

*The Idea of the Devil
and
The Problem of the Indian:
the case of Mexico
in the sixteenth century*

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The Idea of the Devil and the Problem of the Indian: the Case of Mexico in the Sixteenth Century

Introduction

The aim of this paper¹ is to attempt an assessment of the role played by the concept of the devil in the way in which the native cultures of America, especially Mexico, were perceived and interpreted by European missionaries and intellectuals during the first decades of evangelisation.

In view of the renewed attention that scholars have recently been devoting to the question of the 'spiritual conquest', it might seem surprising that such a study has not been attempted before, especially since much of this interest has derived from the proliferation of studies into popular cultures where the diabolic often played a conspicuous role.² It is, however, precisely this stress on the importance of popular cultural expressions that has made the subject of diabolism an awkward one. For, given that popular cultures were primarily oral and thus perceivable almost exclusively through the filter of the educated, the success of investigations into popular beliefs has, as a rule, tended to depend on the way in which scholars handle case histories and subject them to detailed micro-analyses. This approach makes it difficult to study the global context thoroughly and often makes it necessary – as a French scholar recently stated – to 'abandon erudition' in order to 'renew the questions put to the sources', 'with all the dead-ends, errors and risks inherent in that kind of undertaking'.³

On the other hand, the reasons why the more intellectual aspects of diabolism should hitherto have been largely avoided are even more straightforward. For historians of ideas have often tended to deal with themes which are more readily understandable from a modern standpoint, where the concept of the devil is apt to generate a sense of embarrassment. As a result, their outlook at times seems to be blunted by a prejudice similar to that observed by Peter Brown in the attitudes most commonly shown towards the cult of the saints. Here, Brown tells us, the 'enlightened' contempt of the 'vulgar' led to the supposition that a potentially enlightened few – whose theism was identified with the elevated message of Christianity – were being subjected to continual upward pressure from the habits of the lower classes, whose 'religion' was totally distinct from the 'truer' and 'purer' sensibility of the elites.⁴

But the perpetuation of this bipartite approach has in no way been the sole responsibility of the intellectual historians. Social historians and historians of popular cultures have themselves tended to treat the diabolic with a note of uneasiness which in many ways resembles the attitude of their intellectual peers. If it is true that recent approaches have been considerably more

sympathetic towards popular cultures, it is now these which are more often seen as the bearers of the more genuine and authentic values, as if they were engaged in a battle against the truncated artificiality of the elites. In such a context, diabolism has at best been seen as the appropriation of a dominant idea; at worst, it has been explained as an imposition of the elites upon the popular in an attempt to keep them under their control.

Thus, by adopting premises which implicitly deny religious sentiment any intellectual foundation, this bipartite approach has tended to render historians insensitive to the thought processes and needs that led to the rise and expansion of diabolism. It cannot be stressed enough, however, that the idea of the devil was an intellectual construction and that it needs to be considered seriously as such if it is to be understood at all. Just how central and intellectually persuasive the concept was during the 'spiritual conquest' of Mexico is the question that I aim to explore in this paper.

Discovery and optimism: the Devil's defeat

The idea of the devil as an immanent power, as God's grand cosmic antagonist and as a dramatic instrument of God's justice, was fundamental to the intellectual edifice of Christendom. However commonplace such a statement may sound to the modern reader, it is important to understand its implications in their contemporary setting: as living and changing realities in the minds of men and women, rather than as expressions of a stereotyped concept that may be readily understood. For it is often tempting to forget that in the early modern period the universality of social norms and the cultural unity of the human race were axiomatic notions, so that, as Anthony Pagden has explained, any attempt to interpret or to understand 'the other' would have been unthinkable. Even the genuine interest in local cultures that can be detected in such writers as the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas, the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún or the Jesuit José de Acosta, was not part of any attempt to fight 'eurocentric prejudices' in favour of a more objective or 'enlightened' view of the American reality. On the contrary, those 'prejudices' were an integral part of the contemporary vision of the world, and to abandon them would have seemed to them not only dangerous and heretical, but intellectually absurd. It cannot be stressed enough, therefore, that the aim of the missionaries was not to understand 'the other', but to evaluate the Indians in order to eliminate their 'otherness', thereby allowing their incorporation into the conceptual edifice of Christendom.⁵ And since the idea of the devil was central to this conceptual edifice, it is logical to expect it to have played an equally central role in the missionaries' approach to native cultures.

On the other hand, when considering the early modern devil and particularly his 'arrival' in the New World, there is the opposite tendency to lay too much emphasis on the enormity of his power and to ignore the more malleable and oscillating image of him that was still common in pre-Reformation days. For

if it is true that Satan and his legion of assistant demons figured largely in the early chronicles and that indigenous deities were from the start identified with demons, such images were often closer to a world of fantasy, where demons appeared in the same context as mermaids, giants, and even saints and angels, than to the more terrifying climate that would come to characterise the European witch-hunts.⁶ In spite of the undeniable growth of diabolism in pre-Reformation days, most people still conceived of the devil as a subordinate creature of God who had been cast down to eternal punishment and doubly defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, just as medieval mystics like Julian of Norwich felt free to ridicule and mock the devil, convinced of the intrinsic futility of all his actions, the early discoverers and missionaries were generally confident in the superiority of the Christian faith over demonic assaults and instigations.

An illustrative expression of this confidence can be appreciated in Hernán Cortés's attitude towards the 'idoltrous' practices of the Indians. In contrast to the subsequent outright condemnation of all idolatry as intrinsically demonic, Cortés saw idolatry as a sin of ignorance and simplicity rather than as an act of positive wickedness. No matter how grave the sin of idolatry might be, it could always be set right by rational explanation and by suitable instruction. In his second *Carta de Relación*, signed in 1520 and sent to Charles V in an attempt to win his favour over the Council of the Indies, Cortés gave a surprisingly level-headed account of the 'idoltrous' practices of the Mexicans, recounting how he made it clear to Moctezuma and his companions that their man-made idols were not worthy of the worship due to the one true God of the Christians. But the response that he put in the mouths of the Indians is even more revealing:

...and everyone, especially the said Moctezuma, replied that ... owing to the very long time that had passed since the arrival of their ancestors to these lands, it was perfectly possible that they could be mistaken in their beliefs ... and that I, as a recent arrival, should know better the things that they should hold and believe.⁷

There can be little doubt about the imaginary nature of this passage, 'more of a story, a means of inventing a fable to serve his purpose by an astute, wise and artful captain', as Francisco Fernández de Oviedo would later remark.⁸ What is significant, however, is Cortés's firm conviction that the Indians were normal human beings, whose level of civilisation was 'almost the same as the Spanish',⁹ and whose 'errors', far from being the result of direct demonic intervention, were more due to human weakness and susceptible to being set right through rational argument and a good disposition. That this attitude was not just intended as a means to gain Charles V's favour can be deduced from the way in which Cortés put his idea into practice. According to Bernal Díaz del Castillo, whenever the Conqueror ordered the destruction of Indian 'idols' he invariably replaced them with crosses and images of the Virgin, often entrusting the very same Indians that had been responsible for the care and

propitiation of the defeated idols with the care of the new Christian images.¹⁰ This initiative reflected the Conqueror's hope that as soon as the Christian message was preached to the Indians they would naturally realise the errors of their ways and set their house in order. Implicit in this was Cortés's conviction about the intrinsic goodness of human nature. More than a 'splendid politico-military alibi' as Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski have called it,¹¹ Cortés's attitude to idolatry rather echoes Aquinas's thesis that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. But even more than an incipient and rather naive form of Thomism, Cortés's perception of the native cultures of America reveals symptoms of that peculiar millenarianism that would soon come to inspire the Franciscan mission in the New World, a mission to which he lent his full support.

The twelve Franciscans who arrived in Mexico in 1524, recruited at the specific request of Cortés from the recently founded, reformed province of San Gabriel de Extremadura, were animated by a fervent hope in the rebirth of the Church in the New World. Their ideals can be traced as far back as the thirteenth-century Franciscan missions to Asia led by John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck and John of Monte Corvino, whose hope had been the conversion of Mongols and Jews in an effort to defeat Islam and unite the world in Christ.¹² At the time of the discovery of America, this idea had been given new impetus by the revival of interest in the prophecies of the twelfth-century Benedictine abbot Joachim de Fiore, with his division of history into three Trinitarian stages: the age of the Old Testament, governed by God the Father; the age of the New Testament, governed by God the Son; and the age of the Millennium, governed by the Holy Spirit, when the terrestrial hierarchical church would be destroyed to clear the way for the monastic reign of pure charity.¹³ Through the efforts of Colette of Corbie and of Bernardino of Siena in particular, a more moderate version of this view was approved by both spiritual and observant Franciscans at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Into it was incorporated the Bonaventuran identification of St Francis with the angel of the Apocalypse who would unlock the seal of the sixth age to mark the beginning of the Joachite age of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

In this atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that the new continent should have been readily envisaged as the privileged land of Franciscan millenarianism. In a world still imbued with that sense of disillusionment so finely portrayed by Huizinga as a characteristic theme of fifteenth-century Europe, many tended to seek refuge in the longing for a return to a better state of things.¹⁵ After the discovery, this longing could readily be transposed from a world remote in time to a world remote in space. The Golden Age ceased to be the monopoly of an idealised past and for some became firmly localised in the remote shores of the newly found lands.¹⁶ If the letters of Columbus and Vespucci are marked by connotations of fertility and abundance, and if humanists like Peter Martyr and Hernán Pérez de Oliva could go so far as to contrast the innocence and nobility of the Indians with the barbarism of their

European invaders, how much more would the Franciscans view the New World as the land destined to prepare the way for the Millennium?

It is in this context that the best sense can be made of the 'sun-lit euphoric quality' of the first years of evangelisation in New Spain which can be readily appreciated in the writings of Fray Toribio de Motolinía and which still haunts the precincts of churches at Huejotzingo, Acolman and Tzintzuntzan.¹⁷ The ease with which the Indians seemed to convert to Christianity was enough to convince the friars not just that God was on their side but, more specifically, that the devil was clearly on the losing side. Indeed, if the chronicles represent an accurate account, the conversion of the Indians appears to have been carried out in the midst of an enthusiasm submerged in ritual euphoria. With the parishes administered by the religious and with the bishops appointed from the mendicant orders themselves, the new church felt unhampered by the wealth and pomp which afflicted its European counterpart and saw itself as a worthy successor of the early church of the Apostles. This conviction had been reinforced by the way in which thousands of Indians had flocked to hear the Christian message and had submitted readily to baptism. According to Motolinía, some of the Franciscans baptised as many as 1500 Indians in one day, so that they were often 'unable to raise the pitcher ... because their arm was tired'.¹⁸ Additionally, the liturgical calendar was exploited to the full, with elaborate rounds of processions, dances, feasts, outdoor masses, penitential sessions and passion and nativity plays being eagerly devised to replace the pagan ceremonies. In the process, the virtues of the Indians were celebrated in the light of the Franciscan Order's own ideals: their relative poverty, their exiguous diet and their obedient, phlegmatic and docile nature being seen as clear signs of evangelical simplicity. The devil's reign in the New World seemed to have reached a very low ebb.

Conversion and disillusionment: the Devil's re-emergence

If optimism was the dominant mood during the first years of evangelisation, it never, however, went unchallenged. Indeed, from the early days of the discoveries, the theme of the primeval innocence of the Indians ran parallel to the no less arresting conviction of their bestial nature and of the demonic character of their culture and religion. Among many others, Dr Chanca, Columbus's famous companion in his second voyage, referred to their 'bestiality' as 'greater than that of any beast in the world'.¹⁹ For his part, in his brief account of the Conquest of Mexico, Francisco de Aguilar stated that 'there could not exist a kingdom in the world where the devil was honoured with such reverence';²⁰ and in a more extreme example the historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo boldly averred that 'Satan ... [had been] banished from these lands ... with the destruction of the lives of the majority of the Indians'.²¹

Such observations shed some light on the considerably more cautious approach to conversion favoured by the Dominicans, and help to make sense of the criticisms that they levelled against the Franciscans upon their arrival in 1526. On what appears a more realistic note, the Dominican friars were sceptical and critical of the Franciscan approach to baptisms *en masse*, insisting on the need for careful instruction in the basic principles of the faith before the administration of baptism and the other sacraments. Nor was it too long before their observations began to ring true. For, despite the destruction and confiscation of idols, it was soon discovered that clandestine native practices and the native calendar with its pagan ceremonies continued to regulate the lives of many Indians. Even Motolinía's millenarian optimism could not ignore the presence of a devil who was 'served with great idolatries' and 'appeared many times to the priests who served the idols'.²² The Indians, he wrote elsewhere, concealed idols wherever they could, even 'at the foot of the crosses or beneath the stones of the altar steps, pretending that they were venerating the cross, when they were in fact adoring the devil'.²³ To this initial disillusionment was soon added the cyclical onslaught of European epidemics, against which the Indians had no natural resistance, and which began to decimate the native population at the same time as the Spanish settlers were increasing their demand for labour and the tax policies of the Spanish monarchy were eroding the economic basis of the Indian aristocracy. These developments had a demoralising effect on the Indian community, which reverted increasingly to drunkenness, while the mendicants themselves became subject to attacks from a secular clergy eager to regain lost ground. By the mid-1530s it had become clear that the conversion of the Indians had been a very superficial affair. Idolatry was deemed so widespread that the Franciscan Archbishop of Mexico, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, in sharp contrast with the policies of his co-religionists, saw fit to implement the first inquisitorial practices against idolatrous and superstitious Indians.

Few moments in history are filled with more bitter irony. The thought of a Franciscan friar, who was also a humanist, conversant with the writings of Erasmus and author of a treatise which spelled out Christian doctrine in simple language, acting out the role of Inquisitor general, engaged in a ruthless and frantic persecution of unfaithful Indian apostates which culminated in the burning at the stake of the charismatic Indian leader, the Cacique de Texcoco, Don Carlos Chichimecatecutli, would have seemed like a very bad kind of nightmare to the early missionaries.²⁴ And yet it is difficult to imagine an alternative course of action open to the Archbishop. After all, the Indians were no longer innocent pagans awaiting Christian enlightenment, but proper Christians, baptised and allegedly instructed, and therefore subject to the same disciplinary treatment that was used in Europe against the sins of idolatry, heresy and apostasy. All these crimes were clearly widespread and thriving among the Indians. Idols were constantly being hidden in caves not just with the purpose of protecting them against the fury of the missionaries, but in order to allow the Indians to continue their sacrifices 'in the gentile fashion'. Human sacrifice, although less frequent, lingered on, and it was very common to find

young men with their legs cut open or with wounds in their ears and tongues inflicted with the purpose of providing human blood for the idols. The more innocent ceremonies left remnants of sacrificed hens and evidence that the rituals had been accompanied by song, dances and extreme drunkenness.²⁵

More alarming were a number of similarities that could be detected between Christian practices and native rites. Fasting, for instance, was an indispensable prelude to the sacrifices which, as a rule, ended in a communal banquet when the participants would eat the flesh of the sacrificed animals and drink the *pulque*, or 'wine of the earth', that had been offered to the idol.²⁶ Few could fail to notice the striking resemblance between this practice and the Christian observance of fasting prior to the celebration of the Eucharist. The similarity became even more alarming when the Indians accompanied their 'communion' with the ingestion of *teunanacatl* (hallucinogenic mushrooms) which, as Motolinía explained to the Count of Benavente, meant literally 'the flesh of god', 'or of the devil whom they adore', and which, according to another witness, took the Indians 'out of their senses, making them have demonic visions'.²⁷

The intellectual difficulties that such similarities provoked among the mendicants would be difficult to exaggerate. For even more important than their belief in the universality of European cultural values was the missionaries' faith in the unique and universal vocation of the Christian church. Any attempt to relativise these similarities through an exercise in what we might call 'comparative religion' would have seemed to them not merely unthinkable but positively sacrilegious. If the Christian sacraments were believed to have been established by Christ himself as material channels of supernatural grace, how could they possibly find such striking parallels in the idolatrous rites of remote pagans? At best the phenomenon could be explained as the result of a mysterious initiative on the part of God to prepare the Indians for the reception of the Gospel: a kind of prelude to what was to come. This indeed had been Motolinía's hope when confronted with some infant bathing ceremonies which seemed to him to resemble baptism. 'Those baptised in such manner' – he explained – 'were exhorted to struggle with the enemies of the soul and to sweep and clean their consciences ... thereby preparing the way for Christ to come to them in baptism'.²⁸ But such hopes were not easy to hold in face of the more frequent orgiastic ceremonies that were encountered and which seemed to the friars to represent a form of pseudo-sacramentalism imbued with Satanic inversion.

Zumárraga's change of attitude towards the Indians was not, therefore, as dramatic as it might appear at first sight. For it clearly responded to a growing awareness of the threatening reality of Satanic intervention in Indian cultures, a reality that had begun to be discerned beneath the crumbling optimism of the second decade of evangelisation and which had become dominant even among such dedicated friars as the famous Bernardino de Sahagún. Indeed, it is ironically in this mood of increasing disillusionment with Indian cultures that

the foundation of the College of Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco must be understood. As Sahagún explains, just as ‘the physician cannot with certainty apply the medicine needed by the patient without first knowing from what humour or cause the illness proceeds’, so the preachers and confessors, who are the ‘physicians of souls’, must study the ways in which ‘the sins ... and the rites ... and the superstitions ... and the ceremonies of idolatry’, which ‘have not yet fully disappeared’, were practised by the Indians.²⁹ Echoing St Augustine’s description of pagan deities as ‘useless images or unclean spirits and malignant demons’,³⁰ Sahagún insisted that the deities of the Indians

were not gods, but lying and deceitful devils; and if it be thought that these things are so forgotten and lost, and that faith in one God is so well planted and firmly rooted among these natives that there is no need to speak about them, ... I am also certain that the Devil neither sleeps nor has forgotten the cult that these Indian natives offered him in the past, and that he is awaiting a suitable conjuncture to return to his lost lordship; ... it is prudent, therefore, to be on our guard.³¹

Accordingly, Sahagún never tired of warning his co-religionists against any easy enthusiasm that they might feel about the similarities between Christian and pagan religious practices. Hence his denunciation of the growing popularity of the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe – who had come to be venerated in the same place as the native goddess Tonantzin – as a ‘satanic invention’. How could it be, he asked, that ‘everywhere in the land there can be found churches in honour of Our Lady, and the Indians do not go to them, but come from far distances to this Tonantzin, just as they used to in old times’?³²

It is true that behind this growing uncertainty, something of the original optimism of the missionaries could still be detected. Even after the disillusionment of seeing the Indians revert to their idolatrous practices and of realising that their alleged simplicity and innocence had been grossly misinterpreted, the Franciscans could still fall back on authoritative interpretations of idolatry which left Indian cultures relatively unscathed. One such interpretation had been offered centuries before by Isidore of Seville who, following Euhemerus, had ascribed the origin of idolatry to the common human experience of bereavement that tended to seek expression in a longing for the loved and lost. Isidore’s view had been popularised in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through the widely distributed translations of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, a thirteenth-century treatise by the Franciscan Bartholomew Anglicus,³³ and it found a clear echo among some of the founders of the College of Santa Cruz. Writing to Charles V, for instance, Fray Jacobo de Testera emphasised that the Indians’ ‘rites of idolatry and the adorations of their false gods and their ceremonies and sacrifices, however evil, are born of a natural desire that seeks succour but fails to find an efficacious remedy’.³⁴ Others could base similar remarks upon simple appeals to common sense that made any recourse to authority superfluous. ‘We too’, wrote Jerónimo López to Charles V in 1545,

come from gentile peoples, and we too were defeated, conquered and subjected, and we were subjected to the Romans and we rejected them and rebelled and were converted to baptism, and have been so a much greater number of years than them, and still we are not good Christians. What then are we asking of these so short a time after their conversion?³⁵

But these hopes were a mere flicker of the earlier enthusiasm. By the middle of the century there could be little doubt that the growing tide of pessimism had triumphed, and that with it there had also emerged an enhanced and considerably more compelling image of the devil and the diabolic. Already in 1567, the Franciscan Fernando de Arbolancha could write to the Council of the Indies attacking the old idea of the innocence and simplicity of the Indians; and a few years later, the Franciscan Provincial of Guatemala, Fray Bernardino Pérez, urged the Council to legislate in favour of the policy of Indian Hispanisation, stating that a negative decision in this respect would 'cause much evil and even hint at a certain diabolical ambition', because 'just as the devil had encouraged the confusion of tongues in order to keep men under his power, so the particular ambitions of some want to continue it'.³⁶

A clear change had taken place. Whereas Sahagún's deep concern with the influence of the devil on the Indians had expressed itself in a detailed and meticulous investigation of their cultures, his immediate successors seemed convinced that Indian cultures were too dangerous to merit such study.

It would be tempting to explain this change as the result of the missionary disillusionment with the process of conversion. But, although this factor undoubtedly played a part, the change was too wide-ranging to be explained away so simply. In fact, the new attitude soon transcended the missionary sphere and was seen to descend like a thick fog into every statement officially or unofficially made about Indian cultures. While, for instance, the growing mistrust of indigenous cultures led the Crown to insist in 1550 that Spanish be taught to Indians so as to 'avoid the great dissonances and imperfections that native tongues are naturally prone to', a certain Tomás López complained from Guatemala about the diffusion of Nahuatl, 'which I understand to have been and to be an invention of the devil'.³⁷

It should, of course, be remembered that at this time such statements were conditioned by a new set of instrumental assumptions about the practice of Empire. The New World was no longer the millenarian dream of the first Franciscans, but a substantial part of an imperial system which conceived itself as a single and universal community. As such, it aimed to be governed by the same unity and respect for the same laws, and clearly the mere export of a body of legislation was insufficient to achieve this. The monarch, in fact, had to attempt a true 'acculturation' - or, to use a less anachronistic term, Hispanisation - of his subjects. The prime instrument in this process was obviously language, for it was a humanistic commonplace that those who control the means of persuasion control the means of power. As Antonio de Nebrija had

told Queen Isabella as early as 1492 when he presented her with his Spanish grammar, 'language is the instrument of Empire'.³⁸

There was, therefore, nothing startlingly new or revolutionary about the Crown's policy of Hispanisation that emerged around the middle of the sixteenth century. What *was* surprising was the way in which the policy seemed to carry so much conviction, even among those missionaries who only a few years earlier would have been at pains to oppose Hispanisation, as well as the way in which it was accompanied by a conspicuously pessimistic perception of Indian cultures which gave the devil a much more prominent role. It is true that, as a rule, the two aspects of the problem tended to go hand in hand. As Sabine MacCormack has suggested, whenever Christianity is backed by the State, conversion tends to adopt a pattern which entails a rejection of all earlier ways of worship and thought as inimical to the new religion. Such a pattern of the mechanisms of conversion, which follows the age-old directives of Tertullian and Ambrose – the first Christian thinkers to be backed by the Roman empire –, is in clear contrast with the alternative approach advocated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, according to whom the pagan religions enshrined much of what was to be learnt more concretely in Christianity.³⁹ And indeed, as soon as Christian conversion became a specific concern of the Spanish state and was thus taken away from the exclusive sphere of the missionaries, it ceased to be a matter of assent based on reason and argument and it became a matter of acquiescence based on faith, authority and tradition.

In this context, it is natural to expect the diabolic to have been given an active role as a useful means in the struggle for power. Indeed, the devil's influence tended to increase in the perceptions of the friars vis-à-vis the Indians in a way analogous to the way in which it had increased in, say, the perceptions of St Augustine vis-à-vis the Romans. But a problem remains even after this point is granted. For despite St Augustine's insistence on the vast power of Satan and his demons – whom he saw as 'a species of beings superior to men, living for ever, their bodies as active and as subtle as the air, endowed with supernatural powers of perception; and, as fallen angels, the sworn enemies of the true happiness of the human race'⁴⁰ – he nevertheless always placed their power in the context of God's omnipotence. Indeed, God had shown his omnipotence most clearly in the way in which he always restrained the powers of the devil, who, otherwise, would obliterate the whole Christian church.⁴¹ Accordingly, St Augustine revealed the demonic undertow of the pagan past with the purpose of exorcising it. By blaming the devil for whatever seemed barbarous or despicable in pagan history he justified the secular aspects of the pagan past and enhanced their intrinsic value.

By contrast, the Spanish missionaries and officials who supported the Crown's policy of Hispanisation seemed, from the middle of the century, to be stressing the allegedly demonic nature of Indian religions with the purpose of condemning them outright. This was a very different approach to the demonic in Christian thought which cannot be adequately understood outside the context

of contemporary European intellectual developments. Before we can continue, therefore, we must make a necessary digression that will allow us to understand the ideological developments taking place on the other side of the Atlantic where, as we shall see, the perceptions of the diabolic were undergoing a significant transformation.

The European background: Moralists, Nominalists and Reformers

By the time of the Reformation, the chief characteristics of the demonic that would go into the making of the early modern European devil had been known for many centuries. Already in the New Testament the devil could be perceived as the personification of evil: a being who did physical harm to people by attacking or possessing their bodies, who tempted them, and who accused and punished sinners. In contrast to the rabbinic tradition, which had tended to limit the concept of the devil, the early Christians seem to have expanded and strengthened it by identifying Satan and his demons with the fallen angels. In doing this, they not only removed the devil decidedly from his previous divine origin, but they actually clarified the nature and the ranks of good and evil angels and the extent of their power over nature and over men. Just as a natural theology could be argued from the human experience of the good, the early Christians attempted to argue a natural diabolology from the human experience of evil.⁴²

The importance that the devil came to acquire in Christian thought can be seen both in the thought of philosophers, like Origen – one of the first Christian thinkers to identify Satan with Isaiah's Daystar⁴³, with Ezechiel's Prince of Tyre⁴⁴ and with Job's Leviathan⁴⁵ – and, more vividly, in the teachings of the monks of the desert, for whom demonic temptations provided an ideal opportunity to take part in the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan, and whose copious hagiographies added colour and detail to the personifications of evil.⁴⁶

Yet a marked confidence in the power of the Church against the various demonic instigations was always effectively preserved. This was largely due to the way in which Christian thinkers had from the earliest days insisted upon the devil's complete subservience to God. Hermas, Polycarp and Plutarch taught that the devil had no power over the human soul; Justin Martyr, that the devil was a creature of God, with an essentially good nature which he had merely deformed through his own free will;⁴⁷ and Irenaeus and Tertullian, that the devil's powers over men were limited, since he could not force them to sin against their will. The view that evil was not an independent principle was to be reinforced by the Alexandrians Clement and Origen, who were among the first to assert that evil does not exist in itself⁴⁸ and whose teachings would in turn prepare the ground for St Augustine's classic definition which denied evil all ontological existence.⁴⁹

If evil had no substance, no actual existence, no intrinsic reality; if nothing was by nature evil; then a principle of evil – an evil being independent from God – was an absurdity. It would be impossible to exaggerate the strength of this philosophical principle in medieval Christian thought. It can be seen at work even in those areas furthest removed from philosophy. The vivid and frightening devil which characterised monastic sermons and *exempla*, for example, was effectively toned down in popular folklore by making him appear ridiculous or impotent. Thus, the stories of Gregory of Tours in sixth-century Gaul follow the guidelines of Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian in aiming to be amusing and light and in invariably leading to happy endings in which the saints triumphed over their demonic adversaries, often in a humorous way, thereby encouraging the development of a trivial and comic image of the devil in popular literature.⁵⁰ Even the more strictly theological or juridical expressions of the Christian struggle against Satan, which were vividly represented in the exorcisms of the possessed, were much more than the complex ‘psycho-dramas’ that the modern student is apt to imagine. As Peter Brown has suggested, exorcism was held to be the one irrefutable sign of *praesentia* – the physical presence of the holy – in the great basilicas of Catholic Gaul. It was ‘the one demonstration of the power of God that carried unanswerable authority’.⁵¹

There could be little doubt here of the devil’s total subservience to God and of his complete inability to do anything against God’s will. Even inside the cloister, where the devil was seemingly given a much freer hand, the monastic liturgical life was designed to represent a continual battle against Satan and his army of demons. However difficult or potentially demoralising the struggle might have seemed, it was none the less motivated by the firm conviction that God would inevitably triumph.

How, then, was it possible for this unflinching confidence to be so drastically shaken in the middle of the sixteenth century? It is clear that any attempt to answer this question would be incomplete and well beyond the scope of this paper. My aim in this section is merely to point to a few significant developments in late medieval thought that, in my view, help to clarify the intellectual motives for the change of attitude that we detected in the European interpretation of Amerindian cultures.

The Ten Commandments

As a modern historian has suggested, the first signs of the notion of the devil that would become dominant in the early modern period can be traced back to the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century when, in their attempt to reform the world from the vantage point of monasticism, the reformers encouraged a transposition of monastic spirituality from the cloister into the secular world. Since the secular world lacked the liturgical defences of the monastery, the motives and ideals that had led to the development of the monastic devil associated with sermons, *exempla* and hagiographies, adopted

a very different existence in the untrained minds of the secular clergy and lay people.⁵² As a result, quite independently of the rise in manifestations of dissent at this time – notably the Cathar movement – which indeed helped to sharpen the sense of the world’s vulnerability to demonic influence, a sense of helplessness against demonic instigations began to be felt in more personal and direct ways. Already in the writings of the Cistercian mystic and historian Cesarius of Heisterbach (c. 1180-1240), it is clear that demons had become no mere external enemies doomed to be defeated by the bearers of a militant faith, but that they had penetrated into every corner of life and, above all, into the souls of individual Christians. More than the causes of droughts or epidemics, demons had come to be regarded, outside as well as inside the cloister, as the instigators of interior desires that individuals could not acknowledge as belonging to themselves.⁵³

This trend was no doubt linked to the growing mood of spiritual introspection that gathered momentum towards the end of the medieval period. It was especially marked by the growing emphasis on domestic piety and by a widespread urge to achieve a more vivid and dramatic identification of individual religious experiences with the sufferings of Christ, as expressed most typically in the flagellant movements. But, as John Bossy has interestingly pointed out, the new trend was also linked to a curious change of emphasis in late medieval perceptions of sin and penance from a moral system based on the Seven Deadly Sins to one based on the Ten Commandments.⁵⁴ As Bossy explains, the traditional moral system taught throughout the medieval period was based on the seven ‘deadly’ or ‘capital’ sins: pride, envy, wrath, avarice, gluttony, sloth and lust – usually in that order. Although the list was not Christian, but Greek and possibly astrological in origin, it had been given authority by St Gregory the Great and it could be related to the moral teaching of the New Testament by viewing it as a negative exposition of Jesus’s twofold commandment to love God and one’s neighbour. The system had many advantages. Not only did the Seven Sins fit into a whole string of septenary classifications – the seven sacraments, the seven works of mercy, the seven petitions of the *Paternoster*, etc. – which made them easy to remember; they were also easy to represent visually and, perhaps more importantly, they provided a set of categories under which people could identify passions of hostility, which at this time were the most vigorous, as un-Christian. In Bossy’s words, the system ‘taught fairly effectively a social or community ethics’.⁵⁵

Yet the system had the disadvantage of making little of obligations to God and, more worrying still, of having no scriptural authority. It is consequently not surprising to find the scholastic theologians of the thirteenth century attempting to build their treatments of Christian ethics around the Decalogue. And as the new system, based on the Ten Commandments, came to replace the old one, based on the Seven Sins, new perceptions of morality came to the fore whose effects, in Bossy’s words, ‘may fairly be described as revolutionary’.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most significant of these effects was a notable enhancement of the status of the devil. By treating idolatry as the primary offence that a Christian could commit, the Decalogue led to a change from the traditional role of the devil as the anti-type of Christ – the ‘Fiend’ who taught men to hate rather than to love – to his new role as the anti-type of God the Father: the source and object of idolatry and false worship. By analogy, whereas traditionally witchcraft had been seen as the offence of causing malicious harm to others – it is interesting, for instance, to note that in Chaucer’s exposition it had been dealt with, rather loosely, under wrath – in the new context it became a clear offence against the First Commandment. So too, just as the phenomenon of Carnival could in the old context be explained as an inverted image of the traditional machinery of penance derived from a moral system based on the Seven Sins, in the new context, the phenomenon of the witch could be explained as an inverted image of a moral system founded on the Ten Commandments, particularly the first.

It is no accident, therefore, that in proportion as the Ten Commandments became established as the accepted system of Christian ethics, the spell of the witch syndrome, which went hand in hand with an enhanced status of the diabolic, proved increasingly persuasive.⁵⁷

The Via Moderna

If the gradual acceptance of the Ten Commandments as the basis for the moral system of Christendom was central to the identification of diabolism with idolatry in the late Middle Ages, a question that immediately springs to mind is why the new attitude only became dominant in the middle of the sixteenth century. As we have seen, at the time of the discovery of America, it was still common for the vast majority of people to feel confident in the power of the Church against demonic instigations. The attitudes of Cortés and Motolinía were not exceptional and they find parallels in isolated incidents recorded among widely different groups. In 1536, for instance, an Indian woman from Chilapa (now in eastern Guerrero) was allegedly taken by the devil to the top of a mountain to ask her to ‘recognise him and adore him as her God’, whereupon she simply slapped his face and went back down. That same year, the devil was reported to have appeared to the young Spaniard Maese Juan in an island after a shipwreck while he was urinating in the middle of the night, ‘blowing smoke through his nose and fire throw his eyes, with clawed feet, the tail of a bat and two horns’. Far from feeling helpless at the sight of this typically medieval vision, Maese Juan quickly made the sign of the cross and the devil promptly ran away in a fright.⁵⁸

Such confidence was in many ways a reflection of the marked scepticism, still widespread in pre-Reformation days, about the extent of the influence that the devil could exercise over the human will and over the natural world. Natural magicians like Ficino and alchemists like Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno might be firm believers in a nature filled with demons and charged with

magical forces. But these beliefs did not contribute to the growth of diabolism, as Lucien Febvre once claimed.⁵⁹ For rather than being the supernatural servants of Satan, the Neoplatonist demons were natural entities, perfectly amenable to human control. It is true that, on the other side of the philosophical spectrum, Aristotelians were in general happy to accept demonic causation in natural events through such phenomena as 'occult' qualities. But even among such notable Aristotelians as the famous Paduan lawyer Ulrich Müller, the belief was firmly held that witches were not the servants of the devil but simply the victims of poverty or despair or village hatreds. So too, Agostino Nifo, Pope Leo X's physician, affirmed that in a truly Aristotelian universe there was no room for demons, and Pietro Pomponazzi averred that all the marvels ascribed to demons were always the result of a different cause, that apparitions were natural phenomena and that people who claimed to be 'possessed' were merely melancholic. Similar opinions were voiced by contemporary lawyers like Andrea Alciati and Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio, philosophers like Cornelius Agrippa and Girolamo Cardano, physicians like Antonio Ferrari and even Franciscan scholastics like Samuel de Cassini.⁶⁰

It is true that for the most part this kind of scepticism was associated with what Hugh Trevor-Roper once called 'the purified Aristotelianism of the University of Padua', which was renowned for its attacks on the excesses of late medieval scholasticism,⁶¹ and that most early modern Aristotelians would have readily accepted demonic causation in nature. But it cannot be stressed enough that even among the most 'credulous' of Aristotelian scholastics, the firm belief in the devil's complete subservience to God was always effectively preserved. Even the authors of the *Malleus maleficarum*, a work commonly seen as the central theological work of the witch-hunts, were in fact at pains to stress that the real problem about witches was malefice, particularly malefice in relation to the sexual act and marriage, and *not* idolatry or devil-worship. It can thus be misleading to place the *Malleus* in the same tradition as the manuals of demonology that became common during the witch-hunts. For unlike these, the *Malleus* still saw witchcraft in the traditional sense, as a conspiracy against nature, charity and the human race, and not as a conspiracy of idolaters and devil-worshippers.⁶² Despite its undeniable influence during the witch prosecutions, the *Malleus* still managed to preserve the traditional confidence in the power of God and the Church against the attacks of the Enemy.

By the middle of the sixteenth century such confidence had been noticeably diminished. Among the many reasons that can be given to explain this development, one that springs to mind from our current argument is the marked post-Reformation insistence on the importance of an ethical system with a scriptural basis, which inevitably led to the final endorsement of the Decalogue as the definitive moral system of Christianity on both sides of the confessional front. Just as Luther had done, the catechism of the Council of Trent would endorse the view that the Decalogue comprehended the entire moral obligations of Christians. Whereas earlier attempts had kept an important place for the

Seven Sins, from now on these became clearly secondary to the Ten Commandments.⁶³

Nevertheless, it would not be too difficult to present the same argument in reverse. St Thomas Aquinas had, after all, built his treatment of Christian ethics around the Decalogue. Yet, he had equally maintained not only that the Commandments were a compendium of natural law, but also that the natural law was valid independently of the Commandments. Aquinas's treatment of the Commandments was therefore an affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of nature independently of the effects of grace. And if nature was intrinsically good, even independently of whether God had willed it so or no, it is difficult to see how the devil, even through the operation of witches, could have had any arbitrary or uncontrollable influence upon it. Acceptance of the Decalogue, therefore, could also go hand in hand with the decline of the diabolic. This is what seems to have happened among the Aristotelians of Padua and, to some extent, as we have seen, the same attitude can even be detected in the *Malleus maleficarum* itself.

The fact remains, however, that on this, as on many other issues, Aquinas's opinion did not carry the day. Medieval scholastics by and large tended to reject Aquinas's moral system and they were especially offended by its naturalistic bent. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham thought it inadmissible to bind God's moral decisions within a normative system which could be conceived as separate or distinct from God. Where Aquinas would have argued: God wills something because *it* is good, Scotus and Ockham would reverse the syllogism into: something is good because *God* wills it. This left no room for the possibility of a natural knowledge of God or even for the demonstrability of a natural religion. God's claims to absolute freedom and absolute power became so overwhelming that any human act's claim to goodness came to rely solely on the fact that God had commanded it so. Ethics thus ceased to be a matter of reason and became entirely dependent upon Revelation, which in turn became an arbitrary imposition, to be accepted with unreasoning submission and left without comment or explanation. In this way, the natural was necessarily separated from the supernatural, and the concordance between nature and grace lost its relevance.⁶⁴

Taking into consideration the general climate of late medieval spirituality, and particularly its mystical and introspective tendencies, it is not difficult to understand why the *via moderna* – as 'Nominalism' or 'Ockhamism' was known – should have proved more attractive than the *via antiqua* of the Thomists. If not Ockham, certainly Scotus claimed more followers than Aquinas between 1350 and 1650. Significantly among these were the members of the University of Paris, where Cardinal Pierre D'Ailly gave the doctrine the seal of his authority and passed it on to his brilliant pupil Jean Gerson.

It is thus among Gerson and his circle that the inspirational sources of early modern demonology are to be sought.⁶⁵ Widely regarded as one of the most

influential thinkers in the century before the Reformation, Gerson effectively expounded the doctrine of the Ten Commandments from the perspective of Nominalism rather than Thomism. It is no accident that it was during his years as Chancellor of the University of Paris that the famous decision was reached by the faculty of theology in 1398 that all strictly maleficent witchcraft, as well as all seemingly beneficent counterwitchcraft, were in fact idolatrous, since they necessarily entailed apostasy and submission to the devil. A tireless propagator of the Decalogue as the system of Christian ethics, Gerson could only see witchcraft as a sin of idolatry; but since he was also convinced about the philosophical soundness of the *via moderna*, he did not have the defences of the Thomists who could base themselves on the doctrine of the intrinsic goodness of nature to deny the devil the possibility of exercising any arbitrary power over it. In contrast to the Thomist position, the Nominalist separation of nature and grace seemed to increase the devil's power in proportion as it increased the arbitrariness of God's will.

It is true that outside Germany – where the influence of Gerson can be detected on Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (c. 1430) and Johannes Geiler's *Die Emeis* (1516) – any Gersonian influence on demonological treatises is difficult to establish. Nevertheless, it seems safe to suggest without exaggeration that the general spirit of early modern demonology was immersed in the twofold acceptance of Nominalism as a philosophical system and of the Decalogue as a moral system. Indeed, even after Nominalism had become discredited by the attacks of humanists and reformers in the sixteenth century, the demonology that it had helped to establish had become too firmly rooted in Christian thought to be removed with any ease. Lutherans in particular could confidently assert that all maleficent effects were caused by the devil with divine permission, and, consequently, that witches were not workers of malicious harm but idolatrous disciples of the devil and contemners of God.⁶⁶ But the same tendency proved equally persuasive among Catholics, even in spite of the Catechism of the Council of Trent's confirmation of Aquinas's view of the Commandments as a compendium of the natural law.⁶⁷

Nor is this apparent inconsistency surprising. For despite the existence of first rate Thomist commentators like the Dominicans Cajetan (1468-1534) and, especially, John of St. Thomas (1589-1644), the increasingly fragmented and intellectually eclectic theological debates that came to characterise the early modern period were fundamentally inimical to the traditional Thomistic conception of enquiry as a long-term, cooperative, pursuit of systematic understanding.⁶⁸ If the theologians at Trent were willing to welcome Aquinas as a guide, they nevertheless reserved the right to a philosophical method that differed considerably from traditional Thomism. The most authoritative philosopher of the period, the Jesuit Francisco Suárez, for instance, formulated a philosophy that tended to an eclectic synthesis of the thought of Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham with the apologetic purpose of demonstrating that all Catholic thinkers were in agreement. The price of this attempt, as Pietro Redondi has written, 'was the abandonment of St. Thomas's theory of free will

in order to admit direct knowledge of the individual'. In the philosophy of Suárez, therefore, 'there prevailed in respect of pure Thomism an Ockhamist opinion of the epistemological value of the singular and of the individual experience'.⁶⁹

The effects that this Ockhamist persistence in post-Trent Catholicism would have on subsequent demonological thought would be difficult to exaggerate. For the new position was fundamentally irreconcilable with Aquinas's theory of the human intelligence which, in turn, was the keystone of the Thomistic formulation of the concordance between nature and grace. In contrast to his Platonist predecessors, Aquinas had applied the principles of Aristotelian physics to the nature of man, teaching that matter was the principle of human individuation and that the soul was the form of the body. Hence man was not primarily a spiritual being confined in the 'prison' of the body, but a part of nature. And, likewise, human intelligence was not that of a pure spirit; it was 'consubstantial' with matter, subject to the conditions of space and time, and only capable of *knowing* – ie, constructing an intelligible order – through the data of sensible experience systematised by reason.⁷⁰ And yet this recognition of the dependence of human knowledge on sensible experience did not exclude Aquinas's philosophy from the world of spiritual reality. As Christopher Dawson once remarked:

The intellectualism of St. Thomas is equally remote from an absolute idealism and a rationalist empiricism, from the metaphysical mysticism of the ancient East and from the scientific materialism of the modern West. It recognised the autonomous rights of the human reason and its scientific activity against the absolutism of a purely theological ideal of knowledge, and the rights of human nature and natural morality against the exclusive domination of the ascetic ideal.⁷¹

It was the failure of early modern Thomists to preserve this balance that eventually opened the door of Catholicism to that 'alliance between Augustinianism and Nominalism' which has been described by Heiko Oberman as a characteristic feature of Lutheranism.⁷² Certainly Suárez, in his attempt to restore scholastic metaphysics and epistemology, chose to become an Ockhamist in order to defeat sensist Ockhamism. In the process he formulated a philosophical method that denied hylomorphism. If it is true that Suárez affirmed the intellect's capacity to apprehend individual existents without reflection, the need to make a transition from apprehensions of essence to judgements of particular existence necessarily implied a complete separation of matter and spirit. (It is perhaps no accident that one of the most brilliant pupils of the Suarist Jesuits was René Descartes!)⁷³

It was thus this triumph of Nominalism which, when allied to the moral system of the Decalogue, made the post-Trent demonology – the demonology that would make its mark in the New World in the early sixteenth century and which found its inspiration in the works of theologians such as Martín de

Castañega and, later, Martín del Río – so fundamentally different from the demonology of the *Malleus maleficarum*. Malefice had ceased to be the centre of the problem and had given way to idolatry and devil-worship as the main objects of concern. And if it is true that this interiorisation of the crime of witchcraft effectively played against the actual practice of witch prosecution, it is no less true that it made the reality and the implications of diabolism much more immediate and compelling.

This is certainly true of the demonology that first made its appearance in the New World. The rigour with which Zumárraga persecuted idolatrous Indians would have been unthinkable among his Franciscan predecessors. However, it becomes perfectly intelligible when we consider that Zumárraga had not come from the Province of San Gabriel de Extremadura and that any optimistic millenarianism that he could have shared with his co-religionists was overshadowed by his experiences in the Basque country, where in 1527 – only a year before his departure for Mexico – he had been sent by Charles V to investigate the resurgence of demonic activities.⁷⁴ Perhaps the best way into Zumárraga's demonology is through the work of Fray Andrés de Olmos, his closest aide both in the Basque country and in Mexico. For although Olmos had been 'converted' to millenarian optimism by Motolinía soon after his arrival, he was sufficiently disappointed by the persistence of idolatry among the Indians in the 1530s and 1540s to persuade himself of the need to write a whole treatise in Nahuatl on Satanic witchcraft in the early 1550s.⁷⁵ Based almost entirely on the earlier work of Fray Martín de Castañega,⁷⁶ Olmos's central concern in this treatise was to establish that diabolism was not maleficent but idolatrous. Lapsed Indians could no longer be seen as gullible simpletons who had been deluded by the devil, or as malicious sorcerers who used demonic power to harm their fellow beings. Much more serious than this, Olmos asserted, idolatrous Indians were active devil-worshippers, members of a counter church set up by a devil anxious to be honoured like God. With this purpose Satan had set up his own church as a mimetic inversion of the Catholic Church. It had its 'excrements' to counter the Church's sacraments; it had its ministers, who were mostly women, as opposed to the predominance of male ministers in the Church; and it had its human sacrifices which sought to imitate the supreme sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist.⁷⁷

It is difficult to appreciate the logic of this demonology unless we see it in the context of the Nominalist separation of nature and grace that, as we have seen, had come to dominate philosophical and theological thought at this time. As will become apparent from the thought of one of the most able and systematic thinkers to write about the New World in the sixteenth century, it is in the context of this Nominalist separation that the best sense can be made of the obsession with the diabolic that came to characterise European thought at this time, an obsession that would inevitably colour most European interpretations of non-European religious expressions.

The new demonology: José de Acosta

The most competent exponent of post Reformation demonology in the New World is perhaps the brilliant Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta (1540-1600). A corpulent and melancholic figure of Jewish descent, Acosta was educated at the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares, where already the Jesuits were beginning to challenge the Dominicans for mastery over the faculties of philosophy and theology. After completing his studies in Rome and teaching theology at the colleges of Ocaña and Plasencia, he was sent to Peru, apparently on his own request, where he spent the next fifteen years, first as rector of the college of Lima, then as Provincial of the Society of Jesus and finally as consultant theologian of the Third Provincial Council in Lima. Ill health forced him to return to Europe in 1586. On his way back he stopped for a year in Mexico and was in close contact with his fellow Jesuit Juan de Tovar, who supplied him with most of the information on Ancient Mexico that would later appear in his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, a work published in Seville in 1590 and destined to win him immediate and enduring fame.⁷⁸

The particular significance of Acosta's work for our purpose lies in the clarity with which it highlights the permeation of Christian thought – even among those who, like Acosta himself, considered themselves to be in the mainstream of Thomist 'orthodoxy' – by the Nominalist separation of nature and grace. Indeed, the contrast between his treatment of what he regarded as 'natural' and his analysis of what he thought to belong to the 'supernatural' sphere in the cultures of America is so striking that, at first sight, it is hard to believe that they are the constructs of the same mind.

As far as the 'natural' sphere was concerned, Acosta's account of the native cultures of the New World was one of the most objective and original to have hitherto appeared. In easy, fluent style, the reader was provided with a concise and lucid exposition of the nature, origins and organisation of Indian cultures which clarified complex questions with confident and critical acumen. In a work that was very short by the standards of the day, the Jesuit left little doubt that he had assimilated the lessons of the Renaissance as far as style and perspective were concerned, 'at all points rejecting myth and authority in favour of observation and reason'.⁷⁹ Despite his firm Aristotelianism he had no qualms about mocking Aristotle's meteorological assumptions 'seeing that in the place where, and at the time when, according to his rules, everything should be on fire, I and all my companions were very cold'.⁸⁰ He was equally critical of Aristotle's theory of slavery, asserting that natural slaves did not exist and that any slavish behaviour that might be observed among the Indians was the result of habit.⁸¹ Where previous writers had been content to revert to tradition or to ancient wisdom, Acosta insisted that empirical knowledge and experience should always take precedence over the doctrines of ancient philosophers in any examination of the causes and effects of natural phenomena. Accordingly, native cultures had to be understood on their own terms. Comparisons with other races would only lead to absurd and inappropriate

analogies. 'So long as they do not contradict the law of Christ and his Holy Church', he wrote, the Indians

should be governed according to their own laws, the ignorance of which has led to many errors... For, when the judges and rulers are ignorant of the ways in which their subjects are to be judged and ruled, they not only inflict grief and injustice on them, but they also ... encourage them to abhor us as men who in all things, be they good or bad, have always opposed them.⁸²

This seemed a long cry from Zumárraga and Olmos and Sahagún. Indeed, Acosta's insistence on the urgency to assess Indian cultures on their own terms and his pursuit of causality and generality where his predecessors had been content with the mere observation and description of phenomena, in some ways resembled the purpose and method of modern science. It is no doubt this quality that gained Acosta the respect of William Robertson in the eighteenth century, when the Scotsman pronounced the *Historia* to be 'one of the most accurate and best informed writings concerning the West Indies', an opinion that found a recent echo when Anthony Pagden concluded that Acosta's work had made 'some kind of comparative ethnology, and ultimately some measure of historical relativism, inescapable'.⁸³

The fact that the devil had little or no room in this scheme was reflected in Acosta's frequent impatience with the opinions of 'ignorant friars' who imagined the whole of the Indian past as a diabolical hallucination.⁸⁴ Rather than blaming the devil, Acosta was at pains to stress the natural goodness of Indian cultures. 'If anyone – he wrote – is amazed at the rites and customs of the Indians ... and detests them as inhuman and diabolical ... let him remember that among the Greeks and the Romans one finds the same kind of crimes and often even worse ones'. So too, he reminded his readers that according to Bede, the Irish and the English, 'in their gentile days', had been no more enlightened than the Indians.⁸⁵ In their refusal to abandon their ancient rites and customs the Indians were not necessarily playing into the hands of the devil. Rather, their behaviour was no different from that of the bulk of the Castilian peasantry who merely needed instruction to 'submit to the truth as a thief surprised in his crime'.⁸⁶

In all this, Acosta seemed poles apart from the demonology of his time. Even when dealing with the irksome question of conversion, Acosta's insistence on the need to preserve those pagan rites and ceremonies that did not conflict with Christianity⁸⁷ seemed to echo St Gregory the Great's advice to St Augustine of Canterbury, and was in perfect tune with the current Jesuit missionary practice which produced its most illustrative representatives in China and India with Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili. But Acosta was only willing to deploy such analytical acumen when dealing with natural phenomena or with cultural expressions that could be explained from a strictly natural standpoint. As soon as he entered the field of religion proper, all his insistence on empirical knowledge and analysis seemed to come to a complete standstill. To

enter the sphere of the supernatural was to enter the sphere of theological certainty, where the divine law was the one and only standard of truth and where the divine will alone was sovereign. Thus, when faced with the curious similarities that existed between Christian and pagan religious practices, Acosta was as baffled as his predecessors. Unlike Motolinía, however, he could find no room for providentialist hopes. Despite his conviction that in the wider structure of the divine plan good would always triumph over evil, when faced with Indian religions Acosta could not bring himself to anticipate God's intentions. To his mind, the evident similarities between Christian and pagan religious ceremonies necessarily pointed to a supernatural origin in the latter, and since it would be absurd to think of God as attempting to imitate himself, the only alternative source to account for such similarities had to be a diabolical one.

It is true that Acosta, in Thomist fashion, would have accepted that man was capable of grasping religious truth by the mere encouragement of his own innate and natural desire for truth. But this desire seemed in itself insufficient to produce religious expressions that so closely resembled Christian religious practices, especially in milieux where Christianity had been totally unknown. Conversely, it was a commonplace in contemporary theological thought that Satan, the *Simia Dei*, was forever seeking to imitate his creator, so that, as Pedro Ciruelo had put it, 'the more saintly and devout the things he made men do, the greater was the sin against God'.⁸⁸ From this it followed that the more highly structured was the social order of pagan peoples, and the more refined and complex was their civility and religious organisation, the more idolatrous and perverted were the results.⁸⁹

It was in his analysis of Indian religions, however, that the Nominalist separation of nature and grace was taken by Acosta, with impeccable logic, to its most extreme and dramatic conclusions. Defined in the book of Wisdom as the 'beginning cause and end of every evil', idolatry had always been regarded as the worst of all sins: the means through which the Prince of Lies, moved by pride and envy, had blinded men to the true shape of God's design for nature.⁹⁰ Now, by denying paganism any natural means towards a supernatural end – unless, of course, both the means and the end could be classed as diabolic – Acosta effectively equated paganism with idolatry. Anything faintly religious in pagan cultures was necessarily the result of Satan's incorrigible mimetic desire.⁹¹ It was precisely this mimetic desire that was at the root of the existence of counter religious practices among the Indians of America. For the devil was constantly taking advantage of any opportunity that would allow him to imitate the divine cult. In America he had his own priests who offered sacrifices and administered sacraments in his honour. He had many followers who led lives of 'recollection and sham sanctity'. He had 'a thousand types of false prophets' through whom he sought to 'usurp the glory of God and feign light with darkness'. Indeed, there was 'hardly anything that had been instituted by Jesus Christ ... which, in some way or other, the devil had not sophisticated and incorporated into their [the Indians'] heathendom'. In his attempt to imitate

Catholic ritual Satan had distinguished between ‘minor, major and supreme priests, and a type of acolyte’, and had founded ‘monasteries’ where chastity was rigorously observed, ‘not because of any love of cleanliness ... but because of his desire to deprive God, in any way that he can, of the glory of being served with integrity and cleanliness’. It was in the same spirit that Satan had encouraged ‘penances and ascetic disciplines’ in his honour, and sacrifices where he not only competed with the divine law, but actually tried to overstep it: for God had stopped Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, whereas Satan encouraged human sacrifices on a massive scale. His frantic mimetic desire had even culminated in a desperate attempt to imitate the mystery of the Trinity.⁹²

Such Satanic ‘envy and urge to compete’ became even more explicit in the devil’s attempts to imitate the Christian sacraments. For he had instituted sham imitations of baptism, marriage, confession and sacerdotal unction. More histrionically, the Eucharist had been copied and mocked by the Mexicans in their rituals involving communal banquets which, in the May celebrations of the god Huitzilopochtli, reached the level of an elaborate parody of the feast of Corpus Christi: after a long procession, the feast culminated in the communal ingestion of a small idol made of maize pastry and honey. ‘Who could fail to be astonished – Acosta exclaimed – that the devil should take so much care to have himself adored and received in the same way that Jesus Christ ... commanded and taught [to be received]!’⁹³

Since, however, such similarities were a clear proof of the demonic nature of Indian religions, Acosta chose to overlook the chastity of the ‘monasteries’ and the asceticism of the ‘penitential’ practices and to stress that pagan religious ceremonies were invariably mixed with all types of ‘abominations’ that inverted and perverted the natural order. The unction of priests, for instance, was carried out with a substance amassed with every sort of ‘poisonous vermin’, such as spiders, scorpions, snakes and centipedes, which, when burnt and mixed with the hallucinogen *ololhuqui*, had the power of turning the newly ordained priests into witches who saw the devil, spoke to him and visited him by night in ‘dark and sinister mountains and caves’. Similarly, the parody of the Eucharistic host was made from a mixture of human blood and amaranth seeds; the walls of the ‘oratories’ were always stained with blood and the long hair of the priests had been hardened by the clotted blood of sacrificial victims. Satanic pollution and ritual filth invaded every corner of Indian religion. A conscious inversion of the Christian ideals of sacramental purity and ritual cleanliness, their ritualism culminated in the incomparably offensive practice of human sacrifice which, in an unthinkable perverted fashion, was often accompanied by cannibalism. This was not merely an ‘unnatural crime’ like sodomy and onanism; it was the ultimate expression of idolatry: its self-consuming nature associated it with Satanic desire itself.⁹⁴

In this account of Indian religions, Acosta made the Indians guilty of all the idolatrous aberrations listed in the book of Wisdom:

With their child murdering initiations, their secret mysteries, their orgies with outlandish ceremonies, they no longer retain any purity in their lives... Everywhere a welter of blood and murder, theft and fraud, corruption, treachery, riots, perjury, disturbance ... pollution of souls, sins against nature
 ...⁹⁵

The contrast with his assessment of Indian cultures could not be more marked, and it becomes even more striking when we compare Acosta's method with the way in which his Dominican predecessor, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, had dealt with the same problem a few decades earlier. For Las Casas's background and intellectual concerns were very similar to Acosta's. His thought, like Acosta's, had been moulded by the theological tradition of the School of Salamanca and, consequently, like Acosta, he had grounded his anthropology upon the premise that all human minds were the same in essence, that all men were innately susceptible to moral training, and that any analysis of cultural differences needed to be based on an historical explanation. Like Acosta, too, he had insisted on the primacy of empirical knowledge as the basis of any fruitful analysis of the American reality.⁹⁶ Apart from their clear differences in style, structure and length, therefore, the thought of both writers and their appreciation of Indian cultures was surprisingly similar. The one essential difference between them was that, unlike Acosta, Las Casas did not appear to have been influenced by the Nominalist separation of nature and grace. This left him in freedom to approach the supernatural manifestations of Indian cultures from an essentially naturalistic standpoint.

It is for this reason that we find no sharp contrast between the natural and the supernatural in the writings of Las Casas. Although he distinguished clearly between the two spheres, he thought it a mistake to separate them. Following Aquinas's dictum that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, he concluded that the supernatural, albeit beyond human reason and understanding, was none the less as rational as the natural and that, consequently, any human desire for the supernatural was rooted in nature.⁹⁷ Although he would have agreed with St Augustine, as Aquinas himself had done, that the original initiative always came from God, he was adamant that this did not do away with the essential goodness rooted in human nature itself. The desire for God – *latría* – was a universal and perfectly natural phenomenon which responded to an essential human need. By analogy, *idolatria* was not a demonic invention, but an equally natural – albeit disordered – phenomenon, responding to a natural desire for good and emerging from an error of reason caused by the ignorance and weakness of a fallen nature. Although a degeneration of the original *latría*, idolatry tended to be the rule, the 'natural' state, among the higher civilisations, whenever grace was absent. It could not, therefore, have a diabolical origin. No matter how disordered it might appear, or how much it might be used by the devil to perpetuate his perversities, the basic desire behind idolatry was essentially good: a proof, indeed, that the Indians were eager for evangelisation.⁹⁸

This, of course, did not mean that the devil was not as important for Las Casas as he was for Acosta. Indeed, the reality of Satanic intervention in human affairs was just as present in the writings of the Dominican as in those of the Jesuit, and it was often presented in an even more vivid and pervasive way. The devil was deemed to be constantly transporting men through the air and tempting witches to obtain unbaptised infants for their cannibalistic rites; he would also turn men into beasts; he would perform false miracles and he would constantly appear in human and animal forms.⁹⁹ Yet all these demonic actions were set by Las Casas unquestionably in the context of malefice,¹⁰⁰ and his demonology derived directly from the Thomist tradition that had inspired the authors of the *Malleus maleficarum*.

Consequently, Las Casas's agreement with Aquinas on the question of the relation between nature and grace, which, as we have seen, allowed him to give a naturalistic explanation to the problem of idolatry, invested the devil with a justifying rather than a condemnatory role as far as Indian religious expressions were concerned. Where Acosta had initiated his discussion with a furious denunciation of Satan as the author and fount of idolatry, Las Casas began by invoking Aristotle's criteria for a true city, only moving to a discussion of religion once he had demonstrated the essential goodness of its natural foundations. If the devil was indeed the culprit of all native vices and crimes, he could easily be brought to heel once 'doctrine and grace' were made to work on the essentially good religious expressions of the Indians.¹⁰¹ In all this, Las Casas emerges as one of the last upholders of the Thomist doctrine of the concordance between nature and grace. His views on Indian religions were destined to become the last, desperate cry of an essentially medieval thinker. They had, ironically, much more in common with the optimism about human nature that we detected in the writings of his rivals, Cortés and Motolinía, than with the sombre pessimism that in his own life time he would see permeate Christian thought.

Conclusion

It has been one of the aims of this paper to show how the early modern eclipse of the Thomist dictum on nature and grace, which resulted from the prevailing influence of Nominalism on early modern thought, became central to Acosta's ambivalent analysis of the American reality. Without taking this factor into account, Acosta's work inevitably appears riddled with what David Brading has recently called 'a latent contradiction which he fails to resolve in any satisfactory manner' and which he explains as the result of 'his subordination of humanitarian and religious interests to political expediency'.¹⁰² In the context of the Nominalist streak in his thought, by contrast, Acosta's position is perfectly coherent. For despite the clear political slant that can be detected in Acosta's triumphalist celebrations of the Conquest as the fulfilment of a Providential design, in the light of the contemporary philosophical need to draw a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, his work can be seen as

the most able and persuasive exposition of an attitude to the Indian past that would become dominant until the first half of the eighteenth century. Nor is it surprising that, in due course, the decline of the obsession with demonism and of the tendency to 'demonise' the Indian past should have coincided, not with any visible political shift, but with the increasing realisation among Christian thinkers, from the last years of the seventeenth century onwards, that the only means to preserve a viable Theodicy which would leave any room for a credible demonology was a return to the medieval doctrine of the concordance between nature and grace.¹⁰³

Consequently, the reasons why the Indian past was 'demonised' in the minds of the majority of churchmen and intellectuals after Trent go much further than the exclusively political motives that are commonly advanced to explain the development. To view the process of Indian 'demonisation' as the expression of an imperialist – as opposed to a missionary – approach to conversion, might make some sense in the case of Acosta's triumphalist style, of his flirtations with Viceroy Toledo and of his apparently deliberate ignorance of the writings of Las Casas. But why, then, should Franciscan writers like Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta and Fray Juan de Torquemada, who knew and used the writings of the Dominican, have nevertheless opted to follow the interpretation of the facts suggested by Acosta? Clearly an imperialist, political interpretation of the development is unsatisfactory when such a question is posed. Torquemada's *Monarquía Indiana*, in particular, parallels the ambivalence we detected in Acosta to an extent that would be difficult to overestimate. While, on the one hand, he presents us with a resolute defence of Indian cultures, overwhelming us with comparisons drawn from classical antiquity, comparing Moctezuma with Alexander, and seeking to demonstrate the progression of Indian history from a state of savagery to one of civilisation, on the other he confidently asserts that Indian religions belong, in the last resort, to the Kingdom of Darkness, its seemingly noble expressions being, in fact, the product of direct demonic intervention.¹⁰⁴

This sombre pessimism about Indian religiosity, which permeates the thought of most writers after Las Casas and which became dominant throughout the Colonial period, is more likely to respond to an intellectual concern than to any conscious political design. In claiming this, it has been far from my intention to lay the whole weight of the argument on the shoulders of Acosta. My choice of his work to illustrate a tendency which was much more widespread derived from the incomparable clarity with which it highlights the central issue of the Nominalist streak in post Trent theology and the implications that this had on any assessment of the Indian past. It is fair to stress, moreover, that Acosta himself would undoubtedly have been horrified at the developments that subsequently derived from this tendency. He would have been as impatient with the so-called 'extirpators' of idolatry in the seventeenth century as he had been with those 'ignorant friars' who saw the devil at work in any Indian practice that did not conform with European custom.¹⁰⁵ Paradoxically, however, Acosta's ambivalent insistence on the natural goodness and on the supernatural

evil of Indian civilisation served only to confirm the established fears, and subsequent observers too often proved ill-equipped to distinguish clearly between the two spheres. By the end of the sixteenth century any genuine interest in the logic of Indian cultures seemed to have disappeared. Cultural expressions that Acosta would have seen as harmless were increasingly classed as part of a more widespread Indian initiative where 'under the guise and appearance of religion, they dealt with their own rites, giving cult to the Devil and plotting against our Christian religion',¹⁰⁶ a preoccupation that would become the rule throughout the seventeenth century and which would lead to the wholesale 'demonisation' of Indian cultures not just in the minds of the educated but, as it emerges from the archives of the Inquisition during this period, of the population at large.¹⁰⁷

In all this, of course, power and politics played a central role. Nevertheless, it has been my contention that a more thorough consideration of the implications of the intellectual assumptions behind demonism can provide a necessary corrective to the more common explanation along exclusively political lines, with its implicit condemnation of the European failure to understand 'the other'. For, especially at a time when the social historians have discovered the significance of the anthropological concept of 'the other', it is the task of the intellectual historians to remind them that our early modern Europeans are just as 'other' to us as the American Indians were to them. To fail to do so would mean at least as great an injustice towards early modern Europeans as that which is often imputed to them for failing to understand the Indians.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Most of this paper was written at the Institute of Latin American Studies, London. I wish to thank the Director and the staff of the Institute for the time and the space to re-think many of my conclusions and complete my research. Among the many people from whose comments and suggestions I have profited I wish to thank especially the following: Dr S.B. Bayly, Professor J.A. Bossy, Dr D.A. Brading, Dr Stuart Clark, Dr Eamon Duffy, Professor John Lynch, Dr J.J. Lipner, Dr Anthony Pagden, Dr R.W. Scribner and Fr Simon Tugwell O.P. Translations from Scripture are taken from the Jerusalem Bible. All other translations are my own unless otherwise specified.
2. A useful summary of recent research is given in Eric Van Young's conclusion to Susan E. Ramírez (ed.), *Indian-Religious Relations in Colonial Spanish America* (Syracuse, 1989), pp. 87-102. For Mexico the best studies are by Serge Gruzinski, especially *La colonisation de l'imaginaire* (Paris, 1988). The term "spiritual conquest" was first coined by Robert Ricard, *La "conquête spirituelle" du Mexique* (Paris, 1933).
3. Serge Gruzinski, *Man-gods in the Mexican Highlands* (Stanford, 1989), p. 9.
4. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (London, 1981), pp. 12-22.
5. Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man. The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 4-5.
6. In Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), for instance, it is never clear whether the witch derives her powers from demonic or natural magic. Moreover, she is always willing to ask for God's help and, at the moment of her assassination, her first instinct is to ask for a confessor.
7. Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de Relación*, 10th ed. (Mexico City, 1978), p. 65.
8. Quoted in D.A. Brading, *The First America. The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 35.
9. Cortés, *Cartas*, p. 66

10. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, (various eds.), *passim*. The practice was repeatedly opposed by the Mercedarian chaplain, Barlotomé de Olmedo who, more realistically, favoured a more thorough instruction in the basic principles of the Christian faith.
11. Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, *De l'Idolâtrie. Une archéologie des sciences religieuses* (Paris, 1988), p. 12
12. Christopher Dawson (ed.), *The Mission to Asia. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. 2nd edn. (London, 1980).
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15. J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages. A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 3rd edn. (London, 1937), pp. 22-45.
16. J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 24-7.
17. D.A. Brading, *Prophecy and Myth in Mexican History* (Cambridge, 1984), pp.12-13.
18. F.B. Steck (trans. & ed.), *Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain* (Washington D.C., 1951), p. 254.
19. Cecil Jane (ed.), *Select Documents illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus*, Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, Vol. 65 (London, 1930), i, p.71.
20. Francisco de Aguilar, *Relación breve de la conquista de la Nueva España*, estudio y notas de F. Gómez de Orozco (Mexico City, 1954), p. 163.
21. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra firme del mar océano*, in *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* (Madrid, 1959), cxxi, p. 4.

22. Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía), *Carta a Carlos V*, intr. & notes by J. Bravo Ugarte (Mexico City, 1949), p. 52.
23. Steck, *Motolinía's History*, p. 107.
24. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Ramo Inquisición (hereafter A.G.N., Inq.), Tomo 2, exp. 10 (hereafter 2.10); printed as *Proceso inquisitorial del Cacique de Texcoco*, publicaciones del A.G.N., Vol 1 (Mexico City, 1910). A good summary is Richard E. Greenleaf, *Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition 1536-1543* (Washington D.C., 1961), pp. 68-74.
25. A.G.N., Inq. 37.1; 40.7; 30.9; 40.8.
26. A.G.N. Inq. 37.2; 40.8.
27. Fray Toribio de Motolinía, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1973), p. 20. A.G.N., Inq. 38(I).7.
28. Motolinía, *Historia ...*, p. 85.
29. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España*, 6th edn. (Mexico City, 1985), p. 17.
30. St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 225.
31. Sahagún, *Historia General*, p. 189. His evocation of St Augustine is also clear in the parallels he draws between Mexica and Roman gods, *ibid.*, pp. 33-5.
32. *Ibid*, pp. 704-5.
33. Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 58.
34. 'Carta de Fray Jacobo de Testera y de otros religiosos de la Orden de San Francisco al Emperador...', *Cartas de Indias* (Madrid, 1877), pp. 62-6.
35. Quoted in Serge Gruzinski, 'Le Filet Déchiré: sociétés indigènes, occidentalisation et domination coloniale dans le Mexique central...'. Thèse de doctorat d'Etat, 4 vols. (Paris, 1985), i, pp. 138-9.

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37. *Recopilación de leyes de los Reynos de las Indias* (Madrid, 1681), vi, 1, 18. A.G.I., Guatemala, n. 9, fol. 3r.

38. On this point see Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination. Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory 1513-1830* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 56-8.

39. Sabine MacCormack, "'The Heart has its Reasons": Predicaments of Missionary Christianity in Early Colonial Peru', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 65 (3), Aug. 1985, pp. 443-5.

40. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (London, 1967), p. 311.

41. *Ibid*, p. 395.

42. J.B. Russell, *The Devil. Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca & London, 1977), pp. 256-60.

43. Isaiah, xiv.12-15. 'How did you come to fall from the heavens Daystar, son of Dawn? How did you come to be thrown to the ground, you who enslaved the nations? You who used to think to yourself, "I will climb up to the heavens; and higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will seat on the mount of Assembly in the recess of the north. I will climb to the top of the thunderclouds, I will rival the Most High". What, now you have fallen to Sheol to the very bottom of the abyss!'

44. Ezekiel xxviii.12-19. 'You were once an exemplar of perfection, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty ... [But] your busy trading has filled you with violence and sin ... Your heart has grown swollen with pride on account of your beauty. You have corrupted your wisdom owing to your splendour. I have thrown you to the ground ... I have brought fire out of you to consume you ... Of the nations, all who know you are lost in amazement over you. You are an object of terror, gone forever.'

45. Job xl-xli. '... when he sneezes, light leaps forth, his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. From his mouth come fiery torches ... His nostrils belch smoke ... His breath could kindle coals ... fear leaps before him as he goes ... His heart is as hard as rock ... he makes the sea fume like a scent burner ... He has no equal on earth ... of all the sons of pride he is the king.'

46. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, 1990), pp. 228-30. J. B. Russell, *Satan. The early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca & London, 1981), pp. 166-85.
47. Russell, *Satan*, pp. 42-50, 60-72.
48. *Ibid.* pp. 80-148.
49. St. Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 453-4, 473-4
50. J.B. Russell, *Lucifer. The Devil In the Middle Ages* (Ithaca & London, 1984), pp. 154-7.
51. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 106-7.
52. Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1978), pp. 92-3.
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54. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 35-8.
55. John Bossy, "Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments", in Edmund Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 215, 220.
56. Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 38.
57. Bossy, 'Moral Arithmetic', pp. 229-30; Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, pp. 138-9.
58. Luis Weckman, *La herencia medieval de México*, 2 vols. (Mexico City, 1984), i, pp. 217-8. The stories can be read respectively in Juan de Grijalva, *Crónica de la Orden de San Agustín*, ed. F. Gómez de Orozco (Mexico City, 1924), pp. 85-6; and 'Relación y derrotero del viaje que hizo en el golfo de México a varias islas', in Serrano y Sanz (eds.), *Relaciones históricas de América* (Madrid, 1916), pp. 16-25.
59. L. Febvre, 'Sorcellerie, sottise ou révolution mentale?' *Annales* (3, 1948), p. 13.

60. H.R. Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, 3rd edn. (London, 1984), pp.130-1. The works cited are Alciati, *Parergon Juris*; Ponzinibio, *Tractatus de Lamiis et Excellentia Juris Utriusque*; Cardano, *De Subtilitate* and *De Rerum Varietate*, and Cassini, *Question de le Strie*; all from H. C. Lea, *Materials towards a History of Witchcraft* (Philadelphia, 1939), pp. 374, 377, 435, 366.
61. Trevor-Roper, 'The European Witch-Craze', p. 131.
62. I draw on a re-write of 'Moral Arithmetic' for an Italian edition. I am grateful to John Bossy for letting me see the manuscript.
63. Bossy, 'Moral Arithmetic', pp. 227, 229.
64. David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (Gateshead on Tyne, 1962), pp. 306-26. See also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), ii, pp. 22-5.
65. Bossy, 'Moral Arithmetic', pp. 222-5.
66. On Protestant Demonology see Stuart Clark, 'Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition and Society (c. 1520-c.1630)', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 45-81. The paradoxical fact should be noted that this tendency, by 'interiorising' the crime of witchcraft, went in fact *against* witch prosecution. Nevertheless, this incipient scepticism about the reality of witchcraft among demonologists was nowhere accompanied by a decline of the demonic itself. The Nominalist separation of nature and grace not only 'interiorised' demonism, it made it much more persuasive.
67. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, xviii, 1-2.
68. On this point see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London, 1990), p. 150.
69. Pietro Redondi, *Galileo: Heretic* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 222-3.
70. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ii, 76. See also F.C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (Harmondsworth, 1955), pp.156-98. A clear, brief account of the wider implications of the thesis is Christopher Dawson, 'The Scientific

Development of Medieval Culture', in *Medieval Essays* (London and New York, 1953), pp. 148-152.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

72. Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther. Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven and London, 1989), pp. 119-23, 158-61.

73. Redondi, *Galileo*, p. 222; MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 74-5.

74. Baudot, *Utopía e Historia*, p. 132. See also, Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Relación de la descripción de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio...*, ed. F.J. Chauvet (Mexico City, 1947), p. 174.

75. Fray Andrés de Olmos, *Tratado de hechicerías y sortilegios*, edited by Georges Baudot (Mexico City, 1979).

76. Fray Martín de Castañega, *Tratado muy sutil y bien fundado de las supersticiones y hechicerías y vanos conjuros y abusiones...* (Logroño, 1529).

77. Baudot, *Utopía e Historia*, p. 243.

78. Francisco Mateos, 'Personalidad y escritos del Padre Acosta', *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* (Madrid, 1954), lxxiii, pp. vii-xlix.

79. Brading, *The First America*, p. 184

80. José de Acosta, *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*, 2nd revised edn. by Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico, 1962), p. 77.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-59, 203-4.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 281. See also Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (Cologne, 1596), pp. 483, 517.

83. Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, p. 200. Robertson is quoted in Brading, *The First America*, p. 184.

84. Acosta, *Historia*, pp. 188-9.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 228.

86. Acosta, *De Procuranda*, p. 150; the quotation, from Acosta's *Confesionario para los curas de Indios* (Lima, 1588), is from Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, p. 161.
87. Acosta, *De Procuranda*, p. 483.
88. Pedro Ciruelo, *Tratado en el qual se repruevan todas las supersticiones y hechicerías* (Barcelona, 1628), p. 183.
89. Acosta, *De Procuranda*, p. 474.
90. Wisdom, xiv.27; St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 94a. 4 resp.; Acosta, *De Procuranda*, p. 486; Acosta, *Historia*, pp. 217-8.
91. The term 'mimetic desire' was coined, in a different context, by the French scholar René Girard. See especially, *Le Bouc Emissaire* (Paris, 1982), *passim*.
92. Acosta, *Historia*, pp. 235, 238, 240, 242, 246, 248, 249, 268.
93. *Ibid.*, pp.266, 259-65, 255-9.
94. *Ibid.*, pp.262-5, 248; Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, p. 176.
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96. Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*, p. 146.
97. Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman, 2 vols. (Mexico City, 1967), i, p. 539.
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100. *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 308-9.
101. Las Casas, *Apologética Historia* (ed. E. O'Gorman), i, p. 183; ii, pp. 177, 178, 215.
102. Brading, *The First America*, pp. 193-4.

103. D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London, 1964), pp. 53-7, 202-13. For the same phenomenon in Mexico see Fernando Cervantes, 'The Devils of Querétaro: Scepticism and Credulity in Late Seventeenth-Century Mexico', *Past and Present*, no. 130 (Feb. 1991), esp. pp. 16-21. Although in late seventeenth-century Mexico the actual philosophical issue of the separation of nature and grace does not seem to have been addressed, the problem was implicit in the debates over the power of the devil.
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105. Acosta, *Historia*, pp. 188-9.
106. Fray Pedro de Feria, *Revelación sobre la reincidencia en sus idolatrías de los Indios de Chiapa después de treinta años de cristianos* [1584], in Francisco del Passo y Troncoso (ed.), *Tratado de las idolatrías*, 2 vols. (Mexico 1953), ii, p. 383.
107. For the seventeenth century the most illustrative treatises are by Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, *Tratado de las supersticiones y costumbres gentilicias que hoy viven entre los Indios naturales de esta Nueva España*, in Passo y Troncoso, *Tratado de las idolatrías*, i; and Jacinto de la Serna, *Manual de ministros de Indios para el conocimiento de sus idolatrías y extirpación de ellas*, in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, civ. For the 'demonisation' of Indians throughout the population see Fernando Cervantes, 'The Devil in Colonial Mexico', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989, pp. 47-51.



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