

Sydney Isaacks

HIST 3400

Dr Rachel Moore

29 May 2024

### Spanish Evangelism in the New World

As the Spanish made their mark in the New World, many challenges were presented to them. The Spanish had a primary goal of evangelism in the New World and conversion of all its peoples to Catholicism, but the difference in language and culture made it hard for the Indigenous people to understand what was expected of them. This created an imbalance of the practice of Catholicism and led to many issues as the Spanish demanded conversion and the Indians retorted back. I think that the cruel and unreasonable methods the Spanish used for their spiritual demands deserved the subsequent responses and reasoning the Indians gave to those demands, and also played a role in why the Spanish did not seem successful in their conversion efforts.

The Spanish during and after conquest of the New World had a huge focus on God and wanted the subjects in the New World to convert to Christianity. They made many demands and efforts to accomplish this. For example, in Mexico, conquistador Hernan Cortez made it a point to emphasize that people could look for assistance from no one but their God and made sure that the subjects followed this too and were loyal to him. He quickly began to self proclaim himself as a bold and brave conquistador that the indigenous people could view as a God himself, but this really just turned into him looking menacing and otherworldly in a negative way. His

methods were close minded, and many of the indigenous people did not like this and would not join with the Spanish. They planned the Chalulan massacre in order to fight back, which I think was justified considering how their home was invaded and they were being forced to change their culture. After this revolt, the Spanish were driven out of the Aztec Tenochtitlan and forced to regroup. However, one woman named Malinche was a pivotal woman who ended up telling Cortez about the Chalulan massacre that was being planned and allied with the Spaniards to save herself, and she started to become known as the “champion of indigenous catholicism”. Many of the people were very angry with her as depicted in some artwork from the time, demonstrating their frustration with the Spanish in general.

In Peru, Cusco remained as a strong indigenous capital deep in the Andes while the Spanish continued in Lima. Francisco Pizarro was the head conquistador for Peru and had a partner, Diego de Almagro. They confronted the Inca and their leader, Atahualpa, about converting to Christianity. The Inca were angry with those who were evangelizing and trying to convert their people to an unknown culture, rightfully so. Atahualpa was a very defiant leader and even went so far as to throw a bible to the ground in front of Pizarro and Almagro in protest. After this, Pizarro imprisoned him and demanded that he convert to catholicism, in which Atahualpa was ultimately executed. I think Atahualpa’s response to the coercion was valid as the Spanish methods were extremely aggressive at this time. There are many images and art pieces from the time that show the Spaniards mistreating indigenous people. Along with conversion to Christianity, the Spanish also expected the indigenous to provide labor in the Encomienda in exchange for education and protection. However, this system was extremely flawed and there was very little education or protection on the Spaniards' part in the deal. This is yet another example of the unfair treatment the indigenous received. However, there were some

subjects that chose to convert to Christianity, such as Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. He was very cooperative and was an advocate for the Spanish. He thought that they were good people that were being represented poorly. I think this is interesting because most of the indigenous people at the time would not side with the Spanish and hated them, so for him to believe they are still good people deep down, even after all they did, shows a lot about his own culture in terms of forgiveness and open-mindedness, values that are supposed to be found in Christianity. Pizarro and Almagro eventually turned against each other and fought in a civil war, which definitely took a toll on Spanish evangelism.

After things started going downhill, the Spanish started genuinely considering whether or not the indigenous people were rational enough to convert to Christianity, as there was a distinct language and culture barrier that made it hard for the indigenous to understand what they were being asked to do. The Spanish ultimately decided that they were rational enough, so clergy mendicants came and expected the peoples to receive and appreciate even more unwanted education. Dioceses, religious centers, were founded throughout the New World and they converted people to Catholicism rapidly. They expected the elite and influential indigenous people to convert and then convince the others to convert. They would have mass baptisms where they would bring in many people at once and baptize them all without them necessarily understanding what was even happening. They would teach them about Christianity in a corrupted way with pictographs depicting a dark menacing source that they would allegedly escape by converting. The Spanish decided that anyone who refused conversion were “satellites of the devil.” They then decided to carry out an even more aggressive inquisition that terrorized the local population. They would torture people about whether or not they had remnants of their past religion and commit horrible acts against them like waterboarding. This resulted in the

indigenous eventually just lying and telling the Spanish they would give them any remnants, in which they would give them rocks or meaningless things, just so the torture would stop and they would be left alone. Because of these methods and the continuing disconnect, Christianity ended up being practiced in an altered and imprecise way, causing the indigenous people to be persecuted somehow even more. The Spanish realized that the people were not truly understanding and practicing catholicism as hard as they tried to get them to, as explained by Jose de Acosta.

I think that the responses of the Indians were very justified. The rationale they gave was that their lives were being abruptly taken over, and they did not want to just give in to that. They were angry that their leadership and nobles had been brutally wiped out and that new, less wise people had to take over. Because of this, they did not feel comfortable completely erasing the laws and customs the previous nobles had built that had worked so well for them, and they did not understand why they would need to do so. They warned the Spanish about their actions and told them to watch out. It is not surprising at all to me that they would resist converting, lie about converting, or plan uprisings, as their lives were unwillingly uprooted out of nowhere.

In my opinion, I think it was somewhat obvious that the Spanish would not be successful in their conversion efforts. They came off way too aggressive and forceful in the beginning, treating the indigenous people as lesser beings. They did not acknowledge the language and culture barriers, or give any respect whatsoever to the existing culture. This was a sign right from the start that they would not succeed how they wanted. They tried to create fear in the people in order to receive cooperation, but this did not work out how they planned. The way the Spanish tried to force conversion on the people was flawed and called into question if the people even

understood Christianity and what they were being told to convert to, and if when they went to the temples if they were really even practicing the Christianity.

Overall, the Spanish could have used much more respectful and effective methods in terms of settling in the New World.