Thesis Approved

By

Edward P.J. Corbett  Major Advisor

A.C. Harrington, Jr.  Dean
THE MEXICAN RELIGION OF D. H. LAWRENCE:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELIGION
CREATED BY D. H. LAWRENCE
IN THE PLUMED SERPENT

BY

WILLIAM C. JONES

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CHAPTER I

D. H. LAWRENCE AND CHRISTIANITY

The Plumed Serpent, D. H. Lawrence's novel based on his experiences in old and New Mexico, occupies a unique place of importance in the understanding of D. H. Lawrence's religious thought. Religion, it is true, is a recurrent topic in the works of Lawrence. He hinted at his theological beliefs in other novels, and he tried to partially explain them in many of his essays and reviews; but only in The Plumed Serpent did he fully formulate his theology and give it dogmatic and ritualistic expression. Here, Lawrence created a religion, replete with symbols and gods, and offered it as a serious solution to the theological problems of Mexico.

This thesis will attempt an analysis of the religion of The Plumed Serpent, and through this analysis will show both what the theology of D. H. Lawrence was when he wrote The Plumed Serpent and how much of this
religion is reflected in his later works. But since the religion of The Plumed Serpent is offered as a substitute for Mexican Catholicism and since much of Lawrence's theology grew out of his rebellion against Christianity, it is first necessary to see why Lawrence broke with the Christian tradition in which he was raised before an investigation of The Plumed Serpent can be undertaken.

Lawrence was reared in a tradition of Biblical, Congregationalist Protestantism,¹ a tradition from which he never completely succeeded in escaping. "I was brought up on the Bible," he wrote in his introduction to Frederick Carter's Dragon of the Apocalypse," and seem to have it in my bones."² One has only to read Lawrence to see how deeply Christianity was entrenched in his "bones." His writing is shot through with Biblical imagery: his essay "Nathaniel Hawthorne and the


Scarlet Letter" attempts a reinterpretation of the Adam and Eve story; Lilly, a character in Aaron's Rod, demands that Aaron conduct a search for the Holy Ghost; The Man Who Died deals with Christ awakening after the Crucifixion--the examples are almost endless.

But Christianity played a more important part in Lawrence's religious Weltanschauung than merely that of providing him with symbols for its artistic expression. Although he rejected his boyhood faith even before he wrote Sons and Lovers, he never rejected all of its theological precepts. Instead, he attempted to reinterpret Christianity, to remove from it what he considered its false principles and to rejuvenate what he felt was once meaningful but had long since ossified. As this paper will demonstrate, his end result was not a form of Christianity, but it was, he believed, a religion which

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incorporated the most meaningful aspects of the Christian faith.

Much of the difficulty in understanding Lawrence's exact theological position arises from his peculiar position in relation to Christianity. Lawrence did not look upon himself as a man who had "lost" his Christian faith; he believed he had transcended its narrow confines. He assumed, thus, the role of a prophet, of one who saw more deeply and clearly the true nature of God than the orthodox Christian. And, because of his assumption of this role, he made free use of Biblical imagery and Christian theology to explain his personal vision of God.

The theological confines which Lawrence felt he transcended were more narrow than Christianity, however. Christianity, for Lawrence, actually meant the Protestant Congregationalism which he had been exposed to as a boy in Eastwood. And, when Lawrence made sweeping generalizations about Christians, he actually was referring to a comparatively limited number of Protestant Christians, as can be seen from this excerpt from his essay "We Need One Another":
"Alone I did it!" is the proud assertion of the gentleman who attains Nirvana. And "Alone I did it!" says the Christian whose soul is saved. They are the religions of overweening individualism, resulting, of course, in our disastrous modern egoism of the individual. Marriage, which on earth is a sacrament, is dissolved by the decree absolute of death. In heaven there is no giving and taking in marriage. The soul in heaven is supremely individual, absolved from every relationship except that with the Most High. In heaven there is neither marriage nor love, nor friendship nor fatherhood nor motherhood, nor sister nor brother nor cousin; there is just me, in my perfected isolation, placed in perfect relation to the Supreme, the Most High.  

Here, there is no understanding of the Christian tradition of the Mystical Body or that of the Communion of Saints. Instead, the Christian is an isolated member of the "Elect," attaining heaven in spite of his brethren rather than through them, and severing all connection with them as soon as possible after death. And, when Lawrence tried to create characters who were Roman Catholic, the limitations of his theology became even more evident. In *The Plumed Serpent*, he has Don Ramon, a supposedly well-educated Catholic, saying to his sons:  

You had better go back to your school in America, to learn to be business men. You had better say

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6 McDonald, p. 188.
to everybody: Oh, no! we have no father! Our mother died, but we never had a father. We are children of an immaculate conception. . . .

To confuse the Immaculate Conception with the Virgin Birth is not only bad Catholic theology; it is an indication of ignorance of one of the basic dogmas of Catholic theology.

It is not difficult to find fault with Lawrence's understanding of Catholic dogma, but to do so and conclude that his criticisms against Christianity were merely the result of ignorance is to miss the point. There may be dogmas in Christian theology that Lawrence would have agreed with if he had been aware of their existence, but his agreement would not have lessened his dissatisfaction with both modern Protestantism and modern Catholicism. Lawrence had little interest in the latent theological truths of Christianity. Christianity, for him, was a movement that was to be judged in terms of its effects. Thus, Christian theology may have contained

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7 D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 390. (All future references to *The Plumed Serpent* will refer to this edition, and will be annotated by a reference to chapter and page number in parenthesis immediately following the quotation or citation.)
the prophetic vision in which he believed, but, since Christianity had not put it into practice, Christianity had failed. This was his conviction when he wrote *The Plumed Serpent*, and this was his conviction a few days before he died, when he wrote his final condemnation of modern Christianity in his review of Eric Gill's *Art Nonsense and Other Essays*:

For belief, Mr. Gill turns to the Catholic Church. Well, it is a great institution, and we all like to feel romantic about it. But the Catholic Church needs to be born again, quite as badly as the Protestant. I cannot feel there is much more belief in God in Naples or Barcelona, than there is in Liverpool or Leeds. Yet they are truly Catholic cities. No, the Catholic Church has fallen into the same disaster as the Protestant: of preaching a *moral* God, instead of Almighty God, the God of strength and glory and might and wisdom: a "good" God, instead of a vital and magnificent God. And we no longer any of us *really* believe in an exclusively "good" God. The Catholic Church in the cities is as dead as the Protestant Church.

As can be seen from the above quotation, Lawrence sought a religion that "worked"; that is, he sought a religion that brought man into a vital, living relationship with a "magnificent God." And, because Christianity failed to give him or the world with which he came in contact this relationship, he felt that the Christian

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8McDonald, p. 396.
religion had lost its utility. It is doubtful, however, whether Christianity in any stage of its development could have satisfied Lawrence's need for a "living relationship." The "magnificent God" which Lawrence sought was not the Christ of the New Testament, nor was He the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He was, rather, a God who was quite different from the God of Revelation and the Hebraic tradition.

The Christian God is an absolute God, and Lawrence had little patience with absolutes. "I don't believe in any dazzling revelation, or in any supreme Word," wrote Lawrence in "Why the Novel Matters":

We should ask for no absolutes, or absolute. Once and for ever, let us have done with the ugly imperialism of any absolute. There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute.\(^9\)

God, for D. H. Lawrence, was merely a term used to signify many gods. Since there were no absolutes, there could be no one God. In Fantasia of the Unconscious, Lawrence reaffirmed this, and pointed out that "life

\(^{9}\)McDonald, p. 537.
is always individual, and therefore never controlled by one law, one God."\textsuperscript{10}

And, just as Lawrence's God was not absolute, neither was He transcendent. Lilly, the Lawrentian spokesman in \textit{Aaron's Rod}, tells Aaron: "There's no goal outside you. No God, whom you can get to and rest in."\textsuperscript{11} Lawrence's God is an immanent God; He is never a Being who is essentially other, as is the God of the Scriptures. He is in living man, or rather, He is what is most deeply living in man. "In the very darkest continent of the body there is God," Lawrence wrote in "The Novel and the Feelings,"

and from Him issue the first dark rays of our feeling, wordless, and utterly previous to words: the innermost rays, the first messengers, the primeval, honourable beasts of our being, whose voice echoes wordless and for ever wordless down the darkest avenue of the soul, but full of potent speech.\textsuperscript{12}

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\textsuperscript{10} D. H. Lawrence, \textit{Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious} (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 163. \textit{Fantasia of the Unconscious} was originally published separately by Thomas Seltzer in 1922.

\textsuperscript{11} Lawrence, \textit{Aaron's Rod}, p. 374.

\textsuperscript{12} McDonald, pp. 161-62.
\end{flushright}
For God is not only in man, He is in all of creation. For Lawrence, the sun, trees, his cow, growing corn—all that was alive had its individual soul, its innate godhead.13

It is this individual, immanent God that Lawrence wanted man to enter into a vital relationship with, and it was in terms of this God that Lawrence judged and condemned Christianity. However, Christianity’s failure to preach the magnificent God was only half of Lawrence’s charge against it. As has been shown, the God of Christianity is not Lawrence’s godhead. And, because He is not, Lawrence felt that the Christian God only aided in divorcing man from the living religious relationship.

Lawrence felt that the Christ of Christianity was a moral God, a God who demanded that men deny their physical existence in this world and strive for an eternal, spiritual existence in the next. "The thing Jesus was trying to do," Lawrence wrote in his preface to The Grand Inquisitor, "was to supplant physical emotion

13 One of the best statements of this is Lawrence’s essay "Pan in America," (McDonald, pp. 21-31.).
by moral emotion. So that earthly bread becomes, in a sense, immoral. "14 And any God who would attempt this was, for him, anathema. "The earthly bread," that is, physical life, creation, was the domain of Lawrence's magnificent God. And, as soon as man abstracted himself from the "earthly bread" and sought his happiness in the hereafter, he denied himself the possibility of any meaningful relationship with God. Thus, in his review of The Dragon of the Apocalypse, Lawrence stated that:

By the time of Jesus, men . . . put up the grand declaration that life was one long misery and you couldn't expect your future till you got to Heaven; that is, till after you were dead. This was accepted by all men, and has been the creed till our day, Buddha and Jesus alike. It has provided us with a vast amount of thought forms, and has landed us in a sort of living death. 15

Christ and his heaven were not only false concepts for Lawrence; they were insurmountable obstacles between man and his God.

14Ibid., p. 288.

15Ibid., pp. 161-62.

16"Salvation," he wrote a few months before his death, "seems incomprehensible to me. . . . 'Being saved' seems to me just jargon, the jargon of self-conceit." (Harry T. Moore (ed.), Sex, Literature and Censorship [New York: Twayne, 1953], p. 108.)
The Christian man was, to Lawrence, a spiritually degenerated man--man out of living contact with his deity. And, as long as he remained Christian, he would remain spiritually estranged. However, Lawrence did not blame Christianity for modern man's spiritual impoverishment. Christianity was an effect, rather than a cause, of the loss of the living relationship; it was only the theological reflection of an earlier estrangement on man's part from the living God. Lawrence, like the Christian, believed that man had once been at one with his Creator, but that, at some point in his history, he started to make an abstraction of God and brought about his present spiritual death.

In *David*, a play dealing with the Biblical conflict between Saul and David during the last days of Saul's reign, Lawrence attempted to portray the beginnings of man's estrangement, and to prophesy some of its effects. Here, Saul represents man before his fall: his God is within him and is One with him. Thus, when Samuel accuses Saul of breaking the Lord's commandment, he cries out:

> Lo, I have sinned, and lost myself. I have been mine own undoing. But I turn again to the Innermost,
where the flame is, and the wings are throbbing. Hear me, take me back! Brush me again with the wings of life, breathe on me with the breath of thy desire, come unto me, and be with me, and dwell in me.\(^7\)

For David, however, God is essentially exterior; He is not to be reached by turning "again to the Innermost," but by intellectual seeking. Samuel summarizes the difference between the two gods when he tells David:

The Lord is all things. And Saul hath seen a tall and rushing flame and hath gone mad, for the flame rushed over him. Thou seest thy God in thine own likeness, afar off, or as a brother beyond thee, who fulfills thy desire. Saul yearneth for the flame: thou for thy to-morrow's glory. The God of Saul hath no face. But thou wilt bargain with thy God.\(^8\)

And, because David does make his God other than himself, he becomes the villain of the play and of history. Saul prophesies that, because of David,

the world shall be Godless. There shall no God walk on the mountains, no whirlwind shall stir like a heart in the deeps of the blue firmament. And God shall be gone from the world. Only men there shall be, in myriads, like locusts, clicking and grating upon one another, and crawling over one another. The smell of them shall be as smoke,


\(^8\) Ibid., p. 61.
but it shall rise up into the air without finding the nostrils of God. For God shall be gone! gone! gone!¹⁹

David is a good summary of Lawrence's relationship with the religious tradition of western man. Lawrence, like his Saul, was diametrically opposed to David, a Biblical figure of Christ and a Lawrentian figure of modern Christian man, because David meant the death of the magnificent God. And yet, Lawrence fiercely believed in Saul's Jehovah; man's fall from grace, from the living relationship between him and his Creator, was not Jehovah's fault: it was David's. God was there for David, just as he was present for modern man; but neither David nor the Christian knows how to find him. Man, according to Lawrence, had lost the true God; and Lawrence felt it was his duty to bring man back into a living relationship with Him.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 50.
CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF MEXICO

It is difficult to ascertain just what D. H. Lawrence expected the Mexican people to be like before he arrived in Mexico, but, whatever he expected, The Plumed Serpent reveals a profound disappointment with the Mexican people. The novel opens with a vivid description of a bloody bullfight, crudely executed before a sullen crowd of tawdry, a terre Mexican citizens. The bullfight sickens Kate Leslie, the novel's European heroine, but the crowd enjoys the show immensely. This, Lawrence infers, is how the Mexican people are: crude, proletarian, filled with an insatiable lust for blood and death. And, as the novel progresses, Lawrence tells his readers that what he infers is true:

Uncreated, half-created, such a people the Mexicans was at the mercy of old black influences that lay in a sediment at the bottom of them. While they were quiet, they were gentle and kindly, with a sort of limp naivete. But when anything shook them at the depths, the black clouds would arise, and they were gone again in the old grisly passions of death, bloodlust, incarnate hate. A
people incomplete, and at the mercy of old, up-starting lusts (VII, p. 147).

Incident after incident in the novel serves to bear out Lawrence's evaluation of the Mexican people, and, on the whole, there is much more "incarnate hate" in Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent than there is "limp naivete." Violence and hate--and fear, their necessary companion--seem to be the predominant passions in the book. When Kate travels by rail from Mexico City to Sayula, she finds the train passengers fearful and hushed, because, in Mexico, even a train trip can end in violence (V, p. 92). She leaves the train at Orilla, and is greeted with tales of murder and dismembering (VI, p. 110). And, when she arrives at Sayula, the village which is to be her home for the remainder of the novel, the brutality of the atmosphere is only intensified. Here hatred, violence, and fear are everywhere. Murderous bandits roam the countryside; little children amuse themselves either by antagonizing each other or by stoning helpless waterfowl to death; even Kate's own servant family (whose favorite occupation is to squat in the gravel and pick lice out of each other's hair) secretly hate Kate and are pleased when they can succeed
The Mexico of *The Plumed Serpent* is a sick society. It is not merely a society with more obvious brutality than most places; it is a society filled with people who have never really succeeded in being human. "We can't live," a young Mexican professor tells Kate. "Nobody can live. If you are Mexican you can't be human, it is impossible" (III, p. 55). And, though the young professor is prone to making violent statements, Lawrence agrees with this one. Lawrence himself describes the Mexicans as "human beings who squat helpless outside their own unbuilt selves, unable to win their souls out of the chaos, and indifferent to all other victories" (IX, p. 153). And this is the problem of the Mexicans of *The Plumed Serpent*: they have never succeeded in rising above their uncontrolled passions to effect a true human integration. And, after Lawrence finishes giving his readers a graphic portrayal of the Mexican problem, he devotes the remainder of his novel to providing a solution.

There are actually three solutions to the problem of Mexico in *The Plumed Serpent*—socialism, personified
by Socrates Tomas Montes, the Mexican president; Christianity, in the form of the Roman Catholic Church; and the religion of Quetzalcoatl, organized and headed by Don Ramon, a Mexican scholar and patron. But Lawrence feels that only Quetzalcoatl can save Mexico, and he rejects the other two as false ideologies that, unless combated, can only work towards Mexico's further destruction. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the religion founded by Don Ramon, but first, it is important to investigate why Lawrence feels that neither socialism nor Christianity can save Mexico. Such an investigation will not only help to establish Quetzalcoatl's raison d'être; it will also serve to develop Lawrence's racial concept of the Mexican people.

Socialism, the first of these ideologies, offers a straightforward solution to the plight of the Mexican people: kill all the capitalists, institute reforms, and bring about material prosperity for the oppressed laborers. The solution is simple, and, at least in the novel, has a chance of being partially realized. Socrates Tomas Montes, who campaigned for the presidency as el Jesus Cristo de Mexico, is a man powerful and popular
enough to translate his socialistic program into action. But the question Lawrence poses is not whether Mexico can be socialized; it is whether socialism will do any good for Mexico. Don Ramon, the high priest of Quetzalcoatl, feels it will not. "'Politics and all this social religion that Montes has got,'" he tells Cipriano, one of his followers,
is like washing the outside of the egg, to make it look clean. But I, myself, I want to get inside the egg, right to the middle, to start it growing into a new bird. . . . Mexico is like an old, old egg that the bird of Time laid long ago; and she has been sitting on it for centuries, till it looks foul in the nest of the world. But still . . . it is a good egg. It is not addled. Only the spark of fire has never gone into the middle of it, to start it. --Montes wants to clean the nest and wash the egg. But meanwhile, the egg will go cold and die. The more you save these people from poverty and ignorance, the quicker they will die; like a dirty egg that you take from under the hen-eagle, to wash it" (XIII, p. 210).

To Don Ramon, "social religion" is as bad as no religion, because it saves the environment of a man rather than the man himself. The Mexicans, according to Don Ramon, are not incomplete human beings because they are dirty and ignorant, they are incomplete because they lack some inner "spark." And, since Montes' socialism ignores man's inner self while it attempts to save man
from poverty and ignorance, his social religion produces a climate of spiritual aridity in which the souls of the Mexicans, instead of growing towards integrity, can only further disintegrate. "You know, socialism is a dud," Lawrence wrote in a letter after observing Mexican socialism in action. "It makes just a mush of people: and especially of savages." Socialism, Lawrence and Don Ramon feel, may be a good system for people who have already "won their souls out of the chaos"; but the Mexicans are still trying to achieve their full humanity. This, socialism cannot give them. It can only keep them from achieving their full humanity by substituting material prosperity for human integration.


2This thesis assumes an ideological identification between the views of Lawrence and those of Don Ramon, not because Ramon is an artistic re-creation of Lawrence (which he is not) but because there is no discrepancy between Don Ramon's views and the idea which Lawrence expressed in his articles and essays written during the period in which he wrote The Plumed Serpent. Also, Lawrence himself expressed general agreement with Don Ramon immediately after completing the novel. At that time, he wrote to his publisher in England instructing him to "tell the man, very nice man, in your office, I do mean what Ramon means--for all of us." (Moore, II, 859.)
Problems of the soul demand religious answers, and religion, not politics, is what Lawrence and Don Ramon propose to bring to Mexico. True, the Mexico of *The Plumed Serpent*, like the Mexico of today, already had a religion; but in the novel Mexican Catholicism is no more able to save the soul of Mexico than Mexican socialism is. There are no Catholics in *The Plumed Serpent* who demand respect and admiration. The bishop of Mexico City is described as a "choleric man" (XXVI, p. 460), more interested in preserving his position than helping the Mexican people (XVII, p. 292); the pastor of the church in Sayula is a "rather overbearing, fat man" who is afraid of his female parishioners (XVIII, p. 302); the clergy who launch an attack on the followers of Quetzalcoatl are referred to as "a clerical mob led by a fanatical priest" (XXVI, p. 460). And, if anything, the Mexican Catholic laity portrayed in the novel fare worse than their priests. Aside from the Knights of Cortes—the Mexican counterpart of the Knights of Columbus—who are only alluded to when they are breaking out their secret store of arms or drinking oaths in blood (XVII, p. 292), the only devout Catholic
lay person in the book is Dona Carlota, Don Ramon's first wife—a frail, devout woman who mouths pietistic phrases about the Virgin and the evils of putting "Christ back on the cross" while refusing to forgive her husband for committing the "horrible sin" of trying to bring Quetzalcoatl back to Mexico (XII, p. 208).

Lawrence's quarrel with the Catholic Church of Mexico goes deeper than his dissatisfaction with the Mexican Catholics, however. Even if Carlota were not hypocritical and the Mexican clerics were all bold, noble men, he would still condemn the Mexican Catholic Church; for he feels that both the theology and worship of Roman Catholicism are forces working for the destruction of the Mexican soul. Neither he nor Don Ramon could bear to watch the Mexican people worshipping in a Catholic Church. "It [the people praying in church] was not worship," Lawrence reflects. "It was a sort of numbness and letting the soul sink uncontrolled" (XVIII, p. 302). The purpose of worship, for D. H. Lawrence, is to help men "gather themselves together and become graver, stronger, more collected and deep in their own integrity" (XVIII, p. 303). But he
feels that "the Church, instead of helping men to this, pushes them more and more into a soft, emotional helplessness, with the unpleasant sensuous gratification of feeling themselves victims, victimised, victimised. . . ."
(XVIII, p. 303) --Like socialism, Catholicism only aids in making "just a mush of people."

As was mentioned in the first chapter, Lawrence judges a religion by its effects. And, since Catholicism only aids in the disintegration of the Mexican soul, Catholicism is a false religion for Mexico. This does not mean, however, that Lawrence believes Catholicism to be a universally disintegrating force--at least not universally disintegrating in the same way as it is in Mexico. Lawrence rejects European Catholicism and European Christianity in general because it makes people too abstract, too "spiritual," in his sense of the word. 3

3 Lawrence uses the term spiritual psychologically, rather than theologically. In Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, pp. 102-3, he equates "spiritual" vision with objective or analytical vision, and defines spiritual as any activity which is a product of the upper levels of consciousness. That quality in man which the Christian would call "spiritual" Lawrence refers to as "soul." He also makes this distinction in The Plumed Serpent, where, concerning the
Yet Don Ramon, in trying to convince the bishop of Mexico City that Catholicism is the wrong religion for the Mexicans, argues that the Mexican Catholic Church has failed because the people are not spiritual enough to understand it:

"We are in Mexico for the most part Indians. They cannot understand the high Christianity, Father, and the Church knows it. Christianity is a religion of the spirit, and must needs be understood if it is to have any effect. The Indians cannot understand it, any more than the rabbits of the hills. . . . The people sink heavier and heavier into inertia, and the Church cannot help them, because the Church does not possess the key-word to the Mexican soul (XVII, p. 289).

The contradiction here is only an apparent one, for, though both Don Ramon and Lawrence readily admit that European Catholicism and Mexican Catholicism are the same, they feel that Europeans and Mexicans are not. Lawrence's Mexicans are not Europeans of a different color and with a different ethnological background; they are a fundamentally different people. And, because they are so different, they must have a different, non-spiritual religion if they are ever going to find their soul.

Mexican peon, he writes: "He understands soul, which is of the blood. But spirit, which is superior, and is the quality of our civilization, this, in the mass, he darkly and barbarically repudiates" (VII, p. 127).
Behind Lawrence's assumption that the Mexicans are radically different from Europeans is a rather complex theory of anthropology. Lawrence believes, along with the theosophists, that some time before the melting of the glaciers there was a great civilization on earth, populated by a "soft, dark-eyed people" (XXVI, p. 455) who, according to Lawrence, "were in one complete correspondence over all the earth." In this great civilization there was no nationalism and no conflict, because at that time what Lawrence believes to be the cause of human conflict, "the self-conscious ego," had not been born. These people did not arrive at knowledge mentally; instead, as Lawrence describes them in The Plumed Serpent, "the mind and the power of man was in his blood and his backbone, and there was the strange, dark intercommunication between man and man, and man and

4 Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 55.

5 "The external conflict of war, or of industrial competition, is only a reflection of the war that goes on inside each human being, the war of the self-conscious ego against the spontaneous old Adam," D. H. Lawrence writes in his article, "Introduction to Pictures." (Edward D. McDonald [ed.] , Phoenix, p. 769.)
beast, from the powerful spine (XXVI, p. 455). Lawrence variously symbolizes his prehistoric man as "Pan" or "the old Adam"—he even equates Adam's Fall with man's loss of the pre-conscious way of knowing—but, whatever Lawrence calls him, his chief characteristic is a complete lack of self-consciousness. He made no abstractions, thus he had no fears about death, invented no machinery, was subject to no ideology. Instead, he occupied himself with the process of keeping himself in harmony with the deepest forces within himself and, once he achieved that harmony, of keeping himself in harmony with the rest of creation.

With the coming of the great Flood (which Lawrence equates with the melting of the glaciers), this prehistoric civilization was broken up: Atlantis was covered with water, as was much of Polynesia, and the people who survived the deluge were forced to take refuge in the high places of the earth. Here, in these high, isolated places, people grew apart, forming into different races. The old way of knowing began to

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disappear, and, at least in Europe, to be replaced by the abstract, spiritual consciousness.\(^7\)

But the consciousness of the old Adam was never completely replaced. Lawrence believes—though he never tells why he believes it—that some races never developed the European's way of knowing; instead, they have retained their pré-Flood consciousness and exist today in a different world from the white man (IX, p. 162).

For Lawrence, the American savages—that is, the Indians of the southwest United States and seventy per cent of the Mexican population—\(^8\) are one of these pré-Flood races. "That which is aboriginal in America," he writes in *The Plumed Serpent,* "still belongs to the way of the world before the Flood, before the mental-spiritual world came into being (XXVI, p. 455). And, since these

\(^7\) *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious,* p. 55.

\(^8\) In a letter to Murry, Lawrence writes that "70 per cent of these people [the Mexicans] are real savages, quite as much as they were 300 years ago. The Spanish-Mexican population just rots on top of the black savage mass." (*Moore,* II, 820). Lawrence uses the terms *indian,* *savage,* and *native* interchangeably throughout *The Plumed Serpent,* and asserts that the Mexican Indians are one with the New Mexican Indians (VII, p. 138).
peoples are products of a different world, a different way of knowing, Lawrence feels that there can be no real correspondence between them and the white man. "The Indian way of consciousness is different from and fatal to our way of consciousness," he writes in Mornings in Mexico. "Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never to be reconciled. There is no bridge, no canal of connection."9

Granting Lawrence's theory of anthropology, the only effect that the Mexican Catholic Church can have on the Mexicans is a harmful one. Catholic theology is a mystery to them, and will forever remain so, because it is a product of the mental-spiritual way of consciousness; and the liturgy of the Church seems only to help further the disintegration of their souls. Catholicism has no place in Mexico, Lawrence feels, and unless it is replaced by a new faith, the Mexicans will never develop as human beings. "If only they had a new faith,"

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9D. H. Lawrence, Mornings in Mexico and Etruscan Places (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), pp. 45-46. (Each of the two books in this edition has separate pagination.)
he wrote in a letter to his mother-in-law while writing The Plumed Serpent, "they might be a new, young, beautiful people. But as Christians they don't get any further, are melancholy inside, live without hope, are suddenly wicked, and don't like to work."\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10}Moore, II, 744.
CHAPTER III

THE RELIGION OF QUETZALCOATL

In *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence attempts to translate into reality the wish he made to his mother-in-law. Here, to save Mexico from the pernicious influence of Christianity and to help the Mexicans develop into a "new, young, beautiful people," he resurrects the old Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, the bird-snake, and, with Don Ramon as Quetzalcoatl's prophet, creates a religion for Mexico which he feels is capable of helping the Mexicans win back their souls.

Lawrence's choosing an old Aztec deity as the god of Mexico serves a dual purpose. First, Quetzalcoatl is a Mexican god, not a European one; and secondly, Quetzalcoatl was, at least according to Lawrence, a pre-Flood deity. "'Quetzalcoatl!'" Kate exclaims when she first hears that he may come back to Mexico. "'Who knows what he meant to the dead Aztecs, and to the older Indians, who knew him before the Aztecs raised their deity to heights of horror and vindictiveness'? (III, p. 61)
But, as Kate infers, the choice of Quetzalcoatl as a saviour for Mexico also has some bad points. Quetzalcoatl may have been a great god-symbol before the melting of the glaciers, when the "older Indians" lived in harmony with themselves and the universe; but he is also a god of the Mexicans of recorded history and is linked with their horror and vindictiveness, two qualities from which Lawrence is attempting to save the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent. For this reason Lawrence, through the use of a myth, clarifies the nature of his god and explains what the role of this god will be in the Mexico of the present.

According to the old man who tells the myth in the novel, Quetzalcoatl is an old god, older than the pre-Flood civilization. He was present when "the sun beyond the sun"--Lawrence's symbol for the Creator, the great God--created man; and, after teaching the first men how to plant and fish and live in the world, he taught them reverence for himself. "'I am Quetzalcoatl,'" he instructed them,

"who breathed moisture on your dry mouths. I filled your breasts with breath from beyond the sun. I am the wind that whirls from the heart of the earth, the little winds that whirl like snakes round your
feet and your legs and your thighs, lifting up the head of the snake of your body in whom is your power. When the snake of your body lifts its head, beware! It is I, Quetzalcoatl, rearing up in you, rearing up and reaching beyond the bright day, to the sun of darkness beyond, where is your home at last. . . . Without me you are nothing. Just as I, without the sun that is back of the sun, am nothing" (VII, p. 134).

After a while, however, men forgot Quetzalcoatl's warning and began to deny his existence in them. And, the old man relates, "'when the snake of their body lifted its head, they said: this is the tame snake that does as we wish" (VII, p. 135). They no longer used Quetzalcoatl as a religious intermediary between themselves and the dark sun. Instead, according to the myth, they attempted to deal directly with the dark sun through blood sacrifices (VII, p. 135).

Because of man's faithlessness, Quetzalcoatl grew old and weary in Mexico and called out to the dark sun to take him home. "'Then,"' says the old man, "the dark sun reached an arm, and lifted Quetzalcoatl into the sky. And the dark sun beckoned with a finger, and brought white men out of the east. And they came with a dead god on the Cross, saying: Lo! This is the Son of God! He is dead, he is bone! Lo, your god is bled and dead, he is bone. Kneel in sorrow for him and weep. For your tears he will give you comfort again, from the dead, and a place among the scentless rose-trees of the after life, after you are dead" (VII, p. 136).
Thus, Christ entered Mexico, offering the Mexicans sorrow on earth and a promise of Paradise after death. And, for 300 years, Christ remained the only God of Mexico; then he too became tired of his earthly existence. "'What is this that is done to me?'" he finally cried out. "'Am I dead for ever, and only dead'? (VII, p. 136) His cry was heard by the dark sun, who, in his mercy, called him back to himself, where he was allowed to rest and become refreshed.

Christ was gone, and Mexico was godless. Then, the old man relates, the dark sun began looking around the heavens for another god for Mexico and he discovered the Morning Star. "'Who art thou, bright watchman? '" the dark sun asked. And the Morning Star answered:

"It is I, the Morning Star, who in Mexico was Quetzalcoatl. It is I, who look at the yellow sun from behind, have my eye on the unseen side of the moon. It is I, the star, midway between the darkness and the rolling of the sun. I, called Quetzalcoatl, waiting in the strength of my days" (VII, p. 136). Finding Quetzalcoatl refreshed and "waiting in the strength of his days," the dark sun decided that the time had come for Quetzalcoatl to return to Mexico. And, as the old man finishes the exposition of the myth, he tells his listeners that the renewed Quetzalcoatl is
on his way back to replace the dead Christ (VII, p. 137).

The old man's story is a myth, and must be understood as one. Lawrence did not believe in the actual existence of his Quetzalcoatl, nor did he expect his readers to believe in it. "'Quetzalcoatl,'" Don Ramon tells his wife, "'is just a living word, for these people, no more'" (XIV, p. 231). Later in the novel, he tells Kate: "'But you know, senora, Quetzalcoatl is to me only the symbol of the best a man may be, in the next days'" (XVIII, p. 299). Quetzalcoatl, for Lawrence and Don Ramon, is merely a symbol, a "living word" through which people can enter into the religious mystery of life.

And, just as Quetzalcoatl is only a symbol in the myth, so is Christ. In the myth, Christ is equated with Quetzalcoatl: he serves the dark sun as Quetzalcoatl does; he also grows weary of Mexico; and, like Quetzalcoatl, he returns to the dark sun to sleep the sleep of refreshment. The parallel here is deliberate, and its meaning is clear. "Man creates a God in his own image," Lawrence writes in The Plumed Serpent, "and the gods grow old along with the men that made them. . . . Ye must be born again. Even the gods must be born again"
(III, p. 61). The Christ of the myth is a man-made god symbol, just as Lawrence's Quetzalcoatl is. And, as such, he is of even less value for Mexico than the myth's first Quetzalcoatl. The first Quetzalcoatl grew old among the Aztecs and had to be born again. Christ came with the white men from the east and was dead even before he arrived.

In his Quetzalcoatl myth, Lawrence's god-symbols grow old and replace one another, and Lawrence feels that this is as it should be, since they are only man-made creations anyway. But Lawrence does not feel that all gods are the products of man's fancy. In the myth there is the dark sun, a deity more powerful than either Christ or Quetzalcoatl, a deity who remains the same though Quetzalcoatl and Christ come and go. He is the god "without whom" Quetzalcoatl "is nothing"; he is the god whom the Quetzalcoatl that is in man rears up to and reaches out to. He is, in other words, Lawrence's magnificent God, who is eternal and utterly beyond the tamperings of mankind.

But, while Lawrence takes pains to develop Quetzalcoatl, his man-made god in *The Plumed Serpent*, his
great God remains shrouded in mystery. Sometimes he is described as a place, as when Quetzalcoatl says:

I am the living Quetzalcoatl.
Naked I come from out of the deep
From the place which I call my Father (XXI, p. 378).

Other times in the novel he is anthropomorphized; but always his real identity is hidden. No man knows him, and no man is capable of knowing him. "What is God, you shall never know!" (XXI, p. 370) Don Ramon tells the Mexican people. Lawrence's dark sun is beyond knowledge, so far beyond knowledge that even Quetzalcoatl says he does not know him:

Beyond me is a Lord who is terrible, and wonderful, and dark to me forever.
Yet I have lain in his loins, ere he begot me in Mother space (XXI, p. 378).

In Lawrence's play David, David tries to make a person of God and, in so doing, is condemned by Lawrence. Don Ramon never makes David's mistake: for Don Ramon, as for Quetzalcoatl, God is never personalized; he can't be, because Lawrence's God has no person. The dark sun, to Lawrence, is a force, a power which engulfs the universe. "Storms sway in the heaven," he writes in The Plumed Serpent,

and the god-stuff sways high and angry over our
heads. Gods die with men who have conceived them. But the god-stuff roars eternally, like the sea, with too vast a sound to be heard. Like the sea in storm, that beats against the rocks of living, stiffened men, slowly to destroy them. Or like the sea of the glimmering, ethereal plasm of the world, that bathes the feet and the knees of men as earth-sap bathes the roots of trees (III, p. 61).

Lawrence's god-stuff, his dark sun, is not, of course, a Judeo-Christian concept. As was shown in the first chapter, Lawrence had begun to look upon the Judeo-Christian tradition as a failure long before he wrote The Plumed Serpent. And, by the time of the composition of his Mexican novel, he had rejected Jehovah completely. In a letter to Rolf Gardiner, written in July of 1924, he says: "To tell the truth, I am sick to death of the Jewish monotheistic string. It has become monomaniac. I prefer the pagan many gods, and the animistic vision."¹ This animistic vision that Lawrence prefers² has no place for the transcendent God of the Bible. "We must remember," Lawrence writes in Mornings


²For Lawrence the term animism refers to a religion which holds that God is in all of creation, that all things except man-made things have their own individual godhead. These godheads constitute a series of
in Mexico,

to the animistic vision there is no perfect God behind us, who created us from his knowledge, and foreordained all things. No such God. Behind lies only the terrific, terrible, crude Source, the mystic Sun, the well-head of all things. From this mystic Sun emanate the Dragons, Rain, Wind, Thunder, Shine, Light. The Potencies or Powers. These bring forth Earth, then reptiles, birds, and fishes.³

For the animist, God is everywhere, yet nowhere. He is the power of life itself in a universe where everything is alive. In Etruscan Places, a travel book written by Lawrence shortly after the publication of The Plumed Serpent, Lawrence gives a graphic description of this living universe:

dynamic, divine forces; and man, Lawrence maintains, can, through the godhead that exists in his unconscious self, enter into a relationship with and draw power from the forces inherent in the living universe. "I am myself," Lawrence writes, "and I remain myself only by the grace of the powers that enter me, from the unseen, and make me forever newly myself. And I am myself, also, by the grace of the desire that flows from me and consummates me with the other unknown, the invisible, tangible creation." (D. H. Lawrence, The Later D. H. Lawrence [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952], p. 219.)

To the Etruscan all was alive; the whole universe lived; and the business of man was himself to live amid it all. He had to draw life into himself, out of the wandering huge vitalities of the world. The cosmos was alive, like a vast creature. The whole thing breathed and stirred. Evaporation went up like breath from the nostrils of a whale, steaming up. The sky received it in its blue bosom, breathed it in and pondered on it and transmuted it, before breathing it out again. Inside the earth were fires like the heat in the hot red liver of a beast. Out of the fissures of the earth came breaths of other breath, vapours direct from the living physical under-earth, exhalations carrying inspiration. The whole thing was alive, and had a great soul, or anima: and in spite of one great soul, there were myriad roving, lesser souls: every man, every creature and tree and lake and mountain and stream, was animate, had its own peculiar consciousness. And has it to-day.4

To the Etruscans, Lawrence asserts, such was God. And, in The Plumed Serpent, Lawrence and Don Ramon insist that the salvation of Mexico lies in reviving the same vision of God that the early Etruscans had. "'We must change back to the vision of the living cosmos.'" Don Ramon tells Kate. "'We must. The oldest Pan is in us, and he will not be denied'" (XX, p. 347).

Granting Lawrence's and Don Ramon's animistic vision of existence, religion becomes something quite different from the religion of the Christian tradition.

4Ibid., p. 49.
The Christian lives according to the dictates and graces of a loving God, and looks forward to being with his God after death. Thus, his religion is oriented towards the afterlife; it acts as a guide for the Christian through life to eternity. For the animist, however, there is no loving, reward-giving God. The animist's God promises nothing; he gives no graces, offers no life after death. In fact, death is really not a concern of the animist. "'It is life,'" says Don Ramon, "'which is the mystery. Death is hardly mysterious in comparison'" (XXI, p. 386). For the animist, God is life, and the business of his religion is to help him enter as deeply as possible into a vital relationship with the god-stuff. "The animist's active religious idea," Lawrence writes in *Etruscan Places*, describing the animism of the pre-Flood civilization,

was that man, by vivid attention and subtlety and exerting all his strength, could draw more life into himself, more life, more and more glistening vitality, till he became shining like the morning, blazing like a god.  

This is why Lawrence's Mexican religion is centered around Quetzalcoatl, instead of the dark sun.

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Symbolically, Quetzalcoatl is the god through whom man enters into a living relationship with the god-stuff. He is the god in man, "rearing up and reaching beyond the bright day, to the sun of darkness beyond. . . (VII, p. 134). And, through an analysis of his symbolic meaning, one can discover both what this living relationship is and how the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent can enter into it.

The very name Quetzalcoatl implies duality and a relationship. Quetzalcoatl means bird-snake, and he asserts that his name matches his nature:

For I am Quetzalcoatl, the feathered snake,  
And I am not with you till my serpent has coiled his circle of rest in your belly.

And I, Quetzalcoatl, the eagle of the air, am brushing your faces with vision. I am fanning your breasts with my breath. And building my nest of peace in your bones. I am Quetzalcoatl, of the two ways (XXI, p. 378).

He is two separate creatures in one, and his bird and snake exist in and influence two different parts of the human body. The serpent of Quetzalcoatl is sometimes described as being in man's belly, as in the above quotation. Other times, he resides in the loins, as when Quetzalcoatl, in describing his relationship with his
father, says:

He sends the serpent of power up my feet and my loins
So that strength wells up in me like water in hot springs (XXI, p. 373).

Always, however, the serpent is somewhere below the navel; whereas the bird is either in the breast, the head, or just above the head. "'Come! Oh, Bird,'" prays Don Ramon. "'Settle a moment on my wrist, over my head, and give me the power of the sky, and wisdom'" (XIII, p. 218). "'The bird of the outer air perches on my brow and sweeps her bill across my breast'" (XV, p. 250), says Quetzalcoatl.

Lawrence's placing of the bird and the snake is not accidental, nor is it mere poetic fancy. According to the theory of consciousness that he develops in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*—two works written by Lawrence shortly before he began writing *The Plumed Serpent*—there are two great planes of consciousness in man: a two-centered upper plane, which has its positive center in the breast; and a two-centered lower plane, which has its positive center in the solar plexus. The parallel

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6D. H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*, pp. 31-32.
between the locations of the bird and the snake and the two planes of consciousness also correspond to the bird and snake symbolically.

The solar plexus is, Lawrence writes in *Psycho-analysis and the Unconscious*, "the first and main clue to the great alimentary-sexual activity in man, an activity at once functional and creatively emotional." But it is more than this. "Now, your solar plexus, most gentle readers," Lawrence writes in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, "is where you are you. It is your first and greatest and deepest centre of consciousness." Hence, the solar plexus is not only a passionnal, emotional center, but a conscious one; it is the center of what Lawrence calls "dynamic knowledge"—a knowledge that is spontaneous and pre-mental, that is not thought, only known. "Do not ask me to transfer the pre-mental knowledge into thought," Lawrence writes. "It cannot be done. The knowledge that I am I can never be thought; only known." Like the snake which Quetzalcoatl receives from his father, the solar plexus is dynamic and

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7 Ibid., p. 36.  
8 Ibid., p. 68.  
9 Ibid., p. 74.  
10 Ibid.
passional. From it, "strength wells up" in man "like water in hot springs."

In contrast to the solar plexus, the breast is not concerned with the dynamic I am I knowledge. "Here," writes Lawrence in Fantasia of the Unconscious,

there is no longer the dark, exultant knowledge that I am I. . . . Here I only know the delightful revelation that you are you. The wonder is no longer within me, my own dark, centrifugal, exultant self. The wonder is without me. . . . Now I look with wonder, with tenderness, with joyful yearning towards that which is outside me, beyond me, not me.11

Whereas the lower plane is subjective, the upper plane is objective. It is from here that man goes out to and participates in the other and, at the same time, seeks to know the other as other. The breast is the center of wisdom and dynamic participation in the world. Like the bird which Don Ramon prays to, the fruits of its activity come from without.

But, though the upper plane is objective and outgoing, it is not mental, any more than the lower plane is. "The whole field of dynamic and effectual consciousness," Lawrence writes in Fantasia of the Unconscious, "is always pre-mental, non-mental."12

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11 Ibid., pp. 77-78.  
12 Ibid., p. 105.
knowledge, Lawrence feels, has nothing to do with man's dynamic, living consciousness. Its only function is the static one of recording concepts, which are the by-product of living. Thus, according to Lawrence,

All our active desire, our genuine impulse, our love, our hope, our yearning, everything originates mysteriously at these four great centres—the two centers of the lower plane and the two centers of the upper plane—or well heads of our existence: everything is vital and dynamic. The mind can only register that which results from the emanation of the dynamic impulse and the collision or communion of this impulse with its object.

... Knowledge [i.e., mental knowledge] is to the consciousness what the signpost is to the traveller: just an indication of the way which has been travelled before. Knowledge is not even in direct proportion to being. There may be great knowledge of chemistry in a man who is a rather poor being: and those who know, even in wisdom like Solomon, are often at the end of the matter of living, not at the beginning.13

The bird and the serpent, then, represent the "four great centres" of pre-mental consciousness; and, together, they are the symbol of all that is vital and dynamic in man. They are, in combination, the god-stuff in man, for to the animistic vision all that is alive participates in the god-stuff. But the bird and the snake must exist in combination, in a living balance.

13 Ibid., p. 112.
Neither the bird nor the snake is superior; they are both parts of the living man, and, Lawrence feels, if man hopes to be truly alive, he must live from both planes, all four centers, of his conscious self. All the centers are important, and no one is more important than any other. "To stress any one mode," Lawrence writes in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, any one interchange, is to hinder all, and to cause corruption in the end. The human psyche must have the strength and pride to accept the whole fourfold nature of its own creative activity.\(^\text{14}\)

The corruption which results from living from only part of the dynamic consciousness takes on different forms, depending on which plane has been suppressed. The European, Lawrence feels, has suppressed his solar plexus and made the breast his supreme center of activity.\(^\text{15}\) And, as a result of this suppression of the serpent and exalting of the bird, the European has lost contact with his primary dynamic plane and has become dependent on the static mental knowledge generated by the past activity of his upper plane. He tends, Lawrence writes, "to destroy the soul in its first

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 41. \(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 36.
nature of spontaneous, integral being, and to substitute
... the automatic nature of the mechanical universe."¹⁶

Thus, he goes on to say,

we [Europeans] have no spark of wholeness. And we
live by an evil love-will. Alas, the great spontaneous mode is abrogated. There is no lovely great
flux of vital sympathy, no rich rejoicing of pride
into isolation and independence. . . . No, there is
a substitute for everything--life-substitute--just
as we have butter-substitute, and meat-substitute,
and sugar-substitute, and leather substitute, and
silk-substitute, so we have life-substitute. We
have beastly benevolence, and foul good-will, and
stinking charity, and poisonous ideals.¹⁷

The European, by suppressing his lower plane, has lost
the dynamism of both planes of his consciousness. He
no longer has a living relationship with the god-stuff;
instead, he has substituted static mental concepts and
ideals for dynamic consciousness.

With the dark races of Mexico, however, a differ­
ent problem exists. The Mexican Indian has never de­
veloped the European's mental-spiritual consciousness;
the roots of his consciousness are still in the world
before the flood. But, by some process which Lawrence
never explains, the Mexican also has become corrupted,
and has vitiated his existence by living almost entirely

¹⁶Ibid., p. 201. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 174.
from his solar plexus.

The upper plane of consciousness, the plane from which one goes out to and delights in the other, is almost totally lacking in Lawrence's Mexican Indians. And, because it is lacking, the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent spend their lives, as Lawrence writes, "walking forever through a menace of monsters, blind to the sympathy in things, holding one's own, and not giving in, nor going forth" (XIV, p. 241). The Mexicans, Lawrence feels, are incapable of getting outside themselves, of entering into a full relationship with the living cosmos. Their cosmos is the interior one of unbalanced passion and blood-lust.

Before man, be he European or Mexican, can enter into a relationship with the living cosmos, he must first achieve the living relationship of bird and serpent within himself. This relationship is man fully alive, man living from both planes of his dynamic consciousness. It is, in Lawrence's Mexican religion, Quetzalcoatl in the fulness of his being; and Lawrence symbolizes the living relationship between bird and serpent by giving it Quetzalcoatl's other name: the
Morning Star. Thus, Quetzalcoatl tells man:

Between your breast and belly is a star.  
If it be not there  
You are empty gourd-shells filled with dust and wind.  

Should you say: **I have no star; I am no star,**  
So it will leave you, and you will hang like a gourd  
on the vine of life  
With nothing but rind (XXI, p. 374).

In man, the star is the balance between the upper  
and lower planes of dynamic pre-mental consciousness.  
And yet, it is more than a mere sum of these two planes:  
it is man's share in the life-mystery itself. "Not in  
the blood nor in the spirit lay his individuality and  
his supremacy, his god-head," Lawrence writes, describ­
ing Don Ramon.

But in a star within him, an inexplicable star which  
rose out of the dark sea and shone between the flood  
and the great sky. The mysterious star which unites  
the vast universal blood with the universal breath  
of the spirit, and shines between them both.  
Not the rider on the white horse: nor the rider  
on the red. That which is beyond the riders and  
the horses, the inexplicable mystery of the star  
whence no horseman comes and to which no horseman  
can arrive. The star which is man's innermost clue,  
which rules the power of the blood on the one hand,  
and the power of the spirit on the other.  
For this, the only thing which is supreme above  
all power in a man, and at the same time is power;  
which far transcends knowledge; the strange star  
between the sky and the waters of the first cosmos:  
this is man's divinity (XXVI, p. 458).

Here, the star takes on a deeper significance. It
becomes not only the star that rises between the "power of the blood" and the "power of the spirit"--a further set of symbols used by Lawrence in *The Plumed Serpent* to symbolize the two dynamic planes of consciousness--but is "an inexplicable mystery" that "is power" and is "man's divinity." Also, though the star is man's "innermost clue," it is not strictly a personal star. It is totally beyond man's conscious seeking; it transcends the person and is the same star "which unites the vast universal blood with the universal breath of the spirit."

Thus, for Lawrence, the star is the godhead in man, the godhead of all existence, and man's gateway to the power which comes from participating in the ultimate life mystery which is both in him and beyond him.

Since the Morning Star is both the animistic vision and the dynamic religious experience of fully participating in and identifying one's self with the animistic vision, the Morning Star is not only the most important symbol of Lawrence's Mexican religion; in effect, it is the religion itself. For Lawrence, the salvation of Mexico lies in the Mexicans finding the Morning Star; and, in *The Plumed Serpent*, the purpose of the liturgy and
religious instruction of the novel is to bring the Mexicans through an interconnected series of animistic relationships which will lead them ever deeper into the Morning Star, into the power and mystery of life itself.

The first of these relationships, that of the bird and the serpent of consciousness, has already been discussed. Granting Lawrence's evaluation of the Mexican consciousness, this relationship has to be primal, because before the Mexican can enter into any relationship beyond himself, he has to balance his lower plane of consciousness with his upper plane, the plane which is the source of all outgoing love and sympathy. But, just as the god-stuff is not confined to the living man, the living man does not discover the Morning Star purely within himself. The whole universe is alive to the animist: "the earth is alive, and the sky is alive," Don Ramon tells his followers. "And between them, we live" (XIII, p. 218). And, to find the Morning Star, the animist must go beyond himself and unite himself with the living cosmos. "How shall we men become men of the Morning Star?" Don Ramon asks rhetorically. "Lower your fingers to the caress of the Snake of the earth,"
he tells them.

Lift your wrist for a perch to the far-lying Bird.
Have the courage of both, the courage of the lightning and the earthquake.
And the wisdom of both, the wisdom of the snake and the eagle.
And the peace of both, the peace of the serpent and the sun.
And the power of both, the power of the innermost earth and the outermost heaven (XIII, p. 219).

To help the Mexicans effect a dynamic unity with the living cosmos, Don Ramon does away with clocks and church bells and the Roman Catholic Church, and replaces them with drums, chants, and Indian dances. And, through the ritual which he constructs out of these elements, the people's daily existence acts as a constant reminder that all is alive. The Plumed Serpent Mexicans begin work at sunrise with the thud of a drum and the chant of an animistic verse; they pause at noon while the heavy drum thuds and another verse is chanted; they stop working at sunset when the drum sounds again and a voice chants a prayer of thanksgiving to the living sun. At night, the drum thuds in the market-place, signalling to the people to come and perform the most important ritual of the new religion: the treading of the animistic dances of the New Mexican Indians. 18

18 The ritualistic dances performed by the Mexicans
These dances, Lawrence believes, are one of the best ways for a man to bring himself into vital contact with the living earth. "If you know how to tread the dance," General Viedma, Don Ramon's most ardent disciple, tells his soldiers,

you can tread deeper and deeper till you touch the middle of the earth with your foot. And when you touch the middle of the earth, you will have such power in your belly and your breast, no man will be able to overcome you (XXII, p. 401).

And, because of the power the dance gives to the "belly" and the "breast" through vital contact with the earth, Lawrence makes the dance the chief ritual of the Mexicans' daily existence.

But beyond the relationship with the god-stuff that Don Ramon's followers are taught to strive for in their daily ritual, there is another relationship they must fully enter into before they can find the Morning Star: the relationship between man and woman. "It takes a man and a woman together to make a soul," Don Ramon tells Kate. "The soul is the Morning Star, emerging in The Plumed Serpent are almost exact copies of the Indian dances Lawrence observed at Santo Domingo, New Mexico, and later described in the article "Dance of the Sprouting Corn." See Mornings in Mexico, pp. 54-61.
from the two. One alone cannot have a soul"(XXIII, p. 425). This relationship between man and woman that Don Ramon refers to is, of course, a sexual one--a true coming together of man and wife in the marriage act. As Don Ramon tells the newly married Kate:

Remember, the marriage is the meeting-ground, and the meeting-ground is the star. If there be no star, no meeting-ground, no true coming together of man with the woman, into a wholeness, there is no marriage. And if there is no marriage, there is nothing but an agitation. If there is no honourable meeting of man with woman and woman with man, there is no good thing to come to pass (XX, p. 364).

The basis for Lawrence's insistence on the necessity of a sexual relationship before man can find the Morning Star can be found in his theory of psychology. As has already been shown, Lawrence believes that the two planes of consciousness must exist in a balance, and that the upper plane of consciousness is the plane from which man goes out from himself and enters into a deeper relationship with the living cosmos. But, though both planes must be balanced and equal, the upper plane is dependent on the lower plane. The lower plane is the source of dynamic consciousness; it is man's primary center, and all activities of the upper plane must arise out of this primary center, or else man's upper plane
will atrophy and degenerate into a dependence on ideals and static mental concepts. Thus, in Fantasia of the Unconscious, Lawrence writes:

> The blood-consciousness and the blood-passion is the very source and origin of us. Not that we can stay at the source. Nor even make a goal of the source, as Freud does. The business of living is to travel away from the source. But you must start every single day fresh from the source. You must rise every day afresh out of the dark sea of the blood.19

This dark sea of the blood, man's deepest and most elemental self, is a dynamic, rather than a static force; as such, it too must be constantly renewed, just as it constantly renews man's upper self. And this is why sex plays a major role in Lawrence's animistic religion. "In sex," Lawrence writes, "we have our basic, most elemental being. Here we have our most elemental contact."20

And, through this contact, the blood, the elemental being in man, finds its renewal. "In this renewal through coition," Lawrence goes on to say,

lies the great magic of sex. The life of an

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individual goes on apparently the same from day to
day. But as a matter of fact there is an inevitable
electric accumulation in the nerves and the blood,
an accumulation which weighs there and broods there
with intolerable pressure. And the only possible
means of relief and renewal is in pure passional
interchange. There is and must be a pure passional
interchange from the upper self, as when men unite
in some great creative or religious or constructive
activity. . . . But the very possibility of such a
goal arises out of the vivid dynamism of the conscious
blood. And the blood in an individual finds its
great renewal in a perfected sex circuit.21

In Lawrence's psychology, as in his animistic re-
ligion, the sexual act is, in a sense, man's basic ani-
mistic relationship. Without it, man soon degenerates.
With it, he not only renews his own consciousness, but
can move out of himself in "pure passional interchange,"
into the ever deeper relationship with the living cosmos
in which, Lawrence feels, lies the salvation of the Mex-
ican people. But, though it is basic, sex is not the
chief relationship of Lawrence's religion. All three re-
lationships are inter-related, and all three are import-
ant. Man finds his way to the Morning Star only by shed-
ding his self-conscious, mental self; by, as Lawrence
writes of Don Ramon, "passing out in himself, in the very
quick of himself, to the Quick of all being and existence"

21 Ibid., p. 214.
(XVII, p. 278); and, once there, by achieving a dynamic relationship between the living universe and his own sexually renewed, four-centered unconscious. The Morning Star is, thus, an extremely elusive god. The moment man fails in any one of the three relationships, he loses the Star and begins to degenerate.
CHAPTER IV

THE FAILURE OF THE RELIGION

According to the religion which Lawrence creates in *The Plumed Serpent*, the salvation of Mexico lies in the Mexicans' achieving a meaningful relationship with the living universe, with the women they marry, and with the forces of their own pre-conscious selves. Even for the best of men, such a religion is no easy creed to follow. It demands that a man accept a new set of values, a new vision of the world, and, since the religion does not offer a reward after death, a courageous affirmation of the worth of temporal existence. Even Don Ramon, who, in the novel, is the living Quetzalcoatl, realizes how hard his religion is to follow; at one point he reflects that "to find the way, far, far along, to the bright Quick of all things, this is difficult, and required all a man's strength and courage" (XVII, p. 278). But the average Mexican peon in *The Plumed Serpent* is not a Don Ramon; he is an illiterate, childlike being who has little
control over his passions and whose favorite occupations are lice-picking and being emotionally swept away by the religious ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. And yet, the peon is the man whom Lawrence is attempting to lead into the threefold relationship of the Morning Star.

It is true that Lawrence believes that the Mexicans, because of their affinities with the pre-Flood world, are more disposed towards an animistic religion than towards Christianity, but Lawrence does not assume that once the average Mexican is told about animism, given a god which his pre-Flood ancestors worshiped, and taught a prehistoric ritual, Mexico will automatically be saved from the problems which beset it. Lawrence has too little faith in average humanity to make such an assumption. He does not feel that humanity is the evil Leviathan of Thomas Hobbes; but, left to itself, Lawrence believes that mankind is incapable of remaining vitally alive. "Mankind is always exhausting its possibilities," he writes in his article "Aristocracy," always degenerating into repetition, torpor, ennui, lifelessness.1 Life, the wearying strain of everyday

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1D. H. Lawrence, *The Later D. H. Lawrence* (New
existence, is too much for the average man. Even if he has the glimmerings of the Morning Star within him, the business of living will sooner or later extinguish it.

Thus, in The Plumed Serpent, Lawrence writes:

Some men are not divine at all. They have only faculties. They are slaves, or they should be slaves.

But many a man has his own spark of divinity, and has it quenched, blown out by the winds of force or ground out of him by machines. And when the spirit and the blood in man begin to go asunder, bringing the great death, most stars die out (XXVI, p. 458).

But the stars in all men are not extinguished by the forces of life. Lawrence believes that, besides the masses, a few exceptional individuals exist who are capable of both rising above the forces which grind down mankind and bringing mankind back into a living connection with the world. These men are, according to Lawrence, the world's aristocrats, regardless of their birth or material wealth. They are aristocrats because they can do what the bulk of mankind cannot do: they can provide life. "If a man whether by thought or action, makes

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life," Lawrence writes in "Aristocracy," "he is an aristocrat."2 By defining the aristocrat as one who "makes life," Lawrence does not mean that the aristocrat is one who provides the means of existence. "The providing of food, money, and amusement," he writes in the same article, "belongs, truly, to the servant class."3 The aristocrat is not primarily concerned with such things; he makes life by making men more truly alive, by establishing, as Lawrence writes, "a new connection between mankind and the circumambient universe."4

Life, for the masses, comes from the aristocrat. He is their savior, their safeguard against degeneration and lifelessness: only through him can they regain the living connection with the world that they are incapable of sustaining alone. And, because the masses depend upon aristocrats for the living relationship in which, Lawrence feels, lies their salvation, Lawrence felt at the time he wrote The Plumed Serpent that the natural aristocracy of the world should be allowed to rule mankind. "I don't

2 The Later D. H. Lawrence, p. 225.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
believe either in liberty or democracy," he wrote to Mabel Dodge Luhan in 1922.

I believe in actual, sacred, inspired authority: divine right of natural kings: I believe in the divine right of natural aristocracy, the right, the sacred duty to wield undisputed authority.5

As for the masses, Lawrence believes that since they are incapable of anything but degeneration by themselves, their function is to stop trying to run their own lives and submit to the lead of the aristocracy. Thus, he writes in Fantasia of the Unconscious:

It is the business of very few to understand and for the mass, it is their business to believe and not to bother, but to be honourable and humanly fulfill their human responsibilities. To give active obedience to their leaders, and to possess their own souls in natural pride.6

All depends on the leader, the natural aristocrat. If mankind in general, or the Mexicans in particular, are going to be truly alive, in Lawrence's sense of the word, they are going to be truly alive because their natural aristocrats have the power of making them truly alive.


6Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 129.
In *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence further develops his concept of the leader and works it into the religion of Quetzalcoatl. In *The Plumed Serpent*, Don Ramon, the living Quetzalcoatl, is the prototype of the natural aristocrat. "Ramon was a man as the least of his peons was a man," Lawrence writes,

with the beating heart and the secret loins and the lips closed on the same secret of manhood. And he was human as Kate was human, with the same yearning of the spirit, for pure knowledge and communion, the soul in the greatness of its comprehending.

But only he had that starry power for bringing together the two great human impulses to a point of fusion, for being the bird between the vast wings of the dual-created power to which a man has access and in which man has his being. The Morning Star, between the breath of dawn and the deeps of the dark (XXVI, p. 459).

Ramon has the Morning Star, the power of animistic life, within him; because of this, he alone has the ability to save Mexico from degeneration and bring the Mexicans back into a living relationship with the universe. "Only the man of a great star, a great divinity can bring the opposites together again, in a new unison," Lawrence writes. "And this was Ramon, and this was his great effort" (XXVI, p. 458).

Ramon is Mexico's leader, and, in keeping with Lawrence's view of humanity, the success of the religion
Ramon brings to Mexico depends on his powerful presence, rather than the religion's theology or racial appeal. To General Viedma, his chief disciple, Ramon compels belief because of the power of his personality. "I do not believe in Ramon?" General Viedma says to Kate.

"Well, perhaps not, in that way of kneeling before him and spreading out my arms and shedding tears on his feet. But I--I believe in him, too. Not in your way, but in mine. I tell you why. Because he has the power to compel me. If he hadn't the power to compel me, how should I believe?" (XIII, p. 224)

To the peons who work his hacienda, Ramon is the patron, who keeps them working and believing by the exertion of his will (XXV, p. 445). And, in the massive rituals of Quetzalcoatl, it is Don Ramon's "solemn, powerful voice," Lawrence writes, which sends "a change over the crowd, removing them from their vulgar complacency" (XXI, p. 370). Even the written hymns of Quetzalcoatl, which contain the bulk of the religion's theology, are a success only because the voice of Don Ramon is distinguishable in them. "Of themselves," Lawrence writes, "they [the Mexicans] dared not revive the old motion, nor stir the blood in the old way. But in the Songs and Hymns of Quetzalcoatl, there spoke a new voice, the voice of a master and authority" (XVII, p. 286).
The salvation of Mexico depends upon Don Ramon. He is Mexico's natural aristocrat, and only through him can the Mexicans be saved. And, according to Ramon, this is as it should be. If people are going to be saved, whether they are Mexicans or not, he feels that their salvation lies in the hands of natural aristocrats. "I would like," he tells General Viedma,

"to be one of the Initiates of the Earth. One of the Initiators. Every country its own saviour, Cipriano: or every people its own Saviour. And the First Men of every people, forming a Natural Aristocracy of the World. One must have aristocrats, that we know. But natural ones, not artificial" (XVII, p. 272).

In Lawrence's and Don Ramon's insistence on the necessity of natural aristocrats if the world is to be saved, however, lie the seeds of failure for the religion of Quetzalcoatl. As long as Don Ramon can personally exert his influence over the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent he is powerful, and his attempts to save Mexico are a success. "At home in his own district," Lawrence writes,

Don Ramon felt the power flow into him from his people. He was their chief, and by his effort and his power he had almost overcome their ancient, fathomless resistance. Almost he had awed them back into the soft mystery of living, awed them until the tension of their resistant, malevolent wills relaxed (XXV, p. 443).
But away from home, away from the people over whom he exerts a constant influence, Don Ramon loses his power. In Mexico City, he is no longer the patron that he is in his native Sayula. Instead, he is, according to Lawrence, "bled, bled by the subtle, hidden malevolence of the Mexicans, and the ugly negation of the greedy, mechanical foreigners" (XXV, p. 443). And, though he succeeds in spreading the religion of Quetzalcoatl throughout Mexico, he cannot spread it personally; the religion has to be spread by his followers and by the army of General Viedma. As a result, the religion spreads, as Lawrence describes it, "sinisterly" (XXVI, p. 460): so much so that towards the end of the novel Lawrence comments: "the whole country was thrilling with a new thing [the religion of Quetzalcoatl], with a new release of energy. But there was a sense of violence and crudity in it all, a touch of horror" (XXVI, p. 461).

Thus, what started out as a religious attempt to save Mexico from violence and horror ends up showing indications of being another outlet for the very tendencies that the religion was meant to subvert. By the end of the novel, Don Ramon's attempts to save Mexico seem doomed
to failure. Only in his home district is he a success; and, since the religion of the people there depends entirely upon his living presence, Ramon's success at home can be no more than a partial victory. But Ramon's failure is not his own fault, nor is it the fault of his theology. He fails because he is only one man, one aristocrat among millions who are incapable of maintaining a living relationship with the universe unless they are constantly stimulated by the presence of a leader.

Because of Lawrence's view of mankind, the possibility of a religion like the religion of Quetzalcoatl being truly effective in saving humanity depends on a constant succession of large groups of saviors. And, as Lawrence shows in *The Plumed Serpent*, the savior is a rare individual. Not only is Don Ramon the only natural aristocrat in Mexico, he is apparently the only one Mexico will produce for quite a while, since there is no character in *The Plumed Serpent* who seems capable of taking his place once he dies. Because of this, the salvation of mankind appears to be a futile task; and, as Lawrence indicates in his later writings, the religion of Quetzalcoatl is a creed properly designed for the aristocrat, not for the masses.
In *The Man Who Died*, a short novel written the year after *The Plumed Serpent* was published, Lawrence once more writes about a natural aristocrat, this time Christ after his resurrection. But, unlike Don Ramon, Lawrence's Christ makes no attempt to save anybody.

"'My mission is over,'" Christ tells Madeleine in the garden shortly after his resurrection, "'and my teaching is finished, and death has saved me from my own salvation. Oh, Madeleine,'" he goes on to say, "'I want to take my single way in life, which is my portion.'" Through death, the Christ of *The Man Who Died* has gained a deeper insight into the nature of man; and now, after rising, he realizes the futility of trying to save all men. A few days after meeting Madeleine in the garden, he sees a peasant, and reflects:

> Why, then, should he be lifted up. Let the earth remain earth, and hold its own against the sky. I was wrong to seek to lift it up. I was wrong to try to interfere. The ploughshare of devastation will be set in the soil of Judaea, and the life of this peasant will be overturned like the sods of the field. No man can save the earth from tillage. It is tillage, not salvation.\(^7\)

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 22.
Mankind in general, the risen Lord feels, is incapable of being "lifted up." Convinced of this, The Christ of The Man Who Died renounces his mission, turns his back on his followers, and seeks his own fulfillment in the world. And, once he enters the world, he feels sure that he made the right choice. "Strange is the phenomenal world, dirty and clean together!" he exclaims after he sets off on his travels. "And I am the same. Yet I am apart! And life bubbles variously. Why should I have wanted it to bubble all alike? What a pity I preached to them!"9 As the novel ends, Lawrence's Christ finds his fulfillment, his Morning Star. He allegorically "ascends to the Father" not by being a savior of mankind, but by entering into a vital relationship with an exceptional woman.

The Man Who Died represents the culmination of the latent pessimism found in The Plumed Serpent. The Christ of The Man Who Died is as capable of being a religious savior as Don Ramon is, but to Lawrence's Christ, leadership is pointless. And Lawrence agrees with him. In 1928, in a letter to Witter Bynner, Lawrence writes:

9Ibid., p. 41.
Dear Bynner: I sniffed the red herring in your last letter a long time: then at last decide it's a live sprat. I mean about The Plumed Serpent and the 'hero.' On the whole, I think you're right. The hero is obsolete, and the leader of men is a back number. . . . On the whole I agree with you, the leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore. And the new relationship will be some sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men and men and women, and not the one up one down, lead on I follow, ich dien sort of business.10

The savior, as Lawrence implies in The Man Who Died and explicitly states to Witter Bynner, is a dead issue for him. But, as The Man Who Died shows, Lawrence does not feel this way because his view of mankind has changed. If anything, his view of mankind worsened in the two years between the publication of The Plumed Serpent and his letter to Witter Bynner. Two months before he wrote the letter quoted above, he wrote to Rolf Gardiner that "mankind is largely bad, just now especially--and one must hate the bad, and try to keep what bit of warmth alive one can, among the few decent."11 The new relationship which Lawrence proposes to Bynner is not, therefore, a new scheme for the salvation of the masses; it is directed towards the few who are capable of it. With the

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10Moore, II, 1045.

11Ibid., II, 1034.
death of the savior, Lawrence's plans for a national religion also died. And, because of his pessimistic view of the human race, Lawrence could never again entertain the fancy that the multitudes might unite under some religious banner to work out their salvation.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Despite the ultimate failure of the religion of Quetzalcoatl, it represents Lawrence's most serious attempt to find a theological expression for his own vision of life. Truly living, living in dynamic relationship with the forces of creation, with the forces inherent in his own being, with what he felt was the life-restoring force of the sexual act was, for Lawrence, the core of human existence. His God was life itself, and he felt that the purpose of religion was to help man come into a closer relationship with the god of life. Christianity, at least as Lawrence understood it, did not preach a living, vital god; therefore Christianity had no appeal for him. "It was quite easy for me [to reject Christianity]," Lawrence wrote in his essay "Hymns in a Man's Life":

my immediate forebears had already done it for me. Salvation, heaven, virgin birth, miracles, even the Christian dogmas about right and wrong--one soon got
them adjusted. I never could really worry about them. Heaven is one of the instinctive dreams. Right and wrong is something you can't dogmatize about; it's not so easy. As for my soul, I simply don't and never did understand how I could "save" it. One can save one's pennies. But how can one save one's soul? One can only live one's soul. The business is to live, really alive. And this needs wonder.1

Any true religion, Lawrence felt, should be based upon a wonder for life, for the godhead of all existence. And Christianity, with its abstract moral code, its concept of a transcendent God, and its emphasis on the next life rather than the life of the present denied Lawrence access to the wonder which he sought.

Lawrence was equally at odds with European civilization. As Lawrence saw them, the Europeans of the twentieth century were products of the rationalism of the eighteenth; they had narrowed down life to mean life dominated by the mind and had substituted the intellect for the fulness of human consciousness. "The eighteenth century," Lawrence wrote in his essay "The Good Man," "like a vile Shylock, carved a pound of flesh from the human psyche, called it a 'good man'--and lo! we all

began to reduce ourselves to this little monstrosity."²

For Lawrence, the life of man meant far more than mental life. He believed that man's godhead lay in his dynamic, creative unconscious; and that man's intellect constituted only a small, static part of man's psychic being. It is in man's pre-mental consciousness, his four unconscious centers that man is most alive, according to Lawrence. And, because the twentieth-century European had refused to live from all four of these centers, the European had lost contact with his godhead.

In his attempt to find a religion which could express his concept of God, Lawrence turned away from Christianity and European civilization and, through a study of primitive cultures, discovered the clues to a theology more in keeping with his own view of life. Religion, he came to believe, was once based on a feeling of wonder for the living universe; at some prehistoric time man was not obsessed with abstractions but devoted his life to living from his four unconscious centers. At that time, man did not believe in a transcendent God; his god was everywhere, and the business of living consisted of the

²Edward D. McDonald (ed.), Phoenix, p. 752.
great religious experience of striving constantly to enter deeper and deeper into a powerful, living relationship with the forces of life itself.

This prehistoric civilization, Lawrence believed, had been destroyed with the great Flood, but not entirely destroyed. Because the Indians of the American continent did not seem to be as afflicted with mental consciousness as Lawrence's European contemporaries and because, at least in New Mexico, the Indians still retained a belief in an immanent god, Lawrence felt that these Indians still had a spiritual kinship with their prehistoric ancestors. For this reason, Lawrence purposely incorporated prehistoric myth and ritual into the religion he created in _The Plumed Serpent_. He felt that, at bottom, the Mexican Indians were primitive savages, and the myths and rituals of their ancestors would awaken in them the vision of the living cosmos which Lawrence believed in and which their ancestors possessed.

The religion of Quetzalcoatl is a Mexican religion, designed to appeal to a race which Lawrence felt had never developed the European mode of consciousness. And, because it is a Mexican religion, to assume that Lawrence
meant every nation to do exactly as the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent had done is to oversimplify his religious message. Europeans, Lawrence felt, were radically different from Mexicans; they belonged to a different race, and they did not have the same ties with primitive, pre-Flood existence that the Mexicans had. The Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent could revert to primitive myth and ritual because they were savages at heart anyway, but for Europeans, Lawrence believed that conscious reversion to a primitive state was impossible. "The truth of the matter is," Lawrence wrote in Studies in Classic American Literature,

one cannot go back [to a primitive state]. Some men can: renegade. But Melville couldn't go back: and Gauguin couldn't go back. Back towards the past, savage life. One cannot go back. It is one's destiny inside one.

There are these peoples, these "savages." One does not despise them. One does not feel superior. But there is a gulf. There is a gulf in time and being. I cannot commingle my being with theirs.  

But, while one cannot shed one's twentieth-century consciousness and automatically become a prehistoric savage, one can, Lawrence felt, learn from the savage.

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"Yet, as I say," Lawrence continues in the article quoted above, "we must make a great swerve in our onward-going life-course now, to gather up again the savage mysteries." What these "savage mysteries" are can be seen in The Plumed Serpent. For Lawrence, these mysteries meant, essentially, a movement away from dependence upon mental consciousness to a way of life which was based on the wonder of existence as experienced and as entered into by man's entire passional self. And this is the meaning of The Plumed Serpent which Lawrence intended for Europe: man must again realize the life-giving, creative function of his unconscious self; and he must again believe in the magnificent god who is beyond his knowing and yet is within him and in all of creation. Only in this way, Lawrence believed, could modern man again be truly religious and truly alive.

The religion of Quetzalcoatl failed, ultimately, because Lawrence did not believe that mankind could, by itself, sustain the vision of life which he offered.

"It seems a strange thing," Lawrence once wrote, "that men, the mass of men, cannot understand that life is the great reality, that true living fills us with vivid

\[4\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 150.}\]
life, 'the heavenly bread,' and the earthly bread merely supports this. No, men cannot understand, never have understood this simple fact."^5

But the failure of men--whether they be Europeans or the Mexicans of The Plumed Serpent--to understand Lawrence's view of life may not be entirely mankind's fault. As a religious prophet, Lawrence demanded a great deal of mankind. "Lawrence's special and characteristic gift," Aldous Huxley writes,

was an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called "unknown modes of being." He was always intensely aware of the mystery of the world, and the mystery was always for him a numen, divine. Lawrence could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind.6

This gift was, for Lawrence, a religious experience. He believed God was in his unconscious and in the world because he felt Him there; and, because the rest of mankind did not experience the wonder and mystery of existence as he did, Lawrence decided that man had somehow become perverted. In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence tried to correct

5 McDonald, p. 286.

this perversion by offering the Mexicans a national religion which would give them his own religious experience. But, as the novel shows, Lawrence's gift was a special one; most men are not by nature capable of following a religion which depends upon a constant heightened awareness of the mystery of existence.
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