

Mesoamerican Worlds: From the Olmecs to the Danzantes
Life and Death in the Templo Mayor, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma
Mesoamerica's Classic Heritage: Teotihuacán to the Aztecs, David Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, and Scott Sessions
The Offerings of the Templo Mayor, Leonardo López Luján
Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist, Alfredo López Austin
Twin City Tales: A Hermeneutical Reassessment of Tula and Chichén Itzá, Lindsay Jones
Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chronicles of Mexican Civilization, 1250–1569, Georges Baudot

Series Editors:

David Carrasco
Eduardo Matos Moctezuma

Editorial Board:

Michio Araki
Alfredo López Austin
Anthony Aveni
Elizabeth Boone
Doris Heyden
Charles H. Long
Henry B. Nicholson

Eating Landscape

Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan

Philip P. Arnold

University Press of Colorado 1999

6 The (No)Place of Sahagún

Initially, the zeal to forge a utopian world from what was seen as the raw materials of the New World (which included its “primitive” inhabitants) initiated the production of texts. In light of the previous discussion of the Aztec ritual occupation of land, the question emerges as to what kind of landscape does the text engender? What kind of performance originates from occupying a utopian world? These are questions that can be asked of sixteenth-century Mexico but are no less urgent for our present context. My intention is to critically evaluate aspects of utopia in the New World, not only with reference to Mesoamerican texts (as in the previous chapter), but with reference to how it came to terms with a living landscape (i.e., Tlalocan) that existed previous to European occupation. An examination of Sahagún’s interpretive location in the Valley of Mexico is then also a self-conscious appraisal of scholarly activity. This serves to heighten the disjunction between those involved in textual understanding (including Sahagún and other contemporary scholars) and those involved in ritual articulation (including the Aztecs and other indigenous people) in the process of occupying the Americas. Using Sahagún’s work to reflect larger issues, my intention is to dramatize the disjunction between locative and utopian worldviews as a precondition

for understanding Aztec religion and radically other than colonial or modern understandings. Looking at the "referential practice" of these worldviews gives us some position by which to adjudicate the distance between the Aztecs and the Europeans.

Evidence of a radical disjunction between Native Americans and Europeans is borne out of the devastation of conquest. According to recent demographic studies, approximately 80 percent of the nearly 20 million people of Mesoamerica died within the first sixty years of European occupation.¹ Although many died as a result of European diseases rather than cold-blooded extermination, Crosby has shown that the consequences of the biological shock of new illnesses on Native people in the Americas was no less imperialistic than outright warfare.² This enormous loss of life in the years immediately following 1492 came to be known as the "Black Legend," a myth of Spanish brutality that was largely the creation of Bartolomé de las Casas, and then utilized by Protestant countries in northern Europe to fuel anti-Catholic sentiments and justify European commercial expansion in other parts of the Americas.³ Although the justifications for conquering the Americas may have differed in various European countries, the consequences of European occupation throughout the Americas were consistent in generating a tremendous loss of life, culture, and land and resulted in the shrinking of indigenous communities up to the present day.⁴ While the Aztecs are renowned for human sacrifice, as discussed below, these practices pale in comparison with the European extermination of humans.

The Conquest is, at once, proof of the radical Otherness of Europeans in the Americas and an impediment to fostering a locative understanding of religion. To explore religion as tied to the human occupation of a meaningful landscape seems closer to approximating Aztec religion (if not most Native American religions). Yet in applying this definition of religion to the colonial Spanish (or other "American religions"), it is apparent that Sahagún, as well as others of his time, would not have seen landscape as the primary point of orientation for their religion. Rather, the transcendent realm, or heavenly world of God, was more important than material life. European optimism about the utopian possibilities of the New World simulta-

neously limited the colonial understanding of the Americas as an important *religious* point of orientation, while at the same time justifying what Stannard calls "the American holocaust." This suggests that locating Sahagún, along with much of what is called "American religion," requires that the scholar of religion be self-consciously involved in the legacy of the Conquest. By comparing the religion of Sahagún with that of the Aztecs with reference to their material occupation of the New World, perhaps a fuller understanding of the impact of Native American religion can be brought to bear on the American experience.

Twentieth-century interest in Sahagún's work has generated a subcategory of Mesoamerican studies that is sometimes referred to as Sahaguntine studies. Due to the obscure character of his life and agenda, scholarly examination of Sahagún dovetails with the present issue of how to "locate" the author. While some of the particulars of Sahagún's life and intellectual tradition were fleshed-out in the previous chapter, we now turn more fully to those aspects of his material situation that articulate his place and practice in sixteenth-century Mexico.

Sometimes called the "father of modern ethnography," Sahagún and his work, both in terms of methodology and ethnographic detail, represent a conceptual shift in the organization of knowledge of the empirical Other.⁵ It seems evident that Sahagún had an agenda when constructing the *Florentine Codex*. His purpose was to carefully record the details of Aztec religious life so that they could be systematically identified and destroyed. He makes this agenda abundantly clear throughout the codex.⁶ These apologetics begin all of his writings, and they clearly frame an appropriate reading of the *Florentine*. In this light, however, the question becomes: How can Sahagún be at once the father of ethnography and its enemy?

Several scholars have been working on the conceptual and cosmological underpinnings of Sahagún's work, as examined earlier. These studies have proven to be profoundly revealing in tracing the methods of interpretation that he initiated with the *Florentine*. It is not my intention to necessarily add to these efforts, but rather to take

them in another direction. In the context of the current analysis of the Tlaloc cult as an indigenous hermeneutic of occupying Mexico, questions arise regarding the consequences of Sahagún's hermeneutical activity for a colonial occupation of the valley. Can his ethnographic project, reconceived as a hermeneutics of occupying the Valley of Mexico, illuminate interpretive dimensions of colonialism when set in relationship with pre-Columbian evidence? Furthermore, do Sahagún's writings shed additional light on current conceptions and problems of doing ethnography, archaeology, and history of religion? Does his interaction with the Aztec civilization, through writing, tell us something about the origins and meaning of the modern world and the occupation of the New World? The implications of these questions will be addressed in the final chapter, but first we must assess the place of Sahagún within the context of his writing about the Tlaloc cult.

An examination of the ritual descriptions in the facsimile of the *Florentine* reveals a marked distinction between the Spanish and Nahuatl columns.⁷ As Anderson has noted, any translation of the Nahuatl must also take into account the Spanish side of the page.⁸ The striking feature of the *Florentine* is that while the Spanish side physically parallels the Nahuatl, it is actually a running commentary, or gloss, of the action, and not a translation. Thus there is a shift from Nahuatl to Spanish voices, but Sahagún's interpretation in Spanish is authorized by the Nahuatl side. Both Spanish and Nahuatl voices are contained in the document, but the voices are not in dialogue with one another. If there is some interaction between Aztec and European worlds, it should be characterized as seepage rather than dialogue.⁹ Also, there is an interplay of authority between the Nahuatl and Spanish versions. The confines of the text do not allow us to participate in the activity of interaction, but only to participate in the canonization of the colonial project. The *Florentine* demonstrates that dialogue may or may not have taken place previous to the text's creation. Dialogue, as it is conceived by Tracy, is the hermeneutical activity of standing and negotiating the distance between various meaningful speakers.¹⁰ While dialogue, in this sense, is undoubtedly present between Sahagún, informant, and reader, this interaction itself goes unrecorded within the *Florentine*.

In a similar way, there is a striking absence of Sahagún's presence in the text. Even though he is the acknowledged author of this work, his absence is conspicuous in the descriptive aspects of the text. This contrasts with the work of Durán, for example, who also describes these same rituals in Spanish but in a more abbreviated and value-laden manner.¹¹ Durán is not timid about characterizing Aztec rituals as demonic, and he is less interested in writing an objective report of Aztec traditions. Likewise, he is untroubled about replacing Native perspectives for his own Spanish renderings of the rituals. The difference between Sahagún and Durán can, to some degree, be accounted for historically by distinctions between Franciscan and Dominican orders in Mexico.¹² Unlike the Dominicans, the Franciscans in the New World embraced an ethnographic-linguistic approach to their missionary activities; they wished to discover and utilize elements of indigenous worldviews that would correspond to Christian ones. This broke with the conventional wisdom of missionary activity in the Old World.¹³ But Sahagún went beyond the methodological rigor of his time. His decision to record Aztec life in Nahuatl proved to be an enormous undertaking. As he writes,

Another thing about the language which will also annoy those who may understand it, is that for one thing there are many synonymous names, and one way of speaking and one sentence is said in many ways. It became a challenge to know and write down all the words for each thing and all the ways of saying one sentence, and not only in this book but in the whole work.¹⁴

Without question, Sahagún worked hard to accurately represent the Aztecs. He drew on elements from his background to create new ways of recording their world. Given all this effort, however, one cannot help but wonder why his labor wasn't included in his final product. Sahagún's ethnographic style did not include his own creative labors—why? Instead he opted for a presentation of the Aztecs as if their world were transparent to him, and therefore crafts a fictive relationship for the reader.¹⁵ Analogous to his graphic use of illusionistic space, a presentation of Aztec life as if it were a transparent reality

expressed the fiction that Sahagún did not have, and did not need to have, an interaction with the Aztecs. One of the messages conveyed is that what needs to be known is bounded by the document. Ironically, while Sahagún committed his life and energy to the "practice" of working with the Aztecs, the activity of writing about their festivals does not include him. Yet this absence of Sahagún and the transparency of the Aztecs is a fiction that is promoted by the material consequences of book production, and which in turn materially authorized colonial existence. Sahagún was the editor—he framed much of what we currently know of pre-Columbian life.¹⁶

The consequences of his writing style are that there seems to be no connection between Native and European realities. Furthermore, in their seeming transparency, indigenous understandings can be misleadingly judged, seemingly on their own merits, or on the merits of others, apart from historical and cultural frameworks. As Fabian has pointed out, the consequences of writing about people conceptually distant from one's own world can lead to exploitative policies between powerful and weak nations.¹⁷ Sahagún's conceptual (not practical) absenteeism also results in his not being there. It expresses a certainty about what the world is (in particular, the New World) and what it is for. The successful elimination of other interpretations is achieved through his methodology combined with the medium of writing. While we have a dazzling array of cultural formulations in the *Florentine*, Sahagún chose not to regard them. He is an author involved in a monumental interpretive task, yet he cannot be present in the representations of that task.

Sahagún was a colonial inhabitant of Mexico. As with the Aztecs, his life was materially sustained by indigenous foods that were nurtured through the efforts of Native people. From an Aztec perspective, he was constituted and sustained by Tlalocan. Ideologically, however, Sahagún was oriented toward the book (both the sacred books of Christendom and his own ethnographic work) even though he was materially sustained indigenously. It was the book that simultaneously promoted a Franciscan utopian vision and authorized colonial occupation of it. The split between religious and bodily realities is therefore reified in the text. His identity was drawn exclusively, and defined

ideologically, from features of the Old World (Jerusalem). Sahagún's work reveals a discontinuity of occupying Mexico between locative and utopian religious perspectives that resulted from colonialism. Conceptually, he was not present, drawing instead on interpretive models outside his own bodily experience. Substantively, he was present, but his understanding was undermined by his relegating it to an imperfect, or "fallen," physical involvement. It is precisely this discontinuity of existence and meaning that, for my purposes, defines colonialism.

Currently in Mesoamerican studies, the predominate tact when utilizing the *Florentine Codex*, however, has been to ignore Sahagún's voice as much as possible. Ethnohistorians have attempted to isolate the Franciscan voice and Aztec voices in an attempt to determine exactly what was true Aztec culture. By various strategies of textual analysis, scholars have claimed to be able to distinguish regional variations of pre-Columbian culture. Also, they have reconstructed Sahagún's questions that were put to the local elders. The reasons for this kind of close examination of the text is what Carrasco calls a "hermeneutics of suspicion,"¹⁸ wherein the authority of the text has to be subverted in its interpretation to more clearly apprehend the cultural elements embedded in it. Through the author's reformatting of the data, these realities, it is supposed, have been silenced.

A thorough hermeneutics of suspicion would also allow contemporary scholars to question what would constitute an authoritative rendering of voices in the text, no matter whose they might be. Just as primary documents are at such a distance from a contemporary interpretive location, secondary sources are just as distant and not transparent to interpretation. From this perspective, Sahagún's work is just as remote from us as the Aztec and Nahuatl primary sources. But the reasons why both primary and secondary documents are remote are in opposition to one another. Primary texts (those created by pre-Columbian people themselves) are directly uninterpretable because they need to be read with reference to the material realities of ultimate significance (i.e., Tlalocan, in this case). These texts, and we could include archaeological evidence here, are interpretively remote because a scholarly rendering of their meaning necessarily eliminates those performative and material conditions that had rendered

them intelligible. Instead, they are read through a disjunctive colonial lens. Secondary sources, however, are remote because they seemingly present the pre-Columbian world as transparent to the reader, without the need to traverse the material disjunction that is characterized by the shift from Tlalocan to colonial worlds.

The interpretive gridlock of textual exegesis gives way to an appeal for an interpretive third term, which has an ongoing material substance and which can arbitrate between indigenous and colonial contexts. That third term is *landscape*, or Tlalocan. The religious implications of both an indigenous and colonial occupation of Tlalocan are clarified, because Tlalocan requires the ongoing assessment of the material and substantive qualities of existence. To some degree this is made possible by way of a phenomenological perspective in the history of religion.

It seems clear that creativity initiated and sustained Sahagún's work. Likewise, it is a similar creativity that promotes Mesoamerican scholarship.¹⁹ But there is a dire necessity to take stock of the consequences of one's creative impulses, particularly when the work involves a sustained conversation about the Other. I will examine the methodological implications of this issue in the final chapter. With reference to Sahaguntine and Mesoamerican studies, however, the issue is: What will appropriately anchor a creative hermeneutics of occupation? While acknowledging the ongoing creativity of interpretation, in all its attempts, what aspect of this process could intersect self-consciousness?

A beginning would be in acknowledging the significance of the material dimensions of one's interpretive location in such a way as to have that serve as an arena for cultural contact. For the Aztecs, it was the material necessity of the Tlaloc cult that focused the creative energies involved in the process of articulating and forming their cosmovision. While the creative energies of Sahagún's project were also an articulation of a European cosmovision, which resulted in cultural formation (some might argue for a uniquely Mexican identity),²⁰ the difficulty remains in finding the arena for interaction. To put the problem forth in terms of the Tlaloc cult: What is the place of Sahagún? Where does he belong? This becomes the critical question

when considering that he is absent from his work, as discussed above. With his involvement absent from the text, his stated aims for creating the *Florentine* (to uproot and exterminate Aztec religion) determine the ways in which the reader of his work interprets Aztec traditions. The utopian (no)place of Sahagún and his book is ubiquitous. Moreover, the tension between his simultaneous absence and omnipresence has required that Mesoamerican scholars must seek to discover his "true" identity apart from his interpretive activity.

Thus the difficulty of interpreting the *Florentine* is due, in large measure, to Sahagún's inhabiting an abstract space: space without material points of orientation. Writing was his mode of interaction with the Aztecs and Tlalocan. The *Florentine*, in his Franciscan tradition, was his means of divining the essential meanings of the world. The materiality of life in this world had to be rendered transparent (which, as for Bacon, implied a violent disruption) through his ethnographic work in order to imagine the full promise of a utopian (i.e., placeless) vision actualized through conquest. Likewise, a plurality of religious practices had to be erased and purified. Writing was the appropriate medium for this project and was the basis of a colonial occupation of the New World. It enabled Europeans to meaningfully inhabit any place as abstract space. For Eliade, it allowed Europeans to occupy "unfounded," insignificant space. The various meanings of landscape were overdetermined by the text. As a colonial inhabitant of New Spain, Sahagún's (no)place obfuscates Aztec realities. With reference to the *Florentine*, the colonial occupation of Tlalocan stands in stark contrast to the indigenous one. Through this process of indigenization, accounting for the material conditions of his own life and thought, Sahagún's work thus serves as a vehicle for promoting understanding between these worlds.

Conquest, therefore, is not an impediment to understanding the Aztecs but rather constitutes the basis for interpreting all pre-Columbian realities. Focusing on the disjunction between Aztec and European modes of occupying Tlalocan is an interpretive strategy for negotiating the distance between these worldviews. The disruption to the Aztecs through conquest was the condition that resulted in the creation of the textual sources in Mesoamerican studies. Stud-

ies of the Native people of the sixteenth century are not objective documents that give contemporary scholars an unhindered view of pre-Columbian worlds. An obvious point of critical importance regards the reliability or authority of books like the *Florentine*. But how are contemporary scholars to judge their reliability? What criteria can be utilized to make these judgments? These questions become more problematic when considering that textual production put in context (i.e., the beginning of ethnography in the Americas) is also a point of origin for contemporary understandings of scholarly work. Consideration of a hermeneutics of occupation in which texts like the *Florentine* play a significant role, but not in determining all the angles of interpretability, orients the scholar in such a way as to adjudicate the hermeneutical gap self-consciously.

An examination of Sahagún's location in the New World, with reference to the Aztecs, is an examination of the limits of his ability to adequately represent them in writing. As with other ethnographies, the *Florentine Codex* does not offer us the unobstructed, unhindered, and transparent view of Aztec religious life that was previously assumed. Sahagún's intentions to destroy Aztec ceremonial practices, which also justified his (and European) occupation of the New World, can be seen as just one of several limitations on his, and therefore our, understanding of the Aztecs.

Knowing Sahagún had a limited location, however, does not mean that he was not engaged in an important interpretive activity that has consequences today for our understanding the Aztecs. An acknowledgment of Sahagún's creativity in reformatting the pre-Columbian Aztec performative world into the world of books also suggests that the friar had some part in their contemporary creation. Using Charles Long's typology, Sahagún actively *signified* the meaning of Aztec culture, and was thus involved in their second creation.²¹ For Long, the first creation of a culture is where a meaningful orientation to the world is worked-out by a given community for itself. This, by virtue of its intimate connection to the material world, kin, language, etc., is unavailable to anyone outside that context (e.g., that world into which one is born). Particularly during the colonial

era, a second creative process came more aggressively into play. In the New World ethos, as the Others' first creation was being erased, they were being re-created in their second creation by being signified. Writing played an important role in this movement from first to second creations.

When relating the process of signification to Sahagún's work, however, one needs to consider the kind of place he hoped to engender. The New World of colonial Mexico had no intention of extending or developing a first creation. As O'Gorman indicated, the Americas were primarily an invention rather than a discovery.²² The second creation of the Aztecs, however, was formed in a textual utopian world, a disoriented (no)place, that by its nature, could not directly involve the reader in the performative modes of occupying land that were Aztec.

This study uses Sahagún as one of its primary sources for understanding Aztec rituals and therefore is also involved in the Aztecs' second creation. Some have seen this writing about the empirical other (i.e., ethnography) as part of a hegemonic process of colonialism that, like the military conquest of the Americas, eclipses Native American cultural traditions. But, if like the sacred, the Aztecs are unavailable in their first creation, then an important first step in a self-conscious, self-critical interpretation would be the acknowledgment that we are primarily involved in a secondary creative process. Writers such as the present author need to find some way to be responsible to their creations—or, to use Smith's language, to be rigorously self-conscious about their creative impulses.²³

Part of the strategy in this work has been to make an appeal to landscape as the third term that can stand to mediate between various understandings. The Aztecs, Sahagún, and the contemporary scholar need to be able to ground cultural contact around some *thing*. It is of little use to assume that the scholar can answer questions about others by citing various opaque sources. For my purposes, land has likewise served as the touchstone. As difficult and overdetermined as land may be on one side, and as religiously obscure on the other, an Aztec meaning of land (Tlalocan) serves as the Other(s) place to orient our secondary creative activities.

Sahagún and the contemporary Mesoamericanist are bound together in the common task of writing. This performative relationship indicates that placelessness is the central conundrum of scholarly interpretations. As during the colonial period, writing articulates a disorientation to meaningfully occupying the Americas. If interpretations refer only to writers and their books, then no significant pressure can be exerted on the worldview dominated by the book. The result of these considerations shifts the focus of an investigation of Aztec religion away from the fiction of revealing their world as *they* understood it to one of creating an interpretation of their world in such a way as to heighten a contemporary *self*-consciousness about *our* world. The task of writing about the Aztec is thus reconceived as a creative approximation of a radically other way of inhabiting the world. The Aztecs then speak to, and critique, specific cultural assumptions, such as the meaning of land. Questions regarding the choice and assemblage of data are responsive to an author's cultural constitution. Questions such as, what is it that needs to be known? or, how do the Aztec ceremonies reveal another modality of being human? are not only personal fascinations but reflections of the parallel ways in which distinct cultural groups have inhabited the Americas. In the final chapter, I turn to the consequences of my "approximate" understanding and rendering of the Aztec Tlaloc cult. These consequences seem to me to be significant and profound not only in terms of Mesoamerican scholarship, but also for contemporary understandings of landscape that, as demonstrated above, are hermeneutically associated with colonial culture.

NOTES

1. David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
2. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism, The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Europeans sometimes consciously utilized disease as a way to subdue Native people of the Americas and gain access to their lands and resources. The creation of these diseases, which also had devastating effects on Old World populations, seem to have originated out of a cultural understandings of the "proper" human relationship to plants, animals, water, etc.

Although not directly addressed by Crosby, a more thorough examination of the cultural roots of disease would be very interesting.

3. Theodor de Bry drew heavily on the stories of Bartolomé de las Casas and others to create his fanciful images of the New World. See his *Discovery of the New World* (1594–95), engravings, text by Gerolamo Benzoni (Amsterdam: van Hoeve, 1979), and *Conquistadors, Aztecs and Incas* (1596), engravings (Amsterdam: van Hoeve, 1980); and *Discovering the New World: Based on the Works of Theodore de Bry*, edited by Michael Alexander (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). De Bry was Dutch but was forced to flee his country to Frankfurt in 1570 after his family fortune was confiscated by Spanish interests. His work then promoted a sense of anti-Catholic feeling that was supplied partly by las Casas and his *The Devastation of the Indies* (translated by Herma Briffault [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992]). See Bernadette Bucher, *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of de Bry's Great Voyages*, translated from the French by Basia Miller Gulati (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), and Fredi Chiappelli, ed., *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, vols. I and II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
4. The variable status of indigenous people of Mexico and the United States/Canada is an important but neglected subject of study. There are very large differences between Mexican and U.S. involvements in a Native past, which, in turn, have consequences for Native Americans who currently reside in those countries. Acknowledging the differences will have to be enough for now, but I maintain that in their frequent contacts with Europeans (and European Americans) the outcome for Native Americans has consistently been loss of life and land.
5. Although this title is a controversial one, it has been currently argued that it appropriately situates Sahagún in the ethnographic tradition. See Klor de Alva, "Sahagún and the Birth of Modern Ethnography: Representing, Confessing, and Inscribing the Native Other," in *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún: Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico*, edited by J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Henry B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quifiones Keber (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), pp. 31–52.
6. Prologues for all twelve books of the *Florentine* are published in the Dibble and Anderson translation of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 13 parts, edited and translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Monographs of the School of American Research, no. 14 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1951–1982), "Introductory Volume."
7. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *El Códice Florentino de Sahagún*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1979).
8. Arthur J. O. Anderson, "Sahagún and His Times," in *Sixteenth Century Mexico: The Work of Sahagún*, edited by Munro S. Edmonson, School of American Research (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), pp. 17–25. Also see the "Introductory Volume" of the *Florentine* by Dibble and Anderson, in Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*.
9. I am using the term "dialogical" following Paul Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) and David Tracy's *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs (Louvain and Grand Rapids, MI: Peeters

Press and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990). Louise M. Burkhart, in *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), seems to align her notion of dialogue along the lines of my use of "seepage." I make this point to clarify a distinction between theological and linguistic conceptions of the term "dialogical."

10. To my mind, the use of "dialogue" by theologians such as Tracy and Ricoeur is unfortunate. While their intention is to create a living context within which to center an engagement with sacred texts, the consequence is that conversation is determined by a written formulation of the world. For example, it would skew the nature of the Tlaloc cult as a hermeneutic of practice to describe it as "dialogical." Assigning it this designation could set the limits of activity too closely around a particular species of intellectual activity.

11. Fray Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, edited and translated by Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 412–414, 430–433, 441–443, and 461–462.

12. The story of ideological clashes between rival orders in sixteenth-century Mexico, principally including the Franciscans, Augustinians, and Dominicans, is a fascinating aspect of what lay behind the generation of various types of colonial documents. Interactions with Native groups can be seen as also participating in a larger discourse between monastic orders. In terms of the valley region, however, the Franciscans seem to have held control. Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, p. 17.

13. According to Arthur J. O. Anderson, "Sahagún and His Times," p. 20, strategies of winning souls, which had been effective in the Old World through an appropriation of Native religious sites, names, and ritual days, did not fit with the Franciscan social and political ideals in the New World. Their stance in defense of Indians pitted them against imperial Spanish policy.

14. He is referring to his work in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España*, 2 vols., edited by Angel María Garibay (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1967), vol. 2, p. 256. This passage was cited and translated by Alfredo López Austin, "The Research Method of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: The Questionnaires," in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The Work of Sahagún*, edited by Munro S. Edmonson, School of American Research (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), p. 122.

15. See Long's analysis of resistance to this tendency to render the Other as transparent with opaque theologies of color in "Freedom, Otherness, and Religion: Theologies Opaque," in Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 185–199. In particular, see his discussion and quotation of Vine Deloria Jr., on p. 192:

Our foremost plight is our transparency. People can just tell by looking at us what we want, what should be done to help us, how we feel, and what a "real" Indian is really like. Indian life, as it relates to the real world, is a continuous attempt not to disappoint people who know us.

From Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 1.

16. It is still a mystery as to exactly why Sahagún decided to highlight the things he found in the *Florentine*. For example, more emphasis on myths of creation (such as found in the *Leyenda de los soles*) would have furthered his missionary program, but are not included. It could be that it has been the unsatisfactory status, from the viewpoint of a curious and engaged reader, of an absent author and transparent object that propels Sahagún's and Mesoamerican studies.

17. This is tied to his understanding of what he calls "absentee colonialism." Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 69.

18. David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 11–12. Carrasco is drawing on Paul Wheatley's use of the phrase. Paul Wheatley, "City as Symbol," inaugural lecture delivered at the University College, London, on 10 November 1967, unpublished manuscript.

19. This is essentially Geertz's argument in Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lines: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988). His work has been most powerfully dramatized by Clendinnen's approach to Aztec material (Inga Clendinnen, *Aztec, an Interpretation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991]).

20. Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).

21. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images*, "introduction."

22. O'Gorman, *The Invention of America*.

23. As J. Z. Smith has said, "[T]he student of religion, and most particularly the historian of religion, must be relentlessly self-conscious. Indeed, this self-consciousness constitutes his primary expertise, his foremost object of study." Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xi.