Evangelization and Cultural Conflict in Colonial Mexico

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Edited by

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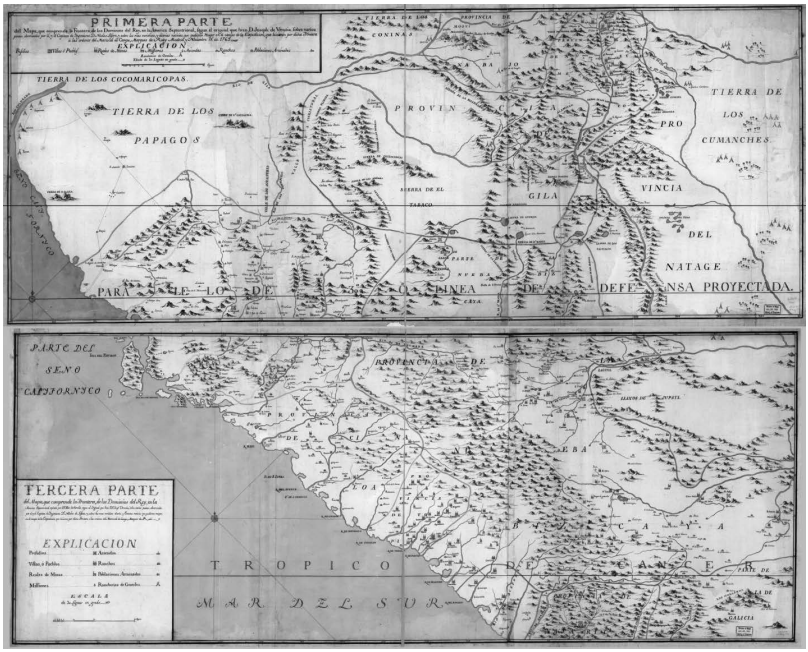

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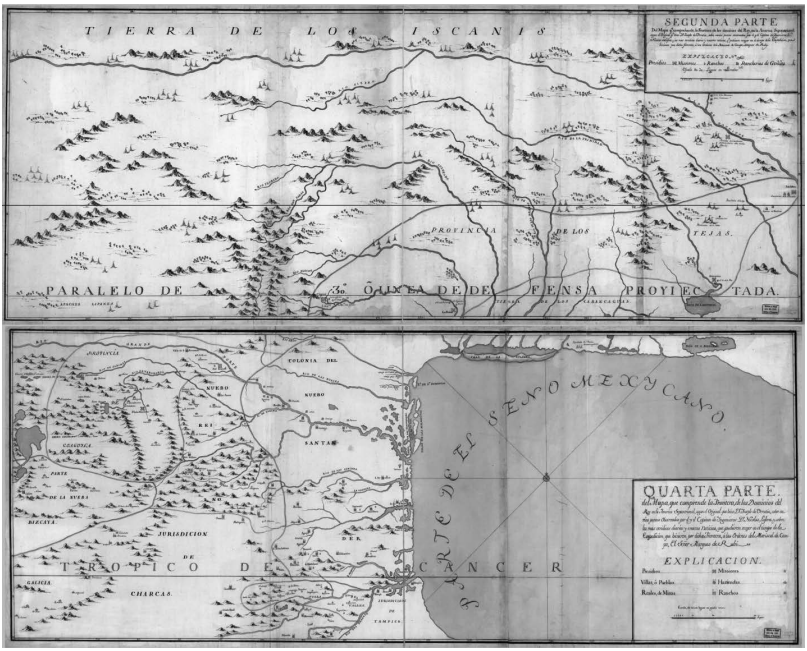

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INTRODUCTION

In 1539, the first bishop of Mexico, the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga, had the inquisition try and execute don Carlos, the *tlatoani* or native lord of Tezcoco. Tezcoco was the site of one of the first four missions the grey robes established in Mexico. Zumárraga accused don Carlos of heretical dogmatism. This meant that don Carlos was not fully collaborating with the Franciscans in the elimination of traditional religious and social practices. The bishop had don Carlos burned at the stake on December 1, 1539 in an *auto de fé*, or an act of public theater designed to send a message to the native population.[1] Despite extreme measures such as the execution of an important native leader, the imposition of the new faith and suppression of the old proved to be elusive to the first generation of missionaries who came to Mexico. The missionaries launched a cultural war to suppress the competing beliefs, and at times the campaign led to public punishments and executions, as in the case of don Carlos. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the missionaries, natives continued to practice their old religious beliefs alongside Catholicism. The natives interpreted the new faith in ways different from what the missionaries intended.

The theme of this collection of essays is Evangelization and Cultural Conflict in Colonial Mexico. Essays in this collection investigate the persistence of traditional religious and social practices in central Mexico as well as on the southern and northern frontiers, and contribute to our understanding of the effort to evangelize the native populations of colonial Mexico. I conceptualize the topic as being a manifestation of a "cultural war." In other words, it was a conflict initiated by a missionary campaign designed to impose new cultural and religious norms on a recently subjugated population, resistance to the imposition of the new religion by the natives of colonial Mexico, and the continued practice of traditional religious beliefs by many natives, even if in covert form. The first missionaries, the so-called Franciscan "twelve apostles," arrived in central Mexico in 1524, the first Dominicans followed two years later in 1526,

[1] For a recent analysis of the trial of don Carlos see Patricia Lopes Don, *Bonfires of Culture: Franciscans, Indigenous Leaders, and Inquisition in Early Mexico, 1524-1540* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

and the Augustinians arrived in 1533. Their efforts to win the hearts, minds, souls, and loyalty of the native populations gave mixed results, and within several decades the missionaries faced the reality of the persistence of native religious practices within a tradition that the missionaries found difficult to control and modify. The missionaries discovered that their conceptualization of religion was very different from that of the native populations.

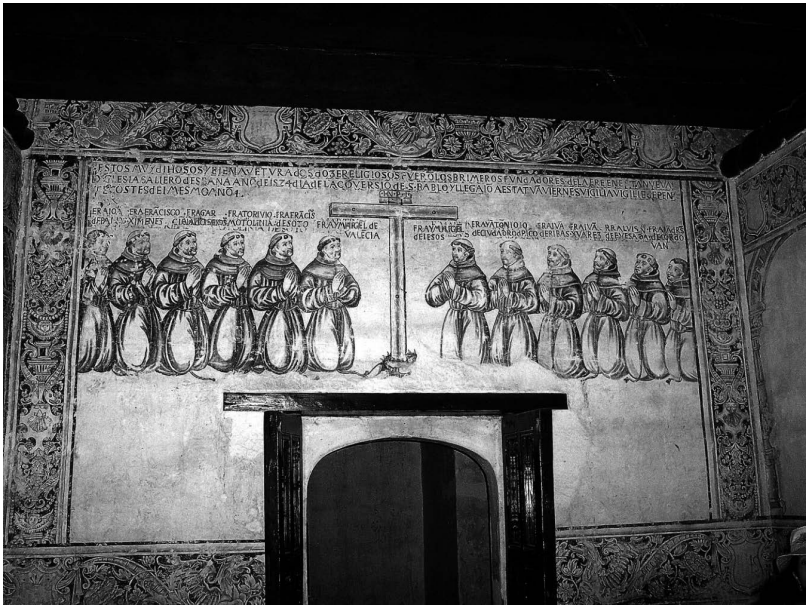

Figure 2: The "Twelve Apostles" from a mural at San Miguel Huejotzingo (Puebla).

Within a decade of the initiation of the so-called "spiritual conquest" the missionaries confronted cases of what they called idolatry or the persistence of native religious practices, and apostasy or straying from the teachings of the Catholic Church. One case of what the missionaries considered to be idolatry occurred at the Augustinian convent at Ocuila (modern Ocuilan, Estado de México) around 1540. The Augustinian missionary Antonio de Aguilar, O.S.A., uncovered evidence of covert sacrifices to pre-Hispanic gods that included blood sacrifices made in a cave close to the convent. The Augustinian also discovered idols and other paraphernalia related to traditional religious practices in the houses of several natives. One native named Tezcacoacatl confessed, and also

implicated a native carpenter named Collin who was not a Christian.[2] The details reported in the record of the investigation suggest that the natives made sacrifices to Tláloc the rain god and Xipe Tótec the god of the fertility of the soil. These two gods were important in order to ensure bountiful crops, and in the logic of the native world view the new faith did not offer a viable alternative to traditional gods that had provided the elements necessary for the agriculture that sustained central Mexican civilization for centuries prior to the arrival of the Spaniards.

Figure 3: Detail of the Malinalco vault mural showing a speech and song glyph.

In a seminal study anthropologist Louise Burkhart analyzed the dialogue between missionaries and the Náhuas populations in central Mexico, and particularly how natives conceptualized the elements of Christian doctrine within the context of their own world view and religious traditions. Moreover, Burkhart debunked the older interpretation of an early and easy conversion to Catholicism. Burkhart discussed the limitations of the early evangelization campaign, including the missionaries' lack of understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and particularly culturally embedded religious concepts. In discussing the dynamic of the Náhuas-Christian dialogue, Burkhart analyzed the missionaries and their methods from an anthropological perspective. She also documented specific examples of how the missionaries and the natives interpreted religious concepts in different

[2] Luis González Obregón, paleography and preliminary note, *Proceso Inquisitorial del Cacique de Tetzcoco,* reprint Edition (México, D.F.: Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, 2009), 105-108.

ways. For example, the missionaries taught an association of Jesus with the sun, and assumed that the natives would understand the symbolism in the same way as did Europeans. However, the natives interpreted this symbolism within their own cultural context, and instead identified Jesus as a sun deity, which was not what the missionaries had intended.[3]

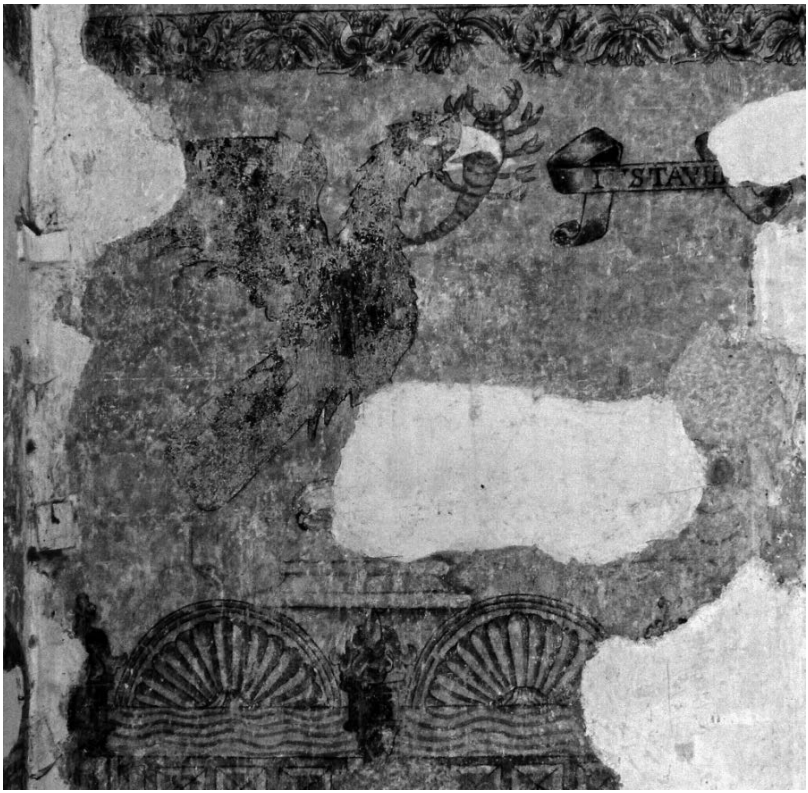

Figure 4: Mural in the *Tecpan* at Metztitlán (Hidalgo) that depicts an eagle grasping a scorpion.

[3] Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 9-13 and passim; Louise Burkhart, "The Solar Christ in Náhuatl Doctrinal Texts of Early Colonial Mexico," *Ethnohistory* 35:3 (summer 1988), 234-255.

Figure 5: The *Tecpan* at Tlayacapan (Morelos) showing embedded pre-Hispanic stones on the façade.

In a recent study art historian Eleanor Wake documented other ways in which natives interpreted the new faith on their own terms through the incorporation of native religious iconography into the new sacred complexes the missionaries had built. According to Wake, it was the native religious concepts and images that framed the sacred in the interplay between traditional central Mexican beliefs and the new faith.[4] In other words, the natives incorporated their own religious concepts and images into the ostensibly Christian iconography of sixteenth century churches and convents, and created a dual faith that included both Christian and native religious beliefs that existed alongside each other. An example of Wake's interpretation can be found in the so-called "paradise murals" in the lower cloister of the Augustinian convent at Malinalco (Estado de México). The murals incorporated pre-Hispanic speech and song glyphs. Wake interpreted the murals as having been a flower song in motion. The song glyphs, for example, are divided into eight sections that were similar to the eight paired verse sequence of a pre-Hispanic song poem. Wake

[4] Eleanor Wake, *Framing the Sacred: The Indian Churches of Early Colonial Mexico* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

concluded that the presence of the song glyph was not a mere "signature" left by the artist as other scholars have argued, but rather was an indication that the native artists converted the mural program into a flower song with a meaning different from what the missionaries had intended. The vault sections number 16, which Wake further argued could be indicative of the murals having been the "performance of two flowery songs or a repeated rendering of one."[5]

Religious structures were not the only space that natives used for iconography related to traditional religious practices. Indigenous civil buildings such as the *tecpan* (municipal palace of the native government) also served to reproduce religiously associated iconography, and it was a space that was not under the control of the missionaries. A mural fragment on one of the walls of the *tecpan* at Metztitlán (Hidalgo) provides an example. The mural depicts an eagle grasping a scorpion in its beak. The symbolism in the mural may have been associated with *pulque* deities.[6] Metztitlán and neighboring parts of what today is Hidalgo were important *pulque* producing regions, and the symbolism linked to *pulque* would have been a direct challenge to the missionaries, who attempted to suppress *pulque* consumption because of its ritual significance. The Augustinians who staffed the missions in the Barranca de Metztitlán and in the Valle de Mezquital had murals created that attempted to teach that *pulque* consumption would open natives up to demonic influence. Mural panels with this theme survive in the open chapel at San Nicolás Tolentino Actopan and the *visita* chapel Santa María Xoxoteco, which was a *visita* (satellite community) of Metztitlán.[7] The *tecpan* mural served to validate the ritual importance of *pulque*.

Native leaders incorporated iconography associated with traditional religious beliefs into other *tecpan* structures, as in the case of the *tecpan* at Tlayacapan (Morelos). There are *chalchihuitl* embedded stones on the exterior walls of the *tecpan* that symbolized water and the water-earth-fertility religion associated with Tláloc, and flowers which may have symbolized the fertility of the earth, and Xipe Tótec. It was a common practice prior to the arrival of the missionaries to decorate sacred structures with stones that carried religious symbolism. For example, the rear wall of the *templo mayor* at Tlatelolco (Distrito Federal) is decorated

[5] Ibid*,* 249-251. The quote is taken from p. 251.
[6] For a discussion of maguey and pulque deities in early colonial iconography see Wake, *Framing the Sacred,* 206-214.
[7] Robert H. Jackson, *Conflict and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Central Mexico: The Augustinian War on and Beyond the Chichimeca Frontier* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013), 95-98.

with *chalchihuitl* and other stones. There was no reason to not do the same with the new sacred structures that replaced the temples. The incorporation of *chalchihuitl* and other stones into public structures also provides tantalizing evidence of the survival of the water-earth-fertility religion following the Spanish conquest.

Figure 6: Embedded stones along the upper façade of the *tecpan*.

The sixteenth century missionaries conceptualized their evangelization campaign as a war against Satan and his demonic minions. They believed that Satan had inspired pre-Hispanic religion, and they launched a war to vanquish him from the hearts and minds of the natives. The missionaries couched the rhetoric that described the process of evangelization and conversion in terms of expelling demons and saving the souls of pagan natives. Satan continued to rule in areas not subject to the cross, the symbol the missionaries used to denote the triumph of the new faith. In describing the natives of Michoacán, one Augustinian chronicler noted:

> …although those people were very idolatrous and full of idols in caves, after our missionaries (*Predicadores*) arrived and catechized them, they later left the (old faith), and easily expelled (*lanzaban*) the demons.[8]

A recent study explored the parameters of the "cultural war" along the porous Chichimeca frontier in the sixteenth century within the context of the belief in Satan's agency in the evolution of pre-Hispanic religion. This was the frontier between sedentary and non-sedentary natives. Augustinian missionaries launched a war against Satan on both sides of the frontier in

[8] See Fray Diego Basalenque, O.S.A., *Historia de la Provincia de San Nicolás Tolentino de Michoacán, del Orden de N.P.S. Agustín,* 2 volumes (México, D.F.: Tip. Barbedillo y Cia., 1886), vol. 1, 96. The quote reads "…aunque aquella gente era muy idolatra y llenos de Idolos en cuevas, luego que llegaban nuestros Predicadores, y los catequizaban, y con facilidad lanzaban los demonios." In the same account reference is made to "expelling the demon from their heart" ("…hechase de sus corazones al demonio…), p. 67.

the 1550s, following the outbreak of a conflict between the Spanish and the bands of nomadic hunters and gatherers collectively known as Chichimecas. They initiated their evangelization campaign among the sedentary native population of central Mexico, but continued it beyond the Chichimeca frontier to the fringes of colonial Mexico in missions established among both sedentary and non-sedentary natives such as the Pames in the Sierra Gorda region. The Pames resisted efforts to change their way of life for more than two centuries.[9]

Figure 7: A *chalchihuitl* stone on the upper façade of the *tecpan* at Tlayacapan.

This volume contains eleven original essays that document different aspects of the missionary evangelization campaign in colonial Mexico. The first essay examines the persistence of traditional religious practices as manifested in cases of idolatry and apostasy. It employs a mural in the Dominican *doctrina* (mission) at Tetela del Volcán (Morelos) to analyze the sixteenth century "cultural war." The essay also examines embedded stones, pre-Hispanic stones placed into churches and convents, as evidence

[9] Jackson, *Conflict and Conversion*, especially chapter 5; Robert H. Jackson, "The Chichimeca Frontier and the Evangelization of the Sierra Gorda, 1550-1770," *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 47 (julio-diciembre, 2012), 46-91.

of the persistence of native religious practices, and particularly rites associated with water and the fertility of the earth that were essential for the survival of an agrarian-based society. The state religion that focused on the principal deities such as Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcóatl had less meaning to the farmers that labored to produce food. The rain deities Tláloc (Náhuas) or Dzahui (Nudzahui) and the god of the fertility of the soil Xipe Tótec (Náhuas) were more important. Even though the missionaries attempted to transform these deities into Christian saints, they were unable to suppress covert sacrifices to these gods.

As already noted, the Franciscans were the first missionaries to arrive in Mexico in 1524. Five essays in this collection document aspects of their evangelization campaign. Miguel Ángel Segundo Guzmán uses painted images from the convent church at Tecamachalco (Puebla) and Franciscan texts to analyze the eschatological approach of the missionaries. Gabriel Márquez Ramírez provides a general overview of Franciscan evangelization methods in sixteenth century central Mexico. The Franciscans established missions in different parts of Mexico including the Yucatán as well as the northern Frontier. Angela Fernández Pérez shows how the Maya in the Yucatán interacted and collaborated with the Franciscans. Maria Wade explores the functioning of Franciscan mission in New Mexico in the eighteenth century, following the reconquest of the province in the wake of a major native uprising in 1680. Although located on the far northern frontier, the Franciscans initiated the New Mexico evangelization campaign at the end of the sixteenth century based on the methods and organization they developed earlier in the century in central Mexico. Eric Schroeder offers an analysis of Franciscan missionary practices on the eighteenth century Texas frontier.

The Catholic Church attempted to control the flow of ideas into Mexico, particularly in the wake of the Protestant reformation. Book censorship was one means employed to accomplish this goal. Albert Palacios analyzes book censorship in Spain and Mexico in the sixteenth century. Images played an important role in the evangelization of the native populations, but also in maintaining proper morals among the urban populations of colonial Mexico. Francisco Manzano and Consuelo García Ponce examine representations of the final judgment in seventeenth century paintings. The final judgment and torments in hell were potent images missionaries also employed in the sixteenth century evangelization of the native population. Popular cultural expressions such as dance also came under the scrutiny of the Catholic Church and Holy Office in colonial Mexico, as outlined in the contribution by Margarita Orozco Trejo. The repression of popular dance continued until the end of the

colonial period in Mexico. In the late 1760s, for example, popular distrust of the clergy manifested itself in the satirical song and dance the Chuchumbé, which the inquisition investigated and banned.

How did the natives respond to the evangelization agenda of the missionary orders? Two essays in the collection examine native responses to the "spiritual conquest." Gerardo Lara Cisneros documents efforts to impose Christianity on the natives living in the Sierra Gorda region. The Sierra Gorda was a frontier region just beyond the Chichimeca frontier settled by bands of nomadic hunters and gatherers, but also by small colonies of sedentary natives. During the entire colonial period missionaries from different orders attempted to change the way of life of the groups of hunters and gatherers that inhabited the region, but with mixed results. The natives living in the Sierra Gorda were loath to abandon their way of life. The natives also viewed missionaries as agents of the colonial order, and killed many. Martin Rizzo discusses the assassination in 1812 of Franciscan missionary Andrés Quintana at Santa Cruz mission on the Alta California mission frontier. The details of how the natives assassinated the Franciscan point to this having been a ritual-political action couched in terms of native culture and particularly concepts of the afterlife. The natives mutilated the body of the Franciscan so that he would suffer for an eternity in death.

This collection contributes to the growing literature that critically analyzes earlier assumptions about the "spiritual conquest." The early interpretation of the ease of the evangelization of the native populations by scholars such as Robert Ricard proved to be incorrect. The "cultural war" in colonial Mexico was a give and take process, and the natives shaped the process on their own terms.

Chapter One

The Miracle of the Virgin of the Rosary Mural at Tetela del Volcán (Morelos): Conversion, the Baptismal Controversy, a Dominican Critique of the Franciscans, and the Culture Wars in Sixteenth Century Central Mexico

Robert H. Jackson

Figure 1-1: The church and convent San Juan Bautista Tetela del Volcán (Morelos).

Figure 1-2: Illustration from the 1778 *Crónica de Michoacán* depicting the process of catechism and baptism. Demons lurk behind the natives attempting to thwart the missionaries, but baptism marks the triumph of the new faith over Satan. The title of the illustration is: Aquí se demuestra el que habiendo venido noticia de la entrega voluntaria y obediencia que dió el gran Caltzontzin… a Cortés, los reyes de Tzirosco e Iguatzio pasaron a rendir obediencia y pedir bautismo, y se demuestra los castigos que hacían a los que faltaban a las buenas costumbres. Archivo General de la Nación, México, D.F., Historia, 9:17, f. 148.

On the second floor of the cloister of the ex-Dominican convent San Juan Bautista Tetela del Volcán (see Figure 1-1) is an enigmatic mural that partially relates an incident that reportedly occurred in 1541. The incident the mural memorializes symbolized how sixteenth century missionaries in central Mexico conceptualized the process of evangelization. The missionaries believed that the baptism of natives marked a transition in their spiritual lives. The missionaries also believed that they were involved in an ongoing war with Satan to win the hearts, minds, and souls of the natives. Visual representations of the evangelization process depicted demons attempting to reclaim the natives at the same time that the missionaries indoctrinated them in the mysteries of the new faith. Once the missionaries baptized the natives, however, the demons were no longer present, and their absence marked their triumph in the war with Satan. The missionaries also believed that Satan inspired pre-Hispanic religion, and that Satan governed those parts of Mexico where the missionaries had yet to plant the Christian cross. An example of a visual representation of this belief is an illustration from the Augustinian *Crónica de Michoacán* that depicts Augustinian missionaries catechizing natives. Demons surround the natives receiving religious instruction, and also appear behind a group of assembled natives with their lord, thus establishing the connection between the native world before the conquest and Satanic influence. In the final section of the illustration the missionary baptizes a group of natives, and through this symbolic act vanquishes the demons (see Fig. 1-2).

Baptism marked salvation through incorporation into the Christian community. Sinners and those who died not having been baptized did not receive God's grace, and instead were consigned to hell, as shown in a sixteenth century picture catechism (see Figure 1-3). The mural at Tetela del Volcán conveyed the same doctrinal lesson. The mural memorialized an incident that reportedly occurred in 1541 at another Dominican mission, Santa María Magdalena Tepetlaóxtoc located near Tezcoco. The Dominicans established a *doctrina* at Tepetlaóxtoc around 1527 or 1528, and it was one of their first missions.[1] The Dominican chronicler Fr. Alonso Franco, O.P. narrated the incident that involved Fr. Domingo de la Anunciación, O.P. According to the account, a native resident of Tepetlaóxtoc died while Anunciación was away from the *doctrina* visiting other communities. The native was unable to confess. Anunciación returned, prayed for divine intervention and particularly for the intervention of the Virgin of the Rosary, and the native reportedly revived

[1] José Tinajero Morales, "La vicaria dominica de Tepetlaóxtoc, eremitismo y evangelización ¿Contradicción o complemento," *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 41 (julio-diciembre, 2009), 17-44.

long enough to receive confession before finally dying. The account further noted that the native told the missionary that: "When my soul left my body demons took possession of it, and with abominable appearance and terrible bellowing took it."[2] The reference to the Virgin of the Rosary was associated with the confraternity of the rosary that the Dominicans first established in Mexico City in 1538, and soon after at Tepetlaóxtoc. It continued to function at Tepetlaóxtoc as late as 1853.[3]

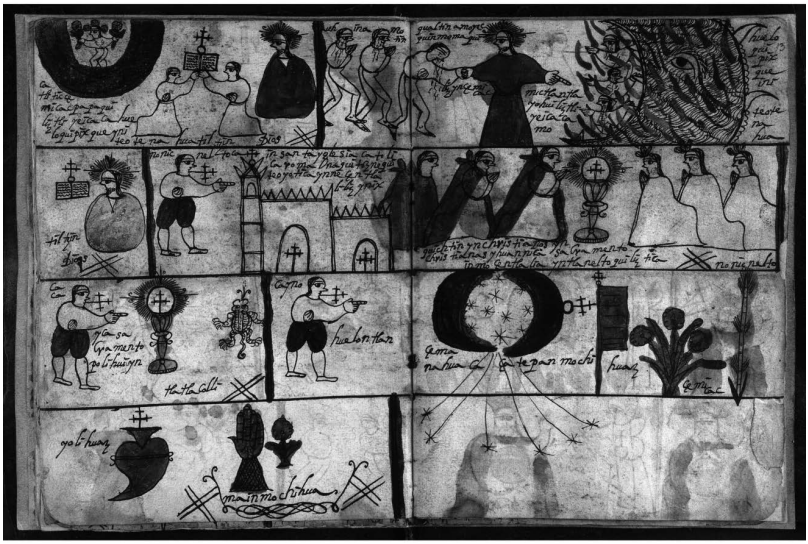

Figure 1-3: Panel from the *Doctrina Cristiana* regarding death and salvation through conversion. *Doctrina Cristiana*, Edgerton Manuscript 2898. Courtesy of the British Museum.

Several scholars have interpreted the mural to be a depiction of the 1541 incident reported at Tepetlaóxtoc. In a study of the convent, Carlos Martínez Marín identified the miracle of the Virgin of the Rosary as the theme of the mural, and also noted its differences from the murals in the

[2] Fr. Alonso Franco, O.P., *Segunda parte de la Historia de la Provincia de Santiago de Mexico Orden de Predicadores* (México, D.F.: Museo Nacional, 1900), 35-36. The original quote reads "En saliendo mi alma del cuerpo se apoderaron de ella los demonios, y con abominables figuras y terribles bramidos la llevaron.

[3] Tinajero Morales, "La vicaria dominica de Tepetlaóxtoc," 33.