

Civilization 161

Chapter 161 The Reform of Mexica Religion – Part 1

Outside the Chief Palace, crowds of hundreds of thousands cheered and celebrated. The chanting of the priests accompanied by the poet's recitation, the beautiful sounds of the ocarina mixed with the thunderous rhythms of drums.

Inside the Chief Palace, there was solemnity and silence. The gentle breeze stirred the curtains of the deities, rows of expressionless elder guards stood resolute, adhering to their duties day in and day out for decades. They had dedicated the rest of their lives to the divine and the elders.

The elder looked at Xiulote calmly. This was a smart child; he should understand the meaning behind bringing him to watch the ceremony. This was also an unknown child, and the elder hoped he would express new insights that matched his own wishes.

In the past dozen years, he rarely changed his original plans or gave people second chances. Or rather, the leniency shown towards Xiulote was the first since his brother's death.

Xiulote closed his eyes in contemplation, memories flashing before him: his grandfather's messages, the murals in the corridors, the paintings in the Serpent House, sacrificial ceremonies, tribute rituals, and finally, the gaze of the elders, akin to that of the divine.

He opened his eyes again and nodded slightly.

"Today's ceremony is like blooming flowers. Yet beneath the flowers burns a flaming fire!"

"The Mexica appear devout, but are in fact wavering. People rely on costly sacrificial rituals to satisfy their spiritual needs. They revere the divine, but do not love Him wholeheartedly. Once confronted with a more powerful and complete faith in a Heavenly Divine, they will surrender to foreign deities adept at manipulating hearts."

"The Mexica City-States seem obedient but are actually loose. The alliance relies on the core military force of the capital to maintain a tribute system of high autonomy and keep the tribes united. Once struck by a powerful external force that diminishes the capital's core military strength, the alliance will fall apart."

Xiulote's expression was grave. He was articulating his understanding of the society while also describing the real destiny that would unfold in the future.

Upon hearing this, the elder's expression changed slightly, and his brow furrowed. The Guard Captain behind him had watched the elder's expression silently the entire time, silently drawing his bronze axe from his waist.

The elder made a slight gesture to stop him, and the Guard Captain sheathed his bronze axe once again, all without a sound. In an instant, the elder's face regained its calm. He turned and headed towards the corridor of the divine. Xiulote followed but could no longer see the elder's expression.

"My child, continue," the elder's voice came drifting from ahead.

"We need to unite the hearts of the Mexica, strengthen our control and integration of the City-States. We need to unify the people's consciousness and establish centralization of power!" Xiulote said firmly.

In the long and dimly lit corridor of the divine, the elder finally came to a stop. He stood in the darkness inside, while Xiulote was placed in the light. History had arrived at the boundary where light and darkness interchanged, just like the divine themselves.

"My child, how do you plan to do this?" the elder once again turned around. He stood in the darkness, his gaze calm.

"Religious reform, establish a code of law. Monotheism and religious law," Xiulote said succinctly.

The elder watched Xiulote's eyes, quietly waiting for an explanation.

"Religious reform and monotheism. The Chief Divine Huitzilopochtli must be elevated to the status of the only Supreme God! He shall become the great and omnipotent Creator, the master of all things and the world, eternal and indestructible.

The Chief Divine shall assume the divine duties of other deities, from thunder fire and wind and rain, mountains and rivers and flora, to time and space, prophecies of fate, from life and death, war and peace, to marriage and mourning, clothing and food, shelter and transportation... He shall merge infinite might, carrying all human hearts. He shall obscure specific images to become the ultimate concept in people's minds!

The other deities, including the important Rain Divine, will gradually be demoted. They will become Subordinate Gods in this generation, then become Saints over the next few generations. Similarly, our ancestral spirits and distinguished individuals can also become Saints."

In Xiulote's view, Monotheism has a strong advantage over Polytheism in spreading. Except for Huaxia with its exceptionally profound cultural heritage and India with its entrenched caste system, the entire world has already been turning towards a monotheistic faith.

In the future, to resist the incursion of the Cross, the nascent civilization of Central America must have a theoretically complete, well-organized indigenous Monotheism to gain sufficient religious resistance.

The elder fell into a long contemplation. He had done much on the path of elevating the War God, turning him into the Guardian God of the Mexica and then into the Sun God, endowing him with the mission of sustaining the world. Yet, Xiulote's idea of monotheism far exceeded his plans.

It was the limitation of the era's perspective. In the ancient American civilizations' faiths, the concept of a Supreme God never existed, with no historical precedent to draw upon. In this polytheistic age, Xiulote's idea was pioneering, beyond the imagination of ordinary people. Of course, he stood on the shoulders of the entire world.

The elder said nothing. He simply continued to walk forward, and Xiulote followed silently. The quiet darkness enveloped them both. Even the divine had become mere instruments of mortals.

After a while, the elder asked again.

"My child, your vision surpasses that of mortals. I wish to hear more details."

Xiulote thought for a moment before revealing his inner thoughts.

"With the religious reform, the Supreme God is almighty, and He does not need sacred blood and flesh to maintain the operations of the world. Therefore, I wish to abolish the sacrifices of life."

Once again, the elder stopped. He stood in a corner without candlelight, calmly gazing at Xiulote. However, Xiulote felt a heavy pressure and a chilling coldness.

"Child, the Mexica need war; they must conquer the world," once more, the address changed.

Xiulote steadily gazed into the darkness. He explained calmly.

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"We can launch a holy war. Against those who do not believe in the Supreme God, the Samurai will also fight for the spirits! The purpose of the war is assimilation, not sacrifice."

Xiulote understood that sacrifices in Central America had the effect of regulating population. But he believed that under his leadership, the Aztec civilization would soon enter the great developmental stages of the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and then the colonization of the vast Americas. Population would become the most important resource.

Besides, the diseases of the Old World were coming. The American civilizations needed enough people to withstand the devastation of disease.

The elder was non-committal. He pondered the concept of "holy war," gradually putting away his intention to kill. After a while, he spoke in a faint voice.

"My child, the Samurai need more spiritual motivation to conquer the vast world. Only after victory can the Samurai put down their war clubs."

"Now, tell me, how will you unify consciousness, gather the hearts of the people?"

Xiulote pondered. He closed his eyes again, drawing on past memories, on the Monotheism of history, to find those fragments that fit with reality, and took a long time before he opened his eyes again.

"We will use religion to gather the hearts of the people. Religion must occupy the hearts of the faithful, satisfying all their desires."

"The first step in religious reform is to depict a beautiful hereafter, to perfect the world after death. We will incorporate our existing Red Kingdom, Sun God Nation, the Land of Death, and the legends of the Samurai souls becoming birds and flowers. Let the pious ascend to Heaven, rewarding those who die for the gods with blessings, while sinners sink into the Land of Death."

In Mexico mythology, different realms of death exist. Brave Samurai ascend to the Sun God Nation, warriors, and women who die in childbirth go to the peaceful Red Kingdom, those who drown go to the Rain Divine's Divine Kingdom, while the rest head to the Land of Death, Mictlan. Mictlan has nine levels of Hell, with chilling winds as sharp as knives, unending darkness in the first eight levels, with only Wealth and the lives of slaves able to protect the souls of the dead.

This Polytheistic faith needs to be re-integrated to more effectively occupy the hearts of the faithful. Religious reforms must establish the desire for Heaven and the fear of Hell, guiding people's behavior and thoughts.

The elder nodded imperceptibly. He remained silent in the darkness.

"Religious reform, the meaning of faith is the pursuit of goodness. We must promote self-cultivation, combining existing moral customs, guiding people toward beauty and kindness, as they long for flowers. Teach people to follow one God, be benevolent, righteous, polite, wise, trusting... all the virtues we hope for."

The elder was expressionless. If there was anything that the Mexica people commonly pursued, it was the bravery in battle and the blossoming in death; benevolence was clearly not included.

"Religious reform requires a system of confession. Now, Mexica people have one chance to confess to the God of Sin, seeking penance to absolve their sins. We need to extend the system of confession, taking back the power of absolution into the hands of the Supreme God. No longer limit the frequency of confession and reform, thereby allowing the Priesthood to control the hearts of the faithful more."

Xiulote thought of the powerful system of confession in the Cross ceremony and the practices of the historical Church and then added.

"The secrets of these confessions should be carefully kept by the Priests. Important confession information needs to be recorded and handed over to the high-ranking Priesthood, thereby having a stronger grasp on society and the populace."

The elder pondered slightly. Daily confession? The power of the Priests would undoubtedly expand. The control of divine power would be strengthened.

"Religious reform requires a system of pilgrimage. The Great Temple in the Capital City is selected as the Holy Temple, requiring every faithful to make regular pilgrimages. The frequency of pilgrimages would decrease with distance, but one must make at least one pilgrimage to obtain redemption in the hereafter."

"The Alliance has no strong control over distant City-States. The speed of transit limits the frequency of communication. We need an effective system of exchange to enhance our control over distant people while influencing faraway City-States."

Xiulote analyzed the role of pilgrimage. In an era where technological levels are limited, to strengthen the cohesion of the Alliance, it was essential not to let City-States satisfy all their religious needs independently. Historical pilgrimage to the Holy Temple has always been a part of various religions, possessing an irreplaceable role.

"Religious reform also needs daily rituals. These could combine existing harvest prayers, divine blessing ceremonies, simplified and improved, to form a stable system. For example, three times a day, set before meals and before sleeping. Twice a month, set on the tenth day."

Daily rituals are also meant to occupy the hearts and time of the faithful. Due to food limitations, ordinary people have two meals a day, plus sleep time, which makes three rituals. And according to the prevalent Mayan Calendar, every 20 days a month, there could be a grand ritual every ten days.

The elder finally nodded again.

"My child, your ideas are good. The Alliance needs to further control the City-States and the hearts of the people. Whatever you think of, continue."

With that, the elder stepped forward, heading down to the palace's underground.

Xiulote followed, pondering again. He hesitated slightly but still spoke frankly.

"Religious reform, collecting taxes in the name of God. The Alliance lacks control over the Great Nobility and the Lords of the City-States, hardly interfering with their taxation and private armies. We need to tax the wealthy Nobility and merchants, providing relief to the poor civilians and Samurai. Weaken the Great Nobility, nurture civilian Samurai, maintaining a balance of class."

The elder paused in his steps. He frowned again but did not look back. The idea was good, but if put into practice, depriving the Great Nobility of their benefits would inevitably lead to wielding the Bronze Axe, with heads rolling.

"My child, have you thought of the future?"

The elder's words floated from the candlelight ahead, emotionless.

Xiulote was slightly startled. Gazing at the feeble candlelight, looking at the elder's blurry and tall silhouette, he asked himself:

"What should the future of religious reform look like?"