

## Christian-Indigenous Art in Sixteenth-Century New Spain: The Decades of Programmatic Syncretism

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The concept of syncretism seems adequate to understand a good part of Christian-Indigenous artworks as well as the cultural circumstance that propitiated them. In 16<sup>th</sup>-century New Spain two different religious traditions met. Christianity was meant to be dominant, but the missionaries never had the purpose of totally eradicating the religious culture of the Indians. Christian practices included some elements of the native religion, and some Christian concepts were expressed in terms of the native tradition. As every process of syncretism, the one that took place in New Spain was originated in a situation of conflict, and began with the destruction of some indigenous images and the persecution of their priests. Despite the fact that Christianity was imposed, as it is common to every process of syncretism, the imposition was moderated by the Humanist culture of the friars, and the practice of an intercultural dialogue that included the study of native religion and the massive spread of schools for the study of writing, singing, handicrafts, Latin in different levels of expertise and even philosophy. There was a basic asymmetry in the milieu of the evangelization, since the predominance of Christian religion and ideology was unquestionable. Such an asymmetry can be perceived in the artworks, when native features appear small in comparison with the Christian context. They even look insignificant or marginal. But the presence of such features re-signifies the whole and the matter of their size or marginal position becomes irrelevant.