

**BERNARDINO DE SAHAGÚN (1500–1590)**  
***COLOQUIOS (1564)***

Then one of the twelve, using the interpreter, repeated everything that they had said to the lords the day before. Having heard this, one of the principal lords arose, asked the indulgence of the twelve, then began to speak and made the following long speech.

Our lords, leading personages of much esteem, you are very welcome to our land and towns. We ourselves, being inferior and base, are unworthy of looking upon the faces of such valiant personages. God, Our Lord, has brought you to rule us.

You have told us that we do not know the One who gives us life and being, who is Lord of the heavens and of the earth. You also say that those we worship are not gods. This way of speaking is entirely new to us, and very scandalous. We are frightened by this way of speaking because our forebears who engendered and governed us never said anything like this. On the contrary, they left us this our custom of worshiping our gods, in which they believed and which they worshiped all the time that they lived here on earth. They taught us how to honor them. And they taught us all the ceremonies and sacrifices that we make. They told us that through them [our gods] we live and are, and that we were beholden to them, to be theirs and to serve countless centuries before the sun began to shine and before there was daytime. They said that these gods that we worship give us everything we need for our physical existence: maize, beans, chia seeds, etc. We appeal to them for the rain to make the things of the earth grow.

It would be a fickle, foolish thing for us to destroy the most ancient laws and customs left by the first inhabitants of this land . . . for the worship, faith, and service of the abovementioned [gods], in which we were born and raised. And we are accustomed to them and we have them impressed on our hearts.

You should take great care not to do anything to stir up or incite your vassals to some evil deed. How could you leave the poor elderly among us bereft of that in which they have been raised throughout their lives? Watch out that we do not incur the wrath of our gods. Watch out that the common people do not rise up against us if we were to tell them that the gods they have always understood to be such are not gods at all.

It is best, our lords, to act on this matter very slowly, with great deliberation. We are not satisfied or convinced by what you have told us, nor do we understand or give credit to what has been said of our gods. It gives us anguish, lords and fathers, to speak in this way. Here present are the lords charged with governing the kingdom and republics of this world. All of us together feel that it is enough to have lost, enough that power and royal jurisdiction have been taken from us. As for our gods, we will die before giving up serving and worshiping them. This is our determination; do what you will. This will serve in reply and contradiction to what you have said. We have no more to say, lords.

Taken from “The Lords and Holy Men of Tenochtitlan Reply to the Franciscans, 1524,” in *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 21–22.