of evil (e.g., Satan and demons), rather Manicheans believed that Christianity contained an inherent contradiction in its theological makeup. According to the Christology of Late Antiquity Rome, the prevailing doctrine argued that God was not responsible for the existence of evil. In the context of Manichean thought, this seemed irrational because they felt a benevolent God would not allow for or wish evil upon His followers. The Manicheans believed that this theological flaw, coupled with the idea of an independently functioning evil entity (i.e., Satan), allowed both pagans and Gnostic sects two logical explanations for evil: (1) it gave them the ability to actively take part in defeating evil and overcoming its control, and (2) it allowed them to justify a dualistic representation of two, equally all-powerful gods that existed outside of human control (i.e., God and Satan). As such, Manichean beliefs allowed for the incorporation of pagan dualism as a rationalization for good and evil. In essence, Mani was able to link his dualist theology to Christianity as a result of the presence of Satan in Christian dogma and the lack of its clarity in an orthodox religious context. Thus, his interpretation of evil coupled with the omission of a clearly defined framework for it in Christian orthodoxy provided Mani and his followers with a more logical foundation for the presence of two, all-powerful gods. As a result, Manichean thought garnered a more substantial following during the foundational period of Christianity and continued its influence well into the Middle Ages (e.g., Albigensian Crusades).

Although Manichean doctrine differs drastically from Christian dogma, the Manicheans were able to effectively manipulate both theologies into a dualistic religion. One example can be seen in the Manichean interpretation of asceticism. In Manichaeism, followers believed that physical pleasures should be avoided, in life, at all costs. More specifically, they argued that all things in the physical world, (e.g., food, clothing, marriage, plants, animals), were inherently evil and, as such, taking part in activities that promoted the preservation or advancement of this world would help the all-powerful evil being (Angra-Mainyu, the god of evil and darkness) to succeed in defeating the all-powerful good being (Ahura-Mazda, the god of good and light). According to their religious cosmology, in order to achieve salvation, one must strive to decrease the power and influence of Angra-Mainyu in a worldly context. This is done solely by adhering to the tenants of Ahura-Mazda. However, this idea was more complicated by the fact that within this faith, evil directly correlated to humanities' connection to matter. Meaning, humans exist in this world as a result of evil taking good (i.e., the soul and spirit) and combining it with evil (i.e., matter). As a result, humans, in a physical context, are inherently evil and prone to sin and morally corrupt behavior; conversely, humans are inherently good, in a spiritual context, based on the soul's connection to Ahura-Mazda.

In addition, Manicheans viewed evil, Angra-Mainyu, as an existing counterpart to good, Ahura-Mazda, thus making life a continual struggle between good and evil. As such, humanity's purpose in the physical world was to separate the spirit from both matter and darkness and restore it back to its purist form. This is not to say that the Manicheans did not believe in an engrained necessity for evil, rather they felt that both good and evil should exist in separate realms in order to prevent the perpetuation of evil in this world. Manicheans believed that the presence of evil was a direct result of Angra-Mainyu's creation of the physical world. Therefore, the only way to prevent evil in Manichean thought was for this world to end and good and evil to return to their separate realms, never to mix again. In essence, Manichaeism encompassed the essence of dualistic thought, that is, in order for the religion to properly function there needed to exist two, independently functional realms (darkness and light) with equally important and powerful gods (Ahura-Mazda and Angra-Mainyu) who were able to exist throughout eternity together in mutual autonomy.

An interesting comparison that can be used to illustrate the incorporation of Christian and pagan thought lies in Augustine's conscience and unconscious links between Manichaeism, and Late Roman Christianity. It is important to note the differentiation between Augustine's unconscious incorporation of Manichaeism and his conscience incorporation of Neo-Platonic thought into Christianity. As previously mentioned, prior to his conversion in A.D. 384, Augustine practiced Manichaeism. Although he later denounced his Manichean beliefs, many of Augustine's writings incorporated dualistic aspects and Manichean philosophy. As footnoted in an earlier

section, Augustinian works, such as *Confessions* and *City of God*, incorporated pluralistic views of Christianity in order to appeal to potential pagan converts and unify the Church. In addition, Augustine used the Manichean thought of asceticism to prevent non-traditional pagan and Christian people from sinning. As mentioned earlier, followers of Manichaeism believed that asceticism was the idea that physical pleasures should be avoided, in life, at all costs. Augustine believed that refraining from the physical world and its pleasures would provide believers with deeper spiritual fulfillment and create a stronger bond with God. Based on Manichean principles of evil, one can argue that Augustine used Satan as a powerful being who had the ability to manipulate and tempt human beings to commit evil acts. It is arguable that his unintentional elevation of Satan to the role of evil incarnate was due to the dualistic nature of gods in his Manichean background. In addition, the elevation of Satan allowed Augustine to partially explain the existence of evil and justify the foundations of Christian doctrine. Building on a general crusading mindset in the Late Antiquity Christian religious hierarchy, Augustine's theology promoted the conversion of pagan followers and recognized the necessity for controlling the populace and for converting them to the orthodox view of "proper" Christianity. In the process, Augustine's unintentional incorporation of Manichaeanist doctrine (i.e., the concepts of dualism, asceticism, and evil) combined with his Christian evangelical goals to inadvertently promote a pluralistic interpretation of Christianity.

Another interesting connection to pluralistic views of Christian theology, and one that will later be expounded upon in the Aztec religious context, is the Manichean interpretation of Adam and Eve. In the orthodox, biblical account of Adam and Eve, God states, "You may freely eat any fruit in the Garden except fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die."³⁹ As this quote implies, God gave humans free-will and the capacity for good and evil (i.e., sin). An interesting point one can surmise from this quote is that even within the orthodox context, dualistic tendencies were inherent in the scriptures. Mani's interpretation of the concepts of "good and evil" illustrated in this verse a subconscious balance between the two terms and an inherent understanding that knowledge brings intelligent rationality. In the Manichean context, Satan, the protagonist of evil and sin in the physical world, was able to convince both Adam and Eve to *not* eat from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, thus building up the balance between God and himself. As stated in Genesis 3:22-24:

Then the Lord God said, the people have become as we are, knowing everything, both good and evil ... So the Lord God banished Adam and his wife from the Garden of Eden and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made.⁴⁰

Based on their failure to uphold the covenant, Adam and Eve were subsequently cast out of Paradise and thrust into a world of evil and sin. As this quote further illustrates, "good and evil," as separate entities were an intrinsic part of the orthodox Christian cosmology. Mani expounded upon the dualistic tendencies in this account by reversing the roles of God and the serpent (Satan). In the Manichean version of original sin, the Creator God was equivalent to evil and Jesus was, in fact, the serpent. The serpent successfully convinced Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and enlighten themselves about both the existence of and the reciprocal nature of good and evil. In doing so, the serpent, in this case Jesus, acted as the facilitator of knowledge for Adam and Eve. In Manichean thought, this action was viewed positively, making the serpent the representation of good and "God" the representation of evil. As a result of the serpent's action, Adam and Eve learned the process necessary to separate the soul from matter and the innate evil present in their bodies from the pure goodness of the soul.

Generally speaking, the Manichean creation story argued that light and dark particles blended together to form the universe. This commingling of light and dark particles, the essence of good and evil, perpetuated the dualistic nature within the physical world. As mentioned earlier, the combination of dark and light was never supposed to occur, and, in order for the balance of the

³⁹ Genesis. 2. 16-17. New Living Translation.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 3. 22-24.

cosmos to return to its rightful state, dark and light particles needed to be separated permanently. An interesting comparison between Manichean and Christian thought can be expressed through this theory. In orthodox Christianity, biblical scripture argues that one day evil will be permanently destroyed and good will reign supreme. However, Manicheans believed that Christianity failed to provide a clear explanation for this destruction. Along this line of rationale, Manichaeism argued that both good and evil would be systematically divided but not completely eradicated, thus allowing for the Christian interpretation to be fulfilled while at the same time maintaining its dualistic structure. For most pagans, the balance in the universe, that is, the need for both good and evil, was crucial for a well-functioning world. Manichaeism offered the best resolution for this dilemma; rather than promote an incomplete understanding for evil, they argued for a logical framework that explained both the blending of different faiths and appealed to those trained in the classical and pagan religions. Thus, Manichaeism argued that their views were less contradictory, making it easier to convert pagans. As Pavry explains "The westward spread of Manichaeism was certainly rapid. It penetrated as far as Gaul and Spain, and at Rome its influence was considerable."⁴¹ Therefore, in the context of Late Antiquity Rome, the appeal of Manichaeism appeared much stronger than that of Christianity.

The Aztec Ethos and the process of Christian Hispanization

Like the Manicheans, colonial Aztec religiosity was a combination of previously constructed pagan religious traditions and Christian rhetoric. To begin with, it is important to understand pre-Columbian Aztec religion in order to understand its later incorporation of Christianity. In the process of assuming control over Mesoamerica and the religious authority of their pre-Columbian ancestors, the Aztecs used both cosmic dualism and polytheistic religious beliefs to establish dominance in the Mesoamerican region.

In general, the Aztecs believed that the world was constructed around the physical and spiritual characteristics of the environment. Plants, animals, humans, and gods all coexisted within the cosmos in order to form a celestial plane which embodied all actions in life and society. As such, humans were expected to interact with spiritual and physical objects in order to maintain the well-ordered, reciprocating balance in life, the spirit world, and nature. Like the pluralistic nature of Manichaeism, Aztec religion believed in the need to rationalize the unknown. Therefore, the Aztecs searched for answers to the complexities of life through their religious beliefs and social practices. Based on the pluralist principles present in Aztec religion, natives created logical explanations for the presence of good and evil, one which explained both the physical justifications for pluralistic tendencies in life and the spiritual explanations of the physical and non-physical worlds.

In the context of Aztec cosmology and creation, the concept of the world was organized into a complex cyclical interpretation of life, death, destruction, and rebirth. Based on the acculturation of Mesoamerican myths, the Aztecs believed that the world (Tlaltecuhli) had passed through four previous creations, all of which ended with the angering of the gods and a battle between the Black Tezcatlipoca, ("Smoking Mirror", the god of war and sorcery) and Quetzalcoatl ("Feather Serpent," the god of life and patron of the priestly order.) This battle ultimately resulted in the destruction of the fourth world and its inhabitants. According to pre-Columbian Aztec codices, the fourth creation of the world ended with a great flood, the falling of the sky, and creation of an all-encompassing darkness.⁴² As scholar Franke Neumann states:

[In Aztec cosmology,] there were several successive worlds or "suns," each possessing its own span of time, and each ending inevitably in catastrophe. Miguel Leon Portilla has pointed out that the story of the "suns" clearly demonstrates the existence of five cosmological categories: (1) the search for a universal foundation, (2) the division of cosmic history into ages or cycles, (3) the notion of the existence of primordial elements,

⁴¹ Pavry, 167.

⁴² Michael Coe, *The Maya*, 6th ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999 [1966]) 201-202.

(4) the division of the cosmos into quadrants, and (5) the understanding of cosmic events within a framework of perpetual struggle.⁴³

Modern research suggests that this perpetual struggle ended only when the fifth world was created and balance was again restored between man, life, and the gods. As carved hieroglyphically on the *Calendar Stone* (13 Acatl or A.D. 1479), the primary Aztec creation myth stated that the latest world was created at Teotihuacán (meaning “the place where men became gods”). It was here where the gods decided to re-create the world for the fifth time, granting humanity another chance to redeem itself and restore the balance of the cosmos. After the major gods declined to sacrifice themselves in order to create the fifth world, the God of snails known as “The Pox (or Purulent) One” hurled himself into a great fire and became the sun (also known as Nanahuatzin or “Noble One.”) Following Nanahuatzin’s example, Coyolxauhqui, (meaning “Heart of the Earth” and who was sister of Huitzilopochtli, the patron god of the Aztec state), offered herself to be sacrificed in order to rise as the moon. This creation myth serves as prime of example of Aztec, pre-Columbian religious syncretism. Similar to the Manicheans, the Aztecs believed that both light and darkness (e.g., the sun and the moon) represented an essential balance between good and evil and was a crucial component for creating a well-ordered world. As an imperial pre-Columbian empire, the Aztecs recognized a general need for reciprocity with various cultures within their realm. Like the Manicheans, they believed that religious receptiveness relied on its ability to reach diverse peoples. As such, they chose to incorporate a syncretic explanation of creation for all faiths in their empire as a way to promote unity and continuity within their culture. This concept became particularly important at the onset of Spanish contact, ideas which will be discussed later in this article. Additionally, the Aztecs believed that the pre-Columbian world in which they existed relied primarily on their ability to: (1) please the gods, (2) ritualistically worship them, and (3) preserve their world in its original form. Deeming the fifth world a gift from the gods, the Aztecs believed it their duty to maintain it through a process of reciprocity (i.e., cosmic dualism⁴⁴) and religious balance between the gods and man. Displeasing the gods, in any way, would result in the destruction of their world and themselves.⁴⁵

As the previous paragraph suggested, the Aztecs considered themselves an integral part of the cosmos. The gods bequeathed the world to natives, providing they maintain the balance of nature (i.e., caring for, protecting, and keeping the world sacred). As such, man interacted with the world both spiritually and physically in order to ensure its longevity. As the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* suggests, the Aztecs believed that the cosmological balance of the world resided in man’s ability to protect and worship the earth as well as the gods who watch over it. Therefore, in order for life to properly function, there needed to be a spiritual and physical balance between the environment, humans, and the spirit world.⁴⁶ This dualistic balance focused on a hierarchical view of life, which reflected the reciprocating nature of the world and the creatures who occupied it. This concept was personified through the great bisexual creator deity, Omēteotl or “Dual Divinity.”⁴⁷ As archaeologist Michael Coe states:

The bewildering multiplicity of Mexican gods was to [the Aztecs] but an embodiment of one comic principle of duality: the unity of opposites, as personified in the great bisexual deity, Omēteotl or “Dual Divinity”...In Aztec philosophy...Omēteotl presided over [all aspects of the] layered universe...⁴⁸

⁴³ Franke J. Neumann, “The Experience of Time in Nahuatl Religion”, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no.2 (1976): 256. (255-263)

⁴⁴ As eluded to in a previous footnote, the term cosmic dualism in the context of the Aztecs can be defined as the reciprocating nature between the spiritual and natural worlds. Humans, as the major participant in the worldly process, are required to interact with the environment, the gods, and the spirit world in a constructive way, ensuring the longevity of the culture in the area.

⁴⁵ Coe and Koontz, 206.

⁴⁶ Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995) 107-115; 116-201.

⁴⁷ Michael Coe and Rex Koontz, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 5th ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) 205.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 206.

Although at first glance, a bisexual god does not seem comparable to Manichean dualistic thought; in the Aztec reality, dualism functioned as the basis for all life in much the same way as the Manicheans. In both contexts, the embodiment of dualism lay at the very foundations of a reciprocating and harmonious universe. In order for each group to function properly, there needed to be a balance in life that accounted for both the actions in the physical and spiritual realms. Thus, cosmic dualism in both the Aztec and Manichean contexts illustrated a general need for plurality and a shared emphasis on a reciprocating system of balance.

In addition, the Aztecs used cosmic dualism to justify the construction of their capital Tenochtitlan and as a tool for developing and expanding their empire. As the *Codex Mendoza* explains, the Aztecs believed the universe was divided into four quarters, each quarter representing the four directions of the world. More specifically, the *Codex* illustrated the relationship between four reciprocating concepts of life, death, war, and peace. Following this rationale, Tenochtitlan was divided into four equal parts, each representing a cardinal direction and the four direct offspring of Ometeotl. Known as the Tezcatlipocas, these quarters represented all that was good and bad in the physical and spiritual worlds; in the north was the Black Tezcatlipoca (the god "Smoking Mirror" who represented war, death, evil and sorcery), in the south was the Blue Tezcatlipoca (the god Huitzilopochtli who represent warriors, honor, and the sun), in the east was the Red Tezcatlipoca (the god Xipe Totec who represented the spring season, blood, and renewal) and in the west was White Tezcatlipoca (the god Quetzalcoatl who represented life, the priesthood and peace). As such, each direction was associated with a spiritual deity as well as various social concepts, illustrating the need for social balances in both Aztec life and religion.

Following this generalized concept of cosmic dualism, the Aztecs aspired to create a symbiotic society which incorporated mutual reciprocity and the gendered deities. For example, through the acculturation of the Mesoamerican god Huitzilopochtli, the Aztecs, as a warrior-based society, were able to substantiate their claims to authority in the region. Building all aspects of their society on militarism, Huitzilopochtli functioned as the principle deity of Aztec warriors and an integral figure in their pantheon of gods. Archaeologist Ross Hassig has argued that continual shifts in alliances and incessant warring between communities turned the Mexican Valley into an area of chaos and corruption.⁴⁹ As the Aztecs emerged as a new social group in the vast Mesoamerican region, territorial claims to rule continued and social chaos ensued. As such, the Aztecs needed a source of validation to reinforced their ability to control and pacify the region. Using the acculturated Mexican god Huitzilopochtli as their guide, the Aztecs were able to gain political control of the region based on visions given by their tribal deities and their ancestral claims to the Teotihuacanos. In doing so, the Aztecs embodied themselves as the supreme rulers of the Mexican region and the inheritors of Mesoamerican religiosity. During the process of pacification, the Aztecs incorporated acculturated notions of good and evil to justify their conquests, as illustrated by the Aztec creation myth. Attempting to unite its peoples under one, universal religion, the Aztecs manipulated religion into a tool for political gain. Arguably, another example can be seen through the personifications of Coatlicue, Mother Earth, and her son Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of warriors. As the personification of both good and evil, Coatlicue represented the principle manifestation of Mother Earth (e.g., life, birth, and happiness) and the Underworld (e.g., death, pain, and sacrifice). In addition, Coatlicue also represented the female aspect of the creator god Ometeotl, thus illustrating the balance needed between genders. Both the god of warriors and the physical manifestation of the sun (not to be confused with the spiritual manifestation of the sun Nanahuatzin), Huitzilopochtli acted as the physical and spiritual guide for both life (as the giver of light) and death (as one of the enforcers of his mother's Underworld and as one of the regulators of human mortality). In the overall context of duality, the importance of Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli resides in the pluralistic attributes they represent in Aztec cosmology. Based on the fact that both gods are inherently dualistic in and of themselves, their presence in the Aztec pantheon of gods represented a necessary balance between two polar opposites; exemplifying the overall personification of a harmonious Mesoamerican universe. In

⁴⁹ Ross Hassig, *War and Society in Ancient Mesoamerica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 82-93.

essence, the Aztecs were able to build a vast empire in less than two centuries and to rise as a religiously syncretic culture with acculturated values, centuries of Mesoamerican beliefs, and dualistic social and religious practices.

Like the Manicheans, Aztecs attempted to justify and explain environmental factors through the creation of complex stories, religious beliefs, and rituals. This contributed further to the importance of good and evil in the Aztec religious context. Generally speaking, in order to understand the everyday occurrences in the world, Aztec peoples dedicated a large amount of time to deciphering “unexplainable” environmental factors around them. In essence, natives believed their actions triggered either satisfaction or displeasure from the gods. As a result, the Aztecs created complex stories about the environment in order to explain the physical and spiritual manifestations of good and evil. For example, the Aztecs placed specific emphasis on birth and its relation to the creation of humans and the world.⁵⁰ They believed that the emergence of humans and the world were represented as a “birthing” process as well as a religious function; in both cases, they emerge from the inside of a larger entity (i.e., humans emerged from the earth, and the earth from the universe) and both were expected to conduct religious ceremonies in honor of their birth and for other gods and/or themselves. As mentioned earlier, within the Aztec cosmology, failure to honor the gods would result in dire consequences and probably death. One could argue that adverse reactions from the gods were a direct result of the failure of humans to maintain good actions and the harmonious balance needed in life; conversely, good actions relied on the avoidance of evil and were associated with acceptance of the gift of life through ritualistic worship. Thus, the Aztecs ascribed a human process to both spiritual and physical contexts in order to better understand and interpret their environment around them. In sum, both the Manicheans and Aztecs believed that both good and bad actions in the physical world influenced the godly actions in the spiritual world, which resulted in consequences for both the physical and spiritual world.

However, with the coming of the Spanish, Eurocentric justifications for the condemnation of non-Christian beliefs and foreign religious ideas caused the transformation of these pre-Columbian Aztec religious traditions. In addition, Spanish imperial policy and law actively promoted the destruction of traditional Aztec religious and social practices, causing the marginalization of the natives as well as the reduction, and, in many cases, the elimination of native religious roles. For example, included in papal interpretations of the Bible were the notions of male dominance and female submission. Resulting from theological Christian understandings of the biblical account of Adam and Eve, women were seen as corrupters of the world and the originators of sin. The Church interpreted male dominance as a necessity for controlling women’s misdoings. Men, being God’s first human and the antecedent of female creation, were chosen to lead and handle worldly affairs.⁵¹ Women were subservient to men and expected to be their companions throughout life. Resulting from the domination of Church in European life and colonial Mexican society, submissive roles for women were considered socially acceptable and God-ordained. Combining Church limitations on Aztec social, religious, and political roles, with eurocentric ideas about the pagans, the papacy was able to exclude alternate interpretations of religion, culture, and gender-based roles on the sole basis of preventing abominations against God. In essence, Spanish law and religious practice restricted the dualistic principles reflected in traditional, pre-Columbian Aztec religion in order to promote eurocentric views of proper societal roles.

⁵⁰ Noting that humans created new life by giving birth, the Aztecs deduced that the creation or “birth” of the world must have come from the birthing process of a large, pre-existing entity or being. As such, the Aztecs believed that the creation of the world was a process initiated by the gods. Thus, the earth, considered a powerful being by the Aztecs, was given human traits in order to explain and justify the birthing of humans into the world. In essence, the creation of the world was a direct result of a “divine conception.” The Aztecs believed that in order for the world to exist it needed to be born or “conceived” by a divine entity. A concept that they later used to explain the concept of the Immaculate Conception.

⁵¹ In the Bible, God created Adam, and, shortly after his creation, God caused him to fall into a deep sleep. In the Biblical account, God forged Eve out of one of Adam’s ribs and called her woman because she came out of man. Genesis 2. 21-23 King James Version.

A major factor triggering the transformation of Aztec religion and gender roles was the European adaptation of Aristotle's idea of natural slavery.⁵² The idea that some humans, in this case the Aztecs, were incapable of rational and moral choices was a revised version of the Greek philosopher's thought that had been incorporated in medieval and Renaissance philosophies and later transferred into New World colonialism. The Spanish believed that the barbarous patterns present in Aztec social structures and belief systems illustrated the Aristotelian implications of an irrational 'natural' man, and justified the destruction of Aztec culture and religion.⁵³ Therefore, the mistreatment and disregard of traditional Aztecs beliefs (e.g., cosmic dualism) and gender relations became acceptable measures in the overall process of Hispanizing the Aztecs. Christianity became a central factor in the destruction of traditional Aztec societal constructs and helped impose the predominantly patriarchal Spanish institutions on the Aztec nation. The destruction of the Aztec religious tradition enabled Spanish conquerors to achieve their goals of native domination and territorial expansion. Without the removal of Aztec dualistic religious beliefs, cultural dominion over the native peoples would have been exceedingly problematic, if not impossible. The destruction of dualism coupled with the disease and warfare helped the Spanish to implement eurocentric views of proper social and religious practices (i.e., Christianity.)

Overall, the introduction of dominant Christian beliefs in colonial religious, social, and political settings forced the initial transformation of dualistic and pluralistic religious interpretations in Aztec society. Resulting from the forced Hispanization of Aztecs and the destruction of pagan customs in the Spanish New World, Aztec roles were drastically diminished in the colonial Mexican world. These ideas will be further expanded in conjunction with the Manichean plight in the following section.

Intellectual and Theological Movements in Late Roman Antiquity

As alluded to earlier, Greek philosophy, specifically the ideas of Plato and Plotinus, contributed to the development of a pluralistic Christian ethos. Resulting from the incorporation of Platonic thought (i.e., traditional Platonic theory, and Neo and Middle Platonism) into Manichean and later Christian thought, religious rhetoric in the Late Antiquity Rome helped perpetuate the classical, pagan philosophical tradition. Based on the works of both Origen and Augustine, the concepts of the divine in Plato's and Plotinus's texts were used to justify the incorporation of pagan philosophies into Christianity, as well as used as a means to convert non-Christian peoples. Both Augustine and Origen (A.D., 185-254) were prime examples of the pluralistic combination of Christianity and pagan theory, primarily due to their combination of classical training and early Christian theology. Incorporating Plato's *Theory of Forms* into their religious and philosophical rhetoric, both theologians used Platonic thought to link Late Antiquity Christianity to pagan philosophy. More specifically, they manipulated Plato's theory in order to justify the conversion of pagan peoples. They argued that through the process of divine inspiration and spiritual discernment, humans were able to define and understand the forms in the physical world around them. In essence, these scholars implemented logic and reason in order to convince pagans to convert. The following paragraphs will illustrate how these Church fathers were able to specifically utilize pagan philosophy to persuade non-Christian peoples to practice orthodox Christianity.

As mentioned in previous sections, the prime reason for the growth of pagan and Gnostic sects was a direct result of the lack of logic and spiritual rationality in Late Antiquity Christianity. Therefore, Origen was able to justify the combination of Christian thought and pagan philosophy in order to rectify the perceived weaknesses in Christian rhetoric. Thus, Origen used Middle Platonism to interpret truth for the purpose of creating a link between "the divine world and [pagan

⁵² It is important to note that natural, in the sense of Aristotle's theory, was in reference to barbarous activities, (i.e. ritualistic killings, human sacrifice, and pagan mentalities.) Any group manifesting characteristics of barbarism was included in various subcategories of a irrational, natural man.

⁵³ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1982]), 3.

philosophy, and for understanding aspects of personal experience], and to point the way to attaining the greatest possible likeness to God.”⁵⁴ More specifically, Origen manipulated the Middle Platonic concept of the Divine Mind to validate the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity. As J.N.D. Kelly states:

Middle Platonism was more definitely theistic than its classical forerunner [Platonism]. At the [apex of Middle Platonic thought there existed] the unique Divine Mind. It retained the conception bequeathed by Plato of a transcendent world of Forms, but represented them as God's thoughts.⁵⁵

According to Origen, the Christian God and the Divine Mind were the same entity. Specifically, he believed that the Holy Trinity was the personification of God, (i.e., existing as three separate entities but united as one being.) He ascribed each of these entities to a corresponding Greek philosophical term in order to relate the concept of the Trinity to the classically trained, pagan mind; in Origen's theory, the Father represented the perfect unity and the purity of the spirit, the Son represented Reason (Logos) and Wisdom (Sophia) of the Father, and the Holy Spirit represented the sanctification of human souls as a result of forgiveness which was bestowed on humans by both Father and Son.⁵⁶ Each entity was created of its predecessor, further illustrating Origen's creation of a descending hierarchy (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It was for this reason, that Origen's philosophy could apply to either monotheistic thought (an all-powerful being with three parts existing as one) or polytheistic, pagan thought (three all-powerful beings working together to fulfill a singular purpose). As such, the ambiguity of his Trinitarian interpretation helped to promote Christian conversions of pagan and Gnostic sects.

Building on Origen's interpretations of Middle Platonic theory and Christianity, Augustine was able to use pagan theory and Neo-Platonic thought alongside Christianity to justify the conversion of pagans. Like Origen, Augustine validated the combination of Christian thought and pagan philosophy in order to excuse the perceived weaknesses in Christian rhetoric. Building on the Middle Platonic concept of the Divine Mind and Plotinus's development of it into the theory of the One, Augustinian theory personified the pluralistic nature of Late Roman Christology. Augustine specified aspects of Origen's Trinitarian interpretation of the Christian spiritual hierarchy, in order to rationalize the implementation of the Neo-Platonic theory of the One. As mentioned earlier, Origen's philosophy allowed for a pluralistic application of the Trinity to either monotheistic thought or polytheistic, pagan thought. In an attempt to remove some ambiguity from Christian rhetoric, Augustine removed the pluralistic interpretation of the Trinity and argued for the monotheistic belief in an all-powerful being with three parts existing as one. One could argue that solidifying Christian doctrine with pagan rhetoric allowed Augustine to remove ambiguity from the Church and insert the polytheistic beliefs of logic and reason into Christian rhetoric, thus compensating for the deficiency. Due to the fact that Origen based part of his interpretation of the Trinity on paganism and Augustine used pagan theories of Plotinus to prove his Christian beliefs, Augustine was able to justify the redirection of pagan beliefs onto orthodox Christian dogma.

In the context of the Neo-Platonic theory of the One, Augustine used Christian thought and paganism to incorporate pluralistic views of the universe. As previously mentioned, the incorporation of the Neo-Platonic view of the One in Christian thought provided a justification for pagan conversion. The dualist tendencies already present in Late Antiquity Christianity (e.g., the concept of evil)⁵⁷ coincided with classical Greek and pagan philosophies in order to logically explain the presence of good and evil in human nature. For example, based on his belief in original sin, Augustine argued that the only way to achieve salvation was through the will of God

⁵⁴ Kelly, 14-15.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 130-131.

⁵⁷ According to Plotinus, everything that existed in both the physical and spiritual realms originated from the One including evil; therefore, the dualist aspect of evil may have been the result of a number factors, (e.g., the One itself, from humanity, or from the Divine Mind.)

and one's own fight against humanity's inherent evil nature.⁵⁸ As such, Augustine was able to incorporate both Middle and Neo-Platonic thought with Christianity in order to illustrate the duality of the soul, where the soul represented the mind and spirit and the body represented earthly desires and physical pleasure. Thus, Augustine believed that the body encompassed both good and evil (i.e., purity of the soul and earthly temptations), which further illustrated the duality of his theology and the perpetuation of paganism in Late Roman Antiquity.

Intellectual and Theological Movements in the Spanish New World

Similar to the plight of pagan and Gnostic sects in Late Antiquity Rome, Christian philosophical rhetoric of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries manipulated Aztec religious practices in order to promote religious conversion. Christian beliefs, perpetuated by negative Spanish perceptions towards Aztecs' religious and social customs, justified the reconfiguration of Aztec cosmological beliefs and the eradication of cosmic dualism. As Inga Clendinnen describes it, "[Aztec relations between men and women] were revealed not through differentiation, but through permutations and transformations, and spoke more clearly of their connection [to] that opposition."⁵⁹ With the introduction of dominant patriarchal beliefs in the religious, social, and political setting of the Spanish colonial world, cosmic duality and the Mesoamerican belief in life's reciprocating nature, all but disappeared. The remainder of this section will focus on the transformation of Aztec religious beliefs as a result of the engrained Spanish mentality of conquest and controlling of pagan peoples.

Along with the expansionistic movements in early modern Europe, increasing intellectual influence from universities and scholarly communities influenced the growth in European curiosity for the unknown, ultimately throwing Europe into a period of internal and external rediscovery. Beginning with the Renaissance and intensified by the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, Europe began a long and complicated process of societal and religious rebirth. Resulting from various contacts made by Crusaders and travelers in the thirteenth century, Europeans became enthralled with various societies' customs and religious practices. The fourteenth-century Italian Renaissance, which had traveled to the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Europe by the fifteenth century, attempted to establish precedence for scientific studies and humanistic endeavors. Renaissance thinkers also confronted the negative effects of societal domination by the church and the papacy. With the onset of the Black Death in the mid 1300s and the church's inability to explain its cause, Europeans became aware that Christianity could not resolve all social and biologically created problems. Faced with this fact, early Renaissance thinkers began to question the Roman Catholic Church's role as supreme dictator of societal activities and knowledge. Becoming the central focus of Renaissance thought, the ideas of scientific analysis, economic stability, and studies of the humanities were brought into the public arena with the hopes of bringing more clarity to a depopulated and intellectually isolated Europe.

In spite of the intellectual growth fostered by these two movements, Renaissance and Reformation scholars adhered to the same Eurocentric mentality that limited pagan and non-Christian roles in medieval times. Incorporating Aristotle's idea of natural slavery, scholars encouraged the limitation of "barbaric and irrational" peoples in the public domain and in intellectual spheres. As previously mentioned, Aristotelian interpretations of natural man argued that some humans, in this case the Aztecs, were incapable of rational and moral choices. Like Augustine and Origen, theologians and philosophers of this time revised Greek philosophy in order to justify native subjugation and medieval and Renaissance crusading philosophies. Specifically in the Spanish sense, they believed that the barbarous patterns present in Aztec social structures and belief systems illustrated the Aristotelian implications of an irrational 'natural' man, and justified the destruction of Aztec religion.⁶⁰ Therefore, the mistreatment and disregard of

⁵⁸ See St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, D.D. (New York: Random House, 2000 [1950]), 380-411.

⁵⁹ Clendinnen, 77.

⁶⁰ Pagden, 3.

traditional Aztecs beliefs became acceptable measures in the overall process of Hispanization and the Christianizing of the Aztecs.

Further attempting to logically justify the destruction and transformation of Aztec religion, many theologians utilized religious rhetoric to support European expansion. Following this mindset, Catholic Reformer and Renaissance thinker Desiderius Erasmus, in his 1524 treatise *De libero arbitrio*, argued that instead of attempting to decipher life's meaning, scholars and skeptics should rely on the church's interpretations of life and society "since truth can not be found any other way".⁶¹ As Erasmus continues "[In] the views of the skeptics wherever the inviolable authority of Scripture and the decision of the Church permit [they should be followed]."⁶² Erasmus believed the guidelines set out by the church already in place in society sufficed to meet the needs of the people. Therefore, a rational being should follow Church rhetoric and abandon all other interpretations of life, including those followers of the pre-Columbian, pagan Aztec faith.

In a similar light, Church fathers gave credence to the argument that the only proper interpretation of life came from a singular, Christian, Eurocentric perspective. This is extremely evident in the works of Martin Luther. Although rejecting Erasmus's skepticism, Martin Luther, in his 1525 treatise *De servo arbitrio*, similarly believed that church doctrine encompassed proper European, and worldly societal actions. "[T]he Holy Spirit is no skeptic, and what He has written into our hearts [regarding proper societal actions] are no[t] doubts or opinions, but assertions, more certain and more firm than all human experiences and life itself."⁶³ As Luther explained, he believed the Bible was the holy word of God, and that no interpretation should be created for any purposes, a main reason why many Biblical thinkers viewed him as a heretic. Practicing Catholics contended this view, believing that interpretations made by the clergy, who were viewed as God's workers on earth, should be taken as God's word. With the majority of Europe practicing Catholicism, the intellectual movements of the Renaissance and Reformation reinforced the Eurocentric schematic of European society and the deconstruction of pagan religions, ideas later employed in the Spanish New World.

As a result of questions raised during the Renaissance and Reformation period, the Catholic Church itself became divided as to which activities should be maintained as the central focus of religious life. The wars of religion, which began under Charles V (the primary agent in New World, Spanish conquest and colonialism), thrust the Catholic Church into the introspective period of Counter-Reformation, where various orders within the church and Protestant religious denominations debated the role of Christianity in European life and society. Impacted by humanist scholars, such as Erasmus, intellectuals began to criticize the teachings and structure of the Church. Catholic reformers were divided into two main groups, ones who believed salvation came through an individual's direct connection with God, and others who believed that only those who were baptized and chose to follow all Biblical laws as interpreted by the church could reach heaven. Like the theologians of Late Roman Antiquity, these scholars argued for the expansion of orthodox Christianity into a more pluralistic interpretation of life and society. Although seemingly unrelated, these actions further prove the link between the hierarchies of the Late Roman Church and Spanish Catholicism. This comparison resonates through its connection to the Spanish Reconquista. As mentioned earlier, most Europeans were left intentionally sheltered from various, non-Christian interpretations of historical fact. When colonial Spanish society labeled the Aztecs as pagan and abominations to the Christian faith, their writings and codices were labeled as heresy.⁶⁴ As such, the Church was able to manipulate European perceptions of New World natives through its use of Christian doctrine and Old World philosophies. In effect, both religious and political agencies were able to discredit the Aztec, non-Christian world.

⁶¹ Barbara Mujica, "Skepticism and mysticism in Early Modern Spain," in *Women in the Discourse of Early Modern Spain*, ed. Joan F. Cammarata (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 55-56.

⁶² Desiderius Erasmus, and Martin Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, trans. Ernst F. Winter. (New York: Continuum, 1997), 6.

⁶³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Ernst F. Winter. (New York: Continuum, 1997), 103.

⁶⁴ Rogers, 124-143.

Utilizing the Inquisition, also used later by the Spaniards as a regulatory tool in the New World, Emperor Charles V and the papacy effectively controlled and regulated the religious doctrines of the Spanish Mexico. Like the orthodox movement of Late Antiquity Rome, the newly established Inquisition of the late fifteenth century served to isolate and promote its ideas of a proper European society. The elevation of orthodoxy brought about by the reintroduction of the Inquisition enabled the Church to promote the Spanish Christian schematic. "The Inquisition concentrated on elevating moral standards by identifying and punishing sexual behavior [and improper social roles] that demeaned the sanctity of marriage, teaching, [and society]."⁶⁵ Stemming from the bitter struggle between ethnicity and religion existing in the European world in this era, the Inquisition allowed Christianity to become a central justification for destroying texts and information about foreign cultures, religions, and peoples.⁶⁶ Although the church succeeded in combating Reformation beliefs by increasing its control over evangelization and reconciling the internal differences among its orders, the push to once again dictate societal activities only perpetuated the Europeans' thirst for knowledge of the unknown. In their attempts to understand the world around them, Europeans moved towards more scientific and academic analyses to answer their questions. The reemergence of scholasticism, the philosophical and intellectual system used to reconcile the differences between faith and reason during the High Middle Ages, became increasingly accepted within religious and secular communities. Scholasticism attempted to unite Aristotelian ideologies with Christian theology in order to create a balanced system, comprised of both reason and faith. Works created by Peter Abelard (A.D., 1079-1142), *History of My Misfortunes*, and Sir Thomas Aquinas (A.D., 1225-1274), *Summa Theologica* [A Summary of Theology], brought scholasticism to the public through their encouragement of scientific questioning and analysis of religious power. The reemergence of classic Greek and Roman ideological concepts, as seen in scholasticism, became the mainstay for Renaissance thought and literature, and ultimately the central tool used by the Spanish to conquer and reformulate New World cultural concepts and religious practices.

Although the Renaissance was full of intellectual nuances that ultimately transformed early modern Europe, many of the ideas established during this time were later used to justify the mistreatment and destruction of New World natives. For example, leading Renaissance humanist Niccolò Machiavelli (A.D., 1469- 1527) in his book *Il Principe* [The Prince] stated that the only possible means to dominate a republic was to exhibit brute force by whatever means necessary to insure maintenance of order and control in a society that has the possibility of turning into a tyrannical state.⁶⁷ Utilizing this commonly accepted theory, the Spanish, in their acquisition of the New World, treated native religious systems as uncivilized and pagan, deeming them incapable of controlling themselves or comprehending European understandings of civilized behavior. Using this ideological concept, the Spanish manipulated native practices in order to reflect the social customs present in the Castilian ruling elite.

As already mentioned, Aristotelian thought was one of the most significant tools utilized during the Renaissance movement in both Italy and the later movement during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Northern Europe. In medieval universities, scholars studied the works of Aristotle and were required to read them as classic understandings for establishing rationales in human thought and action. Encouraged by the intellectual movement of the Renaissance age, various scholars produced new interpretations of Aristotelian thought. Like Origen and Augustine, the Aristotelian students of the Renaissance mastered ancient Greek, analyzing works by Galen, Ptolemy, Archimedes, Plato, and the Socratics, among many others. Adding these texts to their studies opened new doors of understanding, particularly in regard to Aristotle. As eloquently articulated by Anthony Pagden in his book, *The Fall of Natural Man*, sixteenth-century Europeans believed that Aristotle's theory of an uncivilized man encompassed cultures not exhibiting

⁶⁵ Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, "Francisca de los Apóstoles: A Visionary Voice for Reform in Sixteenth-Century Toledo," in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, ed. Mary E. Giles (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 7.

⁶⁶ Karl Brandt, *The Emperor Charles V: The Growth and Destiny of a Man and of a World-Empire*, trans. C.V. Wedgwood (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. LTD, London & Bradford, 1963 [1939]), 66-67.

⁶⁷ Henry Kamen, *Spain 1469-1714: A Society of Conflict*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman Publishers, 1991), 10.

similarly acceptable European traits. As such, New World natives, including the Aztecs, were seen by the conquistadors as existing in a social setting outside of the civilized, European community. Combining this rationale with their aforementioned understandings of religious practices, Aztecs were ultimately labeled as less than human, barbaric by nature, and in need of church authority.⁶⁸

Similar to Origen's and Augustine's use of Plato and Plotinus to promote Christian conversion, sixteenth century scholars manipulated Christianity with Aristotelian theories of uncivilized beings in order to rationalize the domination and acquisition of New World lands, wealth, and peoples. Many Spaniards of the sixteenth century justified the actions of conquistadors and colonizers as being direct consequences of forcibly Christianizing a pagan state. Aristotle's idea of natural slavery⁶⁹, Machiavelli's concept of a tyrannical state, Luther's theological limitations of religious interpretation, and Erasmus' eurocentric interpretation of proper religious practices became central factors for rationalizing the destruction of New World cultures and religions, and ultimately became a justifiable, philosophical theories behind the expansion into the New World, and the destruction of the Aztec religion.

Building on the concepts discussed in the previous paragraphs, sixteenth-century European intellectualism incorporated centuries of religious rhetoric to justify the conquest of Aztecs and the demonization of their religion. It is important to clarify the theological complexities within Spanish thought and its application to the New World. Writers of early New World history can be divided into two general subheadings, Romanticists and Scientific Analyzers.⁷⁰ Romanticists, such as Christopher Columbus and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, approached the study of Native American customs with preconceived religious and philosophical notions of natives as uncivilized barbarians, incapable of developing complex religious systems independent of European or Asian contacts. These chroniclers tended to focus on the aesthetically appealing aspects of native life (e.g., architecture), while openly condemning New World social practices and religious customs (e.g., human sacrifice). Believing that implementing European culture would effectively transform pagan native societies, Romanticists manipulated traditional Aztec customs in hopes of bringing conformity and creating an arena for Spanish domination. In contrast, writers of the Scientific Analyzers group (e.g., Bartolomé de Las Casas, and José de Acosta) attempted to employ more systematic and objective interpretations of Spanish-Aztec contact. Although still heavily laden with subjective ideologies of Christianization and conquest, these writers attempted to develop mentalities reflecting a more secular approach to the treatment of Aztec peoples. Therefore, various alternate lines of reasoning were constructed in order to explain Spanish rationales for undermining native customs and religious traditions.

Although the categories of Romanticists and Scientific Analyzers explain the general foundation for early modern intellectual thought, a more specific categorization of individual mentalities must be developed in order to explain the various influences impacting early writers of the New World. Divided into the five subdivisions, chroniclers, evangelists (friars and theologians), intellectuals, political writers and indigenous narratives, the early writers of the New World were impacted by various European ideological determinants for interpreting the historical past of the Aztecs. Members of the early chronicler group, Christopher Columbus, Fernando Cortés, Sir Francis Drake, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún usually limited their writings to the aesthetically appealing cultural, environmental, architectural, and social conditions of native peoples, and excluded all ideas of a non-Christian nature, such as references to cosmic dualism. Evangelistic writers José de Acosta, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and Gonzalo Fernández de

⁶⁸ Pagden, 8.

⁶⁹ In this context, Aristotle's theory was used in reference to specific barbarous activities (i.e., ritualistic killings, human sacrifice, and pagan mentalities.)

⁷⁰ Both categorizations are based on the criteria established in the given text, Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary H. Gossen, *The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and Culture of a Native American Civilization* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 21-23. I have categorized as Scientific Analyzers those writers referred to as Scientific Precursors in the original volume. The term Scientific Precursors suggests that Europe prior to this time was not involved with scientific thought; therefore I chose to change the categorization to Scientific Analyzers in order to bring more clarity to the subject.

Oviedo y Valdés, Fray Juan de Mora, Diego de Landa, and Sahagún were more concerned with studying the natives' social and religious systems in order to develop an effective way to Christianize them and restructure their societal roles.⁷¹ Early intellectual writers of the New World (Landa and - García de Palacio) focused their studies around the notions of Spanish supremacy in cultural and religious affairs, reinforcing the idea that the Aztecs were uncivilized and incapable of constructing complex structures and social systems without European help.⁷² Political writers, such as New and Old World officials of the Spanish crown (Bernal Díaz, Don Luis de Velasco, Diego Delgadillo), tended to exclude most references regarding the negative treatments of native peoples, and, in turn, presented Spain with stories of the harmonious relations between Spanish and Aztecs. The final group, the Aztecs themselves, among whom Don Pedro Enrique Moctezuma stands out, wrote numerous chronicles as well as various letters addressing their mistreatments, abuses, and their societal resilience. These five categories, when combined with the subheadings of Romanticism and Scientific Analysis, establish the understandings encompassing Spanish mentalities of the New World and the reconfiguration of Aztec religion.⁷³

Conclusion

As the authors of this paper have argued, Church rhetoric in both Late Roman Antiquity and New World Spanish Colonialism promoted idealized, eurocentrically-based interpretations of non-Christian peoples. As both primary and secondary sources have illustrated, paralleling tactics were used by religious theologians in both eras to manipulate non-European, pagan peoples to forcibly conform to orthodox, European views of "proper" society. By looking at both periods in conjunction, this article has demonstrated that an engrained sense of cultural and religious superiority justified the condemnation of pagan groups while, at the same time, promoted the retention of certain pagan beliefs. As such, scholars in both Late Antiquity Rome and Colonial New Spain used religio-centric determinants to undermine and ultimately transform pagan religious beliefs. The dehumanization of pagan thought coupled with Christian ideas of superiority in both religion and culture justified the eventual eradication of the improper pagan traditions and beliefs.

Specifically looking at the biases of prominent theologians used in Late Antiquity Roman scholarship (i.e., Augustine of Hippo and Origen) and the rhetoric used by fifteenth and sixteenth century Spanish theologians (e.g., Aristotle, Erasmus, Thomas Aquinas, Bartolome de Las Casas, and Jose Acosta) this text analyzed the ramifications of Christo-centric rhetoric on New World natives and Old World pagans. Hence, the manifestation of these ideas combined with the Christological structure resulted in the impediment of Aztec and Manichean religious thought. The authors of this document have attempted to place both eras into a more objective historical framework. In the process, this text has uncovered various factors which contributed to the representation of non-Christian cultures in both New World and Old World contexts. Specifically, it illustrated the way in which Late Antiquity Roman theologians demonized Manichean practices in order to promote their own religious interpretations; and it showed how religious and intellectual rhetoric of fifteenth and sixteenth century Spanish Catholicism promoted the transformation of Aztec culture. In both instances, Manichean and Aztec religious practices were deemed by the Christian faith as weak, flawed, and incapable of true Christian salvation.

Hoping to clarify certain misconceptions within the field of Aztec and Manichean historical studies, the authors of this document identified specific factors causing the transformation and reconfiguration of both groups. In doing so, it sheds light on the importance of pagan religions prior to and following their manipulation under Christian orthodoxy. Only recently have historians begun revising the idealized Christian, white, male, Northern European interpretation of history

⁷¹ Bernal, 40.

⁷² Ibid, 22, 29-30.

⁷³ For more specific explanations of the Romantics and Scientific Analyzers/ Scientific Precursors, See Rhianna C. Rogers, [The Spider Woman Rules No More?: The Transformation and Resilience of Aztec Female Roles](#) (Master Thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2004), 120-144; Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary H. Gossen, [The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and Culture of a Native American Civilization](#) (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 21-23.

and the facts surrounding marginalized groups (e.g., Manicheans and Aztecs.) Based on the implementation of more objective interpretations of the past, modern works, such as the ones quoted in this text, have expressed the malleability of Christian law and theology and the way in which pagans manipulated it, thus, retaining aspects of their proto-Christian religious authority.

Although this paper excludes specific references to Manichean and Aztec resilience, overtime, both groups were able to retain certain aspects of their pagan systems of dualistic reciprocity. Obtaining control over economic, political, and religious practices at certain levels (e.g., the Aztecs were able to reinstate their traditional religious practices at the local level and the Manichean dualistic practices persisted well into the Middle Ages) both groups were able to re-implement aspects of cosmic dualism, despite the creation of various Christian institutions of control. In the case of the Aztecs, both men and women continued certain religious practices (e.g., Our Lady of Guadalupe) in the comforts of their own homes away from the grasp of Christian authorities. In the Manichean case, the acculturation of different religious traditions (i.e., Zoroastrianism and Buddhism) allowed them to function outside of traditional orthodoxy in the Catholic Church. In essence, both groups combined traditional pagan mythological beliefs with Christian interpretations of the spiritual and physical worlds to once again bring about the manifestation of pagan, polytheistic practices in an orthodox, monotheistic Christian setting. With further research, these ideas will be expounded upon in a subsequent text, which will include both Manichean and Aztec religious resilience.

Examining both the Christology of the time and socially constructed aspects of European life influencing the transformation of both the Aztec and Manichean worlds, this text has shed light on an aspect of history typically ignored by mainstream historical scholarship. Therefore, the overall aim of this paper was to aid in the understanding of both groups in a non-traditional, historical context. Rather than perpetuate the biased histories previously associated with them, this authors of this text attempted to discuss two specific groups from different eras in history in order to illustrate the value of comparative works. In the process, this text will hopefully contribute to an ongoing discussion of the importance of marginalized groups in a globalized, comparative framework. By looking at the religious culmination of Spanish and Roman thought in both eras, the text has helped deconstruct previously subjective historical interpretations of these eras and has shed light on the actualities of societal domination as dictated by European imperialistic tactics of religious domination.⁷⁴

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