

## Article

# His Body Will Appear in All of the Mirrors: Explaining Christian Doctrine to the Nahuas in the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*

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**Abstract:** After the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521, the first groups of friars arrived in Mexico to Christianize the native inhabitants of Mesoamerica. This task was anything but easy, as explaining Christian doctrine to the Indigenous people posed both a linguistic and a theological challenge. The need to learn Indigenous languages and to prepare doctrinal materials dedicated specifically to the Christianization of this land was a task that might have seemed almost impossible to conduct in a short period of time, yet by the 1540s, the first printed catechisms (*doctrinas*) in Nahuatl began to appear. One of the earliest and broadest of these works is the 1548 Dominican *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Mexicana*, in which the friars attempted to explain all of the principles of Catholic theology to the Indigenous people. This paper analyses how through highly detailed descriptions and a meticulous choice of vocabulary, the authors strove to impart the tenets of Christian doctrine to the Nahuas in such a way as to make it both fully understandable and as unlikely as possible to be misinterpreted. It points to the sources on which the friars relied while writing the text. The article formulates a theory that the creation of the *Doctrina Christiana* would not have been possible without the participation of the native speakers of Nahuatl in the project, even though their role in writing the catechism would have had to be hidden from the religious authorities. The Indigenous authors served as cross-cultural bridges in the process of preparing the doctrinal materials. On the one hand, they could therefore help to explain crucial parts of the doctrine to the Indigenous audience. On the other hand, allowing Indigenous concepts to permeate the Christian discourse often led to the creation of ambiguity and provided a space of contestation that could influence the understanding of the Catholic concepts by the Indigenous audience.

**Keywords:** Mesoamerica; Nahuatl; Christianization; catechisms; language contact; culture contact



**Citation:** Granicka, Katarzyna. 2023. His Body Will Appear in All of the Mirrors: Explaining Christian Doctrine to the Nahuas in the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*. *Religions* 14: 1487. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121487>

Academic Editors: Dana Bultman and Dale Shuger

Received: 3 October 2023  
Revised: 20 November 2023  
Accepted: 23 November 2023  
Published: 29 November 2023



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## 1. Introduction

The military conquest of Mexico, which began in 1519 with the arrival of Cortés, was from the very beginning inseparably bound to the question of religion and the need to Christianize the colonized lands. The reasons are quite obvious. First of all, bringing Christianity to pagan communities legitimized the military action that the Spaniards were conducting in the New World. But more importantly, this kind of approach was an inherent part of the sixteenth century worldview. Europeans saw an opportunity to create an exemplary Christian community in the New World (Burkhart 1989, p. 5). However, it was an extremely difficult task: they had to find a way to explain the Christian tenets of faith and European cultural concepts to people speaking a huge number of languages, far exceeding any possible expectations of the new arrivals; people whose beliefs were based on a worldview completely foreign to the Christian one. Yet at an early stage of cultural contact, the Europeans began to produce catechisms in indigenous languages, in which they preached the Christian faith to native audiences. A little over twenty years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, somewhere between the late 1540s and early 1550s, friars could already rely upon printed catechisms, prepared in Nahuatl, specifically for the Christianization of

these lands. All the basic vocabulary already existed and was used pretty consistently by both the Franciscans and the Dominicans present in colonial New Spain. It seems that the biggest issues with communication were solved by the friars, who had mastered Nahuatl and were able to produce religious texts for the purposes of Christianization. But was that the whole story? Were the texts they produced really that effective in converting the masses, or were there hidden meanings through precolonial terms slipped into the Christian discourse, and to what extent could such terms affect the understanding of the doctrine? This article presents one of the earliest printed Nahuatl sources, the 1548 Dominican *Doctrina Christiana*, as a syncretic effect of Indigenous collaboration with the friars that resulted in an Indigenous retelling of the Christian text.

## 2. The 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*

The *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Mexicana*, authored by anonymous Dominican friars, was first published in Mexico by Juan Pablos in 1548. This was the time when, with the development of the printing press in Mexico City, the very first religious texts were printed in Nahuatl. Juan Pablos came to Mexico in 1539 and that same year the first Nahuatl text, a very short Franciscan doctrine, *Breve y mas Comprendiosa Doctrina Christiana*, came into being; however, no original copy has survived until our times (Sell 1993, p. 5). The next known Nahuatl doctrinal texts<sup>1</sup> were published in 1546, 1548 and 1553 and were created by Alonso de Molina, Dominican Friars and Pedro de Gante, respectively. This was a prelude to a so-called Golden Age of Nahuatl imprints (Sell 1993, p. 114) that occurred between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. An abundance of texts in Indigenous languages was published, and a large portion of them were religious prints, including: *doctrinas* (explanations of the Christian doctrine), *sermonarios* (collections of sermons) and *confessionarios* (materials containing lists of questions to be asked during a confession). The vast majority of these texts were in Nahuatl. As Nahuatl was the language that served the precolonial administration and became the *lingua franca* in Mesoamerica, it also became beneficial for the purposes of Christianization. In 1555, during the First Provincial Council, the bishops officially called for evangelization to take place in Indigenous languages (Tavárez 2000, p. 29; Wasserman-Soler 2016, p. 706)<sup>2</sup>. The Second Provincial Council in 1565 introduced a requirement for all parish priests to learn an Indigenous language or face being removed from their posts (Wasserman-Soler 2016, pp. 713–16). Later, a complex system was created to promote priests who spoke Indigenous languages to higher positions. According to the 1574 *Ordenanza del Patronazgo*, parish priests were to be appointed from among the clergy who had prior experience of working in Indigenous parishes (Schwaller 1986, p. 253; 2012, p. 677). For the priests, who had to travel between various towns, it was most effective to learn Nahuatl, as it was generally understood even in places where it was not the first but the second language of a community (Schwaller 2012, pp. 676, 678–88; Olko and Sullivan 2013, p. 193). This inequality in favor of Nahuatl in terms of the learning of Indigenous languages was also reflected in the number of printed documents in this language—more than half of all texts printed in Mesoamerican languages between 1539 and 1821 were written in Nahuatl (Sell 1993, p. 4).

Besides a multitude of printed doctrinal sources, manuscripts were also produced, resulting in an abundance of religious texts circulating in colonial Mexico. The fact that in the middle of the sixteenth century, this already posed a problem for Catholic authorities can be seen in the provisions of the First Provincial Council in 1555. The council commanded close monitoring of the production of doctrinal texts and forbade Indigenous people from translating them or even possessing them without supervision by the religious authorities. The council admitted that until then, some texts had been translated by Indigenous people only, which could lead to distortions of doctrine (Tavárez 2013, p. 208; Martínez López-Cano et al. 2004, pp. 80–81). Based on the way religious texts were created and who wrote them, Mark Christensen (2013) proposed a typology in which they can be divided into three groups. Group 1 contains official, printed religious texts belonging to various genres—*doctrinas* (books explaining Christian doctrine), *confessionarios* (confes-

sional manuals), *sermonarios* (books of sermons) and sacramental manuals (guidebooks on administration of the sacraments)—that were able to reach a wide audience and were officially used by the friars for the purposes of Christianization. Group 2 is composed of manuscripts created by friars and Indigenous people for local audiences, as well as written copies of printed texts. These texts went through censorship to some extent before being presented to the Indigenous audience. Group 3 consists of unofficial texts, written by Indigenous people without supervision, often leading to distortions of the original doctrine (Christensen 2013, pp. 80–94). From this perspective, the 1548 Dominican *Doctrina Christiana* and other early printed Nahuatl religious sources, belonging to the first group, can be perceived as first attempts to create “official” or “orthodox” teachings that could serve the purposes of effective Christianization. On the other hand, there are texts that were created before the First Provincial Council, when the creation of such texts was not yet as supervised as it was later. They were written during the early stages of cultural and linguistic contact, when it was very easy for Indigenous beliefs to influence and shape the understanding of Christian concepts. They were also created in “mysterious” times, when the involvement of Indigenous people in the friars’ work was usually not admitted openly, but must have been extensive, as the friars had to deal with the task of translating large portions of texts into Nahuatl and had to navigate the nuances of both worldviews in order to preach the Gospel. Therefore, studying such sources may allow us to get closer to the answers to questions about how such “official” Christian discourse was created in the early stages of cultural contact and how it may have been understood by the audience.

Yet the very origins of the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana* are also partially unknown to us. We know that in 1544, a Spanish-only catechism was printed in Mexico and then, on the orders of Bishop Zumárraga, two Nahuatl ones were developed on its basis (Medina 1987, p. 57). The first one, a very short *doctrina* (“*Doctrina breve*”), consisting mainly of prayers and lists of commandments and sins, was prepared by the Franciscan, Alonso de Molina, and published in 1546. It did not have much in common with the long, complicated Spanish text of 1544. The full translation (with some minor changes) was prepared by the Dominicans and published as a bilingual Spanish–Nahuatl *Doctrina Christiana en Lengua Española y Mexicana* in 1548. No authors of the 1548 edition were named—the volume was simply said to be written by “Dominican friars.” However, the 1544 Spanish *Doctrina*, which the 1548 edition closely followed, was said to be authored by the Dominican friar Pedro de Córdoba, one of the first Dominicans, who in 1510 arrived on Santo Domingo (Española) Island. However, Pedro de Córdoba died in 1521, ten years before the Dominicans set off from the Antilles to what is Mexico today. Pedro de Córdoba is, however, believed to be an author of the currently lost 1511 “Antillean manuscript” (*Manuscrito Antillano*), which served the Dominicans in their evangelistic work on Santo Domingo. The text was presumably brought by the friars to Mexico and became a basis on which the 1544 Spanish *Doctrina Christiana* was modeled. However, there is no way of saying how close the relationship was between the 1511 manuscript and the 1544 printed volume. The friars preparing the edition for print must have made some substantial changes to adapt the text to the Mexican realities. For example, both the 1544 Spanish and the 1548 Nahuatl–Spanish editions mention the names of deities worshipped by the Nahuas before the conquest. On the other hand, the 1544 version must have been close enough to the Antillean manuscript that they decided to put Pedro de Córdoba’s name as its author—hence, at least the roots of the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana* must lie in the earliest years of Dominican activity in the newly conquered lands. Yet, as will be discussed further, this edition was prepared specifically for the Nahua audience and was deeply rooted in the pre-Columbian Nahua worldview and vocabulary. The Spanish and Nahuatl texts of the *Doctrina* are arranged in two columns, one next to the other, which allows the reader to observe how the authors decided to translate particular words or phrases, and what specific linguistic decisions they had to make in the translation process. The text of the *Doctrina* was divided into 40 sermons, leading the reader through explanations of all basic Christian concepts and beliefs. The *Doctrina* written in this way is also very broad—occupying 156 folios in quarto.

*The Dominicans Explain the Christian Doctrine—Metaphors and Tomism in the Doctrina Christiana*

The large size of the volume and many broad explanations included in the text are not surprising, given its Dominican provenance. At the core of the Dominicans' evangelization work lay the belief that true Christian faith must be built on a firm foundation of good understanding of the doctrine and that it should be the first step before baptism, because once a person acquires the knowledge of what Christianity truly is, they would want to voluntarily and consciously be baptized. This way of thinking of the missionary work was contrary to the Franciscan *modus operandi*. The Franciscans considered baptism to be the first step to becoming a Christian, and proceeded with baptizing large masses of people, who were to learn more about the new faith by participating in Mass than by learning the prayers and commandments (Schwaller 2011, p. 63).<sup>3</sup> This discrepancy in the methods of preaching the Gospel and converting people to Christianity can also be observed through the texts produced by the two orders in the middle of the sixteenth century. In order to succeed in their mission of making Christian doctrine really understandable to the Indigenous audience, the authors of the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana* resorted to various types of explanations, including picturesque metaphors for describing elements of the Christian faith.

Creating such explanations must not have been easy, given that the *Doctrina Christiana* was written before Council of Trent issued its provisions, including the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Also, despite the fact that the friars were already experienced in Christianizing people (due to massive conversions of Jews and Muslims in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain), the realities of the Americas required them to prepare new materials, designed specifically for people who did not comprehend the most basic concepts of Christianity—like belief in one God, sin or angels (things that were by no means foreign to Jews and Muslims living in Europe).<sup>4</sup> However, the Dominicans also had their roots grounded in the school of Salamanca—the theological school of thought of the prominent Dominicans, Francisco de Vitoria and Domingo de Soto, who based their scholarly work on the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas—that flourished at the University of Salamanca at the beginning of the sixteenth century (Duve 2021, p. 1). Thomistic scholasticism also influenced the beliefs of the Dominicans through the works of the master general of the Dominican order, Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, and were soon to influence their ways of preaching. Without doubt, the works of Aquinas, especially the *Summa Theologiae*, permeated the discourse of the 1548 *Doctrina*. Interestingly, nowhere in the text of this broad volume is Aquinas mentioned by name, although Saint Augustine is mentioned once:

Porque dice el amado de Dios San Agustín, grandísimo letrado y predicador,  
Fecit Deus hominem ut summum bonum intelligeret, etc.

Ca quimalhuia yn itlaço yn dios Sant Augustin uey temachtiani iuā uey teutla-  
tolmatini

Fecit de<sup>s</sup> hominem vt summum bonus intelligeret &c

For this is what Saint Augustine, beloved of God, a great teacher and scholar of divine words, says: “Fecit Deus hominem ut summum bonum intelligeret etc.

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, fol. 10v–11r)<sup>5</sup>

However, it was Thomas de Aquinas's work that most shaped the friars' argumentation in the *Doctrina Christiana*. When closely examining the discourse of the *Doctrina*, it is possible to observe how closely it follows the *Summa Theologiae* both in terms of the explanations provided to the audience and their distribution in the text. For example, the *Summa Theologiae* II-II q.2 talks about the correct enumeration of the articles of faith. According to Aquinas, there are fourteen (not eight) articles—seven about God's nature and seven about Jesus Christ. The same division of articles is presented in sermons 11–17 of the *Doctrina Christiana*, and they are explained one by one, following Aquinas's teachings.

In like manner, with regard to Christ's human nature, there are seven articles, the first of which refers to Christ's incarnation or conception; the second, to

His virginal birth; the third, to His Passion, death and burial; the fourth, to His descent into hell; the fifth, to His resurrection; the sixth, to His ascension; the seventh, to His coming for judgment, so that in all there are fourteen articles.

(*Summa Theologiae* 2020, II-II, q.1, a.8; after: aquinas.cc)

These seven articles of faith that I have told you about refer to God as a man. We are to believe in them in order to be saved, because through these seven articles of faith we get to know the son of God as a man. Because first, we know and we believe that the son of God became a man in Saint Mary's womb, that she is truly his precious mother, that he took his precious body miraculously. It was not by anybody's doing, nor was it done through sin, only it was done through the goodness of God. And from the second article of faith, we know and believe that the son of God was born from his precious mother Saint Mary: it was she who gave birth to him in her eternal maidenhood, not through sin, but truly miraculously.

And from the third article of faith, we know and believe that the son of God our great savior Jesus Christ died voluntarily as a man, only for us, his beloved people, in order to save us from the hands of the devil and from hell, and to take us up to his royal house in heaven.

And from the fourth article of faith, we know and believe that the precious soul of our lord Jesus Christ descended to hell, to take out the souls of Adam and Eve and our other good fathers who were waiting there for his coming. And from the fifth article of faith, we know and believe that our great savior Jesus Christ came back to life from among the dead on the third day. And from the sixth article we know and believe that after forty days he rose up into heaven: he went to settle in the place of our precious father God.

And from the seventh article of faith, we know and believe that he will arise; he will come to judge the living and the dead when the world ends, and he will bring great suffering to the evil, and to the good he will give eternal joy called glory. Oh, my beloved, you have heard all the [articles] of faith, called *artículos de la fe*. There are fourteen of them: the first seven belong to God as a divinity, and the other seven belong to God as a man.<sup>6</sup>

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 17, fol. 78v–79v)

Sometimes, even the questions from the *Summa Theologiae*, which served as starting points for the explanations of the doctrine, play the same role in the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*.

Concerning the first, a double consideration occurs: the first, about the mystery of the Incarnation itself, whereby God was made man for our salvation; the second, about such things as were done and suffered by our Savior—i.e., God incarnate.

(*Summa Theologiae* 2020, III, q.1, a.1; after: aquinas.cc)

Ynic centlamantli tleypampa yn oquichtli omochiuh yn ipiltçin yn dios. Auh ynic ontlamantli quenin oquichtli omochiuh

The first thing is why the son of God became a man. And the other thing is how he became a man.

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 11, fol. 50r)

The friars also used the same reasoning as Aquinas, explaining that Christ's body was made from Saint Mary's blood (*Summa Theologiae* 2020, III, q.35, a.4; *Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 11, fol. 53r) or describing Limbo, including its division into the Limbo of the Patriarchs and the Limbo of Infants and its location a little above hell, and arguing that there will be no punishment by fire in Limbo, but only the pain of not being in the presence of God. Also, to help the audience better understand the nuances of the doctrine, the friars resorted to various metaphors in order to correctly explain the Christian tenets

of faith. As it turns out, the explanations were often also taken from Aquinas's teachings. Therefore, at first, it may seem that the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana* was prepared by Spanish friars, under strong Thomistic influence, with the majority of the explanations provided to the Indigenous audience in the sermons, derived straight from the *Summa Theologiae* or its later interpretations and with commentary added to it from within the School of Salamanca. However, when examining more closely the arguments provided by the authors of the text, the reader may encounter explanations tailored very carefully to the specific needs of the Nahua recipients of the text. While the mirror metaphor comes strictly from the *Summa Theologiae*, the addition of the numbers 400 and 8000 in the *Doctrina Christiana* are not accidental. They are drawn from the Nahua numeric system, which was based on 20, called *cempoalli* ("one count"). The roots for creating numbers were *cem* (1), *matlactli* (10), *pohualli* (20), *tzontli* (400) and *xiquipilli* (8000). These basic numbers were also represented by their individual glyphs in the codices (a crest—*tzontli*, for 400, and a *xiquipilli*—cacao or incense bag for 8000). The number 8000 (being a result of multiplication of 400 by 20) was generally used to designate a "very large number"—just like the amount of cacao beans in a sack. However, the numbers 20, 400 and 8000 were also used in the Nahua military forces, as the typical size of a Nahua battalion—also called *xiquipilli*—was 8000 men and other forces were usually multiples or fractions of this number (Aguilar-Moreno 2006, pp. 103, 312). Therefore, it must have been natural for the Indigenous people to include exactly these numbers in a description of a mirror broken into "multitude" pieces. Even the metaphor of the mirror itself, although evidently derived here from Aquinas's text, has connotations in Christian discourse that might have been much broader for the Nahuas. Reflective materials, such as obsidian mirrors, were naturally associated with the sun (Kilroy-Ewbank 2019, p. 202). Christ, described in Christian texts as the one bringing light to the world and illuminating the darkness, also had a very strong solar connotation (Burkhart 1988). This link between the sun, Christ and mirrors was consciously used by the Franciscans, who took it even further, applying the metaphors related to Tezcatlipoca's smoking mirror to Jesus Christ. A phrase "the wide mirror polished on both sides" (*in coyauac tezcatl necoc xapoi*), which used to be a description of Tezcatlipoca's mirror—and related to his ability to grant wisdom to his believers—appeared in reference to Christ and his wisdom in the 1570 *Imitatio Christi* and later in the doctrinal discourse used by Sahagún (in the 1583 *Psalmodia Christiana*) (Tavárez 2013, pp. 224–25). While Tavárez calls the application of such elaborate metaphors related to Tezcatlipoca's mirror to Christ a "provocative rhetorical strategy" used by the Franciscans, the Dominican *Doctrina* seems to follow *Summa Theologiae* in the first place, adding Indigenous elements such as the specific numbers. However, for the Nahua audience, accustomed to the relationship between the mirror and Tezcatlipoca, this layer of additional meaning in Aquinas's text might still have been visible and clear—despite the friars' efforts to remain faithful to the Christian discourse.

Other explanations linking the *Doctrina Christiana* with specific Nahua beliefs and the Nahua worldview were the naming of certain Nahuatl deities in the fragments condemning idolatry, for example, and a detailed explanation as to why the sun cannot be mistaken for a deity, and therefore should not be worshipped.

And know well that the sun is not a living thing, and the moon and the stars, they are only like stones—very resplendent and very shiny in the sky where our lord God put them. And when heaven revolves, then also the sun revolves, the moon and the stars. (. . .) And you will revere only God himself, because only he is worthy of being revered. And you had been revering and had been making sacrifices to the sun, which is not a divinity, does not understand, does not see, but is only like a crystal or a light that God put there in the sky, and which illuminates the whole world like a candle or a torch stuck in the wall.<sup>7</sup>

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 37, fol. 144v–145v)

This fragment, so detailed and persistent, is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the misinterpretations of the Nahuatl catechisms led the Indigenous people to a some-

what heretical notion that Christ is a solar deity, as the terminology used to describe Christ was derived from a precontact vocabulary describing the sun and its connotations. This concept of a solar Christ was described by [Burkhart \(1988\)](#), who in her study demonstrated how the differences between Nahua and Christian cosmology influenced the way in which the Indigenous people perceived Christ and that this connection between Christ and the sun might have continued until modern times. However, the explanations provided by the authors of the *Doctrina Christiana* seem to address precisely this issue. It looks as though the authors of the *Doctrina* anticipated that their text might cause such misunderstanding of the doctrine and they did take measures to prevent this from happening. However, if that is the case, this would mean that there was a person who provided insight for this explanation and was extremely aware of Nahua cosmology and its possible influence on the understanding of the doctrine, or of such misinterpretations already occurring among the Indigenous people. The question of who this person (or persons) was who was (or were) so aware of the realities of both worldviews that they were able to navigate between the doctrinal discrepancies is in fact the question of the authorship of the *Doctrina Christiana* and the level of involvement of Indigenous coauthors in its creation. The question, in fact, is very simple—Were Indigenous people involved in the translation process of the Dominicans' Spanish doctrine, and did they (and if so, how did they) influence the Nahuatl version of the doctrine? The answer must be carefully looked for in the language of the text itself, as it is not given to us forthrightly.

### 3. The Indigenous Worldview in the *Doctrina Christiana*

Upon their arrival in Mexico, the friars had to deal with the burning issue of communication and the need to create the whole doctrinal Nahuatl vocabulary—Nahuatl translations for all Christian terms. The task presumably would have been impossible without the help of educated native speakers, who collaborated with the friars in the production of ecclesiastical materials. As such, from the earliest years of their activity in Mexico, friars depended on educating the Nahuas, who became intermediaries in intercultural contact. It was particularly the Franciscans who specialized in creating schools for the children of the Nahua nobility and educating them. The Indigenous people educated in this system were able to become cultural bridges who helped the friars to navigate the nuances of linguistic and cultural contact, but were also able to reinterpret their own heritage and keep Indigenous intellectual traditions alive ([Segovia Liga 2017](#), p. 86). The most prominent center of education and collaboration between the Nahuas and the Spaniards was the Colegio de Santa Cruz, founded in Tlatelolco in 1536. This institution offered higher-level education, based on European models, with a broad curriculum, covering Latin, Catholic education and basic scientific knowledge ([SilverMoon 2007](#), p. 3). Originally, the Franciscans' plan was to educate the future Indigenous members of the clergy in the Colegio. However, the provisions of the First (1555) and Second (1565) Provincial Councils regarding the participation of natives in creating ecclesiastical texts were in contradiction with the basic principle of operation of the Colegio, which promoted the cooperation of Nahuas and Spaniards in the evangelization process. Yet the very fact that the Provisions had to make such decisions points to a high level of Indigenous participation in the creation of ecclesiastical texts, especially before 1555. The strict decision of the Provincial Councils, basically officially excluding Indigenous people from the creation of ecclesiastical materials, made the friars even more reluctant than before to admit that in fact they did cooperate with native speakers. However, some accounts mentioning the level of cooperation between Spaniards and Nahuas can be found in the sources. The best-known example is the *Florentine Codex*, written by Bernardino de Sahagún and his Indigenous coworkers, who were mentioned by name in Book II. While the *Florentine Codex* was a source of a very different, more ethnographic, character than the texts produced for the purposes of Christianization and it was easier for the Spaniards to admit the involvement of the Indigenous people in its creation, Sahagún also admitted that such involvement took place in the case of religious materials.

This college has persisted for over forty years and its collegians have transgressed in nothing, neither against God, nor the Church, nor the king, nor against his state. Rather they have helped and still help in many things in the implanting and maintaining of our Holy Catholic Faith, for if sermons, Apostilles and catechisms have been produced in the Indian language, which can appear and may be free of all heresy, they are those which were written with them. And they, being knowledgeable in the Latin language, inform us as to the properties of the words, the properties of their manner of speech. And they correct for us the incongruities we express in the sermons or write in the catechisms. And whatever is to be rendered in their language, if it is not examined by them, if it is not written congruently in the Latin language, in Spanish, and in their language, cannot be free of defect. With regard to orthography, to good handwriting, there are none who write it other than those reared here.

(Sahagún 2012, Book I, pp. 83–84, after: Dibble, Anderson)

The second friar who revealed the participation of his Indigenous coworkers in creating a text was the author of the 1606 *Sermonario*—Fray Juan Bautista Viseo. He named eight Nahuatl writers and teachers in the Colegio who helped work on the nuances of the creation of the doctrinal Nahuatl. While this is the only known case of such direct recognition of Indigenous authors of the text (Sell 1993, p. 43; Tavárez 2013, p. 208), we may presume that this way of operating, in close collaboration between Spaniards and Nahuas, was a very common necessity in the translation process and in the creation of the doctrinal Nahuatl. Nowadays, Nahuatl scholars investigating the creation of various Nahuatl doctrinal texts come to the conclusion that they were a result of close collaborations between the friars and Indigenous intellectuals (see e.g., Sánchez Aguilera 2023a). The involvement of educated Indigenous aides or coauthors could also explain the level of accuracy in the aforementioned fragment of the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana* regarding the sun not being a deity. Only educated Indigenous people had the competence at that time to be cultural bridges and to translate between the two cultures. If that were the case, it means that the *Doctrina* can also be seen as an example of autoethnography, a term coined by Pratt (2007) and introduced into Christian–Nahuatl studies by Leeming (2022). In this context, autoethnography is understood as “writing authored by the subject of European ethnographers’ analytical gaze,” leading the Indigenous author to simultaneously adopt central features of Nahuatl–Christian rhetoric and to push back against certain aspects of the friars’ discourses (Leeming 2022, p. 31). Yet for the Nahuas, the autoethnography was in fact the tool of resistance against the profound change they were submitted to. It allowed the translations of religious texts to become gateways for introducing precolonial concepts into the Christian discourse, sometimes drastically changing the nuances of the doctrine. This way, religious text published in Nahuatl became products of polyphony and hybridization, where two different visions of the world were contrasted and interacted with each other (Alcántara Rojas 2019, p. 81).

As the sole introduction of Spanish loanwords—even though abundant in all doctrinal sources—was not enough for the Indigenous audience to understand their meaning, the authors of the texts had two ways into translating religious vocabulary into Nahuatl. One was by creating descriptive neologisms, explaining the nature of a given Christian concept. The other was by using already existing precolonial Nahuatl terms describing Indigenous beliefs and adapting them to the Christian doctrine. In fact, this specific Christian vocabulary is used very consistently throughout the religious texts, from the earliest dated sources. There are no substantial differences between the terminology used by the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The authors of the 1548 Dominican *Doctrina* used the same terms (such as *mictlan infernos* “land of the dead, infernos” for hell, *tlacatecoltl* “man-owl” for devil or *tlahtlacoa* “to damage something” for sin, among many others) as the Franciscan authors who published around the same time: Molina in his 1546 *Doctrina Breve* or Gante in his 1553 *Doctrina Christiana*. No traces of the earliest discussions or debates about what terms to use are preserved to our times. The process of creating basic doctrinal Nahuatl was more or less completed within the first twenty years after the



conquest. However, even in this basic terminology, it is possible to trace the participation of Indigenous people in its creation. Christensen (2013), for example, pointed out that the descriptive nature of the verb for baptism—*nequaatequiliztli* (lit. “putting water on one’s head”) may suggest that it was created by Indigenous people who witnessed baptism and described the procedure, rather than its theological meaning (Christensen 2013, p. 33). Also, there is no doubt that including elements of the Nahua belief system in Christian discourse (such as calling Christian Hell by the name for the Indigenous land of the dead, or the devil—the name of the lower Nahua deity or “demon,” the shapeshifting man-owl *tlacatecolotl*) influenced the way in which Indigenous people understood the new concepts. Yet the use of all of the basic Christian Nahuatl lexicon in the 1548 *Doctrina* does not necessarily prove the Indigenous authorship of the text (see also Leeming 2022, p. 97). By 1548, these terms could have been well established, well enough for the friars to have learnt them and to use them on an everyday basis. However, other linguistic features of the text reveal the high possibility of Indigenous coauthorship of the text. The authors of the Nahuatl translation of the text moved easily through the nuances of the Nahuatl syntax, achieving a level of grammatical correctness that at that time (or even much later) was not usually available to Spaniards. They also naturally used constructions characteristic of precontact syntax, such as doublets. As pointed out by Mercedes Montes de Oca, in Nahuatl, the possibility of juxtaposing two lexemes could result in a phrase with a new meaning or with a more compositional meaning, with every word adding a feature to the meaning of the whole structure (Montes de Oca 2017, p. 189).<sup>8</sup> In the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*, some monolingual, Nahuatl-only doublets are preserved, despite the authors’ determination to translate the Spanish text almost word for word. One example of such a doublet is *teaxca tetlatqui*, “someone’s thing, someone’s possession,” a Nahuatl way of saying “someone’s belongings,” abundantly attested in other colonial sources as well (Lockhart 2001, pp. 70–71). In the *Doctrina Christiana* this doublet is used as a translation of a singular Spanish term (usually *hacienda ajena*—“someone’s possession” or *cosa ajena*—“someone’s thing”). In the same way, the characteristic doublet *cualli yectli* (something good, something righteous) appears in the *Doctrina Christiana* as a translation of Spanish *cosa nima*. Another interesting example of a Nahuatl doublet used in the *Doctrina* is the phrase *cuahuatl tetl tetoctia*, lit. “to follow the stick, the rock” (*Doctrina Christiana* Sermon 29, fol. 117r.), meaning “to be punished.” This phrase, which Molina translates as *reprehender, corregir, y castigar a otro* (de Molina 1571, II: 88r), contains a precontact doublet *cuahuatl tetl*—“stick, stone,” meaning penalty. While some of these features of the text might have been learned by a Spaniard who was trying to emulate Nahuatl’s high register of speech, they were definitely natural for native speakers. A native speaking author would also be accustomed to expressing possession in a traditional way, that is, without the usage of the verb “to have”—which precolonial Nahuatl lacked. After the conquest, the verb *piya*, originally meaning “to keep, to guard” started to calque the Spanish verb *tener*—“to have.” In mundane sources studied by James Lockhart, the first attestations of *piya* as “to have” appear around 1570 (Lockhart 1992, p. 300), and even there the meaning of *piya* in these sources may be ambiguous. The case of the *Doctrina Christiana* is very interesting, since its authors, in their attempt to translate the Spanish text almost word by word, were already experimenting with using *piya* as the equivalent of Spanish *tener*. However, even having the possibility of using the verb “to have,” it was more natural for the author to use precontact Nahuatl syntax, with *-onca*—“there is”—to express possession (*Auh ca mochitlin yn itlachiualhuan in dios tiquintocayotia nacayoque ynic cētlamantín: yehica ca onca yn intlac: yuā in inacayo*—“And all of these creatures of God we call corporeal; they are the first ones. Because they have a body and flesh.” *Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 4, fol. 23r). It appears that the traditional Nahuatl syntax was natural for the author, where the purposes of the word-by-word translation did not force them to try out new syntactic solutions.

The content of the *Doctrina*, so deeply influenced by Aquinas and his *Summa Theologiae*, reflects Dominican theological training and the Dominican approach to the question of evangelization. The same Thomistic influence on Dominican ways of preaching can be

found in the Zapotec *Doctrina Christiana*, described by Tavárez (Tavárez 2017, pp. 172–76). The discrepancies between the Dominican and Franciscan approaches to Christianization became even stronger over the course of time, as Dominicans focused on orthodox and detailed catechetical instruction (aligned with the provisions of the Council of Trent), while the activities of the less orthodox Franciscans in Mexico were centered around their linguistic work in the Colegio de Santa Cruz, a school for Indigenous elites, and around preparing translation of various religious texts (such as lives of saints, commentaries for the Bible, etc.) (Tavárez 2013, pp. 203–35; 2017, p. 167). However, while these differences in approach to Christianization between the Franciscans and the Dominicans are already very visible in the earliest printed texts, they are not reflected to the same extent in the translations themselves. By the mid-1550s, the basic Nahuatl vocabulary already existed and was used pretty consistently by both the Franciscans and the Dominicans (even though the traces of the process through which the authors of the religious texts in Nahuatl searched for the best new translations of particular terms can be found well into the seventeenth century, these basics remained used in the sources from the earliest stages of Christianization). The Nahuatl tendency to group terms into doublets allowed the authors of the religious texts to pair Nahuatl words with Spanish ones (like *teotl Dios* or *yolia anima*), which could simplify the process of explaining them to the audience. And if there was a substantial difference between the Dominican and Franciscan approach to the question of translation, it may be visible in a consistent pattern in which the Dominicans resort to Nahuatl–Spanish doublets when explaining the doctrine (in the 1548 *Doctrina*, no Spanish term is introduced without being paired with a Nahuatl one, at least in its first attestation), while the Franciscans tended to rely more on the Spanish loanwords themselves in their texts. The reasoning behind these choices may lie in the different theological backgrounds of the two groups. Dominicans, trained in Thomistic humanism, optimistically believing in the essence of the omnipresent God joining the metaphysical with the physical, were more eager to resort to Indigenous imagery when producing their text, while Franciscans, whose beliefs emerged from nominalist teachings questioning the existence of universalism in the world, were more inclined to view Indigenous beliefs as demonic and were therefore more careful using Indigenous terms (Sparks 2017, pp. 3–4)<sup>9</sup>. However, as even the Franciscans needed to resort to these terms to be able to successfully communicate with the people, both groups applied the same basic Nahuatl Christian vocabulary, unique to this language alone and pretty much consistent across Nahuatl religious sources.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous participation in the creation of Nahuatl Christian texts, officially hidden but possible to trace through the nuances of the language, influenced the meaning of Christian doctrine in Nahuatl. It allowed Indigenous concepts to permeate into Christianity. The 1548 *Doctrina* is one of the texts where this high level of Indigenous push-back against the new agenda and preservation of original concepts hidden in the new spirituality can be seen very clearly. One example of such elements snuck into the Nahuatl–Christian lexicon is the epithets describing Tezcatlipoca, used as epithets for the Christian God. Specific definitions—*ipalnemohuani* “he by whom people live,” *teyocoyani* “creator of people” or *tloque nahuaque* “possessor or master of that which is near”—were inextricably linked with the god Tezcatlipoca, “smoking mirror,” the embodiment of change through the conflict, both creator and destroyer, the one who caused discord and conflict (Miller and Taube 1993, p. 164). Yet in many sources, these epithets penetrated Christian discourse as descriptions of the Christian God (Burkhart 1988, p. 68; Oliver 2003, pp. 48, 275; Christensen 2013, pp. 36–37; 2014, p. 51; Leeming 2022, pp. 24–25). In the 1548 *Doctrina Christiana*, the term *teyocoyani* is in fact one of the most frequent appellations used in reference to God—usually as a translation of the Spanish *Creador* (“creator”). Another term, *tetlamachtiani* (“he who enriches people”), is not only a precolonial term used as an epithet related to the Christian God, but became an element of the whole explanation of the notion of Glory provided to the Indigenous audience. The word *tetlamachtiani* was based on the verb *tlamachtia*—“to enrich someone,” “to make someone prosper.” This appellation seems to function early in the sixteenth century, as Molina gives a similar,

twofold explanation in his dictionary: *tetlamachtiani—enriquecedor, o glorificador* (de Molina 1571, II: 108). As a matter of fact, the ability to “enrich” people was attributed to Tezcatlipoca in the *Florentine Codex*. Therefore, an interesting transition took place in the process of creating the Nahuatl–Christian vocabulary: the epithet referring to the ways of sustaining peoples’ lives and providing them with riches was probably taken from the preconquest, non-Christian context, even though those “riches” were understood differently in the Aztec and Christian beliefs. In the case of the Christian God, such a usage refers to the Christian virtues of the soul, not to the actual sustaining of life (in a material or more metaphorical way). In order to avoid a probable misunderstanding of this term in the *Doctrina*, the friars translated the term *Gloria* as *netlamachtiliztli*—“riches, prosperity”—explaining that to be truly rich is to be in the presence of God in Heaven. In this way, a term by which the Nahuas used to refer to Tezcatlipoca became immanently inscribed into the landscape of new beliefs. Under the guise of accurate translation, the authors of Christian Nahuatl reached back to use old names and meanings, keeping them from being lost and forgotten. To what extent this was a conscious attempt to preserve their cultural heritage and to what extent the vocabulary describing the old, familiar, traditional worldview was just easier for them to use we may never know. The Indigenous audience’s understanding of Christian doctrine told through the lenses of old traditions may also remain a mystery to us. Nevertheless, religious texts, although their goal was always to eradicate pagan beliefs, also became a medium that allowed them to survive in the language. The usage of the Nahuatl term *teotl* (“God, deity”) also shows how the incorporation of the precolonial vocabulary was crucial for explaining doctrine in the early stage of cultural contact, given that Spanish terms were still semantically “empty” for the Indigenous audience. Generally, the word “God” was introduced twofold into doctrinal Nahuatl: the Spanish term *Dios* was adopted early on in the process of cultural contact, while the indigenous term *teotl* (deity) was still being used as its synonym, changing its meaning from “sacred power” to “Christian God” (Christensen 2013, p. 35). However, as Lockhart points out, in order to avoid doctrinal confusion, the Spanish loanword dominated in the sources, even though the indigenous noun *teotl* remained present in the sources until the end of the colonial period (Lockhart 1992, p. 253). Also, both terms—*Dios* and *teotl*—are used in the *Doctrina Christiana* in order to render the concept of the Christian God. Perhaps the most interesting distinction between the terms *Dios* and *teotl* has been made by the authors of the Nahuatl text of Sermon 10, in the fragment that talks about God’s divinity. The Spanish “original” uses the phrase *Dios en cuanto dios*—lit. “God as God” or *Dios en cuanto ser Dios*—“God in his being god.”

Aquestos siete articulos de la fe que se os hã dicho/y que se os han dado a entender pertenecen a nuestro Dios en quanto dios/porque por aquestos siete articulos venimos en conocimiento de nuestro grã dios quanto ser dios.

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 10, fol. 49r)

Clearly, to make this text more understandable to Indigenous readers, the Nahuatl text uses the loanword *Dios* only as a personal “name” of the Christian God, while his divine “aspects,” the fact that he truly is a divinity, are still expressed by the term *teotl*.

Auh ca yehuatl in chicontetl neltoconi ī oamilhuiloq̄: ī oancaq̄tiloque ca uel ytech ca in dios ynic teutl auh ca tiquitoa uel ytech ca yn Dios ynic teutl yehica ca ypāpa yeuatl in chicōtetl neltoconi tictixmachilia in toueytlatocauh in Dios ynic teutl ynic Dios.

And you all were told and advised by these seven articles of faith that they pertain to God as divinity and we tell you all that they pertain with God as divinity. Accordingly, because of these seven articles of faith we get to know our great ruler God as divinity, as [his being] God.

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 10, fol. 49r)

The quoted fragment translates two attestations of *Dios* from the Spanish text (*Dios en cuanto ser Dios*) through three terms (*in Dios inic teotl inic Dios*). The first Spanish “God” is reflected through a loanword, *Dios*, the other through a doublet, *teotl Dios*. It seems that even though the noun *Dios* proliferated very early in all kinds of sources and quickly ousted the Nahuatl noun, in fact in the early phase of cultural contact (and still in 1548, when the Dominican *Doctrina* was published), *Dios* was considered more a personal name of the Christian divinity. In order to explain to the Nahuas that He truly is the only deity, the authors of the text still had to recall the preconquest term. The reason why they did not translate *Dios en cuanto dios* as *Dios ynic dios* is that they must have considered it not understandable enough for the audience and had to avoid defining *ignotum per ignotius*. Clearly, they struggled to translate the Spanish text in the most faithful way, yet in a way that would still be clear for the Indigenous people. If the semantic field of the loanword was not clear enough, the translators would deliberately use the preconquest term, covering the required semantic field (even though—in the case of *teotl*—they had to resort to a word strongly related to pagan deities). Moreover, the triple sequence *in Dios ynic teotl ynic Dios*, which expands the Spanish original *dios en cuanto ser dios*, shows the real effort of the authors to make more specific and explain the whole semantic field of the term *Dios*. The first *Dios* in this sequence is used like a personal name of the Christian God, while the second one appears in a doublet with *teotl*, allowing the Indigenous readers to start to perceive these two terms as synonyms, and, in fact, explaining the wider meaning of the Spanish loanword. Interestingly, this attempt to explain the doctrine would not be possible without resorting to the preconquest terms and their meanings, however different they were from the Christian ones, making the Nahuatl Christian vocabulary very syncretic and carrying meanings clear only to the Indigenous audience, however different this was from the friars’ intentions.

In the same way, precolonial terms related to social stratification turned out to be of use for the authors of the *Doctrina Christiana* in explaining the nuances of the doctrine. Yet incorporating them into the Christian discourse required from the people who translated the text (as well as from the audience) a deep level of understanding of precolonial society and the semantic fields attached to particular terms. Therefore, the parts of the *Doctrina* that use terms such as *tlahtoani* (“ruler”), *tecuhitli* (“lord”) or *pilli* (“nobleman”) are further examples of terms that seem to be created “by Indigenous people for Indigenous people,” adding specific Nahua context into the Christian worldview. The terms *tohueytlatoauh* (lit. “our great *tlahtoani* [ruler]”) and *totecuio* (“our *tecuhitli* [lord]”) are the most common titles accompanying the noun *Dios* in the whole of the *Doctrina Christiana*. The choice of the word *tlahtoani*, which in preconquest times meant the dynastic ruler of a city-state (*altepetl*), in order to translate the Spanish *rey* “king,” used in the Christian context in reference to God, indicates that the semantic field of this noun had to go through a couple of changes in the early stages of language contact. The first context is the most obvious one—it is the fact that the precolonial term, reserved for the governor of a political unit, expanded or slightly changed its meaning in order to designate a European king, that is, to be an equivalent of the Spanish term. The second instance is the usage of this word in Christian contexts, where, rather than to an actual king, it metaphorically refers to the Christian God ruling from his Kingdom over his people. This concept of God as a king, originating from both the Old and the New Testament, seems natural in the European worldview, but would have been foreign to the Indigenous people. The preconquest system of beliefs also assumed a connection between a ruler and deity (Miller and Taube 1993, p. 168), and therefore the metaphors used to describe a ruler and a god could have been similar. However, in the Nahua worldview, it was a ruler who was perceived as an earthly equivalent of a deity, and not the other way around, so the implantation of the Christian theology in the New World must have required the adaptation of the terminology and existing metaphors to the new system. The metaphor for God (or Jesus) as a king ruling over his people derives from both Old and New Testaments (e.g., Ps 47:3, Mt 16:16, 1 Cor 15:25) and is deeply rooted in Christian European culture. At this point, it is also interesting to note that attempts

both to overcome the discrepancies in the meanings and to unify the semantic fields of the Spanish *rey* and the Nahuatl *tlahtoani* arise from the practice in the process of translating the Christian doctrine that was initiated long before the conquest of the Aztec state. For example, the authors of the *Septuaginta* chose the Greek word *basileus* “king” to translate the Hebrew word *melek* “king,” “ruler.” However, in *Deuteronomy* the word *melek* was translated through a more general term *archon*—meaning a “ruler” and a “lord”—probably in order to avoid using a term connected specifically to a Hellenistic monarchy (Pearce 2007, p. 173). The word *tecuitli*, which in preconquest times referred to a member of the high nobility, is also (although perhaps not as often as *tlahtoani*) used in Christian sources in reference to God, usually in a possessional form *totecuio*—“our lord.” In the *Doctrina Christiana*, the author uses two terms—*toueytlatocauh* (lit. “our great ruler”) and *totecuio* (lit. “our great lord”)<sup>11</sup>—in reference to God, as equivalents of Spanish *nuestro gran rey y señor* and *nuestro gran señor*. The mutual correspondence of the Nahuatl and Spanish terms should be pointed out: in the vast majority of texts, *toueytlatocauh* is used as a lexical calque of *nuestro gran rey y señor* and *totecuio* as an equivalent of *nuestro gran señor*. In some exceptions to this rule, the term *nuestro gran señor* also corresponds to *toueytlatocauh*, but it is never the other way around (i.e., the term *totecuio* is never used for *nuestro gran rey y señor*). The analysis of usages of both of these Nahuatl terms seems to reveal that the translators’ choice between *tlahtoani* and *tecuitli* was in fact non-random. First of all, the authors of the text consistently relate *tlahtoani* to *rey* and *tecuitli* to *señor*. Moreover, in their eyes, *tlahtoani* seems to be a broader concept: they use only this word to translate the double Spanish epithet *rey y señor* and do not resort to *tlahtoani* or *tecuitli*, even though the analysis of the whole text indicates that the authors were very precise and careful in their translation. This, in fact, is natural and understandable from the point of view of the Nahuatl preconquest pyramid of power. As mentioned by Lockhart, the *tlahtoani* was not merely a large-scale *tecuitli* at the *altepetl* level: the term *tlahtoani* included within itself the semantic field of the term *tecuitli*, since *tlahtoani* “was at the same time *tecuitli* and *pilli*” (Lockhart 1992, p. 109), so the fact that the authors of the *Doctrina Christiana* closely linked the terms *tlahtoani* with *rey* and *tecuitli* with *señor* made it possible to translate *rey y señor* through the broader term of *tlahtoani*. And while it was possible to use *tlahtoani* to translate *señor*, *tecuitli* could not be used to translate *rey*. Therefore, the author of the Nahuatl version of the *Doctrina Christiana* operates within the semantic fields of these two nouns very deeply rooted in preconquest tradition, originating from the political organization of the Aztec empire (Granicka 2018, p. 277). Similarly, the authors of the Nahuatl text consciously chose the term *pilli* to describe archangels in the *Doctrina*. The authors of the Nahuatl version of the text did not borrow the word *arcángel*, nor did they include it anywhere in the text of the doctrine. Instead, it seems that they decided to experiment with the term *ipillohuan in angelesmeh*: *ipillohuan*, built on the root *-pilli* (possessive and plural). This *-pilli* is homophonic with *-pilli*—“niece or nephew of a woman.” *-Pillo* outside of the context of kinship was used in reference to people of high status. The possessive *-pilli* was frequently used both in pre-Hispanic and later contexts. The semantic field of this term shifted from merchants in relation to their ruler (*tlahtoani*), who was their dynastic ruler, to the courtiers of the king and in the Christian context metaphorically to angels (Madajczak 2014, pp. 14–17). According to Tomicki, this term could be translated as “vassal” or “servant” (Tomicki 2003, pp. 265–66). In the Christian context, the point of reference is God and *ipillohuan* often comes in a doublet, *ipillohuan in angelesme*—“his noblemen, that are angels.” In this case, the term *-pilli* could have been more general (“God’s vassals of noble status”), while the second part of the doublet clarified the specific nature of a group in question. Using *ipillohuan in angelesme* in reference to the archangels in the *Doctrina Christiana* made sense from both the Indigenous and European points of view. For the Nahuas, the employment of this construction implied that the angels in question are of noble status; however, they are subordinate to the only God. It allowed them to perceive the angels in a more metaphorical way: as courtiers of the great ruler, that is, God. From the European perspective, this was

also a natural choice, especially given that archangels in the Christian angelology were sometimes referred to as *principes*—“princes.”

The *Doctrina Christiana* also gives us another very interesting example of incorporating Indigenous concepts into Christian discourse, with its usage of the term *-ixitpla*. The nuances of this concept are sometimes hard to grasp for scholars. While the term is often translated as “impersonator” or “representative”—after Molina, who provided three translations for the term *teixiptla: imagen de alguno, sustituto, delegado* (de Molina 1571, II, fol. 95v)—the relationship between the designator and designate may have been much more nuanced. Modern studies devoted to both the relationship between the deity and its representation (*-ixiptla*), as well as to the linguistic analysis of the term *-ixiptla* itself, present the concept of *-ixiptla* as the ritual representation, the “rendering present by simulation” (Clendinnen 2014, p. 358), different from the simple pretense suggested by the term “impersonator.” The identity was achieved through a complex ritual and was always temporary. In the ritual, the *-ixitpla* gained the ability to “see, hear and speak” as the being that was “represented,” to truly “act as that being” (Dehouve 2020, p. 372).<sup>12</sup> The deep ritual connection between the deity and *-ixiptla* must have differed from a Western, more legal, notion of a “representative.” In Christian contexts, it was often also used as a translation of the term *imagen*—“image,” which probably at times could have been quite an accurate description, but it lacked depth and the understanding that the relationship between the two objects (one being an *-ixitpla* of the other) was not merely a physical resemblance or a costume. In this way, the introduction of the term *-ixitpla* into the Christian discourse profoundly affected the possible interpretations of various elements of the doctrine. The variety of usages of this term in the *Doctrina Christiana* is a good example of not one but various appropriations of one concept—more or less accurate—but inevitably shaping the discourse and the understanding of the text by the Indigenous people. The most accurate usage of this term was perhaps applied in the scene in which the devil in Paradise disguised himself as a snake. In the Nahuatl version of the text, the snake became the devil’s *-ixitpla*.

“Y luego tomando forma de culebra o serpiente, aquel malvado engañador fuese a acechar a Eva cuando ella estuviese sola sin su marido Adán.”

“Auh yeuatl teyztlacauiani: nimā omixiptlayoti o ypan moquixti in coatl ni-man oq̄mopachiuito in Eua yn icoac çan ycel catca yn amo yixpan yez yn in-amic Adan.”

“And then he, the liar, took the form (the *ixitpla*) of a snake—took its place—and spied on Eve when she was alone, when her husband Adam was not in her presence.”

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, Sermon 7, fol. 35r)

However, other attestations of this term include, for example, calling the confessor “God’s *-ixitpla*” on Earth. The repercussions of this statement for the Nahua audience might have been enormous: while the Spaniards wanted to explain that the confessor pardons sins in God’s name (as his representative), from the Nahua point of view, the confessor shall become God’s embodiment, a real, true God on Earth. In the same manner, in the text, the pope was called Saint Peter’s *-ixitpla* (as the one acting in his place). Also, according to the text of the *Doctrina*, Jesus, after his resurrection, told his mother, Saint Mary, to remain with his apostles and act as his *-ixiptla*. Also, two attestations of the term *-ixitpla* might create confusion about the interpretation of who are men and women on Earth. Once, in an attempt to translate the scene from *Genesis*, explaining that God created man “in his image,” the Nahuatl text calls a man God’s *-ixiptla*. The other example appears in the same scene, when a man looked for someone “like him”—which in Nahuatl is translated as “his *-ixiptla*”—and God created a woman.

Empero quiere y es su voluntad (si estáis bautizados) que os confeséis delante del sacerdote y confesor, el cual tiene su lugar

Auh çan quimonequiltia (itla oamoq̄ateq̄que) amo yolmelauazq̄ in yxpan in sacerdote teiolmelauāi uel yxiptlatcin in Dios

He only wants you (if you are baptized) to confess before a priest, a confessor, a true *-ixiptla* of God

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, sermon 9, fol. 43r)

Por lo cual, madre mía preciosa, conviene mucho que vos estéis acá y que yo aquí os deje con mis amados apóstoles, porque vos quedáis en mi lugar, y vos los debéis consolar

Yehica notlaçonantcine ca cenca moneq̄ yn oc nicā timocauhtcinoz yn oc nicā nimitznocauliz intlā in apóstolesme: ca teuatcin tinyxitplatiez ca teuatcin tiq̄imoyollaliliz

Therefore, oh, my precious mother, it is truly necessary that you still stay here. I will leave you here among the apostles, because you are my *-ixiptla*, because you will console them

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, sermon 16, fol. 73v)

Y cuando el bienaventurado San Pedro. Y así se va siempre haciendo. Y esta costumbre hay allá en una gran ciudad que se llama Roma: que cuando muere alguno que tiene el lugar de San Pedro

Auh yn icuac momiquili in san pedro ca omocentlaliq̄ in ueue in teopixque yuan oquimixquechilique oquimopepenilique occe tlatatl uel yixiptla in Sant Pedro.

And when Saint Peter died, old priests gathered themselves and they appointed, they picked, another man, a true *-ixiptla* of Saint Peter.

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, sermon 32, fol. 127v)

Y para hacerle tomó nuestro gran Rey y Señor Dios un poco de barro del cual hizo y formó y compuso una figura de un hombre muy bien formado y acabado. Y como lo hubo hecho, luego creó un ánima muy hermosa y graciosa y muy excelente, a su misma imagen y semejanza del nuestro Dador de vida.

Ca achtopa: quimochiuili yn oquichtli: auh ynic quimochiuili ca oquimocuili in toueitlatocauh yn dios achiton çoquitl yc quimochiuili yuan yc quimotlalili ce tlatatl yxiptla cēca tlacēcaualli. Auh yn oquimochiuili niman oquiyocux ce anima cēca chipauac: yuā onca qualli uel yxiptlatcin yn totecuiō yn ipalnemoani

And to create him, our great ruler God took some clay, from which he made and put together an *-ixiptla* of a man, very well formed and finished. And after he made it, later he created a very beautiful and gracious soul, the true *-ixiptla* of our lord, giver of life

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, sermon 5, fol. 26r)

Y después que Adán hubo hecho esto, luego miró con gran diligencia a todos los animales y buscó si por ventura hallaría alguno su semejante

Auh yn oiuhquichiuy ī Adā: ca niman oquēzcalicaittac yn yxquichtin y manemi yuan oquimotemoli yn aço aca q̄motiliz yn ixiptla

And when Adam did it, then he looked carefully at all animals and sought if perhaps he could see his *-ixiptla*

(*Doctrina Christiana* 1548, sermon 5, fol. 27r)

In the attestations above, all used in places where the friars were attempting to explain different concepts regarding the Christian religion, they were derived from a precontact worldview, deeply rooted in the Nahuas' philosophical beliefs about the nature of things and their ability to incarnate into other things. As such, early in the cultural contact, when the *Doctrina Christiana* was written, this precolonial imagery must have still been very vivid and well understood by the audience to whom the friars preached about the Christian faith, using the vocabulary referring to the whole complex worldview in which

powerful precolonial deities called by their specific names could incarnate into other people or objects.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Indigenous coauthors of religious texts in Nahuatl created in the period of initial the cultural contact played a double role in the acculturation process. On the one hand, they facilitated the process of creation of necessary ecclesiastical materials: they had linguistic skills that allowed them to help in the translation of complicated explanations from Spanish and were participating in a sort of linguistic experiment, looking for linguistic solutions that led to the creation of a specific Nahuatl lexicon that later, for centuries, served friars in preaching the Christian doctrine. On the other hand, as strongly as they helped in spreading the Christian agenda in colonial New Spain, they pushed back against it, inextricably rooting it in precolonial discourse. Old beliefs, stories and myths were preserved in the words of newly created catechisms and *doctrinas*, as the Christian stories contained in these sources were retold in a new way through Indigenous lenses. The 1548 Dominican *Doctrina Christiana* is a prominent example of both of these phenomena. On the one hand, it was the first religious source printed in Nahuatl that contained such comprehensive explanations of the doctrine. The authors of the *Doctrina* planted Thomistic philosophical thought on colonial New Spain's ground by creating sermons that, in eloquent, highly advanced Nahuatl, quoted or paraphrased the *Summa Theologiae*. On the other hand, the level of incorporation of Indigenous concepts into the Christian discourse in the *Doctrina Christiana* was also advanced. Besides using ubiquitous basic Christian terminology in Nahuatl, the authors actually retold the stories from the Bible in a way that localized them in the world of precontact Nahuatl beliefs. The reception of the sermons of the *Doctrina* must have varied depending on when the sermons were preached and how educated the audience was. However, the final product of the complicated translation process that was the *Doctrina Christiana* can always be seen as a highly syncretic source, deeply rooted in two cultures—one European, the other Nahuatl—and touching on the core beliefs of both of these cultures. This level of syncretism could have been achieved only through very close cooperation between the Spaniards and the Nahuas who authored this source.

**Funding:** This research was funded by National Science Center in Poland, project number 2015/19/N/HS2/03417.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> After the 1539 Nahuatl *Doctrina Breve*, Juan Pablos also printed some Spanish-only doctrinal texts: a 1540 *Manual de los adultos para bautizar* by Fray Pedro de Logroño and a 1544 *Doctrina Christiana para instrucción de los indios* (Sell 1993, pp. 3–4).
- <sup>2</sup> Stafford Poole points out that the period before the First Provincial Council, roughly between 1524 and 1555, was the time of an idealistic belief that Indigenous people could soon enter the clergy, exercising functions in the order. The biggest advantage of such a solution would be their knowledge of Indigenous languages and their ability to preach in them. The provisions of the council sharply put an end to such plans. However, the question of language and the necessity of consulting with native speakers remained an important and unsolved issue (Poole 1981, pp. 638–40). The few Nahuatl doctrinal texts published before the First Provincial Council, including the 1548 *Doctrina*, are therefore particularly interesting for studying Indigenous influences on the doctrine, as they were created in the time called by Poole “the stage of idealism,” when the participation of the Indigenous collaborators in writing catechisms was seen as a necessity, and not frowned upon.
- <sup>3</sup> The quarrels between the Franciscans and Dominicans went further, as they debated the elements of Christian rituals (especially baptism) that needed to be preserved in order for the Sacrament to remain valid. While the Franciscans advocated for simplifying the formulas, the Dominicans argued that all the formalities needed to be preserved, to avoid heresy. The conflict was discussed by the bishops, who gave official instruction regarding all the necessary parts of the ceremony, and then it was resolved by the 1537 papal bull *Altitudo divini consilii* (Pardo 2004, pp. 28–31).
- <sup>4</sup> Tavárez points out that there were some attempts to rely on materials created in fifteenth-century Europe; he gives an example of a sixteenth-century translation of Thomas à Kempis's *De imitation Christi*, created in the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco in the sixteenth century (Tavárez 2011, p. 28).



- 5 The phrase *Fecit Deus rationalem creaturam, quae summum bonum intellexeret, intelligendo amaret, amando possideret et possidendo fruere* was used in the twelfth century by the scholastic theologian Peter Lombard in his *Four Books of Sentences (Libri Quatuor Sententiarum)*, book II, distinctio I, chapter IV) and in the treatise *De Diligendo Deo*, attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who compiled the works of Augustine. It became attributed to Saint Augustine probably through Saint Bernard's commentary.
- 6 Ca in yeuatl y chicōtetl neltoconi in onamechnolhuili: ca uel itech ca in Dios inic oq̄chtli: ca uel yeuatl tictoneltoquitizq̄ īic Ca in yeuatl y chicōtetl neltoconi in onamechnolhuili: ca uel itech ca in Dios inic oq̄chtli: ca uel yeuatl tictoneltoquitizq̄ īic titomaquixitzque: ca ica in yeuatl in chicōtetl neltoconi tictixmachilia yn ipiltcī ī dios inic oquichtli. Ca ica inic cētetl ticmatī yuā ticneltoca ca in ipiltcin dios oq̄chtli omochiutcino ini itictēco in Sctā Maria ca uel yeuatcin in itlaçonātzin: ca tlamauīq̄oltica cōmocuili yn itlaçonacayotcin: amoma oquichtlachiuāltica / anoço tlatlacultica omochiuh: çan ica yn iqualtica yn iyectica in dios omochiuh. Auh ca ipāpa inic ontetl neltoconi ticmatī yuan ticneltoca ca in yeuatcin dios ipiltcin ytechpatcincō motlacatilitcino ieuatli in itlaçonantcin Sctā Maria: ca yeuatcin quimotlacatilitli in mochipa cemicac ichpuchtli in amo tlatlacultica / çā uey tlamauīq̄oltica. Auh ipāpa inic yetetl neltoconi ticmatī yuan ticneltoca ca in yeuatcin in dios ypiltcin to Tlaçotemaq̄xticacatcin Jesu xp̄o ca omomiquilitcino y iollocopatcincō inic oq̄chtli çan topāpa in titlacouāi inic techmomaquixitilitcino imacpa in tlatatecolutl iuā itechpa infierno auh yuan ynic ompa techmouiquiliz in itlatocachantcincō in ylhuicac. Auh ympampa inic nauhtetl neltoconi ticmatī yuā ticneltoca: ca omotemoui in itlaçoanima in totecuio Jesu xp̄o ompa infierno: yn quialmoquixtilito yn imanima in Adā yuan Eua: yuan occequintin qualtin tetauā: ompa quimochielitacatca in iquin impā motemouiz. Auh ypāpa inic macuiltetl neltoconi ticmatī yuan ticneltoca: ca yeilhuitica monoma yzcalitcino: yn totemaquixitacatcī Jesu xp̄o intlā in mimique. Auh ypāpa inic chicuacētetl ticmatī yuā ticneltoca ca omotlecaui in ompa in ilhuicac ompoualilhuitica: yma yauh campatcincō motlalticnōto in itlaçotatcin in Dios. Auh ipāpa ynic chicōtetl neltoconi ticmatī yuan ticneltoca ca ompa ualmeuatiz quitlatçōtequiliq̄uh yn iyolque yuā in mimicq̄ yn itçonquizayā in itlamia in cemanauac: auh quincēmacaz cē tlaihiouiliztli in aiectī in aqualtin: auh yn qualtin quimmocenmaquiliz cemicac papaquiliztli ytoca gloria. Notlaçouane ca oanq̄mocaquitiq̄ in ye mochi tlaneltoq̄liztli ytoca articulos de la fe: ca matlactetl onnau: in achto chicōtetl ca uel ytechca in dios ynic teutl: auh in ocno chicōtetl: ca uel itechca in dios ynic oquichtli.
- 7 Auh uel ximatica ca in yeuatl tonatiuh/ ca amoma ytla yolqui yuan in meztli/ yuan in cicitlaltin: çan iuhquin tehuilome cenca pepetlaca yuan cenca tlanextia in ilhuicame intech oquimmotlalili in totecuio in Dios: auh in iquac momalacachoua yn ilhuicame quinicōac ynuan momalacachoua yn tonatiuh in meztli yuan yn cicitlaltin (. . .) Auh ca çan iceltcin in Dios anquimoteotizquia yehica ca çan uel iceltcin neteotiloni. Auh in yeuatl in anquimoteutiaya yuan in anquitlamaniliaya in tonatiuh: ca amo teotl /ca amo tlaçau amono tlachia ca yuhqui in teuilotl anoço tlanextli in ompa quimotlalili in Dios in ilhuicac yn quitlanexti lia in nouian cemanauac in iuhqui ce Candela/ anoço ce hacha ytech çaliuhtica in tepantli.
- 8 The existence of doublets in Nahuatl simplified the process of creating “doctrinal Nahuatl” and allowed the friars to introduce Spanish terms describing the concepts of the Christian faith, because Spanish words were often juxtaposed with Nahuatl terms to explain aspects of Christian beliefs in terms of native concepts that the friars found similar to them. Therefore, doctrinal texts in Nahuatl abound in Nahuatl–Spanish doublets, such as *mictlan infierros*, *ilhuicac paraiso*, *teotl dios* and *tlatatecolotl diablo*. Through these kinds of doublets, the friars tried to ensure that a specific Nahuatl term would not be understood in its precontact (and therefore heretical) meaning, while at the same time it served as an additional explanation of the Spanish loanword (Olko 2015, p. 41). *Difrasismos*, which were an Indigenous feature of Nahuatl, therefore turned out to be a very useful tool for Christianization and became ubiquitous in Nahuatl religious texts.
- 9 Sparks points out that this division between Dominicans trained in Thomistic scholasticism and nominalist Franciscans was not always this clear, given that, for example, the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún, responsible for some of the most important doctrinal works produced in the *Colegio de Santa Cruz*, was also trained in the School of Salamanca (Sparks 2017, p. 4).
- 10 Tavárez (2017, pp. 172–76) points out that even though Thomistic influences are as present in the Zapotec Dominican *Doctrina*, the worldview behind the Zapotec Christian vocabulary is significantly different than the Nahuatl one, given that it resulted from using Zapotec terms for the purposes of the translation. Also, Sánchez Aguilera (2023b, p. 2) underlines the fact that the style of each source is, in fact, unique, as it reflects not only such factors as the audience to which it was dedicated or a specific type of publication but also individual style of its' author or authors.
- 11 The orthography used in the 1548 *Doctrina* gives *toueytlatocauh* for *tohueytlatocauh* and *totecuio* for *totecuiyo*.
- 12 The discussion of the meaning and possible translations of the term *-ixitpla* has been lively for decades. Hvidtfeldt believed that from among the definitions provided by Molina, “image” was more accurate than “representative,” and that the usage of masks was crucial in preparing the *-ixitpla* (Hvidtfeldt 1958, pp. 76–100). This approach was criticized by scholars years later (see e.g., Basset 2015, pp. 60–61) for considering only one aspect of the *-ixitpla*'s nature (wearing masks), not analyzing the etymology of the word, and for a comparison that Hvidtfeldt made between the *-ixitpla* and the Polynesian concept of *mana*, which always creates a risk of losing some of the meaning of the concept in the cultural translation. However, Hvidtfeldt's work laid the ground for further research that contributed to the understanding of the term. López Austin (1988, pp. 119–20; 1993) understood Nahua deities as forces who lived in their images. From this point of view, the *-ixitpla* would have been a divinity itself, a container for divine energy. This approach was later carried on by Carrasco, who called the *-ixitpla* “deity impersonators, or individuals or objects, whose essence had been cosmo-magically transformed into gods” (Carrasco 2000, p. 83), and in twenty-first century works can be traced in Maffie's claims that the relationship between *-ixitpla* and *teotl* is one of strict identity, where *-ixitpla* and *teotl* are the same (Maffie 2014, pp. 113–44). Other modern scholars focused on analyzing the complex nature of *-ixitpla* and

its aspects to better describe the relationship between the two beings. Clendinnen focused on different objects that could be an *-ixiptla* or that could have been given an *-ixiptla* (such as seed dough formed into the shapes of mountains). She pointed out that even abstract ideas—like day signs—were given *-ixiptla* form (Clendinnen 2014, pp. 353–54). As she believes the *-ixiptla* to be ritual representations of gods, there always had to be a made, constructed thing, “named” for the particular being and adorned as it, including as a concept that was “made and unmade in the course of actions.” Concluding, she called the basic translations of the term (substitute, impersonator, representation, image, representative) “equally misleading and equally useful: sometimes appropriate and sometimes not,” pointing out the discrepancies between the modern, Western understanding of “representation” and the semantic field of the term *-ixiptla*. Basset assembled the existing translations of the term and confronted them with the attestations of other terms built on the same root. She described the *-ixiptla* as the embodiment of *teotl* and focused on the particular functions the *-ixiptla* played in this regard: facilitating intimacy between deities and their devotees at the level of sensory experience and serving as nexus points between levels of existence in the natural and the metaphysical world (Basset 2015, p. 160). Daniele Dehouve derived the meaning of the *-ixiptla* (and its root *-ixtli*—“eyes”) from the metonymic series “eyes, ears, lips, jaws, tongue, word, breath,” arguing that *-ixtli*, the first term, summarizes the whole series, designating the capacity to “see, hear, and express oneself as god” (Dehouve 2020, p. 359). She argues that the term *-ixiptla* referred to a specific symbolic and ritual complex that resulted (but only temporarily) in an *-ixiptla* acquiring the identity of the being with whom it was adorned—to see, hear and speak as this being and even “to instill him with life” (Dehouve 2020, p. 372).

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