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The religions of Mexico and Peru compared

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A Comparison of the
Religious Sects of Mexico
and Peru

By
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1895.

A Comparison of the Religious Systems of Mexico and Peru.

The evidence is cumulative that religious phenomena ~~is~~ ^{are} world-wide. The increasing chain of proof is augmented by the data supplied by the vast American continent. Its most tribes had some kind of a cosmology. Although the simple beliefs of these untutored beings of forest, plain, and city were often disfigured by the crudest and most childish superstitions, yet the sublime conception of one Great Spirit was never entirely effaced.

Mexico and Peru represented the highest type of power and refinement among the aboriginal inhabitants of America.

Their fronts were first discovered
 to the world by adventurers
 from Spain who successfully
 achieved their conquest. Mexico,
 at this crisis in her history,
 was bounded on the South by
 the Isthmus of Panama, washed
 East and West by the Oceans, and
 on the North by a line starting
 from the head of the Gulf of
 California and sweeping round
 to the mouth of the Mississippi
 with a curve that took in
 Arizona and Southern Texas. There
 was then, as today, a South Amer-
 ican nation. In territorial extent,
 it was a vast empire confined
 between the mountains and the
 sea. Its breadth varied from two
 hundred and fifty to five hundred
 miles, and it was nearly two
 thousand five hundred miles in
 length.

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The chief focus of civilization and religion in Mexico was the lake district of Anahuac; and of Peru, the lake district of Titicaca. The natural phenomena of these districts stimulated the myth-forming imagination of the people. There was a remarkable difference the civilizations of these two countries. Mexico was the battle-field of antagonistic tribes. Revolution and war followed each other in quick succession. In Peru the people enjoyed the advantages of an equitable rule.

Tradition is silent respecting any intercourse between these kingdoms of such vast extent, power, and resources. Commercial enterprise was limited to barter with neighboring tribes. The science of navigation was

unknown. The civilization and religious system of each were of independent origin. According to the many points of striking similarity in the religious beliefs of these countries are of great interest to the student of comparative religions.

It soon appears that the source of the religious development in either the one or the other nation is practically the same. It is an incoherent and confused jumble of nature-worship and of animism or the worship of spirits, but especially the latter. There is a close analogy between these peoples of more primitive times and the people of today that are strangers to all civilization. In both cases, their religious ideas and conceptions are the most elementary.

Sun-worship was the earliest form of religion in Mexico. It was upon this basis that all the various varieties of this country were impressed by the special genius or inclinations of the diverse peoples. This form of worship did not include the thought of monotheism. The Sun was regarded as a personal and animated being having pre-eminence over all other divinities. He was the god par excellence. In prayers, he was addressed as the "god by whom we live; omnipresent, that knoweth all thoughts, and giveth all gifts." He was "invisible, incorporeal, one god, of perfect perfection and purity." Under his wing was repose and cure of disease. There was a conspicuous lack of harmony between the

homage rendered by the people
 and a proper conception of
 these attributes. In spite of a
 decline in the comprehensive
 grasp of the essentials of this
 worship, the Sun was always
 regarded as the residence of the
 Supreme Spirit.

The Peruvians worshipped
 under different names, a Supreme
 Being, the Creator and Ruler
 of the Universe. In the earliest
 representations, he rises out of
 the lake Titicaca, and creating
 the sun, the moon, and the
 stars, prescribes their courses
 for them. In this instance,
 the Supreme Being was a god
 of waters and fertility. This
 representation was followed by
 that of a god of fire, who
 worked within the world to
 form and fashion the world

And enlighten and civilize
mankind.

Thus far there is a slight
divergence in the form and
manner of inception of these
two religious systems. The dif-
ference in form does not
carry with it the implication
that their fundamental tenets
are antithetical. Both are a
unit in positing spirit-wor-
ship as the basis of the systems.
There is also a positive agree-
ment in requiring human vic-
tims in their sacrificial offer-
ings since the suffering of the
victim was regarded as among
the prime requisites of an
efficacious sacrifice.

Gradually mystic and
ethical ideas were associated
were associated with the fair
inseparably connected with

the sacrifice. It was at this point that distinctions of more importance than differences in form, began. The two systems gravitated toward opposite poles. The Mexicans, with a single exception, refined upon the suffering of the human victims with frantic intensity. The moral and aesthetic sentiments of the Peruvians made themselves felt in their religious customs and there was an attempt to restrain the number and mitigate the horror of the human sacrifices. A change in form naturally followed the change in spirit.

Peru now adopted Sun-worship, while the Mexicans rapidly drifted from their earlier worships into the worship of a whole pantheon of lesser deities. The Peruvians displayed

The greatest zeal and devotion
 in the worship of the Sun. In
 some particulars there is the
 closest analogy this worship in
 the two countries. As "Iti" or
 Light, the Sun was sovereign
 Lord of the world, and King
 of the heavens and the earth.

The gold nuggets torn from
 the mountain side were sup-
 posed to be his tears. His repre-
 sentations were made of gold,
 and, in both countries, took
 the form of a human face
 surrounded by rays and
 flames. Columns of stone, repre-
 senting the idea of fertilization
 were erected for the Sun to
 caress with his rays. In the
 mythologies of both peoples, the
 Sun enjoyed the felicities of
 married life. The Moon is
 his spouse. The Mexicans regarded

themselves as the children of this
 union; the Pruvians limited this
 distinction to their monarchs,
 - the Incas and the higher
 ranks of the aristocracy. In
 the latter instance, the Sun
 had taken pity upon the poor
 savages of the country, and
 sent them two of his children,
 - a son and a daughter.

These celestial personages laid
 the foundations for a future
 civilization, and from their
 offspring descended the sovereign
 family of the Incas, who ruled
 as children of the Sun. These roy-
 al personages succeeded so com-
 pletely in identifying the interests
 of their family with those of
 religion, of politics, of civiliza-
 tion, that a theocracy was
 established which insisted on
 the minutest regulation of all

the actions of human life.

While Peru was passing through this stage of her religious development, the popular devotions and practices had pretty much effaced the cultus of the Sun. A very exact place was given to other phenomena. The wind, rain, vegetation were personified as so many special deities. In many cases, the lesser deities were derived from the Supreme Deity. By anthropomorphism, these natural phenomena were transformed into men, of enormous strength, stature, and power. The desire of the people to procure the good-will, the protection and favor of these gods, gave a stronger impulse to the old folly of human sacrifice. Accordingly the gods appeared to be sanguinary monsters

Whose altars, in every city, were
with the blood of human victims.

There was the first faint
dawnings of a third stage in
the religious development of these
countries. It can be traced, in
Mexico, in the gentle and humane
religious tendency which was kept
alive by the priesthood of the god
Quetzalcoatl who had a special
aversion to human sacrifices.
This deity was a god of the Toltecs,
a tribe that retreated before the
sauginary Aztec invaders. In
the conflict between the supreme
deities of these tribes, that of the
former was obliged to quit the
continent, and his return was
confidently expected by many
who were earnestly longing for
the halcyon days of his benevolent
rule. The traditions of the philos-
opher King of Texcoco, who was

a poet and philosopher as well as King, moral, also, the fact that he had no love, either for idolatry or for sanguinary sacrifices. Thus "in the midst of a religion steeped in blood a priesthood was inspired by the sentiment of humanity, linked, as it always should be, with the progress of religious thought."

Likewise in the palace of the Incas, one of the descendants of the Sun is said to have reasoned thus:

"They say that the Sun lives, and that he does everything. But when one does anything, he is near to the thing he does; whereas many things take place while the Sun is absent. It cannot be, therefore, that he does everything. If he were true, he would visit other parts

of the keener which he never traverses. In truth, he moves like a thing held to its task that always measures the same course, or like an arrow that flies where it is shot and not where it wills it self."

Thus, in both countries, there was a certain dissatisfaction with the established Polytheism, and the trend in each was toward a spiritual Monotheism. The career of this latter system was cut short by the Spanish conquests.

These peoples are often unqualifiedly condemned because they endorsed human sacrifices. It is an undisputed fact that human sacrifices and cannibalism have both been intimately associated with all primitive religions without scarcely an

exception. It was thought that the victim became co-substantial with the deity by assimilation, so the worshipper, in his turn, by himself assimilating a part of the victim's flesh united himself in substance with the Divinity being. This longing to enter into the closest possible union with the Adored, is inseparably connected with religious sentiment; and is in harmony with the most exacted tendencies of human nature. In times of ignorance, it often gives rise, it is true, to the most deplorable aberrations.

The almost universal belief in a future life was also a part of the creed of these peoples. It was to be the continuation, pure and simple, of the present life. Evidence of this is found

in the peculiar custom of burying all kinds of useful and desirable objects with the dead. There was no thought of a resurrection of the body; the future life was to be a spirit life.

In both countries, a special abode was assigned to the wicked. The Mexicans included the greater part of mankind in this category, and assigned them to a place of everlasting darkness to expiate their sins. This class was consigned by the Peruvians, to the center of the earth to expiate their crimes by centuries of unresource labor.

Both systems provided some paradises. The highest happiness was comprised in a luxurious life of tranquility; or a negative life of indolent contentment. This

future life was marred by in-
 vidious distinctions of birth
 and rank. These distinctions super-
 seded moral conditions and
 moral worth. In fact, the moral
 significance of these religious
 was very elementary. The desol-
 ating doctrine of aristocratic priv-
 ileges was being qualified
 somewhat in the interests of
 justice; but no moral con-
 ceptions, in either system,
 vivified and hallowed the
 prospect beyond the grave.

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