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HUICHOL PRAYER: IMAGE AND WORD IN SACRED COMMUNICATION

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> How can we make any progress in the understanding of cultures, ancient or modern, if we persist in dividing what the people join and in joining what they keep apart?
>
> Hocart (1970a: 23)

THIS essay has three objectives. First, to present the available data on the Huichol understanding of the relationship between words and images. Second, to enumerate a formal typology of the purposes of prayer so as to better enable comparisons to be made with other societies. Third, to propose that far from being an expression of subjection and resignation to a higher force, as found in both Christian and materialist interpretations, prayer among the Huichol is an active interjection that seeks to control nature as part of a more pervasive endeavour that Hocart (1970a: 52) has called the 'quest for life'. Because of its focus on key metaphysical concerns and principles, prayer can provide access to the central axiomatic issues and preoccupations of certain types of cultures and is capable, therefore, of illuminating great swathes of social life.

Fieldwork among the Huichol was carried out between January 1979 and March 1980 under a grant from the Social Science Research Council. All the prayers quoted in this paper were collected by R. Mata Torres and published in the works quoted in the references. I am responsible for the translations from Mata Torres 1974 and 1980.

Andrew Duff-Cooper wrote that one of the objectives of his *Essay in Balinese Aesthetics* was 'to contribute in a very small way to the social anthropological tradition which holds it is the job of social anthropology, in the first place at least, to find out what the people in question do and what they say about what they do' (Duff-Cooper 1984: 2) . This concern with indigenous exegesis and the holistic study of society was one of the hallmarks of Andrew's anthropology (see e.g. Duff-Cooper 1984: 34–6; 1986a: 224–5; 1986b: 165). Given these recurring concerns, and Andrew's own comments and discussions on an earlier unpublished version of this paper, I hope that this essay will seem an appropriate contribution to this Memorial Issue.

Words and Images

The *OED* defines prayer as 'a short and humble request to God or to an object of worship; a supplication, petition, or thanksgiving, usually expressed in words...a formula appointed for or used in praying...a religious observance, public or private, of which prayer to God forms a principal part; a form of divine service'. In this definition prayer is distinguished by four principal characteristics: (1) it is a form of communication; (2) it is directed from the world of men to the world of God or the sacred; (3) the content of the communication expresses adoration, supplication, petition or gratitude; and (4) prayer may or may not form part of a more comprehensive service incorporating additional forms of ritual speech and actions.

Even early on in the anthropological literature such a Christian-centred definition had constricting results, leading to the imposition of a Western typology that devalued the power and instrumentality of prayer by distinguishing it from spells. Codrington (1891: 145) was forced to minimize the prevalence of prayer in Melanesia because many supernatural addresses lacked a formal character and were believed to be efficacious. Nevertheless, despite this strict definition, many of the remaining examples of prayer discussed in *The Melanesians* all had clear instrumental ends. Hocart (1970a [1952]: 48–9) acknowledged that prayer often had more practical motivations closely tied to the moral welfare and material benefit of the community. In Fiji, he reported, prayers were said 'for rain, fair weather, in time of dearth and famine, in time of war and tumults, plague or sickness' (Hocart 1970b [1936]: 73). Nevertheless, like Codrington, Hocart chose to see Vedic prayers as spells because they were not simply requests for assistance or statements of gratitude or reverence, but expressions of creative force that 'put vigour into the gods and the world' (ibid.: 66–7). This startlingly modern view has been adopted, among others, by Annette Weiner (1983: 702), who similarly interprets Trobriand spells as a means of impregnating objects and activating their

latent qualities. Valid as this undoubtedly is, the relationship between prayer and spells remains ambiguous.

Jan van Baal (1971: 264) has criticized the use of the Christian notion of prayer with its emphasis on subjection and piety, to describe non-Western addresses that are intended as direct interventions in the world. Prayers, he argues, are not 'man-made devices but divine gifts, products of revelation which may and must be used as means to ends' (ibid.). In many societies, including the Huichol, prayers are similar to spells in their intention to intervene in the world, and as van Baal reminds us, whatever distinction remains may be limited to the relative certainty of their outcome (ibid.). Consequently, before it can begin to become a useful analytical category for comparison, the standard English definition of prayer should be enlarged to include at least three further criteria: (1) prayer may possess a supernatural efficaciousness capable of changing some aspect of the world; (2) unlike other forms of communication, prayer is often credited with having a supernatural origin; and (3) prayer may involve deeply felt sentiments and convictions that consequently make it a potentially highly emotive form of enunciation.

Among the Huichol, prayer is not limited to oral forms of communication. The priority the West reserves for words is not shared by the Huichol. Linguistic enunciation, by itself, may even be considered inadequate to communicate with the gods, and needs to be accompanied, or at times even substituted by, other devotional acts. Similarly, the response of the deities avoids language altogether and is transmitted through dreams or visions. The priority given to non-linguistic forms of communication is reiterated in Huichol myth which describes how in pre-creation times the saints were mute and prayers had to be made through pictures painted on magical boards:

> Kauyumarie was painting prayers that he wished granted by the great gods. With beads and coloured wool placed in the wax on the board, he painted...[list of animals]. All the animals, hens, turkeys, and everything else in all colors he painted. The colored rocks of the five points were represented in the painting.Then Kauyumarie took out of his god house a branding-iron and pressed it against the board. An impression of Jesus Christ was left in colors. Thus also did he make Guadalupe and all the other saints. Finally he painted the Sun and the animals of the Sun—the tiger and the eagle. (Zingg no date: 316)[1]

After completing the magical paintings (*itari*), the Sun allowed Kauyumarie to voice prayer on behalf of his people. In this account, images are considered older and more important vehicles of prayer than the recitation of words.

Conversely, linguistic formulas seem to be regarded as more important in the context of the creation and operation of the non-Huichol world, particularly the

1. Kauyumarie is a sacred deer-person. Both culture hero and trickster, he acts as a messenger or intermediary between the Huichol and their gods.

world inhabited by the Mexicans, Americans and Europeans. In this context, words are invested with an extraordinary importance and are believed to possess exceptional power. In the same corpus of myths, the act of naming itself brings the non-Huichol world into existence (see Shelton 1988: 49):

> As Santo Cristo left he met the Mexicans. They were planting with sticks but nothing grew. He greeted them and talked with them. They had no names and were, therefore, still of the devil. They said, 'If you know all this from our Tata, the Sun, bless this field so it will grow. Bless us also for our good health.' He said, 'I name this field the planting.... Let us see what comes up here.' If he was from Tata Sun, he could make the sign of the cross in the same fashion as he had blessed the other people. Santo Cristo did this, and changed the names of things from grass to oxen, plow, straps, yoke, etc. Then he gave the Mexican some corn seed and told him to plant it. He went on until he saw a Mexican wasting time by planting grass-like squash seed. After blessing the grass he named it squash. (Zingg no date: 327)

The myth continues with a long list of fruit and vegetables, followed by tools, fields, irrigation ditches, houses, pottery, and so on, named and therefore created by Santo Cristo. Santo Cristo's words are invested with a particular magical property. Naming is synonymous with blessing and is a generative act responsible for the creation of the non-Huichol world. At first, then, it appears that the powerful nature of words is to the non-Huichol world what the power of images is to the Huichol.

Nevertheless, despite this apparent exception to the importance of non-linguistic forms of communication, the power of spoken language, even when it is framed and restricted to the peripheral world, is still subordinated to older, divinely inspired modes of communication that depend on dreams, visions and images. Linguistic competence is based on a complex theory of reality that explains the deeper importance of non-material existence and older non-linguistic forms of communication (see Shelton 1992: 229–35). The sacred is not restricted to particular areas of life or associated with specific and limited acts, it pervades the whole of Huichol existence. Materials that are transacted and manipulated in everyday life, the routine activities connected with the home, field and community, ensure a continual and enduring relationship between the Huichol and their deities. Consequently, prayer does not stand alone as a solitary bridge between the human community and the divine. The world itself is thought to have been established by the self-sacrifice of the ancestral deities, resulting in their transformation into the local flora and topography. Through sacrifice, their non-material beings separated from their physical bodies, which became the earth, mountains, water, vegetation, sun, moon and stars. The Huichol universe is divided into material manifestations of the deities and ephemeral forms that exist as essences.

There are ample means and occasions for transmitting sacred knowledge between generations. The deities are invoked at birth, baptism, naming, curing and mortuary ceremonies, but complex mythological events are mainly narrated during

agricultural ceremonies. These narratives often rely on complex metaphors that are not always or even widely understood (Mata Torres 1974: 3). Such occasions include dramatic episodes and mimed performances that create images that guide one through the basis of religion. However, understanding and revelation are thought to result not through oral knowledge but through experience gained by devotional acts, pilgrimage, weaving and solitary introspection with the help of the divine messenger Kauyumarie or an animal intermediary.

In Huichol, prayer is called *nenevieri*, derived from *neni*, tongue or speech, and *iyári*, meaning heart or memory. *Nenevieri* means literally to speak with the heart. *Iyári* is the very basis for communication and revelation of the divine constitution of the world. *Iyári* is an immaterial quality made up of the memories or central truths that were inherited from the ancestors. Before the creation of the earth, in a solid world composed of mountain, the ancestral deities communicated through a sort of telepathy. Their thoughts were bounced off the mountain top and reflected back to their recipients (Negrín 1977: 79). The mountain is identified with Tatei Werika Wimari who, after the earth was created, was transformed into the solar eagle guarding the central region of the sky. She is credited with collecting together the thoughts of the deities and preserving them for future generations (ibid.). Tatei Werika Wimari is invoked at the baptism of Huichol children and is said to implant *iyári* into their young bodies. While *iyári* is planted into all children either at birth or baptism, it remains dormant and inactive unless developed and nurtured at the expense of the physical needs of the body. Pilgrimage, with its associated fasts, restrictions on drink, sexual abstinence and physical exertion, provides the technique, also inherited from the deities, to activate *iyári* and open the channel between men and ancestors that is essential for the maintenance and well-being of the Huichol world. In Huichol thought, *iyári* provides the source of revelation. Prayer does not rest on the ability to simply recite narrative formulaically. Its efficacy partly depends on the devotion of the supplicant who, without an active *iyári*, is ineffectual.

Religious devotion is measured by a number of indices. Generally, it is determined by the commitment an individual demonstrates in following the ideal path of life established by the deities. This implies making offerings, weaving, participation in and sponsorship of rituals, observation of appropriate behaviour and continuing the work of creation begun by the deities. A person may attain the grade of shaman, *mara'akame* (plural, *mara'akata*) after making a minimum of five pilgrimages to Wirikuta, a desert plateau in San Luis Potosi, but religious knowledge can be increased by making additional pilgrimages and by performing further acts of devotion. Pilgrimage deepens the relationship with the divinities and increases the individual's understanding of their nature and work, while successively developing their personal *iyári*. The more *iyári* is developed, the greater will be the efficacy of the individual's prayer.

Non-linguistic modes of prayer need to be guided by *iyári*. The most prominent of these are offerings (see Shelton 1992: 211–18) and, among women, such devotional acts as weaving. Offerings are prepared by individuals under the

supervision of the *mara'akata*. They are made for religious ceremonies, for prestations at domestic shrines and for local and distant pilgrimage sites associated with particular deities. Offerings are made to fulfil a personal obligation to care for and respect the deities, in return for which the devotee expects to receive good fortune or redress of an adverse situation or condition:

> We hope for many favours from you, we hope that each of us will receive from your hands the gift of knowledge, from your arrow, power, and from your candle, enlightenment. We hope that each of us may bring to you that which we obtained from you. (Mata Torres 1980: 73)

Offerings include votive bowls, ceremonial arrows, candles, foodstuffs, cigarettes and the sacrifice of livestock. Ceremonial arrows are sometimes attached to coloured miniature woven 'mats' (*itari*), decorated with animal and geometrical designs that identify the deity for whom they are intended and the reason for the supplication (see Shelton 1992: 214, fig. 9.2). Votive bowls are a very old form of offering, used at least from the eighteenth century when they were decorated with abalone and turquoise (see Navarro 1786). The insides of modern Huichol bowls are decorated with wax, beads, coins, grains of corn or yarns, sometimes representing the animals associated with the deity to whom the bowl is dedicated (Shelton 1992: 215, fig. 9.3). The sexual symbolism of bowls and arrows is obvious, and the identification of bowls with the womb and earth is explicit. These sexual connotations are entirely appropriate given that by far the greatest number of supplications are for agricultural and personal fertility and the health and well-being of family members.

Style of Enunciation

Prayer is offered both collectively and individually. The *mara'akame* officiates on important occasions, such as rituals connected with the round of agricultural ceremonies, those designed to promote harmonious relations between deities and between deities and people, as well as at personal rites of incorporation, crisis and dispatch. The recitation of prayers is not restricted to sacred sites. While temples, churches, shrines and ceremonial plazas often provide the stage for ritual events, prayers may also be said in domestic compounds and fields, or in the countryside.

Prayers made during agricultural ceremonies are part of a complex orchestration of ritual actions destined to gain a favourable resolution of natural phenomena that will benefit the whole community. They open with a fairly fixed formula through which the *mara'akame* attracts the attention of the deities to hear his entreaty. This may sometimes include references to their personal exploits during pre-creation times:

> They will find our faces here. Our sacred arrows are covered with flowers. Our arrows have flowered like the mountains. The sacred mountain is covered with white flowers; is covered with divine flowers, divine like the place where you stayed, my gods. See, my gods, between the fields everything has sprouted anew. See that between the mountains everything has sprouted anew. Your sacred plants have also sprouted. What has been born for you is for us life. See what we have brought and offer because we believe that until now it is the best that you have given us.
>
> My gods that exist in all the reaches, listen closely to our song. My gods that live in the place of the sacred deer, listen to our song in all the reaches. Our bowl has remained among you, my gods. And there it will remain as long as you arrange it. It will follow the darkness of my gods. It will follow the life of my gods. It will follow our darkness. It will follow our life. The gods that we find over there will drink the water that they need. In our bowl they will find the sacred flower, the flower of the gods, and we will call this place, the place of the water of the divine flowers. (Mata Torres 1974: 21)

The recitation will then remind the gods of the devotion they receive:

> My gods that live in all the reaches, we have made new arrows, we have made new offerings. We will take them to the place of the sacred eagles, we will take them to the luxuriant place, we will take them to the place that supports the staffs, we will take them to the place of the red clouds, we will take them to the place of songs. See my gods that which you have said, that which you have asked or commanded, we have always fulfilled. (Ibid.: 22)

Finally, the recitation requests favour:

> My gods, take our offerings in your hands and bless our descendants so that they can do the same as ourselves. Take in your hands our offerings and we will have no worries. Those of us who are here may perhaps soon have to leave. We will wash ourselves in the sacred waters, we will wash ourselves at the sacred places, we will wash ourselves in the place of the gods. (Ibid.: 24–25)

The community-based ceremonies include long dramatic recitations of ancestral histories recounting the creation and the events that predated the present world and on which the relationship between the living and the deities are based. The ***mara'akame*** usually elaborates on the central episodes of the narrative using his personal experience. Frequently he incorporates modern themes and examples into the recitation. The dramatic element is heightened by the use of dialogue in which the orator himself enters into conversation with different deities (cf. Preuss 1932: 450). These recitations may continue throughout the night, beginning after dark and lasting until sunrise, and may be repeated for up to five nights during the ceremony. The ***mara'akame*** is usually accompanied by two junior ***mara'akata***, seated at either side of him. They may repeat the few final lines of a recitation and also take over while the principal ***mara'akame*** takes a rest from time to time.

The *mara'akame* accompanies the Huichol throughout their lives. As Mata Torres (1980: 21) succinctly writes, 'he helps the mother so the baby will be born well; he baptizes it and initiates it into the mystery of the gods; he unites man and woman in marriage; he conducts the soul of the dead to its final abode'. In addition, he diagnoses and cures sickness and protects the individual from witchcraft. In all these roles he acts as the intermediary of the deities whose efficacy depends on the extent of his sacred knowledge and oratorical skills in addressing them.

Objectives of Prayer

Among the Huichol prayer can have at least eight closely related objectives:

(1) To maintain concord between the deities and prevent their potential mutual antagonism endangering their creation. Zingg was the first to note that Huichol deities could be divided between the pre-eminently female deities of the wet season period and the male solar-related deities associated with the dry season. In Huichol myth these categories are frequently in competition, occasioning great cataclysms that are thought to have been responsible for the destruction of former creations (Shelton 1990: 156–7). Huichol prayer and offerings venerate both categories of deities, and by appeasing their mutual jealousy and rivalry assure the harmonious bipartition of the agricultural year that is necessary for good crops:

> With the devotion that lights our souls, we deposit our offerings. Behold them my gods of the north, those of the south, those of the east and those of the West. Here is your candle, light of our lives. Here are the crosses, symbol of the paths. Here is the fruit obtained by the rain you sent us. Here are our faces and all the other offerings we bring you, without thinking where or when our story will end, without knowing what end Wirikuta will have, cradle of the deities, without knowing what the way will be like, so many times retravelled, without knowing what your attitude will be when everything is finished.
>
> We hope that you are never destroyed. We hope that your cradle will remain forever inviolate. We hope that our offerings will remain with you to the end of time. We hope that your crown will shine eternally with the same brilliance and that the memory of you will animate all who inhabit this world. (Mata Torres 1980: 73)

(2) Prayer is used to renew the contract between the Huichol and their deities and profess compliance with their mutual obligations. The existence of both the deities and the Huichol is dependent on the recognition of the reciprocal relations between them. In exchange for food and health, which the gods provide, the Huichol must,

in turn, sustain the deities with offerings. Their mutual existence is therefore dependent on reciprocal provision of sustenance:

> Life, my gods, that on which we depend and on which our ancestors depended, continues and will always continue for all those that descend from us. The candle, the same light, will continue century for century illuminating the path and the thought of each person and each community. From the sacred candle our life was born. My gods, you who decide our end, do not permit that I am extinguished, do not let me disappear. The arrow, sacred symbol, weapon of the gods and divine offering, see it today. Nobody but nobody has stained the honour that it represents. Nobody but nobody has made it suffer change through time. It exists as you left it. It has the same figures and is venerated following the custom of our ancestors. The cane of Nakawé, the greatest goddess, the mother of the rains, the queen of goodness and our grandmother, is in its place. We invoke her in the midst of our anguish, we invoke her in the midst of our solitude. The staff, the people's eternal symbol of power, the work of the gods that inhabit all the reaches, we respect and venerate. Staff of Tseriekame, of Tunuwame and of Marrakuarrí, consider the honour bestowed on you that has forever lasted to the present. Look to the above, towards the centre, towards below, towards the right and towards the left, the people applaud you, the people respect you. The sacred offerings are taken to the gods. Your mission is great and favourable to us, those with such brilliance, to whom we make our offerings. My gods, in you we place our lives, the life that budded from you. (Mata Torres 1974: 41)

(3) At baptism, prayer extends this fundamental contract by incorporating new-born children into Huichol society, thereby providing them with the protection of the deities. A prayer recited at a baptismal ceremony opens with the familiar reassurances, before presenting the new-born baby to the deities:

> My god, Tatei Haramara [Western Rain Mother], all my existing gods, see how everything you motivated, continues existing. Messenger of the gods, the message of rain, all the gods are attentive to that which you created and which today belongs to us and will never be extinguished. Your heart, be at peace, our elder brother, Ututawi, be at peace, our elder brothers, always sustain this which is our life. Do not worry about anything, my gods, everything will be done as you arranged, as you said. The Guardians of the gods, the Namakora, said thus. The customs will be the same at the end of time, our lives will be the same though all will be erased, though all will end. In the sacred arrow you will find that nothing has ended, that the death of some has in no way changed what you established. The sacred arrow will be lifted behind the mountain, at the foot of the sacred mountain. We implore our great grandfather gods, we implore Werrikua, the Sun, our great grandfather. You, my gods, be assured that everything will continue as it has until now. Our great grandfather Tseriekame, Witseteiwari, Turamukame, Kuyuaneneme and Türra-Teiwari, once again I am in your presence, I who mean nothing, I who am nobody. I, with your help, baptize this new being who comes to the world. I present him so that you receive him and wash him with the sacred

> waters. My gods, leave their places, they come to this place, so the new being that arrives is of our same heart. Wash him so that he remains clean and pure before your eyes. For us who are about to leave towards you, this child is like a plant that germinates. Keep in your memory the name that this new being takes while he lives, Warrié-temai-ürü-niuweme. My goddess, Tatei Yurianaka, protect him in your hand so that from now until the end you may converse and he will be found under your care. Look after his steps. May he follow in your footsteps. Here, I finish my words, here I retire, I who mean nothing, I who will soon return to the earth. I ask you, my gods, who rule in all the reaches, to you my gods who care for all the new born, to look after this new being, to watch him for life. Forgive my humble words that do not have so much knowledge as those of yours, my gods. Nevertheless, receive my heart, overflowing with happiness for allowing me to comply with my religion, for my own good and that of my people. (Mata Torres 1974: 63–4)

(4) Prayer provides a means of redress if the contract has been violated and one or other category fails to fulfil its obligations. The following fragment, part of a longer prayer, was said during an unfortunately unsuccessful ceremony to cure a sick child:

> Today we know how everything had a beginning, we see that among us someone was born. The sacred candle was with her. The offering was with her. But today it appears that she is going to be forsaken. Today it appears that the little flower is going to lose its colour. My gods, Urukate, do not forsake her. My gods who abide in the sacred mountain, do not scorn the sacred offerings. Do not blow out the candle of life. (Mata Torres 1980: 72)

Prayer permits confession and the purification of the individual so they can be reincorporated into the ideal community.

(5) Prayer, including offerings and devotional acts, provides a demonstration of devotion and acceptance of the contract that ties humans to the deities. Submission to the divine plan is frequently reiterated in Huichol prayer:

> From when we are born, from the first day of coming to the world, we have to serve with veneration and respect our gods of all the reaches. We have to please them because they will visit [guard?] our fate until everything in us will have finished. It is because of this that we have to be religious from the moment of birth, because we could lose our life before we are baptized, or simply, because this is how we have been taught from generation to generation. (Mata Torres 1974: 48)

(6) Prayer articulates and reproduces the cosmology on which the world is said to be held in equilibrium. It serves, therefore, to socialise the uninitiated into Huichol ideology (see Anguiano and Furst 1978):

> The first gods shaped Wirikuta, shaped our father of the centre and our mother, Nakawé. Here in this world, there is nothing for us which does not come from you. Watch over this world, then, which you shaped, and which you inhabit: watch that the peoples everywhere know to carry on a clean and happy life, without a moment of bitterness or weeping for anyone in the world. (Mata Torres 1980: 73)

Narratives recounting the creation story, the first peyote hunt and other rivalries between gods, the great flood, and the origin of agriculture and domestication of maize, to mention just a few, are annually recited at agricultural ceremonies. These long narratives have been recorded by Zingg and others and, for reasons of space, no examples will be given here. It is worth reiterating, however, that the act of reciting these narratives is a powerful invocation of the gods that is an essential means of preserving the world they created.

(7) Prayer opens up a two-way process of communication that enables the wishes and feelings of the deities to be communicated to the supplicant:

> May the greetings of my brothers be stronger and clearer than those that will greet you after my death. May my voice be extinguished in the world if I did not say the words which you my gods inspired me to say. May my existence be forgotten and forgotten my pilgrimages to the places you inhabit if I take a bad course in ascending to you. If your offerings were not put in good hands, let there be punishment for whoever did not know what to do. If with your candle the way to reality is not lighted, may the world we inhabit be covered with darkness. My gods, you our fathers, watch over all of this. (Mata Torres 1980: 73)

(8) Prayer frequently communicates compliance with continuing the work of creation began by the deities and in perfecting the world and all the relations that maintain it.

> Here we offer you our lives, that you in your glory may watch over this people which serves and worships you.... Permit the children, who represent the future of our race, to draw near to you, that the children may know you and feel you in their hearts, and thus become good fathers in the days to come, good bearers of this our religion which we cherish so much.... We wish, then, to obey, and that all may obey in the way those of the first generation obeyed, those of the second, those of the third, and those of the fourth generation which is the one we are living in now. (Mata Torres 1980: 73)

Prayers are made for practical ends. Whether these be for health, fertility, protection, guidance or to secure the necessary conditions for agricultural reproduction, prayer forms an important element of the quest for life. Prayer is an integral part of Huichol ritual whose object 'is to make the macrocosm abound in the objects of men's desires' (Hocart 1970b: 202).

Prayer and Revelation

In the non-sectarian Christian tradition, prayer is a communication from man to the deity. It is considered unidirectional and gives little countenance to even the remote possibility of provoking a personal response. The Christian distinction between prayer and its contestation implies a discontinuity between God and man. There is no such abyss separating the Huichol from their deities, who co-exist side by side and whose individual fates are mutually intertwined and interdependent. The Huichol do not believe, however, that their easy access to the deities is shared by non-Huichol. Mestizos have access only to the Christian Jesus Christ and the saints who, though they are in some communities becoming identified with Huichol deities, were traditionally regarded as a newer family of deities under the tutelage of the Huichol pantheon. Native myth recounts that because the mestizos were unable to comply with the instructions of the gods in carrying out the first-fruit ceremony, complex rituals were entrusted only to the Huichol, while simpler, but less efficacious ceremonies were devised for others (Zingg no date: 346). A myth collected by Zingg (ibid.: 324–5), describes how Kauyumarie, taking advantage of the Mexican people's former illiteracy, stealthily wrote and distributed letters to persuade them to worship Jesus Christ instead of the Huichol gods. Later, after being collected together, these letters formed the Bible. In the Huichol view, therefore, writing led Mexicans to a fundamentally erroneous understanding of the universe and humanity's place in it. The Huichol consider themselves to have a pastoral role in relation to other ethnic groups and practise their religion for the general good.

Huichol prayer not only allows the *mara'akame* to communicate with the gods but, through the intermediary of Kauyumarie, enables the gods to respond to the supplicant. This two-way communication is made possible by *iyári*, which enables the disciple to communicate with Kauyumarie through dreams and visions. *Híkuri*, peyote, the sacred plant of the Huichol, is conceived as the heart of Kauyumarie, which in pre-creation times grew in the hoof marks he left as he ran through the eastern desert (Wirikuta). Hence the path of the deities is sometimes metaphorically called the path of flowers. The Huichol communicate with their deities through *iyári*, an immaterial quality given to all at birth, but only activated among some through feats of physical endurance. *Iyári* permits the proper recitation of prayer and elaboration of offerings in the manner laid down by the ancestors. Prayer, therefore, as van Baal suggested to be the more general case, is dependent on a prior revelation of its application and use. In contrast, the deities communicate with man through the *iyári* (identified with peyote) of the deer god, Kauyumarie. The ingestion of peyote occasions an ontological shift that makes the supplicant receptive to the sacred message that is communicated, as in the first times, by images. These images, conveyed in dreams and visions, are the superior non-linguistic language of the sacred, a far more ancient and richer language whose purpose is to reveal the occult world of essences on which the phenomenal world and spoken language depend.

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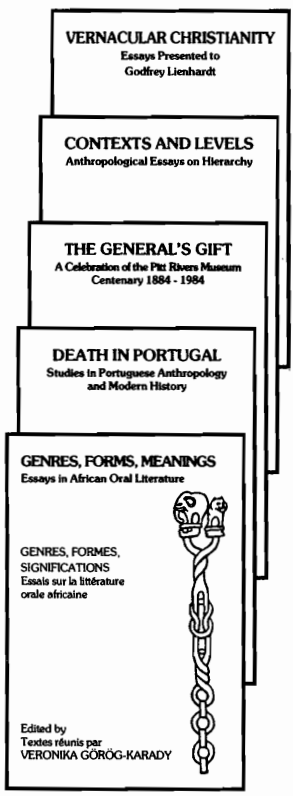

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