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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~~ <sup>are</sup> 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 ~~religion~~. 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. Accordingly by 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 identically 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 truths  
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 were 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 contest 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 trans-  
 lows. 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 itself.

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 un-  
 qualifiedly condemned because  
 they endorsed human sacrifices.  
 It is an undisputed fact that  
 human sacrifices and cannibi-  
 balism have both been intimate-  
 ly 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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Apr 22, 1845.

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