

## MEXICAN SPIRITUALISM

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The literature contains casual, scattered references to spiritualism in Mexico and especially to spiritualistic curing<sup>1</sup> but, except for a couple of popular magazine articles (Mondragón), the present paper probably provides the first published glimpse of this extremely interesting socioreligious institution.

### Spiritualism and Spiritism

#### Differences and Similarities

Among us, spiritualism and spiritism are terms often used interchangeably. Such common usage is recognized by dictionaries, although some add that, technically, spiritualism is a sect, whereas spiritism is a study of the invisible. Articles by Rhine and Lodge respectively reflect this distinction; both appear under the heading of spiritualism, yet approach and content are very different. Rhine speaks of a religious sect, which involves treatment of disease, "counsel in a wide range of personal and practical affairs," as well as "clairvoyant knowledge of hidden or distant events." Lodge focuses on clairvoyance, lucidity, trance utterance, automatic writing, premonition, xenoglossy and psychometry. In short, Rhine treats of spiritualism, Lodge, of spiritism.

Although the Mexican public at large is not aware of it, a parallel distinction holds for the Spanish terms of espiritualismo and espiritismo, and this is recognized by knowledgeable informants, including spiritualistic mediums. The Tepito medium states (to CCG) that "the spiritualist loves only God, without knowing Him, while the spiritist seeks to learn of the hereafter," adding that the spiritualist cures illness caused, deliberately, by the spiritist. In the Xochimilco zone, the trance statement of a medium likewise associates spiritism with sorcery: "This is a spiritual house; here there is no deceit nor sorcery, no blackened candles and no doll" (that is, a figure used as a vehicle for sorcery). A third term often heard is espiritismo, but apparently this merely reflects the scanty academic preparation of many informants.

Mexican spiritualists and spiritists believe in the survival of the spirit after death; in the possibility of communicating with such a spirit through the individual known as a medium; in reincarnation; and in the healing powers of a spirit. Flowers, perfumes and "saturated" or blessed water are common to both groups, as are some details of vocabulary. Both apply the terms of "brother" and "sister" to fellow believers, mediums and spirits.

But differences are profound. Spiritism focuses on sessions held in the dark, with members of the group holding hands to form an unbroken circle; and on ectoplasm, apparitions, light and sound effects, levitation and spirit writing (Protocolos del IMIS). None of these characterizes spiritualism, whose emphasis is on trance utterance, in the course of which a spirit is believed to

speak through the mouth of the medium, having become incarnate in the latter, while the medium's own spirit remains to one side, connected to the body by a "filament." Through the medium, it is believed that a person may converse not only with the tutelary of the medium, but with an individual spirit of his own choice. In addition, divine revelation is believed to come through trance utterance, which is said to rest not on possession but on the medium's ability to transmit "irradiations." Finally, although spiritism has some religious implications, Mexican spiritualism is fundamentally a complex of religious beliefs and practices, to which the present study is devoted.

### Followers

Spiritism flourishes in Mexico, but I have little contact with its adherents, most of whom are highly sophisticated and well established socially, professionally, and politically (Protocolos del IMIS). Presumably it is they who buy the Spanish translations of the works of Allan Kardec and other European authors. These books--inexpensive and sometimes in pirated editions--seem to be published chiefly in Argentina but are sold in Mexico City book stalls.

In contrast, the followers of spiritualism come from a less glittering segment of the population, ranging from the illiterate mediums of the Laguna and Tehuantepec, through the domestic servant, the chauffeur, the day laborer and the beauty-parlor operator of Mexico City, to the Oaxacan school inspector. Practitioners and adherents are predominantly women, but men appear among both mediums and believers.

With outstanding exceptions, the devotees of spiritualism are persons whose schooling is scanty and who would read little, even if published material were available; the classic works of Allan Kardec are largely unknown to them. They also are persons whose economic situation is limited, if not precarious, and the cost of spiritualistic consultation is in keeping with their reduced resources. Generally, the client makes a voluntary offering; if there is a fixed charge, it is between 1.00 and 3.00 pesos. Many claim to seek spiritualistic treatment of disease because the cost of medical attention is prohibitive. There are occasional tales of commercial exploitation by spiritualists, but such cases appear exceptional.

By and large, spiritualism is associated with mestizo, not native peoples, and is primarily an urban phenomenon, particularly prominent in the low-income areas of large cities and in towns characterized by a sizable floating population or by disruptive contacts with modern commerce and industry. Accordingly, the followers are found chiefly among those whose cultural roots either are shallow or disturbed. To many such people, espiritualismo evidently provides greater emotional satisfaction than does Catholicism or, for that matter, one of the Protestant sects.

### Spiritualism

#### Historical Background

Mexican spiritualism apparently had its start in a cave near Contreras, a few miles southwest of Mexico City, September 1, 1866, when a Catholic priest named Roque Rojas went into a state of trance. This heretical achievement resulted in his withdrawal from the Church<sup>2</sup> and in his assumption of the name of

Padre Elías (Elijah).<sup>3</sup> The cave suggests an obvious tie with the Prophet Elijah and, according to tradition, the latter spoke through the mouth of the priest, during trance (Mondragón, 1961a). In any event, Roque Rojas, the priest, became identified with the Prophet Elijah or Elías and he, in turn, with the Holy Ghost. In fact, some informants declare flatly that the Padre Elías is the Holy Spirit. In the home of one family of believers, a vigil light is said to burn adjacent to his photograph, and a daily prayer in that household runs thus: "In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and my Father Elías, accompany us and fill us with blessings this day."

This fusion--or confusion--is not easily disentangled but presumably rests on divine revelation and is related to a belief that the days of the world are divided into three eras, or "times." The first, associated with God the Father, refers to the Old Testament; the second, associated with Christ, to the New Testament. We live in the third era, which is linked to the remaining member of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost. There is Biblical authority (Malachi 4:5) for the belief that Elijah will return to earth before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord." This promise apparently is regarded as fulfilled, with the identification of Roque Rojas with Elijah, and additional identification with the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the third era.

My informants are unaware of subsequent developments, but Mondragón (1961a) reports that, upon his death, Roque Rojas was succeeded by a young woman named Damiana Oviedo; in 1920, through revelation, she received instructions to prepare others to carry on the doctrine.

Obviously this has been done, and with some success, for spiritualistic centers are strewn from Torreón to Tehuantepec. Strangely enough, there seems to be no real over-all organization, although the Templo del mediodía, in the Nonoalco district of Mexico City, probably comes closest to heading the sect. One person calls it the "cathedral" of spiritualism, yet there are indications that its leadership is merely nominal. Unfortunately, I have not yet had opportunity to visit this temple and learn the views of its staff with respect to its authority. The Portales medium states that budding practitioners in Mexico City should go to the Templo del mediodía to have their powers tested, but she herself has not bothered with this formality and others either have not heard of it or they deny it. Many spiritualistic centers prepare new mediums, some of whom sally forth later to establish new centers; in this case, at least some notify the Templo del mediodía. But centers pop up like mushrooms after a rain and no informant has the slightest idea of the total. Comparatively few comply with the government requirement that, as religious institutions, they must register with the Secretaría de gobernación. There is not even an approximation to a federation.<sup>4</sup> Although an avowed goal of spiritualism is world unity for its doctrine, the group itself exhibits minimum internal unity. There are even hints of jealousy between some of the centers, and each one seems largely autonomous, with followers believing and operating in accord with the revelations received through its own mediums.

Mexican spiritualism has, of course, a strong messianic flavor and to see this in proper perspective requires more knowledge than I possess of the social and religious environment of the era, as well as more detailed information concerning Roque Rojas and his associates. Certainly these were unsettled times

for Mexico and the Church. Maximilian was in uneasy possession of the capital, with dissidents intermittently in control of nearby points. The anti-clerical measures of Juárez were only a few years in the past; Protestantism was infiltrating, and contemporary newspaper accounts lament the introduction of the Protestant Bible. Among other things, early Mexican spiritualism may have represented an effort to return to the simplicity of the ancient Christian faith, without the pomp and circumstance of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

Informants are quite unaware of connection with contemporary developments in the United States or elsewhere, and such broad relationships await definition. They regard spiritualism, as described in the present study, as Mexican in origin and distribution, although I should expect a considerable extension into the American Southwest, among those of Spanish speech. In fact, there are indirect reports of the institution in south Texas. However, elsewhere in Latin America, it appears to be spiritism rather than spiritualism which has become entrenched.

As an essentially Mexican institution, occasional nuances of nationalism may be detected in spiritualism. The Mexicans are the chosen people, and references in the revelations to the people of Israel are said to apply to them. Likewise in the revelations they are addressed affectionately as the "pueblo trinitario mariano," an expression which links them to the Trinity and the Virgin.

### Religious Content

Knowledgeable informants insist that spiritualism is not a religion and call it, euphemistically, a "spiritual doctrine." Nevertheless, it has some unmistakable earmarks of a sect. Spiritualism and spiritism alike are condemned by the Catholic Church,<sup>6</sup> yet many followers of spiritualism consider themselves Catholics, attenuate upon occasion and make religious vows in time of crisis. Presumably they are unable to participate in Church rites which must be preceded by confession, although at least one informant claims there is no barrier on this score. What happens, as a rule, is that spiritualistic believers tend to become lax in matters related to the Church but seldom break fully with it.

In the absence of written records, one can only guess at the spiritualistic doctrine of a century ago. Today, in a general sense, the basic creed is pretty uniform, but in detail there are almost as many variations as there are informants. This is expectable in any body of beliefs and practices which rests on oral tradition combined with recurrent revelation, which has no central control, and which is widely extended territorially among people of limited schooling.

Emphasis is on the Trinity, with the fused figure of the Padre Elías and the Prophet Elijah commonly substituted for the Holy Ghost. During the rite known as the cátedra, revelations from these "powers" (potencias) and from the Virgin Mary take place through the medium in trance. Upon occasion, the latter is referred to as a "human antenna" and, as already noted, revelations are attributed to transmission through "irradiation," not through direct possession.

Idolatry is condemned. The Christian saints are rejected and as intercessors are replaced by the spirits of the dead. However, as one example of deviation from what may be called orthodox viewpoint, the following is enlightening:

An elderly, illiterate Tepepan neighbor is crippled by rheumatism, yet manages to attend a spiritualistic center in nearby Xochimilco. She claims to solve transportation problems by calling on the tutelary spirit of the Xochimilco medium. The spirit obligingly communicates with Santiago or San Martín Caballero--both, incidentally, saints depicted on horseback--one of whom, in some obscure manner, makes it possible for her to reach her destination by public bus.

Reincarnation is a basic belief, with emphasis on retribution and progressive spiritual advancement. There is wide variation in detail. A well informed follower declares that "the spirit never dies. In this life one pays for what one has done in a previous existence." The Portales medium has heard that a spirit is reborn after a lapse of 33 years--that is, after a time which corresponds to the years of Christ on earth. Someone else speaks of a maximum of three reincarnations in a century, giving an average of 33 years.

The most elaborate system of reincarnation is reported (to CGG) by the Tepito medium. After death, the disembodied spirit wanders in space from one day to 1,000 years, until rebirth. There are seven reincarnations in all--the medium himself being in his seventh and final one--each under different circumstances. The world is divided into four groups: rich and poor, learned and ignorant; those poor in this life may expect wealth in the next. Invariably rebirth is in human, not animal form, and within the same family. In one existence, a given spirit may be the father; in the next, the mother. There is continuous spiritual evolution, and one who in this life has tried to love his fellow man and to be charitable toward him will, in the next rebirth, attain "greater spiritual elevation."

Communication with the spirits of the dead is through mediumistic trance and rests--unlike the revelations--on spirit possession of the medium. In the course of routine consultation with the tutelary spirit of the medium, the public seeks advice on health, domestic and even business problems.

In spite of emphasis on spiritual evolution, there is a strong vein of fatalism: "everything that happens to one has a reason," although it may not be immediately apparent. Ill health, unemployment and domestic turmoil are to be accepted with resignation, either as punishment for transgressions in a previous life, or as a means to spiritual advancement. Heaven and hell are on earth and are matters of conscience. One devout person claims to make no major decision--be it marriage, a business trip, or a real-estate purchase--without divine approval, apparently requested at the conclusion of catedra. As a consequence of such close cooperation with the supernatural, a feeling of harmony and even complacency results, for his undertakings enjoy divine sanction. Self interest is not entirely absent, and there is a feeling that, thanks to spiritualistic belief and practices, "all doors are opened" and all transactions proceed smoothly.

Religious doctrine is revealed and reiterated through the "irradiations" of the cátedra. These emphasize the teachings of Christ and enjoin the congregation to "seek light"; abandon the material for the spiritual; love and respect all fellow beings; spread the doctrine and, through it, establish world harmony and unity.

## Locale

The scene of spiritualistic meetings is a place variously called a centro (center), recinto (place, precinct), or templo (temple), but some reserve the latter term for a church.

Often the recinto forms part of the living quarters of the medium, although in one village near Torreón, a substantial, freestanding masonry room has been built exclusively for spiritualistic sessions. In the larger centers, where several mediums work, the chances are that the locale is devoted primarily to cult use. In Tehuantepec, in 1956, 2,000 pesos allegedly had been raised by public donation toward the construction of a new center, apparently on land owned by the medium.

Often the installation is improvised. The Portales medium holds consultations in what originally was a garage attached to her dwelling, and her cátedras take place in a neighbor's bedroom. For the latter occasions, a table and three chairs are covered with sheets, to provide the equivalent of an altar and seating space for the mediums, although only one is present. A Xochimilco center consists of a windowless room with earth floor, unplastered walls and homemade door; nevertheless, it boasts an elaborate, altarlike stepped structure.

What the layman would call the altar is designated by the initiated as the gradas (steps). It is terraced and ideally has seven levels, presumably representing the "seven steps to perfection." Covered with white cloth or paper, it accommodates flowers, burning incense, tapers; oil or paraffin vigil lights and other ritual paraphernalia. Other furnishings, even in the smallest center, include an armchair for the medium in trance, and three such chairs are common. Sometimes a pillow is hung on the wall above, to protect the head in case of convulsive movements during trance. In addition, there are chairs or benches for the public.

Despite usually austere surroundings, the restrained ornament in some centers has complex religious symbolism. A triangle containing an eye, with eye-lashes, is a popular motif and is explained (to CGG) by the Tepito medium as the Trinity, with the all-seeing eye of the Creator; this identification is rejected by another authority (Asociación de estudios, pp. 262-263), without offering an alternative interpretation.

Two centers in the Torreón area are decorated with photographs of the individuals whose spirits manifest themselves through the medium, and there are representations of Christ and the Virgin, as well as, in one recinto, photographs and testimonials of clients who have been cured of illness. Two centers (one, Mexico City; one, Papantla, Veracruz) are described as having no ornament other than a crucifix; in one recinto in Xochimilco, representations of the Padre Elías and Juárez hang cheek by jowl on the wall; and in the Tepito center, of Christ and the Padre Elías.

Some, but not all recintos are named: Temple of hope, Temple of noon, Temple of light, The second new life, Faith, Tears of Abraham.

## Personnel

A small, impoverished center may be operated by a medium alone, but generally there is also an aide, called columna (column), who functions as a factotum, passing "the oil, lotion and 'balsam'"; receiving contributions from clients; and helping arouse the medium from trance.

A larger recinto, where several mediums work, has a more elaborate organization, and any of the posts may be held by a qualified individual, irrespective of sex. The director is the guía (guide), who may or may not be a medium. The principal assistant, the Pedro (Peter), is the "foundation stone" (cf. Matthew 16:18), with the responsibility of "guiding the sheep, showing them their obligations and setting a good example." There are various columnas, said to have more exalted duties than their namesakes in the smaller institutions; unfortunately, I'm not clear concerning their obligations. The same holds for the guardian (guardian), who is mentioned by title alone. The official scribe, yclept the pluma de oro (gold pen), records the revelations of the cátedras. The more progressive centers are said to use tape recorders of late, and one is reputed to sell mimeographed copies of the texts.

In any recinto, large or small, the medium of trance is a key person, through whom contact with the spirit world is established and through whom divine revelations are transmitted. The Tepito medium describes (to CGG) a hierarchical ranking, applying the term of facultad to the medium who still is a novice. He calls the experienced practitioner a pedestal (pedestal) or jilguerillo (little linnet), saying that this status permits the individual to occupy one of the special chairs which are reserved for mediums. Incidentally, he refers to Roque Rojas as the first jilguerillo. The highest rank is that of ruiseñor (nightingale) and applies to a medium who has "taken the strength of the Universal ray," meaning one who has transmitted divine "irradiations." The linnet-nightingale nomenclature is difficult to explain in terms of Mexican origin; a thrush, called jilguerillo, is a popular song bird, but the nightingale is little known locally.

In keeping with the bewildering variations which characterize my data on spiritualism, the ranking just described is denied flatly by another informant, who regards facultad, jilguerillo and ruiseñor as synonymous, saying that all receive divine revelations. To add to the confusion, the Portales medium seems uncertain of the meaning of jilguerillo but regards ruiseñor as synonymous with God the Father. These terms are not mentioned by either Torreón or Tehuantepec mediums.

After several months of regular attendance at a center, there is a ceremony of initiation during which the individual is "given the marca" (brand) and his potential spiritualistic powers are determined. He may have the ability to see spirits (videncia and claravidencia) or to hear them; he may have "hands" to cure illness; or he may have other gifts. The nape is examined to determine if his "brain is open" (abierto el cerebro), for a medium of trance is said to have a tiny aperture which permits reception of spirit and divine communications. If a person is so-equipped anatomically, he may develop mediumship through study and practice. Some seek such powers, and one informant describes the Templo del mediodía as frequented by persons offering themselves, with "their faces to the heavens, asking God to bestow the gift."

Sometimes, through a personal revelation, an individual comes to realize his mediumistic powers or he first appreciates them after seeking spiritualistic treatment for illness. One medium describes her initiation as follows:

It is barely three years since I started this work. I was ill--trembling inside, frightened, fearful someone would push me in front of a bus. I went to doctor after doctor. They tested my blood and urine and metabolism; they gave me psychological [sic] tests, such as tapping my knee to see if I would kick my foot. They could find nothing, except that my breathing was double [the normal rate] and that sometimes I had fever.

I stopped menstruating and thought I was pregnant, so I went to a woman doctor [presumably a midwife] to be "cured." This cost my husband 300 pesos. Three times a catheter was used but not a spot of blood resulted, and I continued ill.

One day I went to call on a neighbor named Elena; she worked [as a medium] . . . She said, "What is the matter? Do you not know? I do" [explaining that the informant had mediumistic powers]. I did not want to believe her and said I should be no good; that I had no patience. I told her, "Get rid of it; I do not want it" [the power]. Daily, for three days, she "cleansed" me with flowers. Then I felt well. . .

Some days later, Elena became ill and so did I. I found her in bed. She said, "What you should do is start work. Sit down and put your hands this way" [one hand on either knee]. Later I tried to raise my hands but could not, nor move, nor speak, nor open my eyes.

The [spirit of the] little brother [who was to become her tutelary spirit] began to speak but could not be understood very well until the third day. Then the facultad [Elena] said, "Who are you? What do you want? Why have you come?" He answered that he had come to do good, to be charitable and to cure. Only later did he . . . give his name.

He told the facultad I should resume menstruation February 24, and so it was. He said he had been the cause of the cessation but now that he had been "born," my menstruation would return.

### Tutelary Spirits

Each medium relies largely on one tutelary spirit, although a Torreón practitioner claims four such "protectors." In reference and address, the spirit is called hermano or hermanito (brother, little brother), or its feminine equivalent.

The spirits are a motley assemblage. Flecha Roja and Zapocle, "of the Aztec tribe," as well as Tizon and Tenamantla, suggest ancient Mexico. María Matilde and Rebeca del Campo are of the "Piel roja tribe," with Rogelio Piel Roja presumably of the same persuasion. The latter is said to have presented himself first in Ixtepec, Oaxaca; unhappy because the medium was illiterate, he transferred to the Tehuantepec center.

Some familiar spirits are known only by first name: Filisteo, Sebastián, Rosita. Others are more fully identified: Rebeca Cervantes; Josefina González; Enrique G. de la Garza; the Bishop of Jalapa; Alfredo Echeverría, a Franciscan; Manuel Correa, a priest; Dr. Ricardo de Landa. In northern Mexico, the spirit of Pedro Jaramillo seems to dominate the scene; a famous faith healer in south Texas, at the turn of the century, his spirit continues to effect cures. Adrián

Carriel and Alán Cardel may be informants' approximations to Allan Kardec. An international note is provided by an anonymous Arab physician; a classical one by a Roman gladiator.

For difficult problems, particularly qualified spirits occasionally are summoned--for example, that of a former physician, to advise in case of a serious illness. Mexico's special spirit protectors are said to be Moctezuma, Cuauhtemoc, Hidalgo and Juárez.

### Rites

I am making a distinction between rituals and less formal sessions, which latter are reported later, as services rather than ceremonies.

An initiation rite, during which the novice is "given the marca" or brand, has been mentioned in connection with personnel and mediumship. At this time, not only are the individual's spiritualistic powers defined, but he is assigned to one of the tribes of Israel. Theoretically, he now is irrevocably bound to the specific congregation (hermandad; brotherhood, alliance) and recinto; one informant even says he should not attend cátedra elsewhere, although if taken ill while traveling, he may go to a nearby center for treatment.

Baptism and marriage rites seem to be limited to the larger recintos. Special ceremonies are held to celebrate the anniversary of a center, to dedicate land earmarked for a new one, and to bless a home. On Holy Thursday, the last supper is reenacted and communion administered to the congregation; however, in the Portales center, there is communion monthly following each cátedra and, apparently, following the blessing of a house.

Cátedra. The cátedra has been mentioned frequently above. It is difficult to find a precise translation but the term refers to teaching or classes, at a high academic level. In spiritualistic parlance, it applies to the ceremonies and to the revelations which, during those ceremonies, are transmitted through the medium, by "irradiation." The latter generally is attributed to Christ, but one recorded text has the equivalent of a group discussion between God the Father, God the Son, the Holy Spirit (in the guise of "the shepherd Elías") and the Virgin Mary.

There is no set day for the cátedra. The Tepito center holds the ceremony every Sunday morning and the first, ninth, thirteenth and twenty-first of each month, in the afternoon (CGG), and the same dates are reported from another recinto in Mexico City. At the Portales center, cátedra is the first of each month; and in some of the Xochimilco area, the first and twelfth are the preferred days. Curing and other individual consultations are suspended during cátedra.

I have detailed accounts of the two cátedras I attended, but space permits only a bare summary of one of them:

The medium, in white smock, seats herself in one of the three sheet-draped chairs which face the group and are to one side of the altar, likewise sheet-covered. She goes into trance and her spirit protector addresses the congregation briefly, then withdraws. Two members of the group sing,

"Father, Son and Holy Ghost," following which there is a sudden tenseness. Everyone kneels and most cross themselves.

The medium speaks anew, and from context it is understood that she now is receiving "irradiations" from Christ. Although sermons of two hours are reported for some recintos, this one lasts about half an hour. At the conclusion, the columna kneels before the medium, flings open her arms, and with a great display of emotion, gives "thanks, infinite thanks," for the recovery of her son, earlier in the week, from a "spiritual" appendectomy.

With deep sighs, the medium emerges from the trance, claiming to feel "terribly," and adds, "I felt as though I passed through the roof and that you were very, very small. And I saw a tremendous light. I tried to listen, because I, too, should hear" [the sermon]. She drinks from a glass of water which sits on the otherwise vacant, sheet-covered chair on her right.

The columna removes from the altar a plastic dish with store cookies; each person receives one and then is given a small glass containing a couple of tablespoons of grape juice, which likewise has been on the altar, in uncorked bottles. The columna tells me this is communion and announces to the group that she also has placed water on the altar, in case anyone needs it. This sanctified or "saturated" water is the "balsam" which is used for curing and general well being.

The above outline gives no idea of the emotional atmosphere. At another cátedra in the same center, a couple of months later, the tension is such that of the thirteen adults present only three do not weep: the lone man of the group, my housekeeper, and I. One woman breaks into loud sobs, moves forward and kneels at the feet of the medium, to receive words of consolation transmitted from Christ. Throughout the session, the shoulders of the young woman in front of me twitch nervously and another woman, said to be a visiting medium, goes into trance and has to be aroused. In fact, the tutelary of the presiding medium returns to the scene to expel the spirit which has possessed the guest.

Delivery is fluent and vocabulary well above average, although the medium certainly is of limited scholastic background. A recorded cátedra from another Mexico City center is extremely redundant and obscure, with a heavy sprinkling of Biblical phrases, combined with a peculiar grammatical construction, which uses the second person singular and plural in combination. Certainly the message must be incomprehensible to most of the congregation. Another text from the same recinto is far less involved in presentation, as is that of a published collection of fifteen from a center in Tampico (Asociación de estudios). The conclusion is that literary style varies widely, even within the same recinto.

The religious content of the cátedras has been noted previously. The Tampico texts emphasize, as do the other revelations, the teachings of Christ but, at the same time, they present some quite distinct viewpoints and include observations on an extraordinary variety of themes: pregnancy, evolution, culture history, Atlantis, reincarnation, the solar system, universal laws and international politics. Vocabulary is somewhat specialized and there is a dash of the zodiac and of the doctrine of Karma. Data supplementary to Biblical facts are provided: for example, the Essenes figure prominently; Joseph dies when Christ is ten years old; Judas is not ill-intentioned and does not expect his treachery to lead to disaster.

At the conclusion of the revelation, members of the congregation sometimes participate. At the session mentioned above, the columna gives special thanks for the recovery of her son and a weeping woman receives personal consolation. Sometimes one of the group describes a vision or requests advice or instructions. Several of the Tampico cátedras are followed by a question-and-answer period, during which interested persons ask for clarification of specific points.

### Services

Followers look to the spiritualistic center for a variety of services, and most mediums give individual consultations daily, except Saturday.. Included are the following:

"Giving light" and "communicating." A spirit (ser) remains in darkness if it is not "given light"; apparently this is not intended as a figure of speech, for a ser must manifest itself through a medium in order to receive "light."

At the Portales center, some time every Monday is devoted to "giving light," and this is a daily endeavor throughout November. One spirit after another presents itself and, speaking through the medium in trance, announces its Christian name. The columna, who stands in front of the medium, says rapidly to each, "Light and more light for your road, brother" (or sister); thereupon the ser withdraws unless someone present is interested in speaking with him. To summon a specific spirit, one addresses one of the throng of seres, saying, "For the sake of kindness (caridad), brother, will you do me the favor of calling Fulano?" The spirit so cited "may or may not come."

Dark spirits (seres oscuros) sometimes appear, using foul language and causing physical reactions so violent as to injure the medium. The latter accepts these spirits as a matter of "charity," for through such appearances they have opportunity to "evolve."

Communication with a recently disembodied spirit is difficult and one must wait until some time following death; some say half a year. Moreover, the spirit must receive "light" regularly for perhaps months, before any approximation to conversation is possible. Seres with little "light" are scarcely audible; those with sufficient "light" present themselves "laughing and happy." A certain widow confers almost every Monday with the spirit of her husband, receiving advice concerning family property and the control of her stepchildren; now, gratifyingly, he urges that she remarry.

A special problem--such as the location of a lost object--may require another kind of "communication." Thus when I request assistance in finding a mislaid purse, the hermanito asks my address and, in a sort of reverse trance, leaves the medium; proceeds to my house for an on-the-spot search; returns, repossesses the medium; and delivers his opinion.

Furthermore, it is possible to summon the spirit of a living person for consultation, most easily accomplished when that individual is asleep. In this type of "communication," the theory seems to be that the spirit is summoned and enters the body of the client, while the latter's own spirit remains to one

side, just as does that of the medium during possession by the tutelary spirit. Through this double possession, the tutelary is able to converse with the spirit which has become disengaged from the body it normally occupies and installed for the time being in that of the client.

"Cleansing." The public may go to a center to be "cleansed" of evil influences resulting from "envy and ill will." Headache, vague discomfort, accidents, inability to make ends meet--are all attributed to sal (salt), which is synonymous with bad luck. "Salt" is removed by reciting prayers, while whipping the client briskly with a spray of herbs, flowers, or young branches of the pepper tree (Schinus molle L.). A dwelling likewise is "cleansed" by "sweeping" the walls and floors with sprays of plants.

Healing. A great many people go to the spiritualist for treatment of disease, without sharing the religious beliefs of the cult and without attending catedra or other rites.

The Tepito medium sagely remarks (to CGG) that "there are two kinds of illnesses, organic and spiritual; the first are cured by the doctors but the others need spiritual approach." This distinction corresponds pretty closely to our own between organic and psychosomatic afflictions. Perhaps because the psychosomatic ailments are considered the particular province of the spiritualist, they are mentioned more frequently than are matter of fact, organic illnesses. Nevertheless, in urban areas, cancer, tuberculosis, ulcers, kidney stones, heart lesions, appendicitis and allergies figure among the diagnoses.

More frequently, illness is attributed to possession by "perverse and ill-intentioned" spirits, who are responsible for mental disturbances, epileptic and other attacks, as well as a variety of ill-defined ailments. Sorcery and maledictions are recognized and spiritists held responsible for illness from which the victim is bound to die within a specified time. Sorcery is the most popular diagnosis in relatively unsophisticated areas, such as the small towns near Xochimilco. There a skin eruption, diagnosed medically as allergy, is said to result from sorcery, "owing to envy." A bad burn, the consequence of overturning a container with boiling water, also is attributed to sorcery, and the latter diagnosis is a foregone conclusion if, irrespective of symptoms, there is a remote hint of sexual jealousy. Witchcraft is not limited to persons, for a new oven which does not heat uniformly is declared bewitched, and the medium in trance, with the aid of the men of the family, removes an enormous (spiritual and invisible) serpent from it. But even in a low-income area of downtown Mexico City, informants declare, one after the other, that only the spiritualist can cure sorcery and recommend that practitioner for folk ailments such as air (aire), fright (espanto) and evil eye (mal de ojo). Similarly, in Tehuantepec spiritualistic diagnosis conforms to local patterns, and some infirmities are attributed to tristeza, or sadness, which takes many forms and is believed to come from sorrow, embarrassment, or other emotional affliction.

The curing of any illness is said to be largely a matter of faith. Prayers are murmured while the patient is "cleansed" as described above and while his head and body either are pressed or brushed lightly with hands moistened with cologne, perfumed "lotion" or water, all of which have been blessed or "saturated." Consecrated cologne is called "essence"; consecrated water, "balsam."

This equivalent of holy water is available in most spiritualistic centers; at the entrance of one is a large pottery jar with balsam; in another, it is stored in three clay pots on the floor in front of the altar. Some add sweet basil and sugar to the water. Approximating a panacea, balsam may be drunk or applied externally. Cologne and "lotion" also are multi-purpose home remedies, useful in treating bruises and in reviving an unconscious person; slapped on the nape of a child's neck, they assist him in school examinations. The Tepito medium reports (to CGG) that wine blessed on Holy Thursday is an infallible cure for all ailments and adds, but with no detail, that his tutelary spirit, the hermano Filisteo, relies heavily on oil for curing.

Folk preparations are not disdained. For "air in the ear," the hermanito instructs me to drink rue tea with chocolate, and to place two sprays of rue, in the form of a cross, under my pillow for nine nights. A brew of corn silk, manzanita berries and paletaria is prescribed for rheumatism. From a spiritualistic center in Villa Cardel a staggering assortment of home remedies is recommended for a single treatment, the same day. One lot of 22 different items is to be boiled together and the resulting water used for a bath; another, of five ingredients, is to be boiled and the liquid rubbed on the body; nine more items are boiled to produce a liquid which is to be applied to the chest as a hot compress; finally, nine other items are to be prepared as a tea. Patent medicines are prescribed at some spiritualistic centers and dietary restrictions occasionally are imposed; one client is told she may eat anything except chili and a certain variety of bean.

Sorcery is treated with the inevitable "cleansing," but sprays of medicinal herbs or of flowers seem more popular than do young pepper branches. An unbroken egg commonly is held in the medium's hand, along with the sprays. Once used, the latter sometimes are shaken over coals on which copal and incense are burning.

To dislodge a spirit which has taken possession of the patient, "lotion" is rubbed on the nape; the medium's hands, moistened with "lotion," press the body, to an accompaniment of prayers and perhaps even chants. Sometimes the offending spirit is removed through exhortation and through insistence that it give its name. A persistent case which does not respond to such treatment may require extraction through spiritual surgery.

Such surgery--which involves no physical contact with the body of the patient and which may be performed by remote control, even in a distant town--is reported specifically for heart lesions, appendicitis and for witchcraft which is disguised as a burn or which takes the form of intestinal cancer. Usually the patient is prepared for such surgery by drinking balsam in quantity and by having "lotion" applied. Spiritual hypodermic injections also are reported.

Miscellaneous services. The advice and moral support of the hermano, through the medium, help one to face and solve a great variety of personal problems: alcoholism, domestic rifts, a wandering spouse, disposition of a runaway child, support of a family abandoned by the husband, location of lost objects, settlement of land titles, unemployment. No problem is too large and none too small to receive consideration and, in one instance, the hermano

obligingly administers, by remote control, a spiritual hypodermic injection to an ailing family pet.

### Summary and Appraisal

This study sketches the outlines of Mexican spiritualism, a religious sect which apparently began close to a century ago and which is a fusion of elements from spiritism, Catholicism, and Protestantism, plus some whose origin is less clear and perhaps should be sought in theosophical and Rosicrucian sources and in early Christian heresies. In addition, local folk medicine and sorcery have contributed generously.

Spiritualism appears a fluid institution whose configuration varies with the culture of the individual and of the local area. This flexibility is manifest in healing, for diagnoses and, to a lesser extent remedies, blend chameleon-like with the cultural environment. At comparatively sophisticated horizons, infirmities recognized by Western medicine are mentioned, but closer to the folk level spirit possession and sorcery dominate the scene.

The religious aspects also vary and, although the general features are clear, there are marked personal and local differences. The doctrine derives from the Bible and Christian teachings, supplemented and interpreted by divine revelations transmitted through the medium in trance. Language tends to be abstruse and incomprehensible to an unlettered person, a situation which makes for major differences in beliefs between a semi-literate follower and one whose scholastic preparation enables him to understand the revelation. Such differences in creed are reinforced by the absence of any systematic codification of doctrine and effective central administration.

To all believers, Mexican spiritualism provides a warm, personal religious experience based on (a) individual communication with the tutelary spirit of the medium and (b) divine revelation, likewise through the medium. To followers, it means the comfort of a personal intercessor in the supernatural world, in the form of the tutelary spirit, with whom the individual is able to sustain a relatively chummy question-and-answer exchange. This approximation to personal contact with the supernatural presumably offers more satisfaction than does supplication through prayer addressed directly or through a saint, for prayer brings no immediate reply. The difference may be likened to that between telegraphic and telephonic communication: with the latter, the answer is forthcoming at once. Probably to most believers the tutelary of the medium is the tower of strength. One woman says, "Thanks to the hermanito, I can face any problem and any crisis," but adds with wry humor, "The only difficulty is that one problem follows the other."

A more sophisticated devotee does not emphasize rapport with the spirit protector but thinks in terms of submission to and harmony with divine will. He combines a somewhat fatalistic attitude with the practice of directly requesting divine guidance when faced with a major decision. The outlook is quite different. Nevertheless, either attitude, when combined with what must be a pretty complete purging of emotional tensions during the cátedra ceremony, results in a feeling of personal confidence and security--which, in this day and age, is not a little. For its followers, Mexican spiritualism seems to satisfy

a need which is very real among those of the modest social sector where it finds its chief acceptance.

#### ENDNOTES

1. For example, Redfield, 1930, p. 168 and 1941, pp. 151, 244, 312, 326; Madsen, p. 56; Lewis, 1959, pp. 158-160 and 1961, pp. 130, 401, 473.  
In 1953, in Torreón, Coahuila, I recorded material on folk medicine, including spiritualistic curing. In 1957, a monograph based on this information was prepared and accepted by the University of Texas press, but publication has been delayed, awaiting clearance from Mexico's Ministry of Health. Further data on spiritualistic curing were collected incidental to field study in Villa Cardel, Veracruz (1954) and Tehuantepec, Oaxaca (1956). In the latter area, Catalina Garate de García (cited as: CGG) and I worked jointly. Finally, during a decade of residence in Tepepan, near Xochimilco, D.F., such data as came to my attention were recorded.  
The present study is preliminary and results from the chance discovery, in the fall of 1961, that a Tepepan neighbor is an ardent devotee. Tepepan has no practicing spiritualist and interested persons go to Mexico City or to one of the three spiritualistic centers in Xochimilco. My neighbor amiably has permitted me to accompany her to the center she regularly attends, in the Portales district of Mexico City. There I had a number of "consultations," was able to witness the "giving of light" to the spirits of the dead, and twice to participate in the rite called cátedra. These experiences provide a useful background for the present paper, but much of the information comes from observations made in five other spiritualistic centers, plus data from a good many informants, scattered throughout Mexico.  
These informants include four mediums (two, interviewed by CGG), a columna and several knowledgeable followers who provide data for the historical and religious background. Most informants, however, are clients who attend a spiritualistic center in the hope of solving health or other personal problems. Vague concerning both history and religious concepts, they provide insight into the functions of spiritualism.  
Most of the material is from my field notes, but I am enormously indebted to Mrs. García, mentioned above. She has made available important information she collected in 1956 from a medium in the Tepito district of Mexico City; these data are cited in the present tense, although the informant died three years ago. Grateful acknowledgment also is due Aurelia Contreras, my housekeeper for many years, for assistance in collecting material. Finally, I should like to express thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Juan Humberto Carreón, Dr. Paul Murray and Dr. Felipe Pardini, S.J.
2. It may be difficult to determine if the Church took formal action against him. In 1866, Mexico was in turmoil. Newspaper files are incomplete, and from the tenor of news items, it seems unlikely that the heresy in question would have been printed. Ecclesiastical records from this time appear to have remained in the hands of the Church, but archives devoted to heresy would be kept in a secret file, available only by special permission from the archbishop. Accordingly, at the moment, I am not able to document the oral tradition reported above. The Tepito medium mentions (to CGG) a biography of Roque Rojas, but without details, identification is difficult.
3. A photograph of the Padre Elías shows a man evidently of European antecedents, perhaps 45 or 50 years old. He is bald, with a strong, yet sensitive

face. He wears a dark suit and a string tie; his right hand, which rests on a table, holds a small cross.

4. The Federación espírita mexicana is a spiritist group.
5. Dr. Remy Bastien suggests that some of the beliefs may trace back to the early Christian heresies.
6. As early as 1872, the bishop of Querétaro complained of the "superstitious practices" of spiritism (Vera 1:711).

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