

RURAL COFRADÍAS:
 A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SYNCRETISM, FERTILITY BELIEFS
 AND COMMUNAL WORSHIP AMONG PEASANTS IN MEDIEVAL
 EUROPE, THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND THE MAYAN
 REGIONS OF CENTRAL AMERICA

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Introduction

While carrying out field studies in the Dominican Republic I came across several rural *cofradías*. A *cofradía* is a religious brotherhood which was common in Europe during the Middle Ages. They still exist, particularly in Spanish towns, but differ from the rural *cofradías* found in Latin America today. I became particularly intrigued by the fact that Dominican *cofradías* had obviously safeguarded various aspects of old European fertility rituals. Dominican *cofradías* have succeeded in preserving ideas and rituals which disappeared in Europe during the great reformatory movements of the 16th and 17th centuries. These features have combined with similar notions from Africa, transmitted by black slaves, and the result has been a particular expression of Dominican peasant religion, well adapted to its local environment.

When, a few years later, I came to live in Guatemala, I found that *cofradías* were flourishing in almost every Guatemalan village and town. As a matter of fact, they appeared to be the main exponent of Mayan popular religiosity.

Why do the *cofradías* have such an appeal for poor Dominican peasants and downtrodden people such as the Guatemalan Mayas? How could the *cofradías* adapt so smoothly and effectively to different environments? I assume the answer to these questions are to be found in a comparative study of popular religion in medieval Europe, colonial Santo Domingo and colonial Guatemala. African slaves and Mayan Indians probably had something in common with European settlers and priests, otherwise the religious notions of these different peoples would not have been able to mesh with the *cofradía* system.

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All three cultures - the West-African, the Mayan and the European - were agriculture-based, and the beliefs and rituals of the peasants constituted a common denominator which made it possible for diverse religious beliefs to merge within the *cofradía* framework.

My study is divided in four parts. First I trace some beliefs common to peasant societies the world over. This part is somewhat superficial, but it nevertheless supports the thesis I present in this paper, namely: that ideas connected with fertility and the importance of the collective constitute the backbone of all peasant religions and that these same ideas were essential to the emergence of *cofradías* in both the Dominican Republic and Guatemala.

Second, I present a picture of European peasant religiosity during the late Middle Ages and try to demonstrate how this particular blend of religious ideas shaped the making of *cofradías*, enabling them to provide valid solutions to many of the afflictions besetting the Europeans of the period.

Part three examines a specific *cofradía* in a rural and fairly isolated part of the Dominican Republic. Since I have some first-hand experience with this particular *cofradía*, I describe its various rituals and attempt to show how they are reminiscent of both African and European fertility rites.

Finally, I present Guatemalan *cofradías* as preservers of the old Mayan agricultural cosmos, demonstrating how they have been able to safeguard the age-old universe of Mayan agriculturists despite centuries of chaos and persecution. In Guatemala the *cofradías* succeeded in tailoring Christianity until it met the needs and fit the personality of a colonized people. My direct experience of the Mayan world is still somewhat limited, and my descriptions and conclusions based more on books than on actual observations.

Local Peasant Religion

Religious rituals and beliefs found in rural areas often appear in pertinent scholarly literature under the heading of 'popular religion', a term used to denote the culture of certain groups of people which, within stratified and complex societies, are labeled the 'lower stratum'. This lower stratum is often considered to be more or less identical to peasant society.¹

Robert Redfield has stressed the existence of a 'different', rural folk society and analyzes it in relation to urban society and its 'great tradition',² the sophisticated culture of the dominant urban élite and its monopoly on knowledge and learning. The 'little tradition' of the rural population,³ is described as a 'long-established homogeneous, isolated and non-literate integral (self-contained) community'.⁴ Redfield's views have been harshly criticized in several circles, and it has been pointed out that the peasant culture is not necessarily homogeneous, nor is it particularly fixed or stable. Inhabitants of any village community manifest a wide range of opinions and religious doubts. Accordingly, they also interpret human and natural phenomena in different ways. Radical transitions often occur in rural areas, and global changes which have af-

fects the political economy over the past 150 years have undoubtedly left their mark on almost every peasant's notion of the world.⁵

Still, compared with more 'dynamic' faiths found in urban areas, peasant religion obviously exhibits some particular characteristics. The peasant's religion is intimately tailored to his needs and environment. It is a local phenomenon and can rarely be studied from a distance:

The ways that it consecrates relationships with nature, society, and identity must be lived to be understood. Context is crucial, for it gives meaning, often of a particularly local variety, to religious behavior that might otherwise appear to be universal.⁶

If the peasant's religious beliefs are studied at close range, it soon becomes evident that these beliefs constitute a highly dynamic faith which adapts smoothly to changing local conditions and furthermore interacts with the development taking place in urban areas. Rural believers share many religious beliefs with their urban counterparts. Still, compared with the urban setting, there is an aspect of permanence in the peasant's life, 'a long-term stability in his physical and social landscape'.⁷

The peasant's religious beliefs perpetuate traditions that have become extinct in more dynamic urban settings. Traditional places of veneration are often located on the same spot for thousands of years, and traditional acts, such as religious vows and offerings, are often the self-same acts as hundreds of years prior: In essence, they have survived within the local landscape, been transmitted through use, and been kept alive for centuries in close-knit family communities.

The peasant is often practical-minded and thinks in terms of 'real' situations and feasible possibilities.⁸ Economic considerations tend to influence his daily decisions. The peasant wants something in return for his efforts and this is also the case when it comes to religious matters. He often approaches religion in a businesslike fashion, making 'deals' with the dwellers of the 'spiritual sphere'. He offers his deities gifts that are believed to please them, such as candles and flowers. In turn, he expects the recipients to favor him in other ways.

The peasant works and lives within a 'production landscape', making use of his immediate physical environment. From experience he is well aware of the fact that nature is capricious. Drought and pests may destroy his crops. The future is difficult to predict. It becomes natural for him to strive for order and security. Thus, he seeks to give meaning to the inconceivable and tries to make the unpredictable predictable. He is guided in this endeavor by the past, by his own experience and by that of his forefathers. The peasant's ability to interpret and classify the ecological system is essential to his survival. Changes in climate and vegetation are observed, recorded and interpreted with the help of a body of knowledge which has been passed on from older generations.⁹

The village community also means a great deal for the peasant: In a peasant community men must often depend on each other, if only for that sense of continuity which renders life predictable, and hence meaningful.¹⁰

The average peasant finds himself within a vast context, where the limits between the self, the collective, nature and the 'spiritual sphere' are indiscernable. The peasant's familiarity with the recurrent cycles of birth and growth makes him feel that death is not final. - The dead, his ancestors, do not disappear; they continue to exist amidst of the living and their presence can be felt everywhere.¹¹ 'Here are two worlds in one, one visible and one invisible. The things we do not see, we do not understand [...] but we can feel their presence'.¹²

Likewise, the forces of nature are always close to an agriculturist and he often imagines them as emanating from an ever present, impersonal, morally indifferent and omnipotent power. The local landscape has a sacred overlay; special places for contacting the divine are known to everyone.¹³ The force may also manifest itself through chosen individuals, serving as receptacles for this power and capable of transmitting its energy to other people.¹⁴

The world of many peasants consists of two spheres: the one is visible and controllable to a certain extent, the other is invisible and more difficult to cope with. The forces of this invisible world are often conceived of in 'analogy' with the visible world. 'Impersonal' forces assume human qualities.¹⁵ Therefore, it is natural to try to communicate with the invisible beings. These beings, who may be deceased relatives, saints, 'supernatural owners of nature' or 'spirits', are all very powerful but at the same time they display 'human' characteristics. Just like our neighbors, they can be both vain and capricious, good or evil.

Different Ways of Looking at Things

The religion of Latin American peasants is often stamped as 'syncretistic'.¹⁶ The term often has a disdainful ring to it, much like the very rebuked term 'primitive'. Using the word 'syncretistic' to describe a religious practice may imply that it is not a full and worthy member of the league of 'Great World Religions', such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Still, syncretism might just as well indicate a living and practical faith. Syncretistic believers pick up elements from a religious complex which have a direct meaning for them, in the same way the peasant picks up a new tool and throws away an old one when he finds that the new one serves him better.

Through the Spanish conquest of America, Indians and Africans came in contact with a new and often aggressive faith. After years of struggle, they succeeded in combining Christianity with certain elements of their own beliefs. Such a process may be described as syncretistic in the sense of a fusion of

analogous notions, but it was not an adaptation of 'primitive' beliefs to more 'sophisticated Christian notions'.

The faith which was brought overseas to America is not exactly the Catholicism preached from the pulpits of Latin America today. Still, many Catholics like to imagine that the beliefs which were planted in the Indian and African soul were of a higher order than the traditional notions of these 'unfortunate peoples'. Such a view was occasionally reflected by the activities of certain Christian groups during the celebrations of the 500 year anniversary of the Spanish conquest.

When driving through the Guatemalan countryside huge crosses can be seen at entrances to villages or towns. The text on their cross-beams commemorates 'five hundred years of Christian evangelization'. In Santo Domingo, a huge 'Columbus Memorial Lighthouse' was erected for the 500 year anniversary. An enormous marble building constructed in the form of a giant cross sits above the tomb of Columbus. It is crowned by powerful searchlights which cast beams of light into the sky, forming a luminous cross in the clouds. On clear nights the beams project to a height of 3,000 feet. The walls of this strange construction are engraved with the words of Columbus:

You shall set up Crosses on all roads and pathways, for as God be praised, this land belongs to Christians, and the remembrance of it must be preserved for all times.

Such euphoria conjures up images of benevolent missionaries and valiant conquerors spreading the word of the Lord. Many Latin American régimes have used similar notions to unite their nations around the 'moral strength' of Catholicism. Such was the case in the Dominican Republic, under the dictatorship of Trujillo. The Spanish conquerors were then described as 'gentlemen of true *Hispanidad*', who came to America as messengers of God, implanting civilization and morals among primitive savages. Culture was made synonymous with Spanish Catholicism.¹⁷

Such rhetoric has probably made many persons believe that America was christianized by erudite and outstanding personalities such as Bartolomé de Las Casas or Bernardino de Sahagún, but they reluctantly admit that a few greedy fellows and unpleasant fanatics might have participated as well. Still, a culture is not vanquished and transformed by a few missionaries and conquerors. To gain a full understanding of the process of christianization in Latin America it does not suffice to study the popular culture which developed after initial contact with the Europeans took place. We must consider European society as well. It was primarily 'popular European culture' which merged with the beliefs of Indians and Africans. In order to gain some insight into the life of the common people of medieval Europe, we have to look beyond kings and bishops.

In doing so the researcher may be aided by a new wave of historical thinking which has swept across the world. In search of how individuals and various

social groups conceived their world, historians have delved into parish, diocesan or inquisition archives. The daily life of long forgotten times is slowly coming to life in historical descriptions which remind of anthropological accounts of different cultures in remote areas of the world.¹⁸ Still, much of the studies on popular religion in Latin America have remained fixed on preconceived notions of the Europeans who conquered the new lands across the ocean. European settlers and missionaries have been viewed with inadequate knowledge of the world that shaped them. The faith which was brought to Latin America was not so much the beliefs of dedicated scholars or fervent mystics, but rather something which had been fostered by the ancient, practical religion of European peasants and poorly educated parish priests - a faith which had its roots deep in the past, nurtured by ancient beliefs in magic and fertility. Cults and rituals found their expression in lascivious May-games, or coarse and merry carnivals¹⁹ - a kind of religious merry-making which came under heavy fire during the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The starting-shot for that great event came with the Council of Trent in 1545,²⁰ but long before that year European popular religion had traveled to the colonies on the far side of the Atlantic. While Europe was engaged in modernizing the medieval Church, traditional beliefs and rituals prolonged their existence overseas.²¹

Medieval Cofradías

Cofradías have been called 'the most characteristic expression of late medieval Christianity'.²² They emerged in the twelfth century and soon became a familiar feature in both towns and countryside. They originated in Italian towns, where groups of people, often from particular guilds, gathered under the auspices of certain saints.²³

The *cofradías* soon spread to almost every European town. This surprisingly rapid development can be seen in connection with extensive social changes which left their mark on late medieval society. During the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries several European districts developed into industrial centers. What is now Belgium, north-east France and the Rhine Valley prospered as a result of the textile industry. Hanseatic merchants, from burgeoning towns in northern Europe, traded the goods north and east. The merchants of the towns in southern France, northeastern Spain and northern Italy spread the commodities over the Levant. By offering their inhabitants more opportunities than a rural existence circumscribed by feudal rules, the new industrial and mercantile centers attracted a lot of people from the countryside.

Medieval industry cannot be compared with the giant enterprises which transformed Europe during the nineteenth century, but it did consist of something more than small workshops. Even if job opportunities increased steadily, the growing towns were soon unable to absorb surplus population. Plagues and wars worsened the situation. Beggars crowded into the towns and frustrations

mounted. Many of the new urbanites felt alienated in the insecure urban environment. A slight change of luck could force anyone to join the beggars outside the cathedrals.²⁴ In their search for security, many joined the *cofradías*.

Cofradías were often considered to be some kind of urban copies of village communities. By guarding age-old village traditions they embodied kinship and communal solidarity. Members acquired a sense of belonging and since all *cofrades* were considered equal,²⁵ men and women found a breathing-space in a society which assigned people determined roles and positions. *Cofradías* were voluntary associations. Their members were recruited from specific professional groups, or from certain areas of a given town. The *cofradía* would choose its own governing body, which would handle the economy and govern the activities in accordance with an established constitution. Membership was for life and members who could not support themselves were helped by common means. Still, most funds were spent on feasts and processions. Wealthy *cofradías* could even maintain a salaried clergy and independent chapels.²⁶

Beliefs and rituals differed from *cofradía* to *cofradía*, but they all belonged to the huge complex of medieval religion. Here below I focus on some outstanding traits of medieval popular religion which may have contributed to the rituals and religious outlook of many *cofradías*, namely: the fertility aspect, the importance of relics and saints, the rituals which developed around rural chapels, death rituals and the all-encompassing cult of the Virgin. Finally, I deal with the relations between the official Church and the *cofradías*.

The Importance of Feasting and Fertility

The highlights of the *cofradías*' activities were the communal meals called *convivium*, often followed by dances and other entertainment.²⁷ During the Reformation, the festivities of several *cofradías* were described as lewd and unfit for Christians. In medieval times, popular-festive banquets had nothing in common with static private life or individual well-being. Popular images of food and drink were active and triumphant. Religious banquets concluded a process of labor and struggle and thus stressed happiness, community and abundance.²⁸ The *convivia* of the *cofradías* must be seen in connection with ancient traditions related to fecundity in rural societies.

Most European peasants lived in a state of serfdom under feudal lords and were bound to the earth for a lifetime. Still, it is inaccurate to view rural medieval Europe as an immobile society. Like many Third World countries today, it was a hunger zone and 'with hunger for bread went hunger for land'.²⁹ During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, peasants from Flanders and the Rhine Lands settled on the sparsely populated lands of eastern Europe.³⁰ In Spain, Christian settlers occupied former Moorish lands. Epidemics, famine, poor harvests, as well as fear of war and oppression made peasants move all over Europe. New ways of thinking and the exchange of religious beliefs surely af-

fected the inhabitants of Europe's scattered villages. Even if some believers moved away and others moved in, the forces of the local landscape lingered and the supernatural rulers of forests, fields and lakes remained. The European cultic landscape remained unchanged for centuries.

As a being living close to the earth and totally dependent on its fruits, the medieval peasant was naturally interested in all aspects of fecundity. He assumed that a powerful force of germination was imbedded in the land. His universe was also inhabited by a vast number of invisible forces and he wanted their help in his permanent struggle to achieve fecundity for barren fields and wombs.

... agriculture, like all basic activities, is no merely profane skill. Because it deals with life, and its object is the marvellous growth of that life, dwelling in seed, furrow, rain and the spirits of vegetation, it is therefore first and foremost a ritual. It was so from the beginning and has always remained so in farming communities, even in the most highly civilized areas of Europe. The husbandman enters and becomes part of a sphere of abundant holiness. His actions and labours have solemn consequences because they are performed within a cosmic cycle and because the year, the seasons, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest-time build up their own essential forms, each taking on its own autonomous significance.³¹

The medieval Church was unable to take action against the peasants' ancient traditions. It was obliged to incorporate pagan fertility festivals and turn pagan sites of nature worship into Christian ones by associating them with saints and virgins.³²

The driving force behind the vast peasant universe was fertility and almost all agricultural rituals were connected with it.³³ Most of these rural fertility rites included common meals. Most important were the big communal feasts around winter and summer solstice. In the summer, a whole cycle of festivities was developed in the name of St. John the Baptist, imagined as a bringer of water and fecundity. St. John cleansed with water, and rituals connected with the purification by fire and water were, and still are, common in peasant communities all over Europe. Huge bonfires were made, and people bathed in lakes and springs. Fields, animals and humans were anointed with blessed water. Amatory rites and activities of various types abounded, as well as common meals and ritual dancing.³⁴

Relics and Saints

Of crucial importance for the *cofradías* were the major annual processions in honor of the fraternities' patron saint, the care of its effigy, and the

decoration and cleaning of the chapel where it was lodged.³⁵ The patron saint of the *cofradía* was considered its principal member, endowed with a nature and will of its own. When the *cofrades* mentioned their saint they referred to it as a living being.

The medieval cult of the saints was connected with the intense adoration of relics which began with the birth of Christianity. In those days, most of the world was thought to be ruled by the Devil or by demonic pagan gods. In such a threatening world, Christians sought to harness the power which was thought to radiate from everything considered holy. Churches were founded on the graves of martyrs, and the bones and other attachments of sanctified men and women meant protection against all evil. Any church enjoying such treasures radiated a powerful circle of safety.³⁶

For many people during the Middle Ages relics became the most important aspect of religion. They served a variety of practical purposes; they were essential to the judicial system, since the swearing of oaths were conducted on them, kings carried them into battle in pursuit of victory and they were carried across the fields to grant them fertility. People who lived near sites with particularly valuable relics prospered by their presence, and towns grew up around holy fragments which pilgrims from far away places came to see and touch. Pilgrimages became the chief motive for travel for over a thousand years, determining communications-structures and shaping the international economy. Relics were much more valuable than precious metal, and churches and wealthy laymen amassed fortunes in relics, fetching high prices for them on the open market.³⁷

The energy which emanated from the relics was thought to be of almost nuclear proportions. Accordingly, it was not unusual that peasants imagined that a germinating force was transmitted to their soil if a saint's precious bones were carried over it.

Over time, the caskets containing precious relics became more and more elaborate. They often borrowed the shape of the relic they enclosed - an arm, a foot, or a hand - and in the tenth century the first free-standing anthropomorphic reliquaries appeared. Finally the free-standing statue of a saint, with or without an enclosed relic, became a must for every church and rural chapel, and the old powers of the relics were transmitted to the mere pictures of saints and martyrs.³⁸

Pictures and statues of saints in the small village chapels were familiar and life-like. They even looked and dressed like their believers. Paupers, monks, artisans, former prostitutes, children and lovely maidens could be found among the saints. No service was too small to ask of them, and they shared the everyday problems of their worshippers, who endowed them with distinguished fancies and tastes. The statues were even dressed and washed. The saints became well known members of the the village community and did not inspire any fear or terror.

The most important feature of the saints was the fact that they had lived on earth as human beings and, accordingly, were closer to their devotees than

God, the ultimate life-force, who was imagined as aloft from mankind, both unaccessible and incomprehensible. Supplicants needed intermediaries in order to communicate with God - other divinities who were able to render warmth and compassion to the inconceivable power underlying everything. Most religions distinguish in practice, if not in strict theory, between a higher god and lesser divine beings. If the higher God tends to be remote, the lesser ones are in closer touch with mortals and concern themselves with such mundane matters as the well-being of the village and the family, as well as the fertility of fields and beasts.³⁹

Rural Chapels

Most writers who have dealt with *cofradías* stress their urban origins.⁴⁰ Still, groups of devotees had already been formed around sacred places in rural areas long before the urban *cofradías* came into existence. Such religious communities later developed into rural *cofradías*, functioning in a similar fashion as their urban equals.

Saints were worshipped in the parish churches, but also by altars kept in private homes, or in small chapels, in Spain called *ermitas*. Most *ermitas* were erected close to holy places which had been venerated for centuries, often due to their connection with fertility beliefs.⁴¹ In such places a small group of people often maintained the site and kept it holy by helping to distribute the powers of the spiritual powers believed to be present there.⁴² Such keepers of holy places were often committed to their task through a personal vow⁴³ given to the force of the place they tended. The groups which formed around such sites used to support a lady, *beata*, or a man, *santero*, whose task it was to take care of the place.⁴⁴ These guardians lived by their *ermita*, separated from the villagers and sometimes dressed in home-made habits. Many of them were in charge of small groups that gathered around them, helping them by maintaining the holy place and providing economic support for the yearly feasts which were arranged on the guardian saint's day. Feasts meant vigils, processions and penance, but also music, dance, food, drink and merry-making, particularly if the cults had grown up around sites for worship of the forces behind fertility.⁴⁵

The Virgin

Many *cofradías* were dedicated to various saints, but the majority also served the Virgin Mary. She answered almost any human need and sometimes her cult seemed to overshadow that of God and Christ. Her alleged compassion made her the ideal intercessor and intermediary between her devotees and the distant male godhead. Her role as mother of all humankind rendered her the ideal patroness for the *cofradías*.

In the late Middle Ages, her cult spread even more intensely. All over Europe plagues and violent social changes created a sense of despair and damnation. In times of stress people tended to commit themselves to the Virgin, hoping to obtain her protection after death. One way of doing so was to join other fervent Virgin worshippers and form *cofradías* in her honor. The Virgin was the most important divine promoter of growth and fertility, the ideal patroness for all agriculturists, and her cult was just as strong in the towns, as in the countryside. She was the inheritor of the great classical earth goddesses and her cult often succeeded her predecessors in various cult sites.⁴⁶ As a protector of fertility, Virgin Mary presided over marriage, pregnancy and childbirth.⁴⁷ She was thought to facilitate all transitions - childbirth, the germination of the seed and also the passage from life to death.

As Mother Earth, she reigned over the dead, who are buried in the earth like seeds. For an agriculturist the ritual of burying a deceased person may be connected with the sowing of seed. It is not only an act of concealment, but also an act of fertility. The seeds, like the dead, are resting in the womb of the Mother Earth and like seeds they may be transformed and rise from the earth.⁴⁸ In the same way the rituals associated with sowing were important for harvest, the funeral rites were of utmost importance for the ongoing existence of the dead in the 'spiritual sphere'. The survivors had to be sure about the benevolence of the deceased, who continued to be present in their midst. Accordingly, rural vigils by the corpse were extremely complex and demanded the assistance of the neighboring community.⁴⁹

Death

Many urban *cofradías* were founded as associations intended to help their members with all matters relating to death and it was due to this particular mission that many of them chose the Virgin as their patroness. Many people living in the late Middle Ages were obsessed with the thought of death. This could perhaps be explained by the fears aroused by recurrent plagues and wars, but it could also have been the result of the alienation which gripped poor urbanites with roots in the countryside.

Generous donations had been given to the clergy and the friars by wealthy people so they could rest in peace after death, knowing that intercession was granted for their souls, thus avoiding the torments of Purgatory. Masses and funeral processions for the wealthy became costlier and more elaborate, probably due to the fact that the clergy wanted to do their full share and attract new customers. Poorer urbanites probably wished for something similar and many longed for the communal rites of rural villages. Alone they could not afford to pay for elaborate funeral rituals.

Soon laymen formed associations to take care of their own funeral services, as well as masses, common meals, processions, burials, care of the graves, support of widows and orphans, and recurrent intercessions for the souls in

Purgatory. Such societies were modelled after beggar-orders or town councils, and if they were dedicated to a saint they turned into *cofradías*.⁵⁰

The Church and the Peasants

The Church formed an integral part of the village community and was considered a receptacle for life-giving powers. The devil was allergic to holy water and it was taken as medicine or sprinkled over home, fields and domestic animals.⁵¹ In certain places in Russia it was even the priest himself who was taken out of the church and rolled by women over the newly sown ground.⁵² No ritual festivity was complete without the participation of a member of the clergy. Many rural pastors were just like the members of their flocks. They did not care much about sermons or confessions and shared the peasants view of the Church as a provider of magic power. For many peasants the priest was much like a master magician and was used to exorcize storms, drive away swarms of locusts and bless the fields and their fruits.⁵³ The Church did not deny that supernatural actions were possible, but taught that magic could emanate from only two sources: God or the Devil.⁵⁴

Humble friars and poor parish priests dealt with the peasants on a daily basis, while members of the higher clergy tended to be hostile to rural dwellers. The Church had its spiritual centers in the towns, where the wealthy clergy served its well-to-do benefactors. It was customary among rich citizens to bequeath some of their wealth to the Church in order to secure blessedness for themselves at the time of death. In the medieval economy, most wealth was accumulated and reinvestment on a grand scale was not introduced until the advent of the industrial revolution.⁵⁵

Many bishops and abbots were simply politicians, courtiers and businessmen in ecclesiastic garb. Many monasteries were luxurious establishments, while bishops and popes lived in huge palaces. In short, members of the church hierarchy found themselves far away from the simple tillers of the soil. Few peasant saints are found in the calendars, and clerical writers used to emphasize the bestiality and avarice of the peasants.⁵⁶ Until the coming of the Counter-Reformation, rural unorthodox beliefs were mostly ignored and left in peace with their 'superstitions'.

Whether or not the peasants got any due attention from their parish priest depended much on the quality of the soil they tilled. Well educated clergymen focused their efforts on wealthy country districts. Furthermore, most parish churches were privately owned and expected to generate a profit.⁵⁷ As long as the peasants attended mass and paid their levy, the parish priest accepted cultic transgressions without much objection. Clerics lived a fairly secularized life. In Spain, for example, many of them lived in open concubinage, and in Castile, until the end of the fifteenth century, a child of a priest could inherit from his father if the latter died intestate.⁵⁸

With the waning of the Middle Ages, feelings of disdain towards the wealthy and secularized clergy grew strong among common people and some members of the clergy. Peasant revolts and millenarian movements rocked Europe and new religious orders tried to establish closer links with the commoners and demanded a thorough reformation of the Church.⁵⁹ But the piety of the beggar-orders also carried the seeds of destruction for the traditional peasant religion and its offspring, the *cofradías*. Soon demands were made upon the Church to cleanse itself of notions and rituals alien to 'pure Christian faith'. Many *cofradías* and fertility rites which had prospered within their midst came under heavy fire.

The Church and the *Cofradías*

In Spain *cofradías* had gained enormous popularity. By the beginning of the sixteenth centuries there were 19,204 in Castile and 6,577 in Aragon alone.⁶⁰

It was in Spain that the central government first discovered that the strict organization of the *cofradías* could be used for political purposes. In their efforts to unite their kingdom, the Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabella, turned their attention towards the *cofradías*. Some of them, particularly in bandit-infested Castile, had already organized private police forces to protect their meetings and members from robbers and evil-doers. The Kings now forced them under central control in the form of a council called *La Hermandad*. A military force was linked to the principal *cofradía* in every town and village, and leading members of various *cofradías* were forced to act as an unremunerated judicial tribunals under governmental supervision. The *cofrades* passed judgement and meted out penalties. Members of the *cofradías* were forced to cover all costs for both the trials and the military forces. The arrangement had the desired effect and Castile was soon free of bandits. After a few years the system was abolished and the *cofradías* returned to their original activities.⁶¹ However, the maneuvers of the Crown proved that *cofradías* constituted a force to be reckoned with.

The coming of the Counter-Reformation meant the beginning of the end for most *cofradías*. What exposed them to the wrath of Church authorities was their independence and apparent flaws in their understanding of Christianity. Great reformers thundered against them, demanding order and dogmatism. Charles Borromeo, for example, wanted to force them under the jurisdiction of the dioceses and adapt them to the dogmas of the official Church. He wished to turn them into 'well-organized armies' at the service of the clergy.⁶²

In Spain, the Catholic Reformation affirmed the rural side of religion and merely tried to correct what it saw as its excesses. Peasants were allowed to remain with the core of their devotion - their vows and patron saints - and they continued with feasts and vigils in their honor.⁶³ What the reformers turned against was the *mezcla de cosas profanas con divinas*, the mixture of profane and sacred things. All traces of the old fertility religions had to be wiped out.⁶⁴

In the 1570s, the Holy Inquisition, instituted by the same beggar-orders which had worked earlier in close community with the poor, began to shift its attention from *Conversos* and Jews and began scrutinizing rural religion. While studying rural customs the inquisitors soon became alarmed over what they discovered. They could not find any 'true religion', everything had been 'perverted by heresy', and some of them doubted whether there had ever been such a thing as 'true religion' in the countryside.⁶⁵ The inquisitorial campaign first focused on blasphemies and sexual offences. The campaigns which were carried out to eradicate impious utterances are explained by the clergymens' belief in magic. After all, it was words which turned wine and bread into blood and flesh during the mass. Consequently, conjurations in the name of the Devil were also dangerous, since they could lead to tangible results as well.⁶⁶ The sexual behavior of the rural inhabitants differed from that in towns and inquisitors found that they could not be too harsh in dealing with peasants:

the reason why we are less strict with fornicators is because we know from experience that most of those we arrest in these lands, where there is a great lack of doctrine especially in the rural areas, speak from stupidity and ignorance and not from a wish to commit heresy.⁶⁷

Unorthodox customs connected with fertility rites were suppressed, such as bullfights as part of religious festivities and the selection of May queens and May kings.⁶⁸ Offensive statues of 'unauthorized' saints were removed from the altars.⁶⁹ Vigils, i. e. nightly wakes in rural *ermitas*, were often prohibited or had to be supervised by a priest and carried out with lights on. What the inquisitors objected to was the indecorous mingling of men and women and 'the profanation of sacred places by dancing, feasting and drinking, farces and plays, and secular dirty and lewd songs'.⁷⁰ When the suppression of rural fertility traditions began in Europe they had already taken root on the the other side of the Atlantic.

La Cofradía del Espíritu Santo in the San Juan Valley

It is early Sunday morning, Pentecost, and an expectant crowd is waiting and dancing outside a modern church in the outskirts of San Juan de la Maguana, a town situated in the fertile San Juan Valley in the western part of the Dominican Republic. Several hundreds of persons of all ages have gathered. Judging from their torn - but clean and tidy - clothes, most of them are poor peasants from rural districts. Some of the older women are dressed according to their *promesas*⁷¹ red and yellow dresses, the colors of *Espíritu Santo*, the patron saint of the *cofradía*. Others wear the colors of the Virgin - blue and white. Several

ladies have scarves wrapped around their heads. I recognize many persons I have met in various rural ermitas. A group of three men is playing the *palos*⁷² of the *cofradía* and a *guayo*.⁷³ Surrounding couples are dancing the distinctive *Baile del Espíritu Santo*; the ladies move their bodies in an undulating fashion, sometimes lifting their skirts or spreading them like fans. They approach and withdraw from their partners, who circle around them, also moving their entire bodies in a wavelike manner. The dance is expressive and fascinating, like a conversation without words.

The atmosphere outside the church is relaxed and friendly, people are chatting and laughing. Mass ends around ten o'clock, at which time people kneel down on the ground, placing themselves one after another, forming a long row, huddling together, bowing their heads and keeping their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. An old lady appears between the open church doors. In both hands she waves white banners decorated with three blue crosses. After the old lady follows a compact group carrying various red banners, some plain, others decorated with yellow crosses. Prominent among the ladies carrying the banners is the red-dressed *reina*, queen, of the *ermita* of St. John by the spring in *La Aguíta*.⁷⁴ After the banners follow two men carrying a framed picture of *Virgen de la Altagracia*, the patroness of the Dominican Republic.⁷⁵ After the Virgin comes the small statue of the saint, carried by four men in a palanquin made of mahogany, decorated with gilded flower-creepers and mounted by a cross. The saint is surrounded by bouquets of red roses and carnations. In front of him burn candles made of bees-wax. The effigy is no more than 45 cms high and looks like a doll; a white, black-haired, chubby-cheeked little boy, holding his hand in a gesture of benediction. The piece cannot be more than 150 years old. He is dressed in a purple-red, gold-fringed mantle, with a cross embroidered on the chest. The men carry the palanquin over the heads of the kneeling devotees, some of whom hurry and kneel in front the saint again in order to repeat the process once more. Many of the *cofrades* want me to take pictures of them together with their 'little saint'. They talk about him with affection, as if he were a child of their own.⁷⁶

Accompanied by the ringing of bells and the singing of *salves*⁷⁷, the saint is carried by men and women who continuously shift places; it is an honor to carry him. He is taken through the corridors of the public hospital and patients come forth in order to see him and touch him. The bearers sometimes pause to rise and lower the palanquin three times as a greeting and blessing. After visiting the hospital the saint is carried through the streets of San Juan. In front of the Cathedral and the Police Headquarters the palanquin is raised and lowered as a sign of respect. The *cofrades* also carry the palanquin into the homes of prominent members of the *cofradía*, or where people are afflicted with grave illness. The bearers always enter a building backwards because the saint must leave the house facing the door.

The home of *Espíritu Santo* is El Batey, a village situated 13 to 14 kilometers from San Juan de la Maguana. On Friday evening his image is brought

down to San Juan de la Maguana and left to rest in the church. The saint stays in the church during the nights of Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Before being returned to the church, he is brought every evening to different houses and placed beside the family altars, while devotees dance and play the drums in front of him. Inside the houses he is removed from his palanquin and placed on a table covered with white sheets. The white wooden doves which always accompany him, are placed on the family altar. During the processions these doves are often lifted from the palanquin and placed in front of houses or people, thus transmitting the benediction of *Espíritu Santo*.

On Whit Monday the saint is carried back to El Batey. His image is then accompanied by more than two thousand persons, some on horseback, carrying red and yellow or blue and white banners, all adorned with crosses. On his way to El Batey the saint passes animals which are taken out by the side of the road. The animals - horses, cows and oxen - carry red ribbons on their foreheads. While the statue passes, the peasants ask the bearers of the palanquin to halt so that the saint may bless their animals.

In El Batey a huge crowd is awaiting the arrival of the saint. The palanquin is first placed in an open space in front of the church where people throng to touch the little image. They dance, sing and kneel in front of it. After a short time the saint is taken to the *two calvarios*⁷⁸ of the village. He is carried around the crosses three times, while people kneel and beat their chests, praying for mercy. Some deposit stones around the crosses; many have carried them as penitence on their heads all the way from San Juan de la Maguana. After his visit to the calvarios, the saint is taken back to the church. The same scene as in San Juan de la Maguana is repeated. People kneel in rows in front of the palanquin so that the saint may pass over them. All the while bells chime, *salves* are sung in honor of *Espíritu Santo* and some women fall into a trance, possessed by *luases*⁷⁹ or by *Espíritu Santo* himself.

Inside the church the saint is placed on a table covered with white sheets. The statue remains that way for nine days until it is finally placed within its own retable, a huge mahogany structure where the little effigy stands in a glass-covered niche. Behind the dark-brown retable a red sheet covers the wall. In front of it the altar is adorned with paper flowers, wooden doves and a small cross attached to a wooden plate, which devotees often place on their heads while they kneel in front of the saint. Framed pictures of four 'saints' also adorn the altar - The Trinity, *La Virgen de Altagracia*, St. Elias and José Gregorio Hernández.⁸⁰

A peculiar fertility rite is also connected with the celebrations of *El Espíritu Santo*. After the saint has been placed in the church, some devotees walk down to a small stream, where the *novia*, bride, of the saint is thought to dwell. Here water and wine are poured into the brook, while hymns are sung in honor of the *novia*.

The church in El Batey was built in 1985 with funds provided by the *cofrades* and some additional support from the Catholic Church. Formerly, the Catholic bishops in San Juan de la Maguana had been hostile to the *cofradía*, but the attitude of the clergy has changed of late and the priests in the valley

now help the *cofradía* with the handling of its economic affairs. Nowadays the members may pay their fees in any parish in the valley, and the Catholic church keeps the records. In 1986, every member paid a minimum of five *centavos* a year for seven years in order to be a life member, but most devotees pay much more. A book with the names of all the members is kept in El Batey. The Catholic priests act as 'assistants', while the directory of the *cofradía* is in charge of everything. 'The help from the Church has been most valuable; before, everything tended to be a mess and money often disappeared'.⁸¹ *The Cofradía del Espíritu Santo* has local branches all across the southwestern part of the Dominican Republic. Its incomes are 'rather impressive' and it owns 'some land' administered by a directory, which is chosen and changed every year.⁸²

The feast rendered to the saint begins seven Fridays before Whit Sunday. Each of these Friday nights is dedicated to a vigil in the church of El Batey, where *palos* are played, *salves* sung and the dance of *El Espíritu Santo* performed.

Cooperation with the Church has been excellent, probably due to the fact that many young priests are followers of the so-called liberation theology, which gained importance in Latin America after Vatican II and the meeting in Puebla. This particular outlook means a rapprochement to the popular religion of the peasants:

It is often among the peasants you meet real and profound faith, which is both practical and sincere. [...] *The Cofradía de Espíritu Santo* is influential in the whole valley. It is a dry season phenomenon, when people have the time they dedicate themselves to their religion. I think it may have some connection with rain-asking. The processions, the saint, all that. [...] When their people die they want to hear the drums. They believe their sound carries them to Heaven. We cannot use them in the church. We have tried, but it does not sound right. It is their thing. You cannot mix old wine with new one.⁸³

Many of the rituals of the *Cofradía del Espíritu Santo* are reminiscent of European medieval piety. Evidently, this Dominican *cofradía* has preserved several features inherited from Spanish predecessors - the same intense devotion to the saint and a deep belief in its healing and life-giving powers. In the same way relics and holy effigies were carried over the fields in medieval Europe, the little saint from El Batey is passed above the heads of both human beings and animals. As in the European Middle Ages, the cult is concentrated in a rural chapel and supported by a group of devotees, who celebrate feasts, vigils and processions in honor of their patron saint. As was the case in Europe, this Dominican *cofradía* also takes care of its deceased members and tries to ease their passage to the 'other world'. Still, the Dominican *cofradía* has a distinctive character all its own, due to influences from other quarters - Africa and the local environment.

Origins of the *Cofradía del Espíritu Santo*

For centuries the San Juan Valley was a fairly isolated place. The first Spanish settlers who established themselves on its vast grasslands were cattle-breeders. When the Indians who lived in the area had succumbed to mistreatment and various diseases, the Spaniards bought African slaves, who soon became integrated into what later became known as the *hato* system.

Hatos were cattle ranches where undomesticated cattle roamed free over huge savannas. On the average *hato* lived the owner, his family and generally three or four slaves, who often had families of their own. All worked together. Some *hatos* were even run by the slaves themselves, while their masters lived in Santo Domingo, the administrative center of the island.⁸⁴ The general poverty and isolation which characterized this system led to a high degree of equality and personal relationships between masters and slaves. Few priests found their way to the isolated valley and if the *hateros* practiced any religion it was an intimate and private affair in front of a saint in a rural chapel. In such an environment the beliefs of slave and master could easily mingle.

Most Spanish settlers were forced to leave the San Juan Valley in 1605. Towns and villages were torn down since the central government feared that the settlers might cooperate with French *buccaneers*, hunters and pirates, who approached the colony from the west. When the Spaniards had left, runaway slaves came down from the mountains where they had lived in secluded villages, so-called *manieles*, where Indian and African traditions had developed independently. For more than a hundred years the San Juan Valley was a virtual 'no man's land'. Exquemelin, a Dutch physician who lived with the *buccaneers* for some time, described the inhabitants of the valley as people of 'mixed blood', all of them 'cow-skinners or hunters'.⁸⁵

The religion of this people was 'neither completely Catholic, nor pagan, but a mixture of both beliefs'.⁸⁶ It was not until the middle of the 18th century that the San Juan Valley was repopulated with Spaniards and Canarians. Without much interference from the clergy, the *Sanjuaneros* were free to create a local religion of their own, where, just as in rural Spain, caves and springs played an important role as sources of a life-giving force called *El Gran Poder de Dios*.

Local traditions state that it was not until the middle of the 19th century that the *Cofradía del Espíritu Santo* was 'brought' to a small settlement in the valley, in the charge of the members of two black families by the name of la Fortuna and Florentino. The *cofradía* had been brought from the sugar districts around Baní.⁸⁷ Somewhat later, a lady named Casimira Ampalló established another *cofradía* with the same name in San Juan de la Maguana. She is said to have brought it with her from the border-town of Bánica.⁸⁸

It is most likely that the *Cofradía del Santo Espíritu* in El Batey is an offspring of a *cofradía* which bears the same name in Baní. Reference to this particular *cofradía* is already mentioned in the 18th century. It was founded by black African slaves and was famous for its serious efforts in assisting sick

plantation-slaves. It has been described as a '*cofradía* with strict rules, it was not only a manifestation of Afro-Catholic syncretism, but it also many times tended towards spiritism'.⁸⁹

Black *Cofradías* and their Offspring in Santo Domingo

Cofradías became an important part of the lives of many black slaves during the 16th and 17th centuries and spread rapidly in several parts of the Congo, Angola and Portugal, Brazil and the Spanish colonies. The governors of Spain and Portugal saw associations of this kind as a useful means of social control. Blacks and Mulattoes were excluded from White fraternities, but they were allowed to govern and organize their own.⁹⁰ The reasons why slave-owners accepted black *cofradías* were various. Most important was that the discovery that their serfs' involvement in the *cofradías* provided an outlet for their tensions and frustrations. Through the communal life within the *cofradías* the slaves regained some of their self-reliance and were able to turn their interests inward toward their own group, instead of pondering too much about their personal alienation, and eventually direct their anger towards the slave-owners. Within the *cofradías*, slaves and freedmen competed for various positions and planned the communal feasts, dances and processions which took place on the feastdays of the patron saints. The Blacks were free to gossip and associate beyond the vision of the masters' scrutinizing eyes. In short, for a moment, they were able to live as independent human beings.

The attitude of the clergy was to accept those African customs which could be adapted to Catholicism. It was better to have 'Africans' organized around a Catholic saint and to let them choose their own leaders, rather than to have them live outside the reaches of the Church, apt to rebel under the leadership of some heir to old African kingdoms, maintaining pagan rituals in the bush. Black *cofradías* were modelled after white ones and the *cofradía* leaders often served as intermediaries between masters and slaves.⁹¹

West African slaves were not unfamiliar with associations similar to *cofradías*. Various regions in West Africa were home to cult groups reminiscent of Christian *cofradías* - divinities such as Shangó, Omolí, Ogun, etc. had their own priests, fraternities, monasteries and sanctuaries.⁹² In Dahomey the Fons envisaged groups of deities forming pantheons ruled by a pantheon head. Every such pantheon had a cult, specialized in beliefs and rituals. Every Fon belonged to a particular cult group. As in medieval Europe, the most important godlings were deified dead (like the saints), the *vodúns*⁹³, who changed into saints or *luases* in Santo Domingo. Many of these deities had the same intimate character as medieval saints. They had distinct tastes and personalities and their devotees considered them to be as close as kin.

We are wrong to think of West Africa as a 'backward' or 'primitive' area compared with medieval Europe. It was not because of any imagined 'inferiority' that black slaves were preferred by the Spanish slave-owners. As a matter of fact, the first slaves brought to Santo Domingo were both white and black and all were nominally Christians.⁹⁴ However, white slaves could not stand the climate and the Indians died in the thousands. Finally, only black Africans were imported. The use of African slaves was determined by their ability to work with tropical agriculture within plantation systems. Many Africans had been serfs in their own countries as well. Some West African nations were powerful feudal states largely resembling feudal Europe. Internal fighting was endemic among the West Africans, just as it was in medieval Europe. Strong states shook and changed the old framework of tribal equality and mass subjugation of one people by another was not an uncommon feature. Some African kingdoms had masses of commoners, living in a form of vassalship under a limited class of rulers.⁹⁵ As in Europe, the religion of the ruling class differed from that of the practical-minded agriculturist.⁹⁶ As in Europe, West Africans moved about and mixed their religious beliefs, but the old, practical, locally bound, fertility religion persisted.

A wide variety of different black *cofradías* emerged in colonial Santo Domingo. Many of them had chapels in the Cathedral of the capital and most of them safeguarded old African traditions, such as the *cofradía* dedicated to St. Cosmas and St. Damian, attended by *Araras*⁹⁷, or the one dedicated to St. John the Baptist - the most popular saint of all.⁹⁸ The *cofradía* of St. John the Baptist was known to exercise various acts of charity and assumed at least half the costs of its members' funerals. Its chapel in the Cathedral was very sumptuous and its feasts in honor of San Juan were popular among both Blacks and Whites. They included not only masses and processions, but also dances and bullfights. In 1740 various priests were reprimanded for participating in the San Juan festivals. They had participated with the company of various ladies and were soon recognized 'although they went with masks and in disguise'.⁹⁹

Black *cofradías* reached the Dominican countryside through the huge sugar plantations, which were large enough for a sufficient number of blacks to gather and form independent *cofradías*. By the time these *cofradías* finally reached isolated parts of the colony, they had already lost their exclusively 'black' character and attracted agriculturists of no particular racial denomination. In this new setting, the *cofradías* were transformed once again, adapting to the local landscape. Thus, a *cofradía* such as *Espíritu Santo* in El Batey presents a wide range of features borrowed from Europe, Africa and local traditions.

Espíritu Santo: Water and Fertility

The local tradition. *Cofrades* in El Batey recount that the effigy of the saint was found 'more than a hundred years ago', by an orange tree in the meadows outside El Batey. It was found by a peasant, José Tomás Alcántara, who

believed it had been stolen from the church in San Juan de la Maguana. He did not dare to touch the image, but went to town and brought the parish priest up to El Batey. When they returned to the meadow the saint was still there, but now he carried a dove and two small miniature drums on a string around his neck.¹⁰⁰

This story has a lot of similarities with legends told in rural Spain, where statues of virgins and saints are miraculously found by shepherds, cowherds or peasants.¹⁰¹ A probable explanation for these findings is that they were connected with fecundity and the sanctifying of the local landscape. Such effigies used to be found found by trees, in caves or in waterways.¹⁰² The little statue of *El Espíritu Santo* clearly has something to do with fertility. As a matter of fact, he is thought to be identical to something called *El Gran Poder de Dios*, The Great Power of God.

The most typical features of popular religion here are an exaggerated belief in healing saints and a belief in *El Gran Poder de Dios*, which means that they seek force and power in different places.¹⁰³

This Great Power of God is imagined as a life-giving force inherent in the landscape. It is the germinating force below the earth and the breath of nature. It is symbolized by the saint in El Batey, but it is also imagined as an impersonal power, whose presence can be felt in certain places:

The peasants say they meet God in *La Cueva*, high up in the *Cordillera Central*. I have been there myself. It is a very impressive place. Here are many holy places like that, where they feel the presence of a spiritual power.¹⁰⁴

The Great Power of God comes forth, among other places, in the spring of La Agüita, north of San Juan de la Maguana. Here the force is also called St. John the Baptist. St. John is called 'Master of the Spring', and is thought to be the ruler of various Indian spirits who are said to dwell in the water of La Agüita.

An *ermita* and a *calvario* are erected where the path that leads to the spring of La Agüita begins. The *ermita* is guarded by a *reina*, a 'queen', who wears a crown of red paper. She counts on a small *cofradía* for her support and is also a member of *La Cofradía del Espíritu Santo*. The spring is a half-hour walk along the path. It is situated in a grove where a spray of water comes forth from a mound of stones, forming a shallow pond beneath it. The water is considered to have healing powers. At one of my visits, three women, who had come all the way from the capital, threw sweets and toasted bread in a cavity close to where the water emerges from the rock. They were naked. One of them got possessed by an Indian queen called Anacaona and flung herself into the water. She searched for 'signs' in the water, when she found a glittering bottle cap which was interpreted as a message from the Indians, 'who are fond of glittering things'.¹⁰⁵

People in the San Juan Valley believe that the Indians disappeared from the surface of the earth after the Spanish conquest. As they are believed to be 'just and discrete', they hide themselves in caves and under water. As the original owners of the land, they preside over its riches. In Dominican voodoo, they form a division of their own. When people are possessed by them they rarely speak, but move around in a gracious manner. Possessed women often take off some of their clothes, since the Indians are imagined to be naked and adorned with feathers. They 'live under the water', are 'keepers of hidden treasures' and may endow their devotees with gifts of wealth, both material - money, jewels and children - or immaterial - sexual powers and fertility.¹⁰⁶

The African tradition. Anacaona, the Indian queen who dwells in the waters of La Agüita appears to have much in common with Oshun, a water and fertility goddess among West African Yorubas. Anacoana was a historical person, married to the fierce Indian chief Caonabo. When her husband died, she became the leader of her people, until the Spaniards forced her to hang herself. Now she lives beneath the water and bestows her believers with gifts of wealth and fecundity. The Yoruban goddess is also believed to have killed herself and, upon her death, to have taken all her wealth with her to the sacred, watery depths. From her abode beneath the water, she brings children to those 'seeking and longing for them'. She also supports her 'worshippers with other aspects of the "good life", such as money and wealth'.¹⁰⁷ Just like her Dominican counterpart, she is symbolized by feathers and considered to be lovely and calm, but like the Indian queen she may also be eager for battle.¹⁰⁸

In La Agüita, Anacaona serves under St. John the Baptist. Among Haitian and Dominican voodooists, St. John the Baptist is considered to be the master of earthquakes and thunder¹⁰⁹ and is said to be married to Erzulie, the voodooist love goddess, associated with water. These associations link St. John with the Yoruban God Shango, master of lightning and fertility, and his three wives, who all dwell under water and are fond of feathers and glittering things. The most important of Shango's wives is Oshun. In the same way Shango governs over his wives who dwell in springs and underwater courses, St. John the Baptist governs over the Indian ladies in La Agüita and another Indian water spirit who is believed to dwell in a stream outside of El Batey.¹¹⁰

The European tradition. The tiny statue of *Espíritu Santo*, a chubby-cheeked boy with raven-black hair, depicted with a baroque flavor, fits well with European depictions of St. John the Baptist.¹¹¹ Baroque art became the universal style of the Spanish colonies. Its guidelines were determined by the demands of the Counter-Reformation. It was expressive and extroverted, a popular artform aimed at the masses and adapted to their tastes. Its symbols and allegories were never complicated. It was realistic and appealed more to the senses than the intellect. Like Murillo's sweet and youthful Madonnas, who were faithful interpretations of popular fertility notions. Akin to May queens, they rise up to heaven, standing on the crescent moon, surrounded by lovely, plump and naked children, who carry roses and ears of corn in their hands. In

the same hall of El Prado Museum in Madrid where we can admire Murillo's Virgins, we also find his depictions of St. John the Baptist, a healthy little chubby-cheeked child who plays with lambs in lush meadows, or is offered a drink of water by an equally sweet and childlike Jesus.

But why is such a powerful saint depicted as a child? St. John the Baptist is the only saint whose birth, and not death, is celebrated in the Christian calendar. He is, together with Jesus, the only Christian deity who is worshipped in the guise of a child, and both children are connected with the most important dates in the agricultural calendar - Jesus with the winter solstice, which takes place around Christmas, the principal feast of rejuvenation for all of Christendom and St. John the Baptist with the summer solstice, which takes place around his day (24 June), which serves as an occasion for feasts celebrating rejuvenation and fecundity.

In European iconography children incarnate possibilities which lie ahead. The New Year and the different seasons use to be depicted as children. Children symbolize innocence, growth and fertility and they are often connected with water.¹¹²

Images representing human littleness inevitably became associated with the general good, the total community's welfare as opposed to selfish or sectional interests [...] and thus with the fertility of men, animals and crops, as well as with their preconditions: peace in the cultural order and rain (not excess rain, only 'little rain') in the natural realm.¹¹³

Drums and Death

The African influence on Dominican *cofradías* is of course most evident in the *cofrades*' profound veneration of the palos. The drums accompany every ceremony and all dances are performed in honor of the *Espíritu Santo*.¹¹⁴

The drums are baptized, endowed with *compadres* and given names.¹¹⁵ The biggest one is called *Palo Grande*, and the others *El Bulador* and *El Alcahuete*.¹¹⁶ Other names on the big ones are *Mayo* and *Segundo*; the small one is always called *Alcahuete*.¹¹⁷ The power of the drums is imagined as a spiritual force. The *cofrades* use to say that the drums hide profound secrets. Every drum has a personality of its own and they are all connected in some way with *El Gran Poder de Dios*.¹¹⁸

When a *cofrade* dies he wants the force of the drums to accompany him to the other world and the members of the *Cofradía del Espíritu Santo* consider it to be one of the *cofrades* main tasks to accompany fellow-members at the hour of death. In that respect, the Dominican *cofradía* attests to its European inheritance.

When a *cofrade* is dying, his fellow-*cofrades* prepare an altar in his room, decorate it with the oleographs of the *Gran Poder de Dios*¹¹⁹ and order the *palos* to be played. When the *cofrade* has died, vigils are arranged for nine successive days. On the last night, called *El Rincón* or *El Banco*, an *enramada*, a covered dance floor, is constructed by the house of the departed. Bread, meat, coffee and rum are offered to the guests and the *palos* are played from six o'clock in the evening until one o'clock in the morning. *El Baile del Espíritu Santo* is danced and often someone gets possessed by the Holy Ghost, or even by the soul of the deceased.¹²⁰

The *cofradías* in colonial Santo Domingo helped their members to gain some security in an environment which was new and different for many of them. They offered them a sense of belonging and self-respect, safeguarded traditions from their respective home lands and were even able to help them meet some of their material needs. When slavery was abolished, the *cofradías* prolonged their existence in the Dominican countryside, where they were intimately adapted to peasants' needs and notions.

Survival and Syncretism: The Emergence of Modern Mayan Religion

Dominican *cofradías* are part of a dynamic world, vast and unpredictable. The cult is spontaneous and innovative. The ceremonies are gay, colorful and noisy. By contrast, when we now enter the Mayan world we are surrounded by a different universe, which is enclosed, governed by strict rules and regulated by calendars. Still, we soon discern that this world also has its internal dynamics, a continuous effort to adapt its view of the world to an ever changing environment. As in medieval Europe and the Dominican Republic, we find the same veneration of, and dependance on, nature, as well as a profound belief in communal solutions to personal problems.

Few parts of the world are as diverse as the Mayan area of Central America.¹²¹ Pine-covered mountain ranges and towering volcanoes of the 'Green Andes' rise above the rain drenched jungles of Petén, fertile plains and parched deserts follow in rapid succession. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the area was as fragmented as medieval Europe: feudal lords and city states, almost as obsessed with war as their counterparts across the sea, a wide range of different languages and cultural traditions, sophisticated élites and masses of uneducated peasants, migrations, invasions and peasant uprisings. Still, just like the inhabitants of medieval Europe, most Mayas shared a worldview, a kind of stationary backdrop for all upheavals and changes. Like the Europeans, the Mayas belonged to a peasant culture, firmly rooted in the soil.

The upper crust of society consisted of a hereditary class of nobles, who held political offices and acted as high-ranking officers and merchants. Members of the high clergy, who administered the huge ceremonial centers, also

belonged to the Mayan aristocracy.¹²² The religion of these nobles was probably far from that of the peasants. Rituals of the priestly castes were executed in secluded chambers elevated high up on steep pyramids, far from the people who thronged to the marketplaces below the temples. Apparently, the peasants were fairly uninterested in the orthodox religion of the nobles.¹²³ There are indications that the huge ruins of magnificent temples from the so called Classical period, which laid overgrown by bush and jungle already before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, were deserted due to the fact that the aristocrats who managed them had been annihilated by revolting peasants.¹²⁴

Some fifty years after the Spanish invasion, the old Mayan cultures were completely crushed and maybe more than two-thirds of Meso-America's entire population succumbed to diseases brought by Europeans and African slaves.¹²⁵

By the time the Spaniards arrived the most common social institution among the peasants in Meso-America was what, in Nahuatl, was called *calpulli*:

A territorial unit whose members were linked by ties of kinship, reciprocity, solidarity, and common economic activities. The *calpulli* was connected with mythical ancestors and worshipped a tutelary god [...] who ensured its survival.¹²⁶

Dreadful population losses and mass migration disrupted the traditional *calpulli*-system. Flourishing, densely populated districts were reduced to a few scattered and wretched settlements.¹²⁷ It was of utmost importance for the Mayas to reconstruct their ruined communities as soon as possible. The Mayan peasant viewed individual security in collective terms. Alone he feared destruction. The Mayan society had always been, regardless of its various degrees of complexity, an agrarian society, and the peasant, the *macehual*, commoner, constituted the basis of the entire social order. The extended peasant family was the basic unity of society, and the division of labor was strictly sexual. Reciprocal aid was the foundation of Mayan family organization; without his family unit, or his *calpulli*, a man would be totally lost.¹²⁸ Thus, the Mayas soon reorganized themselves in small close-knit village communities, where archaic agrarian traditions remained, naturally adapted to their new environment. Meanwhile the beliefs of the Mayan aristocracy began to fade and finally disappeared. The management and communal rituals of the villages which had substituted the *calpullis* were no longer in the hands of the nobles, but were taken care of by a new organization, the *cofradías*, led by men chosen by the villagers themselves.

The Catholic clergy, Franciscan and Dominican friars, had followed in the footsteps of the Spanish conquerors. The Mayan lands were declared 'mission territory' and friars set about their tasks with enthusiasm and dedication. Soon massive churches rose over levelled temple grounds and the Indians were converted to the 'true' Christian religion. It was a hard task; the Indians allowed themselves to be baptized, but hid their idols in secluded corners of their homes

or deep down in caves and jungles. The old Mayan nobility became the focus of the missionaries' attention. The Christian friars were probably blinded by the outward signs of the enormous prestige and power of the Mayan hierarchy.¹²⁹ They suppressed the old official cults and tried to win over the nobility, often resorting to forceful means. Human and animal sacrifices were banished, sacred books were burned, clandestine worship of the old gods was punished with a hundred lashes. The Franciscans established boarding schools for noble youths, where they were indoctrinated in order to help the friars in their evangelization efforts. Most Mayan priests were re-educated and many of them became *maestro cantores*, church functionaries, who helped the Catholic priest with everything except delivering mass.

The Christian clergy succeeded in wiping out most traces of the old Mayan official religion. Christianity took over the towns, just as the churches had taken over the temple sites.¹³⁰ The poor agriculturists interpreted the new religion in terms which were familiar to them. The words of the priest and the rituals in the church were almost as far from their immediate reality as the rituals on the summits of the old pyramids. And just as the former Mayan élite before them, the Catholic clergy did not pay much attention to the earth-bound rituals of the peasants. When the fervent missionary friars were finally replaced by common parish priests, the latter were generally contented with a steady income and did not care much about the 'simple superstitions' of their parishioners.

The Mayan *Cofradías*

The missionary friars organized their Indian parishioners in *cofradías*. Most of them were dedicated to the patron saint of the village church, arbitrarily designated by some European friar. This suited the Indians well, since they felt the need for a particular guardian of their locality now that their old gods had been excoriated. As soon as the statue of a saint had been placed in the church, they adopted him as their own and vested him with old Mayan piety. The jurisdiction of these saints was as limited as the horizons of their Mayan devotees. Following the collapse of the ritual Mayan centers, communal worship outside the sphere of the village community ceased to exist. The saints became tied to the locality, not because their devotees associated them with a particular terrain, but because the Indian peasants were organized by territory; lineage and occupational speciality were of secondary importance to them.¹³¹

From the beginning it appears as if members of the old Mayan nobility and clergy were assigned a leading role within the *cofradías*, but after some time the Spaniards tried to limit their powers and the friars battled their religious beliefs. Soon the Mayan élite was relegated to a subordinate status and their horizons shrank to the size of their former peasant subjects.¹³² Their grip over the *cofradías* loosened, probably in keeping with the interest of the Spanish masters, and the religious brotherhoods became democratic institutions in

the sense that it was free for everyone to join their ranks provided they showed sufficient interest in the common good and the purpose of the *cofradías*.¹³³

The *cofrades* acted as intermediaries between Indians and Whites. The *cofradías* also succeeded in binding the Indian communities together and ushered the population in under the wings of the Church. The clergy appreciated the activities of the *cofradías*, since they facilitated the work of the parish priest by maintaining churches and chapels, as well as paying him for masses and other ceremonies.¹³⁴

The *cofradías* tended to be rather conservative institutions, preserving the traditions within the village communities and trying to achieve their goal by exerting their influence in a discrete, even clandestine, way. Many white settlers were totally unaware of how the *cofradías* functioned and who their real leaders were. Still, they were generally not detrimental to the interests of the Whites. When violent, social upheavals shook the Mayan communities, the *cofrades* seldom acted as leaders of such movements.¹³⁵

The revolts which took place in Chiapas, Yucatan and Quiché during the colonial era seldom turned into armed resistance until the Church, or some other political force, tried to 'reform' communal worship. Famine, governmental inefficiency and tax increases could be tolerated, but when religion came under attack the emotions of the Mayan peasants easily got overheated.¹³⁶ Many communal religious protests took the form of 'revitalistic' liberation movements in the sense that the revolutionaries longed for a return to old traditional values and liberation from the yoke of the Spaniards.¹³⁷ However, when the resurrectionists were free to reinstate Mayan gods and rituals, they did not do so. Instead, they reinterpreted Christian rituals, presumably because the old gods no longer had a separate identity. Christian symbols and rituals were incorporated into the Mayan way of thinking to such a degree that the names and rituals of the old 'pagan' religion were changed into 'Christian' ones. The manifestations of anti-Spanish feelings were never anti-Christian.¹³⁸ They were, however, far from being Christian in any strict, dogmatic sense.¹³⁹

Even if the *cofradías* remained on the fringe of such movements, their influence was crucial in the development of a new blend of religions which emerged in the Mayan areas. Old Mayan cults and social organizations simply operated under the auspices of the Catholic Church and ceased to be a separate religion. Through the *cofradía*-organizations the Mayas were able to control much of the cult themselves. The Catholic clergy, just as the *ahkines*, the Mayan priests, before them, acted like religious assistants and intermediaries, but the total responsibility for the cult rested securely with the *cofradías*.¹⁴⁰

Organization of the *Cofradías*

Cofradías, with slightly different organizational structures and different names for their officials, exist in every rural community of the Maya-speaking

world. Different *cofradías* exist in the same village or town, each one dedicated to a specific saint. They are all hierarchically organized. The most important one used to be the one dedicated to the community's patron saint.

Every *cofradía* has a dual organization. One group consists of the *cofrades* (mostly six), the other of their wives. Each member has well defined responsibilities and carries a title which indicates his position on the social ladder of the *cofradía*. The leader, often called *principal* or *mayordomo*,¹⁴¹ is endowed with a *vara*, as the outward sign of his dignity.¹⁴² He keeps the patron saint of the *cofradía* in a corner of his home, which is ritually 'set apart' from the rest of the house and decorated in a distinctive way. The saint is taken from the home of the *principal* to the church during the processions which are carried out on important feast days. Otherwise cult is rendered to the saint in the home of the *principal*.

New members are elected annually by the outgoing *cofrades*. Climbing the *cofradía* ladder, often constitutes a way of obtaining political power within the local government.

'Modern times', i.e. the period initiated by liberal movements during the 1870s, have been characterized by constant clashes between the *cofradías* and the secular powers, who have sought to limit the influence of religion over rural politics.¹⁴³ The *cofradías* have also come under attack from reform movements within the Catholic Church, which have demanded a 'return' to a more dogmatic faith and have wanted to purge the Church of the 'superstitions' of the *cofradías*.¹⁴⁴

Feasting within the *Cofradías*

One prominent notion among the Classical Mayas was that the gods needed food. Feeding the gods was essential, otherwise they would not bestow their favors upon mankind.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, feeding the saints is equally important for the *cofradías*, if not always as tangibly as in the case of the *cofradía* of Maximón in Santiago Atitlán, where *cofrades* pour *aguardiente*, vodka, through the effigy's round mouth and also place lit cigarettes in it. Among Yucatan Maya the term *matan* refers to both communal feasts and religious offerings.¹⁴⁶ Feasts in honor of a saint are always connected with sumptuous communal banquets, constituting a kind of communion with the spiritual sphere. Certain members of the Catholic clergy have always been shocked by the the dancing, merry-making and often unbound drinking of feasting Indian *cofrades*.¹⁴⁷ In unsuccessful attempts to curb these 'excesses', *marimbas* have been burned, often together with 'unorthodox' saints. Still, the cults have remained. The power of the *cofradías* has always proved to be too strong and too well integrated in Mayan society.

The Religious Experts

Even if the *cofradías*, in principle, are purely Christian organizations, attached to the Catholic Church and to its clergy, they have always maintained close cooperation with religious practitioners outside the established Church. Most *cofradías* count on the assistance of a native Mayan priest.¹⁴⁸ The Mayan priest performs rituals connected with old pagan cult-sites and is an expert in divination with the help of beans and the Mayan agricultural calendar. He is acts as faith-healer and connoisseur of various herbal remedies, as well as spiritual advisor of the *cofradías*. He is the link between the community and the two spheres of Mayan religion, the world of the saints and the world of the pagan gods:

the old pagan gods of earth and nature governed over the forests and fields where the Mayas worked; the Christian saints presided over the affairs of the village.¹⁴⁹

The Mayan priest is neither chosen by the community, nor does he inherit his office. He receives his calling through dreams and revelations and decides to seek out a well known Mayan priest in order to be initiated into his craft which, among other things, means learning a wide variety of songs and prayers, as well as all the names and individual characters of the deities governing the Mayan calendar.¹⁵⁰

The Mayan agricultural year is reflected and governed by *tonalamatl*, a calendar of 260 days, which regulates and circumscribes the peasant's life, telling him what to do and what the future holds in store. The Mayan priests help the peasant and the *cofradías* to interpret the *tonalamatl*.¹⁵¹ At one time there were two calendars in the Mayan lands, but the one of the nobility and high clergy was suppressed by the Catholic priests, while the agrarian calendar of the peasants remained untouched.¹⁵² In the *tonalamatl* every day is a godhead which, like thousands of other distinct forces, governs the world of the Mayan agriculturist. The gods of the *tonalamatl* sanctify and regulate time, while the *mams*, who live in rivers, on mountains, in the wind, and in lightning, govern the immediate surroundings of the peasant.¹⁵³ The Mayan priest's familiarity with all these powers is seen as a guarantee for maintaining order and safeguarding the traditions which help the agriculturist interpret and understand his environment.

Rinterpreting the World and Maintaining Order

What immediately strikes the outsider when confronted with the Mayan *cofradías* is their strict and complicated organization. All rituals are very intricate and the ritual calendar which regulates the ceremonies must be interpreted by experts. The *cofradías* reflect the complex structure of the Mayan universe.

The individual, the community, the landscape and the universe are intimately linked to one another and all are governed by strict rules. The main task of the *cofradías* is to interpret and uphold these rules - **The Law of the Saints**.

The world vision of many Mayan peasants is circumscribed by their immediate surroundings. The sky is close; the sun, the moon and the earth are part of a familiar universe where celestial bodies are thought to be related to each other as father, mother, grandmother, uncles and nephews. The village and its surrounding fields are protected by spiritual guardians, delimited by mountains, woods, or even stones or crosses the peasants have erected in order to cut off and protect their world from alien and threatening forces.¹⁵⁴

Death does not mean departure from this restricted existence. The ancestors are thought to be interested in almost any event which occurs in the Mayan communities. Altars dedicated to the ancestors are kept in private homes and they are still worshipped in caves and churchyards, even within the Catholic churches.¹⁵⁵ During Holy Week and All Saints' Day, sumptuous meals are prepared for the ancestors, the doors of peasant homes are left open during the night and food is left on the tables. Food is also carried to the graveyards, laid out upon the graves and the living share their feast with the dead.¹⁵⁶

The Mayan universe is a cyclical world, where every day has a name and every man a given place.¹⁵⁷ Everyone has to obey **The Law of the Saints**.¹⁵⁸ The main keeper of this order is often called *Mundo*, the World, or even *Dios Mundo*, God World. He is the synthesis of nature's contradictions, the life-force behind all existence.¹⁵⁹ Most important of all his subjects are the sun, by some called Jesus, and the moon, called Virgin Mary.

According to several Mayas, Jesus has different shapes and characteristics. It remains uncertain as to whether all these appearances are considered to be various manifestations of the same godhead, or if they are viewed as different deities.¹⁶⁰ One of his manifestations, as *Niño Jesús*, the Jesus-child,¹⁶¹ is reminiscent of *Espíritu Santo* in the Dominican Republic. In the shape of a child, Jesus is venerated as a harbinger of fertility; he also serves as a personification of nature's capricious character.¹⁶² *Chacs*, childlike rain-gods, still venerated by many Mayan agriculturists, reflect the ancient origins of the connection between children and fertility in Meso-America.¹⁶³ Jesus may also manifest himself as the sun, and some Mayas even consider him to be married to the moon, i.e. Virgin Mary.¹⁶⁴ The moon is the patroness of the earth and signifies coolness, womanhood and rest. As the sun and moon move, the seasons move, repeating their circular movements. The ascent of the sun is reflected by the warmth and fertility of the rainy season; its descent is equivalent to the dry season.¹⁶⁵ Thus, Jesus and Virgin Mary have been reinterpreted by the Mayas, lost most of their historical and traditional characteristics, and been adapted to a peculiar Mayan scheme of fertility and cyclical rhythms.

Some *cofradías* play an active part in a constant process of reinterpreting the world. They adapt ancient Mayan views of the universe to a changing world, combining them with features borrowed from Christianity and other thought

systems. An interesting example of this is the cult which the *Cofradía Santa Cruz* in Santiago Atitlan renders to a deity called Maximón.¹⁶⁶ In Santiago, Maximón is represented by an effigy which is clad in an abundance of scarves and other textiles. He wears shoes and a hat; his face is a wooden mask with a round mouth. Tradition states that he was found by a religious leader called Francisco Sojuel,¹⁶⁷ who came upon an abandoned effigy of Judas, a doll burned by children during Easter time, lying in a churchyard. He took care of it and thought it ought to be made of wood just like all other saints. Maximón is namely a saint for the downtrodden, the outsider. He is called the Wanderer and sometimes compared to Alvarado, the blood-thirsty conqueror of Guatemala, or Judas, the traitor. He is considered to be a deity who goes his own way, married to a prostitute¹⁶⁸ and uninterested in public opinion. He is the 'third path' which runs between those of Jesus and the *Santo Mundo*.

*Santo Mundo*¹⁶⁹ is the force which stands for the cyclical order in nature, harmony and stability, the equilibrium between good and evil. *Santo Mundo* is the benign aspect of nature, which offers its blessings to everyone. Parallel to the world of *Santo Mundo* exists that of Jesucristo, the world of individual sacrifice and hardship. Both paths are easily recognized and laid down in a determined fashion. Most human beings hesitate while wandering along their chosen paths. They want to take chances, follow their own path. Everyone needs a Maximón. He is familiar with both paths, the traditional one of *Santo Mundo* and, and that of *Jesucristo*, i.e. the path of the white outsider. His presence brings about a healthy tension in the world. He prevents the world 'from remaining asleep'. He represents the human capacity to influence the environment.¹⁷⁰ He is the symbol of the Mayas who, rooted in their own traditions, were able to transform these traditions and harmonize them with the religion introduced by their conquerors. With the help of the foreign *cofradías* they were able to preserve the spiritual foundation of their traditional way of life. Ju'l Juuj Tijax, a group of *cofrades* dedicated to Maximón, stated in 1978:

To respect the customs and traditions is not to go back in time, nor to become stagnant; to respect a culture is to partake of its message, correct its errors, where possible, and enhance its values.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Most members of the *cofradías* I have studied have been agriculturists - peasants dependent on the earth and its capacity to provide subsistence for them and their families. This dependency has made them preoccupied with forces which they consider to be in control of fertility.

I found that the various people this paper have dealt with all appear to share a belief in an all-encompassing life-force inherent in the earth - *Gran Poder de Dios* for the peasants of the San Juan Valley, *Dios Mundo* for the

Maya-Quiché of Guatemala, *Ashié* for the West African Yorubas. This power is considered to be impersonal and unimpressed by human prayers. Still, it is a positive force, since it inhabits the landscape and guarantees its continued existence.

In order to come in contact with this immense power, human supplicants must seek help from intermediaries who are divine, but still maintain some traits of their former existence as mortal beings. This characteristic feature makes it easier to deal with them than with the impersonal force behind everything. They may be ancestors or saints, but they are invariably believed to be familiar with the environment and needs of their devotees. Through such deities unknown powers are endowed with a familiar face.

Without this sense of belonging a peasant would be lost. His chances of survival are greater as part of a community. This was the dilemma of the African slave, uprooted from the agricultural communities of his homeland, and as well as that of the medieval peasant who found himself lost in growing cities, or the Mayan *macehual* who experienced how his *capulli* was crushed and dispersed. For all these individuals the *cofradías* became a life-buoy. Within these religious brotherhoods they regained their lost, ordered world. Within the community, and under the protection of benevolent patron saints, the anguish of being alone and helpless disappeared. The shattered world became whole again.

The recurrent celebration of this wholeness was a common feature among all *cofradías*, whether in medieval Europe, rural Santo Domingo or rural Guatemala. Dancing, eating and playing were carried out as the community's homage to the patron saint who bestowed favors on them all. Banquets were acts of thanksgiving - a delight in the fruits of labor and immersion in the strength of the community.

The function of the *cofradías* differs between the Afro-Caribbean brotherhoods and the Meso-American ones. The African had been uprooted from his natural environment and subjected to serfdom. He had to regain his self-confidence and create a new community. He appreciated the sense of community fostered by music and songs more than capitulation under strict rules and hierarchical order. The Mayas, on the other hand continued to inhabit their own land, but experienced how all had been changed and destroyed. Perhaps they were more apt to rebuild an elaborate and finite universe, based on fixed rules they had inherited from their ancestors. Still, the cult of Maximón suggests that positive values were also sought in dynamic processes instead of traditional immobility.

At the beginning of my analysis I mentioned that the peasants' world was characterized by 'long-term stability in his physical and social landscape', and it appears as if the *cofradías* strived to achieve just that through their devotion to patron saints and earth-deities, their care for the living and preoccupation with the dead. They wanted to make the world ordered and secure, amid the violent changes continuously shaking the world of the urban élite and the high clergy. It was a familiar peasant world of fertility rites the Africans brought with them to

the Caribbean, not the rituals of noble houses and priesthoods. The palaces and temples of the Mayan élite crumbled and fell and not many traces remain of their faith, but the earthbound beliefs of their subordinates have survived to date.

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NOTES

1. Hultcrantz (1960), p. 143.
2. Redfield and Singer (1984), p. 341. For a description of notions related to the term **folk** see Hultcrantz (1960), pp. 126-144.
3. Cf. Redfield (1955).
4. Redfield and Singer (1984), p. 341.
5. Christian (1987), pp. 371-372, p. 371.
6. Ibid., p. 371. The reader would do well by keeping this in mind when reading this paper. I often mention 'the beliefs of the peasant', as if they were the same for all members of rural communities over the world. Needless to say, this is a gross generalization, since in every society every single peasant has his own individual characteristics and beliefs. These, however are colored by his immediate environment, making it possible to arrive at some sort of generalization.
7. Ibid., p. 372.
8. Cohn (1978), p. 275. Cf. Berger (1981), p. 216.
9. Rooth (1969), p. 46.
10. Wolf (1966), p. 103. This does not mean that peasants live in a state of constant harmony with their neighbors. As in all secluded societies, tensions are likely to erupt between individuals. Jealousy, competition, slander and fights over land and inheritance are endemic in peasant societies.
11. Cf. Berger (1981), pp. 216-219.
12. Interview with Julián Ramos, small holder, 102 years old, Higüerito, Dominican Republic, 16 January, 1986.
13. Christian (1981), p. 176. Such places are often located by groves, springs and caves.
14. In rural Spain the possession of such powers is often called *gracia* and is considered to be 'a divinely ordained privilege, a power which is a free gift which demands no rational justification and no payment' (Pitt-Rivers (1971), p. 189). Notions of such impersonal forces are known in various societies around the world and the Melanesian concept of *mana* is often employed as an all-encompassing term for them (Pettersson (1980), pp. 31-43).
15. Cf. Godelier (1975), pp. 202-203.

16. From Greek, *synkretizein*, i.e. to join forces against a common enemy. Later it came to mean 'in confusion with'. 'The process of fusing two different religious ideas or systems which are usually analogous' (Hultkrantz (1960), p. 228).
17. *Hispanidad* was a term often used by Dominican ideologists under the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1961). It implied that the culture of the Dominicans had to be delivered from all African and Haitian traits in order to adapt itself to an imaginary Spanish culture epitomized in the literal and artistic achievements of the 'Spanish Golden Age' (cf. Cassá (1976)).
18. For an interesting analysis of some of these historical works, cf. Clark (1983).
19. Cf. Bakhtin (1984).
20. The Council met on three occasions, 1545-1548, 1551-1552 and 1562-1563. The last was dedicated to matters of 'disciplinary regulation and correction' (Chadwick (1982), p. 274).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
22. Bossy (1985), p. 58.
23. Rojas Lima (1988), pp. 45-46. That guild members were devoted to certain saints appears only natural, since many saints were already viewed in connection with certain offices, such as St. Ivo for lawyers, St. Bartholomew for butchers, St. Eligius for goldsmiths, Sta Anna for bricklayers, St. Anthony for innkeepers, St. Joseph for carpenters, St. Dismas for thieves etc.
24. Cohn (1978), pp. 57-59.
25. Bossy (1985), p. 58.
26. Bossy (1970), p. 59.
27. Bossy (1985), pp. 58-59.
28. Bakhtin (1984), p. 302.
29. Heer (1974), p. 87.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Eliade (1976), p. 331.
32. Thomas (1984), p. 54.
33. Cf. Eliade (1976), pp. 331-366 for an interesting description of various European myths and rituals connected with fertility.

34. Foster (1960), p. 198.
35. Bossy (1985), pp. 58-59.
36. Such beliefs in the power inherent in places and relics are perhaps easier to understand if we consider the modern tourist's desire to visit places where his idols have trodden or the high prices fetched for such items as John Lennon's guitar or Elvis' Cadillacs at Southeby's auctions.
37. Johnson (1980) pp. 161-166.
38. Andersson (1967), p. 148.
39. Wilson (1983), p. 1.
40. Rojas Lima (1988), pp. 45-50.
41. Christian (1972), pp. 60-61.
42. Christian (1981), p. 177.
43. A religious vow, *votum* in Latin, is 'a solemn promise made to God or to any deity or saint, to perform some act, or make some gift or sacrifice, in return for some special favour'. (*The Oxford English Dictionary. Vol. XII* (1961), p. 319. Cf. Christian (1972), pp. 119-120). Vows are common within a feudal setting and can be interpreted as a reflection of the clientship which existed between a feudal lord and his dependents (Sallman (1979), p. 871).
44. Christian (1972), p. 31.
45. Caro Baroja (1974), pp. 31-76, describes strange rural festivals in the Spanish villages of Talavera and San Pedro Manrique which show compelling affinities with fertility rituals which, in classical antiquity used to be carried out in honor of the fecundity goddesses of Demeter and Ceres.
46. The cult of the great 'Mother Earth' has followed mankind through the centuries. She has borne such names as Ishtar, Nerthus, Cybele and Demeter.
47. Barren women pray for offspring, but also women, who through the Catholic ban on contraception are condemned to child bearing without respite, come to her, the woman who brought forth virginally and without pain (Warner (1983), p. 275).
48. Eliade (1976), pp. 349-351.
49. Ariés (1978), p. 94.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-99.

51. Thomas, pp. 33-34.
52. Eliade (1976), p. 355.
53. Cohn (1976), pp 82-84.
54. Thomas (1984), p. 303.
55. Ariés (1978), pp. 81-94.
56. Johnson (1980), p. 228.
57. Ibid., p. 228.
58. Elliott (1970), p. 103.
59. Cohn (1978), pp. 82-82.
60. Rojas Lima (1989), p. 52.
61. Elliott (1970), pp. 86-88.
62. Bossy (1970), p. 59.
63. Christian (1981), p. 177.
64. Ibid., p. 161.
65. Kamen (1985), p. 199.
66. Cf. Klintberg (1980).
67. Inquisitor cited in Kamen (1985), p. 206.
68. Christian (1981), pp. 162-163. The so-called May-feasts were common all over medieval Europe. As part of the festivities, a May queen, a young girl, used to be crowned in every village preceding the festivities. As a distant reflection of ancient fertility rites she was often symbolically married to a young man (Foster (1960), p. 189).
69. Christian (1981), p. 163.
70. Ibid., p. 164 and 255-256.
71. There exist various kinds of religious *promesas*, i.e. religious vows. A *promesa* often implies the carrying out of certain acts, performed as personal penitence,

or as a sign of earnest devotion. In rural Dominican Republic a very common *promesa* consists of dressing oneself in a certain way for a limited time, sometimes for several years.

72. *Palos* are long (110 cms) drums made of hollowed-out tree-trunks, covered with goatskin. They are played standing up while the drummer keeps them between his legs. *Palos* are played at popular religious festivities all over the Dominican Republic, particularly on voodoo ceremonies and on feasts held by the various *cofradías*. They are also played when a member of a *cofradía* is *in extremis* (Lizardo (1988), pp. 288-295).
73. A rasped metallic cylinder, held in one hand, which the musician plays using it a small piece of steel-wire held in the other hand (Ibid., pp. 148-149).
74. La Agüita is a highly venerated place on the mountain slopes north of San Juan de la Maguana, center of a *cofradía* dedicated to St. John the Baptist, lord of a healing spring which has its source some hundred meters from the *ermita*.
75. The cult of the Virgin in Higüey centers around a painting. The legends connected with the miraculous piece are similar to those common in Spain in connection with statues of saints and virgins. The picture was acquired mysteriously from a vanishing stranger, then it disappeared from its owner and appeared in the crown of an orange tree where the chapel of the Virgin finally was constructed (Pepen (1984), pp. 17-30).
76. My description is based on a visit I made to San Juan de la Maguana during Whit Week in 1989. Cf. Lemus and De Oleo (1977), pp.299-303.
77. In the Dominican Republic the *salves* are popular religious anthems, formally based on the Catholic hymn *Salve Regina*. They show great variety in both melody and text. In the San Juan Valley the singing of *salves* is a communal activity, often carried out under nightly vigils. On such occasions people sing them standing or sitting close together. The song is conducted by a lead-singer who, by himself, sings four varied lines which are always followed by a refrain, sung by all present. The *salves* may be very long and include more than fifteen verses. The singing is often accompanied by drums, accordion and *guayo*. Rum is often consumed by everyone, but it is seldom anyone gets drunk. The sessions of *salve*-singing may be followed by dancing and feasting. Possessions may also occur.
78. A *calvario* is a group of three crosses, often surrounded by circles of stones, found at the entrances of Dominican villages or towns, and in certain holy places. It is thought to be imbued with strong powers and is erected in order to 'sanctify' the ground the crosses stand on.
79. A *lua, ser* or *misterio*, is the Dominican equivalent of a Haitian loa, a voodoo deity which manifests itself by possessing individuals. Most *luases* find their equivalents among the Catholic saints, sharing the same functions and images,

but they are not identical. You may serve either the *luases* or the saints. On Dominican voodoo, see Deive (1979), Lizardo (1982), Miniño (1985) and Davis (1987).

80. The four pictures illustrate various aspects of the syncretistic cult which flourishes around Espiritu Santo. The picture of the Trinity symbolizes *El Gran Poder de Dios* (see below p. 27). *Altagracia* is the patroness of the Dominican Republic. The picture of San Elias serves as a disguise for the *lua* Baron del Cementerio. This *lua* reigns over the dead and is the supreme master of magical sciences. San Elias has become the equivalent of Baron del Cementerio because the oleograph which depicts him shows him brandishing a sword while he tramples on a prophet of Baal. The vanquished prophet is interpreted as a corpse. Thus, San Elias has been transformed into the Lord of the Dead, stressing the importance of the *cofradía* as caretaker of the dead and dying. Gregorio Hernández is depicted to as a bourgeois, complete with three-piece suit and tie, smugly serene and quietly confident. He is standing in a meadow while, in the background, a figure in a white surgical gown crouches over a half naked man, lying on a pallet of straw which serves as a surgical operating table. Gregorio Hernández (1864-1919) was an exceedingly charitable and pious surgeon and general practitioner, who introduced the microscope to Venezuela and made its medicine scientific and modern, at least according to the prayers printed in his honor which can be bought everywhere, as well as the hagiographies which are continuously reprinted and distributed all over Latin America (Alvarez del Real (1988)). His spirit is now invoked by spiritual healers all over Colombia, Venezuela and the Caribbean (Cf. Taussig (1987), pp. 147, 279-281). His presence on the altar stresses the healing faculties of *Espiritu Santo* .
81. Interview with Arsidé Gardes, small proprietor, 72 years old, vice treasurer of the *Cofradía del Espiritu Santo*, El Batey, 9 April, 1986.
82. Ibid.
83. Interview with Brian Kennedy, 37 years old, who has been serving for six years as a pastor in Las Matas de Farfán, 3 May, 1986. *Padre* Brian is a Redentorist. The San Juan Valley is a 'missionary district' and all parishes are served by members of the Catholic Order of the Redemptorists (Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer). The order was founded in 1732 by St.. Alphonsus Ligouri, for the purpose of working among the neglected country people in the neighborhood of Naples. From the beginning, the friars specialized in 'preaching the word of the Lord among the poor'. They were instructed to offer sermons and instructions which were 'solid, simple and persuasive'. The center of the order is now in the United States, and its missionaries work all over the world, particularly in peasant areas (Wuest (1911), pp. 683-687). It was the dictator Trujillo who offered the order the San Juan Valley as a mission field in 1935. The redentorists were meant to act as a 'civilizing force', bringing 'law and order' to the neglected parishes and to try and combat the influence of 'Haitian voodoo' (interview with Monsignor Thomas Reilly, 78 years old, former bishop of San Juan de la Maguana, 12 December, 1985). The clashes between the clergy and the

- cofrades* died down in the mid-sixties and many priests started to cooperate with the *cofradía*. However, the *cofrades* are still not allowed to carry out their ceremonies inside the Cathedral of San Juan de la Maguana.
84. Deive (1980), pp. 341, 344 and 349.
 85. Exquemelín (1969), p. 36.
 86. Gómez de Sandoval, cited in Deive (1980), p. 498.
 87. Cano (n.d.), p. 148. *Cofradías* existed in the valley before that time, but I have been able to trace only one - *La Cofradía del Rosario*, founded in Bánica 1740 (Demorizi (1975), p. 148). This particular *cofradía* no longer exists.
 88. Garrido Puello (1973), p. 72.
 89. Larrazabal Blanco (1975), p. 136. 'Spiritism' is a term used by many Dominican authors to denominate Dominican voodoo.
 90. Gray (1987), p. 54. As a matter of fact, *cofradías* were the only kind of organization permitted to operate legally allowed for the non-white population in Spanish America (Davis (1987), p.198).
 91. Bastide (1978), pp. 53-54.
 92. Ibid., p.62.
 93. Herskovits and Herskovits (1933), pp. 9-10.
 94. Christian black slaves proved to be 'ungovernable', apt to run off to the mountains and teach Indians 'bad manners'(Larrazabal Blanco (1975), pp. 13-14). When a devastating measles epidemic killed off vast numbers of the remaining Indians in 1518-1519, large-scale import of black slaves began (ibid., p. 20). This time all were *bozales*, i.e. unevangelized and imported directly from Africa. In 1568 it was estimated that some 20,000 black slaves were working in the Dominican sugar industry (Moya Pons (1973), pp. 6-7 and 15).
 95. Davidson, pp. 30-39.
 96. On the importance of fertility and the practical view on religion as a means of obtaining wealth and security among the West African *Yorubas*, see Hallgren (1988).
 97. Larrazabal Blanco (1975), p. 136. The Araras were former members of the Ewe-Fon people of Dahomey. Cosmas and Damian are twin-saints, often called 'the holy money-less ones' and considered to be the patron saints of physicians. Their help use to be invoked by poor people afflicted with disease. Finding Fon

as their devotees is not surprising, since much of the Fon religion concerns twins (Herskovits and Herskovits (1933), pp. 11-12, 56-57 and 59). Traces of African twin-cults may be found in Dominican concepts tied to the *Marasas*, i.e. twins (Deive (1979), pp. 139-141 and Davis (1987), pp. 129-130).

98. Larrazabal Blanco (1975), pp. 137-138. St. Juan is the fertility deity above all, both in rural Spain and in Santo Domingo. Connected with water and fecundity he has his European feasts around the night of the summer solstice (15-24 June). Among African slaves in Santo Domingo he was associated with Shàngó (Sòngó) of the Yorubas (cf. Hallgren (1988), pp. 34-36), or Xebiosu or Sogbo of the Fons, god of thunder, fecundity and life-giving water. The Dahomean Sogbo is somewhat mysteriously imagined at times as a woman - strange since Shàngó is manliness incarnated, a phallic deity.
99. de Nolasco (1982), pp. 354-355.
100. Interview with Pirindin Solis, El Batey, 11 April, 1986.
101. Turner and Turner (1978), pp. 41-42 and 47.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
103. Interview with Monsignor Thomas Reilly, San Juan de la Maguana, 12 December, 1985.
104. Interview with Brian Kennedy, 3 May, 1986.
105. Visit to La Agüita, 18 January, 1986. It was actually my wife who witnessed and recorded the proceedings by the spring. As a man I was obliged to remain outside, listening to the voices of the women. The spring is surrounded by sheets of corrugated steel. Women and men all bathe naked, but always apart, waiting their turns outside the screen.
106. See Lizardo (1982), p. 16, Miniño (1980), and Deive (1979), p. 179.
107. Hallgren (1988), pp. 34-35.
108. Thompson (1984), pp. 79-80.
109. Simpson (1970), p. 510.
110. Some authors indicate that the Afro-American cult of Shango-St. John the Baptist was replaced by that of Kalunga-Espíritu Santo. Kalunga is the lord over death and water, supreme God of several Congo-Angolan peoples. The shift may have been due to an increased import of slaves from areas of Kalunga worship (Espín (1984) p. 608 and Davis (1987), p. 203).
111. Cf. Davis (1987), pp. 186-187.

112. Compare legends of how small children are saved from water by fishermen or gardeners, or stories about newborn children who are brought to their parents by water-animals such as storks or frogs.
113. Turner and Turner (1978), p. 73.
114. Also the particular dance of the *cofradía* reveals its fertility connections. It is probably of African origin, related to the *sarandunga* of the *Cofradía de San Juan* in Baní and thus also with the 'Spanish' *zarabanda*, which came to Spain from the Caribbean. All of them are couple dances and, as such, originally connected with West African fertility dances (Jahn (1960), pp. 59-93).
115. Davis (1987), pp. 316-317.
116. Cano (n.d.), p. 148.
117. Garrido Puello (1973), p. 72. In the Dominican Republic, *alcahuete* is a word with pejorative connotations indicating cringing persons, squealers or seducers. The last meaning of the word is the most common one in Spanish-speaking countries, where it also means 'pimp'. I have not find the word *bulador* in the dictionaries I have consulted, but it may have the same meaning as *burlador*, seducer or libertine. It is even more likely that the name is related to *bula*, the smallest of the three drums used in Haitian voodoo ceremonies. It follows then that the name *alcahuete* could be the result of a chain of associations: *bula - bulador - burlador - alcahuete*.
118. Davis (1987), p. 101.
119. In the form of an oleograph called *La Mano Poderosa*, The Powerful Hand.
120. Lemus and Marty (1975), p. 120. Cf. Davis (1987), pp. 192-193.
121. Approximately covering the Yucatan Peninsula, the Mexican states of Chiapas and Tabasco, Guatemala, Belize, and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador.
122. Coe (1975), p. 169. *Halach uinic*, true men, was the title of the nobles who served both as governors and high priests. The principal mission of the *halach uinic*, separate from his political functions, was to supervise the teaching of hieroglyphic scripture, check the calendars and appoint new priests. The title of his servants, the Maya priests, was *ahkin*. Two subdivisions belonged to the *ahkin* caste, the *ah nakomes*, human sacrificers, and the *chilanes*, soothsayers and prophets (Thompson (1987), pp. 211-215). These titles are from the Yucatan area. In the Quiché region of Guatemala, for example, the political and clerical leaders were named *c'mal-bé*, pathfinders, a title which is still used for certain cult-functionaries who officiate at marriages (Rojas Lima (1988), p. 147).
123. Thompson (1987), pp. 206-207.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 76. Cf. Gallenkamp (1981), pp. 173-183.
125. In 1960 a famous study by Cook and Borah estimated that no less than 90 % of the entire Indian population died in central Mexico. This figure is probably excessive, but there is no doubt that the impact of smallpox, measles, yellow fever, malaria and typhus was devastating (Thompson (1987), pp. 77-80). The New World simply lacked the ecological complexity of the old one, the level of disease was underdeveloped among its life-forms, animal and human as well. The Amerindian encounter with disease before the arrival of the Spaniards had been unimportant from an epidemiological point of view, and accordingly was their biological vulnerability extremely high when they came in contact with European diseases (McNeill (1979), pp. 185-216).
126. Gruzinski (1989), p. 13.
127. Farriss (1984), pp. 15 and 256. It was not only the deaths by plagues which depopulated the towns and villages. Many Mayas fled and sought the security of the vast jungles in order to avoid forced labor and persecution (*ibid.* pp. 18 and 75).
128. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-136. Cf. Mendelson (1965), pp. 39-43.
129. On the concepts of power among Mexican Indians, cf. Gruzinski (1989), pp. 18-24.
130. Farriss (1984), pp. 290-291, 355.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
133. Carmack (1979a), p. 213 and Carmack (1979b).
134. Rojas Lima (1988), pp. 83-84.
135. Carmack (1979a), p. 233.
136. *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.
137. Cf. Bricker (1989).
138. Farriss (1984), pp. 314 and 316.
139. When the people of the district of Cancuc rebelled in Chiapas in 1712, they did so out of desperation concerning taxes and repression, but the direct cause concerning rebellion was the unwillingness of the authorities to authorize a cult which had developed from a peasant girl's vision of the Virgin. The 'Indian'

- Virgin thus turned into the protector of Mayan society. The rebels called themselves warriors of the Virgin, and ousted the priests and Spanish settlers. The rebels' religious leaders dressed themselves in robes of runaway priests, held masses in the churches and were called 'sons of the saints'. Bishops and governors were elected after the Spanish model. The district capital was renamed Jerusalem. Spaniards were branded as 'Jews', since they had rejected the divinity of 'Our Lady of Cancuc' (Bricker (1989), pp. 120-135).
140. Carmack (1979b), p. 323.
141. Most titles are in Spanish but have their equivalents in the native tongues of the different Mayan groups.
142. The *vara* is a highly elaborate staff, or silver object, carried by the *principales* in the processions and kept in their homes as a venerated object. It is thought to be imbued with strong powers and, within many *cofradías*, it is never touched directly and has to be carried with the help of a scarf. In some towns and villages the *cofrades* also carry certain habits, indicating their status.
143. Rojas Lima (1988), pp. 84-91.
144. Cf. Mendelson (1965). For detailed studies of the structures and activities of different *cofradías* see Bunzel (1981), pp. 199-316, Reina (1973), pp. 145-268 and Rojas Lima (1988).
145. Thompson (1987), pp. 215-231.
146. Farris (1984), p. 324.
147. Bunzel (1981), pp. 310-316. The positive connotations applied to everything which rises and gives warmth, like the sun, may have something to do with the ritual importance of incense, candles, firework, rum and cigarettes (Gossen (1979), p. 123).
148. In Guatemala the denomination of this cult-functionary changes according to the language spoken in his community. His title is *chuchqajau* among the Quichés, *tatapish* among the Pokomams and *boqol balwactis* among the Ixiles.
149. Thompson (1987), pp. 207-208.
150. About the functions of the Mayan priest, or perhaps more correctly the shaman, cf. Bunzel (1981), pp. 115-119 and Reina (1973), 161-175.
151. Bunzel (1981), pp. 332-350.
152. Colby and van den Berghe (1977), p. 71. The liturgical calendar of the aristocracy consisted of 18 months and 365 days, regulating official feasts and holidays.

153. Spahni (1982), p. 161.
154. Nash (1970), pp. 146-149.
155. In Chichicastenango, those ancestors who were the 'most important people' of the community (like former leaders of various *cofradías*) are contacted in the choir. The nave is reserved for 'common souls' and 'co-parents', while souls of magicians and fortune-tellers linger by the entrance doors (Bunzel (1981), p. 326-329).
156. Ibid. pp. 328 and 330.
157. Mendelson (1965), p. 143.
158. Reina (1973), pp. 165-166.
159. Bunzel (1981), pp. 320-321. The Ixiles, who live in the Guatemala Highlands, do not think of *Mundo* as a divine being. For them it is rather a place beneath the earth, inhabited by the *angeles*, intermediaries between humans and an omnipotent force called *Q'esla Kub'al*. The angels are given food, drinks and incense where *El Mundo* comes forth, i.e. in caves, rivers, or on mountain tops (Colby and van den Berghe (1977), p.109).
160. Farriss (1984), p. 311.
161. Several Guatemalan *cofradías* are dedicated to the cult of *Niño Jesús*. The most important ones are found in Amatitlán and Chinautla (Reina (1973), pp. 240-244).
162. The Olmec jaguar God was often depicted as an infant with large fangs. An image of the capricious and dangerous side of nature (Farriss (1984), p. 286).
163. These *Chacs* (*Chiccháns*, *Chaucs* etc.) may also be imagined as giants or old men (Thompson (1987), pp. 306-329). The cult of flowers, hallucinogenic mushrooms and notions of a happy realm inhabited by tiny infants were, in Nahuatl-speaking areas of Meso-America, associated with the child-god *Piltzintli* (Wasson (1983), pp. 161-194). There are several descriptions of the drowning of children as sacrifices to Mexican rain gods, the *Tlállocs* (González Torres (1985), pp. 194-197, cf. Turner and Turner (1978), p. 73).
164. The Virgin is venerated all over Meso-America and it is probable that it is her fertility connotations which attract her devotees among the peasants. As fertility goddess she shares many traits with the Mayan *Ix Chel* - the goddess of women, helping them when they give birth. She also bestows fecundity to married couples and is related to both water and earth. She is called 'Mother of Gods' and 'Patroness of the Earth' (Thompson (1984), pp. 296-304).

165. Gossen (1979), pp.117-129.
166. We find slightly different Maximones in many other communities as well. In Cantel, close to Quetzaltenango, he is called San Simón, or Judás. Represented by a statue depicting a white man with black moustache, hat and suit (Nash (1970), p. 134). A similar cult exists in Zunil (Spahni (1982), pp. 182-185).
167. Francisco Sojuel, who died in 1903, is considered by the Tzutuhiles be the last of their twelve *Nahual Taq Achá*, sacred patriarchs and culture heroes. He is said to have 'perfected the cult' of Maximón (Ju'l Juuj Tijax (1978)).
168. Maximón has two wives - María B'atz B'al, his Indian wife, and María Castellana, his *Ladino*, non-Indian, wife (probably the prostitute). Maximón's two wives stress his position as mediator between various worlds (Ju'l Juuj Tijax (1978)).
169. Also called San Martín.
170. Mendelson (1965), pp. 81-146 and 192.
170. Ju'l Juuj Tijax (1978).