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Religious Beliefs of the Aztecs

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Abstract: This article states that the Aztecs of Mexico were religious fanatics who eventually were led to human sacrifice. The myths and legends of the Aztec people are perversions from the true gospel of Jesus Christ that was had in the first and second centuries A.D.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE AZTECS

By Dr. Charles E. Diddle

EDITOR'S NOTE: Scripture is replete with instances of nations who prospered through living the word of God but later apostatised from the faith. In most instances the falling away of these groups of people was characterised by a gradual corruption of principles and practices rather than a sharp, instantaneous rejection of the truth. As more and more error crept in, fact and fancy became closely blended into a creed of superstition and myth with only a faint connection to the truth from which it sprang.

A striking example of this we find in the story of the ancient inhabitants of the American continents. They who were privileged in the first and second centuries A.D. to have in its purity the Gospel of Jesus Christ had, at the time they were discovered by European explorers, degenerated into worshippers of false Gods, held firmly in the bonds of ignorance and superstition. Dr. Charles E. Diddle, head of the Anthropology Department, University of Utah, here presents some of the outstanding legends of the Aztec Indians of Mexico.

THE Aztecs of Mexico were a fanatically religious people whose fanaticism led them eventually to excess in human sacrifice. Although these people founded their city as late as 1325, they had had centuries of migration prior to the founding date.

During their years of wandering they were led by their god Huitzilopochtli, who spoke with them and counselled them constantly. It was

this oracle which spoke to them during their wanderings and commanded them to introduce human sacrifice as a token of reverence and obedience to their god. The Aztecs were somewhat like the Romans; they had their own gods, but, as they conquered and incorporated other peoples, they included new gods in their pantheon. From this amalgamation of gods and concepts certain beliefs stand out.

THE CREATION

The world had been created many times, i.e., mankind had been created and destroyed many times. The sun, which to them was synonymous with the world and life itself, had been repeatedly created and destroyed.

Tezcatlipoca, the god of night and magic, made the first world and created the first men. They were giants who practiced no agriculture but lived from wild fruits and seeds. The sun (Tezcatlipoca) was struck by Quetzalcoatl, the god of learning, and the sun converted itself into a tiger and ate all the giants. The earth was in darkness and without people.

Quetzalcoatl became the sun and man was created for a second time. A great wind arose and all mankind perished except a few who were converted into monkeys.

The god of rain was then converted into the sun, and man was created for a third time. It subsequently rained fire and all perished except a few who became birds.

The goddess of water became the fourth sun and mankind was again placed upon the earth. Soon the earth was flooded and all men were drowned.

A very few were saved by being converted into fish.

For the creation of the fifth sun all the gods congregated at Teotihuacan, where two of them threw themselves into the fire. Through this test they became purified and because of their splendour they became the sun and moon.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

Human sacrifice should be viewed in the light of the Aztec concept of the creation. The life-giving sun and the Indian had been created by the gods who gave their lives in the creative process. Conditions favourable to the Indian (sun, rain, corn, etc.) could only be assured by keeping the gods placated and nourished. The common food of the lowly Indian (corn, beans, and chili) would not be acceptable to the gods. They could only gain sustenance from the most precious thing the Indian had to offer—human blood. This offering of human life meant merely keeping the Indians' half of a reciprocal arrangement. The gods gave their lives to create man and give his sustenance; man gave his life to provide the gods with nourishment.

THE AFTERWORLD

The Aztecs believed in a life after death. The soul of the deceased Indian passed to Mictlan—the place of death. This "other world" consisted of many divisions where the souls arrived according to their profession in life and the manner of their death. Those who died in battle or were sacrificed joined the sun in a privileged life in spacious gardens, where they fought or whiled away their hours according to desire. Those who drowned, were struck by lightning, or died of disease, went to a paradise which abounded in fruit trees, corn and beans. All other souls undertook a perilous four-year journey before reaching a final resting place.

THE PRIESTHOOD

Because it was very necessary to



Dr. Charles E. Dibble

maintain a friendly relationship between the Indian and his many gods, the priesthood played an important role in Aztec society. At birth many boys were dedicated to a life in the ministry. Upon reaching their fifteenth birthday, they entered a seminary where they were trained in the mysteries of the priesthood. They were instructed in the art of painting and interpreting the sacred Aztec books which dealt with religion, mythology, and history. The priest and his religion entered many phases of Aztec life which seem unusual to us. Sports, warfare, commerce, science, and art were daily activities which enjoyed the guidance and patronage of the priesthood. Indeed it may be said of the Aztec as of Europe during the Middle Ages, "learning was nurtured on the steps of the temples."