

linguistic territory; we do not honor this map by arguing that the territory which Sapir glimpsed dimly has been rigorously surveyed.

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PEYOTE AND THE MEXICAN INQUISITION, 1620

The institution of the Inquisition which the Spaniards introduced into Mexico in 1571 was not solely concerned with ferreting out and punishing heresy against the existing state religion. The functions of the Holy Office also included the care of the moral well-being of the community, and this responsibility inevitably brought it certain police powers in the more secular aspects of daily life. As in the case of other governmental agencies of control set up under the Spanish system the Inquisition possessed legislative and executive as well as judicial powers, and in fulfilling its special obligation to protect public morals and customs it was authorized to investigate, to issue decrees with the force of law, and to punish offenses such as witchcraft, bigamy, simony, perjury, blasphemy and other similar crimes. Surviving records of these varied activities of the Holy Office, including its legislation promulgated in the form of edicts, offer today something of the interest of modern police reports and regulations, and often throw considerable light on the social life and manners of colonial Mexico. One of the peculiar problems with which this commission of public welfare had to deal was presented by the apparently widespread use of that small, grey-green, spineless cactus called peyote (*Lophophora Williamsii*) possessing some remarkable narcotic properties.

The intoxicating effect of this plant had been noted in Mexico as early as the middle of the sixteenth century by that Franciscan missionary and pioneer anthropologist, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, and Juan Cárdenas in his *Primera parte de los secretos maravillosos de las Indias*, published in Mexico City in 1591, had written of the hallucinations caused by eating peyote.¹ If previously only scientists had taken cognizance of the use of this narcotic plant among the Indians, by 1620 the officials of the Inquisition were well aware, judging by a decree issued that year, that the peculiar effects of the use of this cactus were evident among other persons besides the Indians. The purposes of prophecy and of establishing guilt which peyote was apparently serving brought the matter clearly within the sphere of authority of the Holy Office and moved it to post publicly throughout the realm an edict forbidding under the severest penalties the use of this "herb."² It is of interest to note, perhaps, that these unscientific guardians of public morals denied to peyote or any

¹ R. E. Schultes, *The appeal of peyote (Lophophora Williamsii) as a medicine* (American Anthropologist, 40, 1938), pp. 698-715. See also Schultes, *Peyote. An American Indian heritage from Mexico* (El México Antiguo, 5, Nos. 5-6, Tacubaya, 1938), pp. 199-206; M. E. Opler, *The Use of Peyote by the Carrizo and Lipan Apache Tribes*, (American Anthropologist, 40, 1938), pp. 271-285; W. LaBarre, *The Peyote Cult* (New Haven, 1938).

² See appendix. Original from the *Archivo General de la Nación* (Ramo de Inquisición, tomo 289, Mexico City).

other plant the narcotic properties which it actually possesses. Typical of the time and the mind of the Inquisition was the conviction of its administrators that such curious manifestations as those associated with the use of peyote could only be the work of the Devil against whom they waged a ceaseless and unremitting fight—an unavailing struggle since the banned practice has long outlived that institution.

DOCUMENT

NOS LOS INQUISIDORES CONTRA LA HERETICA PRAVEDAD, Y APOSTASSIA EN LA Ciudad de Mexico estados, y Prouincias de la Nueva España, nueva Galicia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Yucatan, Verapaz, Honduras, Yslas philipinas, y su distrito, y iurisdicion por autoridad Appostolica. &c. Por quanto el vso de la Yerba o Raiz llamada Peyote, para el efecto que en estas Prouincias se ha introducido de descubrir hurtos, y adebinar otros sucesos, y futuros cõtingentes occultos, es accion supersticiosa y reprouada oppuesta à la pureça, y sinceridad de nuestra Santa Fee Catholica, siendo ansi, que la dicha yerba, ni otra alguna no pueden tener la virtud, y eficacia natural que se dize para los dichos efectos ni para causar las ymages, fantasmas y representaciones en que se fundan las dichas adeuinaciones, y que en ellas se vee notoriamente la sugestion, y asistencia del demonio, autor deste abuso, valiendose primero para introducirle de la facilidad natural de los Indios, y de su inclinacion à la idolatria, y deribondose (*sic*) despues à otras muchas personas poco temerosas de Dios, y de fee muy informe, con cuyos excesos ha tomado mas fuerça el dicho vicio, y se comete con la frequencia que se hecha deuer (*sic*). Y deuièdo Nos por la obligacion de nuestro cargo atajarle, y ocurrir à los daños, y graues offensas de Dios nuestro Señor, que del resultan. Auiendolo tratado, y conferido con personas doctas, y de rectas conciencias, acordamos dar la presente para vos, y à cada vno de vos, por la qual exortamos, requirimos, y en virtud de santa obediencia y sopena de excomunion mayor latae sententiae trina Canonica monitione praemissa, y de otras penas pecuniarias, y corporeles (*sic*) à nuestro arbitrio reseruadas (*sic*). Mandamos, que deaque adelante ninguna persona de qualquier grado, y condicion que sea pueda vsar ni vse de la dicha yerba, del Peyote ni de otras para los dichos efectos, ni para otros semejantes, debajo de ningun titulo, o color, ni hagan que los indios ni otras personas las tomen con apercibimiento que lo contrario haciendo, demas deque abreys incurrido en las dichas Censuras y penas, procederemos contra los q̄ rebeldes e inobediètes fueredes, como cõtra personas sospechosas en la santa fee Catholica.

Y por quãto el dicho delicto ha estado hasta aqui tã introducido, y vsado como se sabe, y nuestra intencion es prohibirle, y remediarle para adelante, y aquietar las conciencias de las personas que le an cometido queriendo vsar de venignidad, y de la comisiõ que para ello tenemos del Illustrissimo señor confesor de su Magestad, Inquisidor General en todos sus Reynos, y Señorios, concedemos gracia, y remision de todo lo passado en el dicho exceso hasta el dia de la publicacion deste nuestro Edicto, y prohibicion, y cometemos à qualquiera (*sic*) confesores seculares o regulares aprobados por sus Ordinarios, licencia, y facultad para absolver del dicho delicto à los que como dicho es le vuieren cometido hasta aqui. Con tal que la dicha absolucion no se estienda à lo venidero ni à otros delictos, excesos hechicerias, y supersticiones de las contenidas en el Edicto general de la fee, y en los demas que en esta raçon hemos mandado publicar los quales han de quedar en su fuerça, y obseruancia, y porque lo contenido en esta carta venga à noticia de todos, y nadie lo pueda ygnorar, mandamos que se publeque (*sic*) en todas la Ciudades Villas, y lugares de nuestro distrito. Dada en la Sala de nuestra Audiencia à diez y nueue dias del mes de Iunio de mill y seiscientos y veinte años.

L^{do} D. Pedro Nabarre de Ysla (Rúbrica)

TRANSLATION

We, the Inquisitors against heretical perversity and apostasy in the City of Mexico, states and provinces of New Spain, New Galicia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Yucatan, Verapaz, Honduras, Philippine Islands, and their districts and jurisdictions, by virtue of apostolic authority, etc.

Inasmuch as the use of the herb or root called Peyote has been introduced into these Provinces for the purpose of detecting thefts, of divining other happenings, and of foretelling future events, it is an act of superstition condemned as opposed to the purity and integrity of our Holy Catholic Faith. This is certain because neither the said herb or any other can possess the virtue or inherent quality of producing the effects claimed, nor can any cause the mental images, fantasies and hallucinations on which the above stated divinations are based. In these latter are plainly perceived the suggestion and intervention of the Devil, the real author of this vice, who first avails himself of the natural credulity of the Indians and their tendency to idolatry, and later strikes down many other persons too little disposed to fear God and of very little faith. Because of these efforts the said abuse has increased in strength and is indulged in with the frequency observed. As our duty imposes upon us the obligation to put a stop to this vice and to repair the harm and grave offense to God our Lord resulting from this practice, we, after consultation and conference with learned and right-minded persons, have decreed the issuing of the present edict to each of you, one and all, by which we admonish you and summon you to obedience by virtue of your holy submission [to the Church] and under penalty of anathema *latae sententiae trina canonica monitione praemissa*, and other pecuniary and corporal penalties within our discretion. We order that henceforth no person of whatever rank or social condition can or may make use of the said herb, Peyote, nor of any other kind under any name or appearance for the same or similar purposes, nor shall he make the Indians or any other person take them, with the further warning that disobedience to these decrees shall cause us, in addition to the penalties and condemnation above stated, to take action against such disobedient and recalcitrant persons as we would against those suspected of heresy to our Holy Catholic Faith.

Inasmuch as the said vice has been so widely introduced and practiced up to the present, as is well known, and as our intention is both to ban it, and to remedy this evil henceforth and to ease the conscience of those who have been guilty, we, desiring to act with consideration and enjoying the authority to do so bestowed on us by the Most Illustrious Confessor of his Majesty, the Inquisitor General in all his realms and dominions, do hereby grant pardon and remission of all past sins in the said vice up to the day of the publication of this our edict and bann; and we confer upon any confessor whatsoever, whether of the secular or the regular clergy duly approved by his Superior, the right and power to absolve from the said sin any person who may have committed it up to now, but with the proviso that this absolution shall not be extended to the future, nor [apply] to other misdeeds, abuses, sorcery and acts of superstition enumerated in the General Edict of the Faith, or in other decrees of this tenor that we have had posted as they shall remain in force and be observed. In order that the content of this letter may be brought to the knowledge of everyone and that no one may be ignorant of it, we order that it shall be published in every city, town and village of our district. Given in the Hall of our Court on the 29th day of June, 1620.

Licenciado D. Pedro Nabarre de Isla (Rubric)
IRVING A. LEONARD