

IDEOLOGY AND THE SACRO-SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF COMPADRAZGO  
IN SANTA MARÍA BELÉN AZITZIMITITLÁN, TLAXCALA, MEXICO

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INTRODUCTION

The major aim of this article is to discuss several features of *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship) that have been virtually ignored in the ethnographic literature on Mesoamerica. Although the data presented here derive primarily from the community of Santa María Belén Azitzimititlán, Tlaxcala, most of our analysis can be generalized to the entire rural sector of the state of Tlaxcala, for we control comparative information on 35 rural Tlaxcalan communities gathered almost continuously during the past 17 years<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, no other area of Mesoamerica of comparable size is as culturally and ethnically homogeneous as rural Tlaxcala (see Nutini and Isaac 1974: 2<sup>a</sup> Parte).

The most important of the features of *compadrazgo* analyzed here is what we call its sacro-symbolic component and functions, that is, the deeply symbolic, unconscious, fundamental, and highly efficacious domain which, more than any other socioreligious facet of the rites and ceremonies of *compadrazgo*, covertly structures and stabilizes the relationship between humans and the supernatural. Inasmuch as the sacro-symbolic functions – or whatever one may wish to call them – of *compadrazgo* are among the more obvious features of the institution, and certainly the most universal, it is strange that they have never been analyzed in the ethnographic literature. The sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* are the most important properties of the institution in terms of giving it unitary meaning and the necessary universality in rural Mesoamerica for comparative purposes. While *compadrazgo* as a global complex may vary greatly from community to community and from region to region, the structural and ideological implications of its sacro-symbolic component remain relatively constant. We contrast the sacro-

<sup>1</sup>These data are also utilized in Nutini's forthcoming book, *Ritual Kinship: The Structure and Historical Development of the Compadrazgo System in Santa María Belén and Rural Tlaxcala, and Its Comparative and Ideological Implications for Latin America* (Nutini 1976a). In addition to an exhaustive ethnographic description of the institution of *compadrazgo*

in Belén in particular and rural Tlaxcala in general, the book contains a complete structural analysis of *compadrazgo*, some ethnological generalizations concerning the institution's comparative manipulation, and its acculturative-syncretic development in Mesoamerica from the Spanish Conquest to the present.

symbolic domain with the folk-formal domain, that is, the symbolic, propitiatory aspects of the more or less orthodox folk religion of Belén, expressed in an overt, consciously accepted complex of rites and ceremonies.

A second important feature of Belén (and rural Tlaxcalan) religion in general and of the *compadrazgo* complex in particular, is the ideological unity of the Catholic and non-Catholic elements, practices, and belief systems. Although anthropologists are accustomed to thinking in terms of structural complexes with their own built-in ideological mechanisms, we stress that Belén's religious and *compadrazgo* systems must be viewed as ideologically monistic. Structurally, Beleños endeavor to maintain a separation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic, but ideologically the religious system of Belén is an undifferentiated whole, even though its Catholic and non-Catholic components often are discharged differently.

The third important feature of *compadrazgo* that we analyze in this essay is the element of risk involved in ritual sponsorship. Except for Forbes' insightful Master's Thesis (1971), the anthropological literature on *compadrazgo* contains no analysis of this important, and apparently universal, aspect of the institution<sup>2</sup>.

Sociologically, we endeavor to present *compadrazgo* not only as an egocentric, essentially dyadic phenomenon, but also as an exocentric, systemic institution which in some Mesoamerican communities rivals consanguinity and affinity as an organizational principle and integrative mechanism. This exocentric dimension is another of those facets of *compadrazgo* that have received all too little attention in the ethnographic literature.

But while our level of analysis is eminently sociological rather than psychological, we stress consistently the symbolic and sacred nature of *compadrazgo*. In other words, we indeed deal with values, attitudes, and ethos – but at their level of realization as social action and behavior, not as cognition or mentation. At the same time, we recognize that a truly complete analysis of *compadrazgo* would have to combine the sociocultural and psychological dimensions – an undertaking for which we have neither proper data nor the requisite expertise.

One aspect of the institution of *compadrazgo* that we have left untreated here is its extra-socioreligious functions. We do not, for instance, say anything explicit about the function of *compadrazgo* as a mechanism of economic reciprocity or political support, although this element is implicit in some of our discussion. Let it be clear that we are neither denying nor attempting

<sup>2</sup>The present analysis incorporates much of Forbes' thesis (1971) and is also indebted to her additional suggestions and analysis of the element of risk and of the sacro-symbolic functions and general aspects of *compadrazgo* in Belén. We are also indebted to Angel Palerm

for his thoughts and suggestions on the element of risk in *compadrazgo* and for pointing out that this facet of the institution has never been analyzed in the literature, apart from Forbes' work.

to minimize the extra-socioreligious functions of *compadrazgo*; indeed, a truly complete analysis of the institutional complex would have to include them (cf. Foster 1967; Mintz and Wolf 1950). Rather, we have chosen to single out the eminently sacred aspects and functions of *compadrazgo*; given the richness of the data at our disposal, the analysis of this single dimension is both warranted and difficult to accomplish within the confines of an article. Suffice it to add that we agree with Gudeman that the sacred nature of *compadrazgo* relationships always distinguishes them from the extra-socioreligious relationships established by means of them. Where *compadrazgo* relationships enter the economic or political domains, these are « to some degree 'spiritualized' » (Gudeman 1975:226) – but not necessarily vice versa.

### SANTA MARÍA BELÉN AZITZIMITITLÁN

Santa María Belén Azitzimititlán, or Belén, as it is known, is a community of slightly more than 1,000 population located on the western slopes of La Malintzi volcano in the central part of the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico. Like most rural Tlaxcalan communities, Belén's ethnic character is predominantly Indian. Although Náhuatl, the indigenous language of the area, is now spoken by only a few members of the community, Beleños retain a considerable identification with the Indian past and, culturally speaking, are by no means thoroughly « mestizoized » (assimilated to modern, urban-national Mexican culture). Less than 25 percent of the local working force is engaged in fulltime agriculture. Over 50 percent of the male working force migrates on a daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or seasonal basis to seek wage employment or other economic opportunities in nearby cities or as far away as Mexico City and Veracruz. Within the town are eight sewing workshops (*talleres de costura*) which specialize in the making of brassières for sale on the regional and national market. These workshops employ an average of 10 women each on a part- or full-time basis.

In terms of the organization of the family, Belén has 215 nuclear-family units with an average of 4.8 members each, and 43 three generational extended-family units; the latter comprise a total of 98 nuclear families, or about 40 percent of the population. Although residence rules are not strict, post-marital residence is overwhelmingly patrilocal. There are no formal, well-structured, and enduring kinship units in Belén beyond the extended-family household, although the non-residential extended family has some significant functions in organizing kinship behavior beyond the confines of the domestic group (see Nutini 1967:385). Belén is a bilateral community in the sense that kinship ideally is reckoned through both males and females, without social or economic differentiation on the basis of sex of connecting

relative. In practice, however, and as a structural standard, Belén has strong patrilineal bias. All effective social units operating at the religious level are structured along patrilineal lines, and the alignment of kin for a variety of purposes shows the same characteristic.

The religion of Belén may be characterized as being primarily of the folk type, that is, its ritual and ceremonial complex is markedly different from the national Catholic religion of Mexico and is carried on by the *barrios* (quasi-socioreligious units), *mayordomías* (religious stewardships), *hermandades* (religious sodalities), and other, less important religious institutions of a syncretic nature. The importance of the folk elements in the religious organization of Belén – including such non-Catholic beliefs and practices as witchcraft, sorcery, soul loss, and a series of anthropomorphic or animistic supernaturals – is enhanced by the fact that the community has no resident priest. Apart from the Mass and baptismal, funerary, and other orthodox Catholic rites, which are presided over by a visiting priest, the ritual and ceremonial life of Belén is coordinated by a body of elected administrative officials (*fiscales*) known collectively as the *República Eclesiástica* or *Ayuntamiento Religioso* (local religious government).

This brief cultural outline of Belén could be replicated a hundred times throughout rural Tlaxcala (see Nutini 1968:23-93; Nutini and Isaac 1974: 27-117), as could the ensuing discussion of *compadrazgo*. The details might vary, but the essential configuration of elements would remain the same. Regarding *compadrazgo* specifically, the major differences are in the community incidence of different types, varying from 18 to 34, although there is a core of approximately 12 types which are present in all rural Tlaxcalan communities.

#### THE UNITARY IDEOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC AND NON-CATHOLIC BELIEF SYSTEMS

The ideological predominance of Catholicism in the folk, syncretic religion of Belén may easily lead the ethnographer to think that the region has a religious-ideological system that is basically Catholic, with a few additions due primarily to the still rather strong presence of witchcraft, sorcery, and other non-Catholic beliefs and practices. This assessment erroneously presupposes that the Catholic and non-Catholic belief systems are entirely separate. But while this is true structurally – that is, the folk practices of Catholicism show few points of articulation with non-Catholic practices in ritual and ceremonialism – it is not true ideologically. Rather, both folk Catholicism and all non-Catholic aspects regarding the supernatural share a common belief system and a common ideological system in which we find the same attitudes, the same general cosmogonic conceptions, the same conception

of supernatural forces, and the same operational mechanisms – regardless of structural manifestations. Thus, when Beleños pray to a certain image, sponsor a certain *mayordomía*, or engage in the various rituals of their folk Catholicism, they are essentially engaging in the same supernaturally directed activities as when they engage in non-Catholic practices such as witchcraft, the propitiation of non-Catholic supernaturals, intensification rituals, and so on.

Although structurally there are several kinds of supernatural domains and levels of religious integration, the whole roster of supernatural deities, entities, and things comprises a global supernatural complex with a unitary ideological meaning. This complex encompasses both Catholic (rosaries, prayers, the Mass, benedictions, processions, the entire roster of supernaturals, and so on) and non-Catholic elements (witches and witchcraft, sorcerers and sorcery, *nahuales* [trickster-transformers], *tezitlazcs* [weathermen], tutelary mountain owners, enchanted places, talismans, soul loss, and so forth). Within this scheme of things, Beleños definitely distinguish between the Catholic and the non-Catholic, and they consciously try to keep them separate structurally. This structural differentiation gives the initial impression of a thoroughly differentiated religious system. But once we move beyond the immediate, structural manifestations of folk religion, we discover that the same fundamental ideological elements and psychological processes become operative when Beleños worship, propitiate, intensify, or approach both Catholic and non-Catholic supernaturals. In other words, the supernatural belief system of Belén (and rural Tlaxcala) is an undifferentiated ideological whole, even though its levels of integration (the main cleavage being Catholic versus non-Catholic) are discharged structurally in different ways. Thus, when the average Beleño undertakes a *manda* (a promise to Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint in exchange for a favor) or consults the *tetlachihuic* (sorcerer), he is engaging in basically the same supernatural activity, operating within the same psychological frame, and expecting to achieve the same results – even though the former route involves a series of ritual steps that are quite distinct from those of the latter. Furthermore, Beleños do not distinguish degree of goodness or predisposition to help between Catholic and non-Catholic supernaturals. This is clearly specified in the words of an aged informant: « Aquí en Belén siempre hemos creído que las fuerzas que gobiernan este valle de sufrimientos están la mayor parte del tiempo dispuestas a ayudar, cualquiera que sea su naturaleza. Hay gentes que rezan, otras que buscan las mayordomías, y otras que consultan y se conectan con los tetlachihuics. Todo es lo mismo si se pone el corazón en la súplica » (Here in Belén we have always believed that the forces which govern this valley of suffering, whatever their nature, are most often predisposed to help. There are people who pray, others search for mayordomía sponsorship, and still others consult and get close to the sorcerers. It is all the same if one puts one's heart in the supplication).

What is the attitude of the people toward this vast, structurally differentiated but ideologically unified supernatural array? Beleños believe that the world in which they live is controlled and regulated by supernatural powers which they can reach and with whom they can establish rapport for the benefit of social existence. Supernatural forces, deities, and personages are conceived by Beleños as existing close to them, but in a realm that is never clearly specified. These supernatural forces, deities, and personages are thought to be able to influence quickly and directly the present actions of humans and the outcome of future affairs. Furthermore, Beleños could be said to suffer the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, for seldom can they think about the supernatural in terms of general principles or forces, but almost always in terms of concrete, often personified, anthropomorphic deities, entities, or things.

Beleños show a certain ambivalence in their relationship to the supernatural: On the one hand, supernatural forces, deities, and personages are feared because they may remain indifferent to supplication when not properly propitiated; on the other hand, Beleños love them and are firmly convinced that – with the exception of the Christian devil, the *tlabuelpochinime* (a type of witch), and such tutelary mountain owners as El Cuatlapanga – the supernaturals are essentially benevolent. In general, Beleños are governed more by fear than love in their relations with the supernatural – fear that unless the appropriate ceremonies and general behavior toward the supernatural are forthcoming, there will be a disruption of the established order binding humans to their non-human overseers. In fact, the cornerstone of the religious system and the most fundamental operational principle in the supernatural belief system of Belén is: Humans and the supernatural are arranged in an established order in which both have rights and obligations, and so long as both sides comply with their respective parts, the world will run fairly smoothly – given the fact that the world of human affairs is only the best of a bad job. The theological sophistication of the Beleños is not sufficient to allow them to specify what would happen to the supernaturals if humans disregarded them completely. But Beleños are certain about what happens to humans who do not fulfill their part of the bargain, which consists primarily of two things. First, humans must retain always a certain attitude toward the supernaturals: respect, deference, a certain amount of love, and above all a firm commitment to try to please them. Second, humans must perform a vast structural array of rites, ceremonies, and specific behaviors according to specified custom on the basis of a yearly calendar, seasonal variations, recurring or unexpected events – and, above all, with respect to individual supernatural deities, personages, or objects.

The discharge of ritual is not only the core of Belén religion, it is also nearly its sole concern. Once Beleños have complied with their ritual obligations – compliance which makes the supernaturals disposed to help individuals and the group, thus making the realm of social affairs reasonably

safe – then everything else is *de facto* less important to them religiously. And in the hierarchy of rites and ceremonies concerning Catholicism, the folk aspects rank much higher than the more orthodox aspects. Thus, it is much more important to the average Beleño to sponsor a given *cargo* (folk religious office) and to participate in certain processions than, say, to go to Mass, confession, and communion. Once he has done the former, he feels no compulsion to do the latter; in his belief system, he has already done what is required of him by the supernatural. In matters of compliance, individual and collective responsibilities are not entirely separate; what is left undone by individuals may adversely influence the community as a whole by hampering the smooth functioning of the established order in human-supernatural affairs. Thus, community pressure is sometimes brought to bear upon individuals with regard to complying with rites and ceremonies, for example, those involved in several *compadrazgo* types (Nutini 1976a: Part I).

This last point deserves some elaboration, because one could easily get the impression from the ethnographic literature on Mesoamerica that community pressure for socioreligious participation and compliance results largely from economic considerations, that is, that enforced compliance with certain rites and ceremonies is mainly directed at divesting the wealthy (or, less impoverished) members of the community of their wealth and « redistributing » it to the community at large or some segment of it in the form of liquor, food, or entertainment. We do not deny that some economic « levelling » may result, as a latent function of ceremonial compliance – even though, as Cancian (1965: 106-125, 136-140) shows, this type of levelling prevents neither the maintenance nor the intergenerational transmission of differential family wealth (cf. Woods and Graves 1973: 47-48). But in our view, the prescriptive force behind compliance with religious rites and ceremonies in rural Mesoamerica rests on the sacred nature of these very rites and ceremonies. Not only does individual malingering in compliance with sacred duties reduce the community's aggregate fund of supernatural good will, but there are also certain rites or ceremonies, compliance with which is essential to the human-supernatural balance, which can be carried out properly only by persons possessing special and scarce qualities – one of which may be wealth. And it is for the reason specified above, that is, to make life secure through the ideologically most efficacious means, that individuals possessing the requisite qualities or who otherwise have reached the appropriate life, social, or religious juncture, are impelled socially toward supernatural compliance.

The supernatural belief system of Belén has one general, predominant characteristic, namely, to make the individual and the collective world of social existence safe and secure by the proper propitiation of all supernatural forces, regardless of the structural means employed. The relationship between humans and the supernatural, then, is characterized by pragmatic and rather selfish motives for which the individual and the group pay dearly in time

and both economic and social resources. Regardless of their social or recreational value, nearly all religious activities and behavior are individually and collectively aimed at propitiation of the supernatural in order to achieve certain finite goals. In fact, virtually the sole concern of religion in Belén is rapport with the supernatural, whereas ethics, morality, and appropriate behavior generally are almost exclusively a social concern<sup>3</sup>. This remarkable lack of a moral and ethical component in the folk religion of Belén and the overwhelming emphasis on propitiation and pragmatic self-interest – traits reminiscent of the pre-Hispanic, polytheistic religion of the region (see Vaillant 1950: 168-181) – set folk religion rather sharply apart from orthodox Catholicism, which is permeated with ethical values.

What the individual and the collectivity should or should not do, what is proper or improper, what is permissible or not permissible, and the setting of standards for acceptable behavior generally are regulated almost exclusively by the social structure in Belén (and rural Tlaxcala generally). Failure to comply with ethics and morality carries social and economic punishment and sanctions, but not supernatural sanctions. An individual who engages in anti-social behavior is punished by the human group and not by the saints or any other supernatural; if a couple fail to marry properly, they are punished economically or socially by their kin or a sizeable segment of the community; and so on. We caution that there are many instances in which seemingly social kinds of behavior elicit supernatural sanctions for failure to comply with expectations. Upon closer examination, however, the ethnographer discovers that these cases really involve religious, supernatural behavior and are, therefore, rightly punishable by forces beyond the domain of the social. This is the case, say, with failure to contract an important, prescriptive *compadrazgo* relationship, a failure that disrupts the human-supernatural order and affects both the individual and the group.

Given the pragmatic, self-seeking nature of religion in rural Tlaxcala, we would expect to find a good deal of supernatural specialization. Indeed, this is so, not only among Catholic supernaturals (an inherent trait of Catholicism, whose roster of specialized saints must have blended well with the pre-Hispanic, polytheistic religion of Tlaxcala), but among non-Catholic super-

<sup>3</sup> We say *virtually* because there are a few instances in which religion may become the arbiter of ethics and morality, even though this is by no means the attitude which pervades orthodox Catholicism and which regulates every domain of social behavior. A case in point is the fact that a man in Belén cannot discharge some of the most important religious *cargos* (offices) unless he is properly married, that is, married in religious ceremony. In this case religion does regulate a segment of social

behavior; on the other hand, however, religion is not a moral deterrent to polygyny or concubinage in Belén and rural Tlaxcala. The global analysis of religion clearly indicates that it has remarkably little influence on social ethics and morality, and supports the contention that religion (defined as the ritual and ceremonial propitiation of the supernatural) and the social structure (in the restricted sense) are separate domains with few overlappings.

naturals as well. Thus, just as one prays to a particular saint for a particular favor, as indicated by the saint's specialization, one can also engage specific non-Catholic supernatural personages (La Malintzi, El Cuatlapanga, Angelina María, La Serpiente Negra, and several others), practitioners, and complexes that are clearly specialized in their powers and which are approached with a variety of supplications. What is never specified is the relationship that holds together this vast supernatural pantheon, nor is there a hierarchical order in which the multiple deities, personages, practitioners, and things can be placed and which determines how they influence each other. The one vague operational principle seems to be a conscious effort to keep the Catholic complex more or less separate from the non-Catholic at the structural level. But as we have said, this manifest separation does not entail a bifurcation of the fundamental ideology and supernatural belief system. Nor does it even redound in situational exclusivity; several *compadrazgo* types, for instance, involve Catholic ceremonies followed by non-Catholic ceremonies (Nutini 1976a: Part I), both directed toward the same goal and guided by a unitary ideological system. But the fact remains that we are faced with a unitary ideological system that nevertheless can be expressed structurally in manifold ways – apparently with a minimum of confusion.

In conclusion, 450 years of acculturation, structural transformation, diffusion, and other change processes have resulted in a unitary religious ideology embracing both pre- and post-Hispanic elements, and in syncretism so complete in many other cultural domains that the search for the provenance of specific traits often is fruitless and not even very meaningful. But these forces of change have failed to homogenize either belief or praxis at the structural level in rural Tlaxcalan folk religion. Thus, we find the same individuals alternately participating in rites and ceremonies that are clearly Catholic (for example, confirmation), clearly autochthonous (for example, propitiation of tutelary mountain owners), and mixed Catholic/autochthonous (for example, erection of a Burial Cross *compadrazgo*). We have no evidence that this pluralism of structural discharge leads to confusion or personality disorders for the Beleños; indeed, the various structural realizations of Belén religion strike us as efficaciously complementary, for individuals and for the whole religious system. But does this heterogeneity at the structural level signify that the sociocultural system is in a state of flux, on its way to a synthesis that will « resolve » the segmented nature of belief and praxis? Apparently not – unless a situation that has persisted for roughly four centuries can be taken to represent a state of flux. But is it a sign of a poorly integrated sociocultural system? Again, we must answer in the negative, for as Barnett has argued, compartmentalization – the partial or complete dichotomization, or segmentation, of otherwise conflicting beliefs or behaviors – is a universal aspect of sociocultural systems irrespective of the question of change (Barnett 1971: 485, 491-492). We would add that, in our view, not only is compartmentalization an important psychological capacity that

enables individuals to resolve conflict through disjunctive avoidance, it is also one of the major mechanisms or principles by means of which sociocultural systems *qua* systems achieve integration. This principle should long ago have been evident – but was not, except to a few (see McFee 1968) – to students of acculturation, because the mechanism of compartmentalization is most readily perceptible when two vastly different sociocultural complexes or systems meet and must be reconciled through simple incorporation, substitution, syncretism, or compartmentalization. Space permits us to add only that Mesoamerican ethnology, with its potential for good diachronic controls, presents fertile ground for a thorough study of compartmentalization as a dynamic principle of sociocultural integration.

### THE FOLK-FORMAL AND SACRO-SYMBOLIC DOMAINS

As we have seen, Beleños distinguish between the Catholic and the non-Catholic and try to maintain them separate structurally. But what is true structurally is not true ideologically, that is, the supernatural belief system of Belén is an undifferentiated ideological whole, even though its Catholic and non-Catholic components are discharged structurally in different ways and sometimes even sequentially. At another level, however, we encounter a fundamental distinction of great theoretical importance for understanding Belén religion: a distinction between folk-formal and sacro-symbolic domains.

When we refer to the folk-formal aspects, elements, or attributes of the *compadrazgo* system in Belén, we have in mind, on the one hand, the folk-sanctioned ways of administering the sacraments involving ritual kinship sponsorship and the celebration of a large number of fiestas in the Catholic calendar that require ritual kinship sponsorship and involve strictly Catholic ceremonies, such as Masses, processions, rosaries, benedictions, and so on – which may or may not require the presence of a priest or other folk-sanctioned religious practitioner(s). On the other hand, the term folk-formal also refers to the system of beliefs which underlies these folk-sanctioned, administrative ways. The functional attribution of this complex has been analyzed elsewhere (Nutini 1976a: Part II), and the essentially Catholic ideology and symbolism of the folk-formal domain have been well described in the ethnographic literature (see Carrasco 1952; Foster 1953, 1960; Gillin 1951; La Farge 1947; Madsen 1960; Spicer 1940; Vogt 1969; Wagley 1949). What interests us here is that the folk-formal ideology and symbolic complex which regulate the surface structure of religious-ritual kinship in Belén and which are uppermost in the minds of the people, are underlaid by a sacro-symbolic ideological complex that plays an important role in structuring certain facets and behaviors in the *compadrazgo* system.

Of course, this differentiation of domains should not be interpreted to

mean that we deny sacred or symbolic attributes to the folk-formal domain. We mean, rather, that the structure and ideology of folk-formal symbolism are somewhat different from what we denote as the sacro-symbolic domain. In the latter, symbolic attributes and components acquire a different, much more encompassing and integral nature than in the former. We are distinguishing, then, between the symbolic, propitiatory aspects of the more or less *orthodox* folk religion of Belén, expressed in an overt, consciously accepted complex of rites and ceremonies, and a more basic symbolic and propitiatory complex which is unconsciously and covertly practiced – that is, its elements are not, for the most part, subject to the same extent of articulate mentation as are the elements of the folk-formal domain – but which more adequately illustrate the most fundamental supernatural belief system that we described earlier in this paper. When Beleños engage in the various aspects of the folk-formal domain of their religion they are not so intensely bringing into play the fundamental supernatural belief system as when they engage in what we are calling sacro-symbolic behavior. From this viewpoint, we can say that the sacro-symbolic is the most basic operational principle which, more than any other kind of socioreligious behavior, covertly structures the relationship between humans and the supernatural, thereby creating the greatest stability in the established human-supernatural order. Thus, we are not substantively separating the folk-formal from the sacro-symbolic, but merely separating the level at which they are efficacious and showing how the latter represents a more fundamental ideological-structural juncture in the relationship between humans and the supernatural for the conduct of a safe and orderly social life.

Thus, we can define the domain of the sacro-symbolic as the kind of supernaturally oriented behavior which to the highest degree exhibits the operational principles regulating the relationship between humans and the supernatural, and whose efficacy is greater than that of strictly folk-formal behavior – or what we can regard as folk-formal behavior within the context of Belén's traditional, Catholic, folk religion. Sacro-symbolic behavior as practiced by the people of Belén and rural Tlaxcala constitutes a deep, unconscious, and highly symbolic complex of rites, ceremonies, and associated aspects which, in the global socioreligious belief system of the community, is the most efficacious in creating rapport between humans and the supernatural, thereby making the world reasonably safe and secure for human existence. By the term sacro-symbolic complex we mean simply the total ensemble of sacro-symbolic behavior together with its associated system of symbols, which is an undifferentiated whole operating across the global spectrum of supernaturally oriented behavior. Therefore, when we refer to the sacro-symbolic functions or dimensions of *compadrazgo* we have in mind something far more encompassing than its strictly folk-formal functions and aspects, which serve either to reinforce certain highly significant, basically orthodox practices (e.g., baptism, confirmation, first communion) or to intensify

certain folk-formal practices (e.g., blessing of an image, giving a scapulary, the coronation of the Virgin Mary), which in themselves may have important primary or subsidiary sacro-religious aspects (see Nutini 1976a: Part I).

## THE SYMBOLIC SYSTEM OF BELÉN

The symbolic system of Belén is a syncretic complex which began at the time of the Conquest and continued to evolve until perhaps the end of the 19th century. It contains pre-Hispanic religious and magical elements, Spanish Catholic elements from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, European witchcraft elements, and even some essentially secular elements introduced by the start of the machine age in Tlaxcala about a century ago (see Nutini 1976a: Appendix 1).

By symbolic system, we mean simply the global complex of symbols which constitute the principal reinforcing mechanism operating between a stated ideological order and its corresponding structural domain. Thus, the symbolic system of Belén has the primary function of reinforcing the supernatural belief system of the community, uniting it into a single complex of rituals, ceremonies, and associated practices. Along this line, we should note that individual socioreligious symbols in a symbolic system are not independently efficacious; rather, they exert a collective action and impinge upon each other to form an integrated whole. And, from the heuristic viewpoint, independent symbols are rarely isolable and we must deal, instead, with symbolic systems involving collective representations.

By socioreligious symbol we mean a physical (sign) or social (patterned action) representation which stands for a general or particular concept embodying a single or complex ideological domain. The presence or activation of the symbol involves the functional reinforcement of the denoted ideological complex, which is always translated into specified behavior and action. Symbols and symbolic behavior in Belén are sociopsychologically designed to create kind of self-fulfilling prophesy of what the supernatural belief system of the community dictates; in fact, there are really no effective symbols which are not religious or directly associated with Belén's supernatural belief system (see Nutini 1976a: Part I).

Be it a scapulary, a *chiquihuite* (basket containing ceremonial food and liquor), a *pedimento* (formal request of ritual kinship sponsorship), a round of speeches or innumerable other physical or social entities, symbols in Belén are clearly identifiable objects or occasions which have two immediately distinctive functions beyond their evocative, reinforcing functions: to impress upon the people the importance of ideological beliefs in operation and the necessity of doing things according to tradition and custom; and to insist upon the proper discharge of the events which will follow and upon the

rights and obligations binding the personnel involved. These two secondary functions of the symbolic system, or symbolic behavior, are the psychological corollary of the main, evocative, reinforcing function, whose aim is to foster an overlapping of the ideological and structural orders. Stated differently, the most fundamental property of the socioreligious symbol is the reinforcement of the stated ideological order, acted out in its corresponding structural domain. From this viewpoint, a socioreligious symbol is a kind of mechanism which involves both the ideological and the structural orders: the more effective the symbol, the stronger the causal relationship.

Be they physical or social, socioreligious symbols have three additional important properties. First, although they are physically or socially represented and immediately perceived by the polity, the people are not aware of them as evoking the reinforcement of ideological beliefs translated into behavior and action. Thus, when couples who are asked to enter into a baptismal *compadrazgo* relationship accept a candle and *chiquihuite*, they are, of course, aware that the *pedimento* ceremony is an important event in the syntagmatic chain of *compadrazgo*, concretely conceived. But they are not conscious of the analytical or systemic dimension of the *pedimento*, that is, they are not aware of it as a symbol that not only maps the future of this particular *compadrazgo* relationship but also formally binds the contracting parties to a socioreligious domain whose ideology structures behavior and action on a rather broad scale. It may be noted in this connection that socioreligious symbols vary in their degree of conscious (or unconscious) evocation: the more physical the symbol, the more conscious the evocation, and conversely, the more social the symbol, the more unconscious the evocation<sup>4</sup>.

Second, the efficacy of a symbol or complex of symbols is always commensurate with its physical or social representation, that is, with the form and position that it occupies within the general ideological-structural domain under consideration. The adequacy of a physical or social representation of a given symbol is determined primarily by historical, psychological, and even specific political and economic considerations. Let us take, for example, the case of the scapulary as a physical symbol of protection against supernatural, evil spirits. The origin, syncretic composition, or specific psychological mechanisms which make this sociophysical symbol an efficacious reinforcer of behavior and action do not matter to Tlaxcalans, nor are they conceptually interesting to us in the present context. What is interesting and conceptually significant is that the sociophysical evocation of the scapulary is an effective reinforcer of certain kinds of behavior and action, among which the estab-

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with what we have said about the primacy of the folk over the orthodox aspects of Catholicism, one can easily imagine the greater effectiveness of symbolic behavior

regarding folk religion. The Mass, for example, is not an effective symbol, whereas the cross, a strictly orthodox symbol, has acquired interesting folk and even non-Catholic dimensions.

lishment of an appropriate compadrazgo relationship is one of the most important.

Third, although symbols or symbolic complexes have different individual interpretations, invariably they have a core of unitary meaning which constitutes their effectiveness at the pan-societal level and makes their functional discharge uniform at all levels of societal integration. To a large extent, it is this unitary symbolic meaning of compadrazgo, coupled with its fundamentally ideological basis, which makes pan-Tlaxcalan compadrazgo a remarkably uniform institution. Of course, the compadrazgo system is discharged in accordance with local constraints, for example, the type of kinship system or the degree of secularization, which vary from community to community. But once we have analyzed the basic complex, we need only ascertain and measure these local constraints in order to determine the structure and function of the compadrazgo system in any Tlaxcalan community.

It is evident that proper analysis of symbolic behavior must involve an important psychological dimension. Indeed, anthropologists who have dealt with symbolism (see Turner 1967; Douglas 1967; Leach 1962) have, very often implicitly, emphasized the psychological matrix of operation to the consequent detriment of their avowed sociological aims. The analysis of symbolism presented here sins explicitly in the opposite direction. As a result, we might be criticized, for example, for confusing symbolic behavior with what are simply highly structured aspects of social behavior. Along this line, the *pedimento*, which we have treated as a complex symbol or a bundle of symbolic behavior, might alternatively be analyzed as a highly significant event in the syntagmatic chain of compadrazgo. But analyzing it as a complex symbol emphasizes the articulation of the symbolic system as a mechanism of evocation and reinforcement in sociological terms – which means analogously the same in psychological terms. Hence, the criticism which might be made of the present analysis could be made equally of the traditional, more psychological analyses of symbolism. Those considerations aside, we wish to stress two points: the complementarity of the psychological and sociological dimensions of symbolism; and the role of symbolic behavior as a mechanism of evocation, intensification, and reinforcement of the ideological domain.

#### COMPADRAZGO IN BELÉN: AN OUTLINE OF THE LOCAL PARADIGM

There are 31 occasions in the life cycle, ceremonial cycle, and socioeconomic cycle of Belén in which couples, an individual man or woman, in some cases children, and frequently groups may enter into compadrazgo relationships. Beleños attach sociological significance to the following clusters of compa-

drazgo types: *Compadrazgo Sacramental* (Sacramental Compadrazgo), *Compadrazgo No-Sacramental Primario* (Primary Non-Sacramental Compadrazgo), and *Compadrazgo No-Sacramental Secundario* (Secondary Non-Sacramental Compadrazgo). The 31 compadrazgo types in Belén are distributed as follows within these broad clusters:

*Compadrazgo Sacramental:*

- (1) *Bautizo*. Baptism.
- (2) *Casamiento*. Marriage. (Including 10 subsidiary compadrazgo relationships, brought about by the following objects or events: three *padrinos* [godfathers] and *madrinas* [godmothers] of *velación* [nuptial benedictions], *arras* [earnest-money], and *anillos* [wedding rings]; and seven *madrinas* of *lazo* [ornamental tie], *ramo* [flower bouquet], *libro* [prayer book], *rosario* [rosary], *pañuelo* [scarf], *pastel* [wedding cake], and *cola* [train of the bridal dress].)
- (3) *Confirmación*. Confirmation.
- (4) *Parada de Cruz de Entierro*. Erection of a Burial Cross.
- (5) *Primera Comunión*. First Communion.
- (6) *Compadrazgo Contraído por el Casamiento de los Hijos*. Compadrazgo Contracted by the Marriage of One's Children.
- (7) *Compadrazgo Contraído por el Casamiento de los Abijados*. Compadrazgo Contracted by the Marriage of One's Godchildren.

*Compadrazgo No-Sacramental Primario:*

- (8) *Acostada del Niño Dios en Casa*. Bedding of the Child Jesus at Home.
- (9) *Acostada del Niño Dios en la Iglesia*. Bedding of the Child Jesus in the Church.
- (10) *Apadrinación de Ornamentos de la Iglesia*. Sponsorship of Church Paraphernalia. (Including the following objects: *pallio* [pallium], *imágenes* [images], *sagrario* [cibary], *estandartes* [banners], *altar* [altar], *lienzo de Cristo* [Christ's tunic], *cáliz* [chalice], *ornamentos sacerdotales* [priestly ornaments], *reclinatorio* [pew], etc.)
- (11) *Bendición de Santo o Imagen*. Blessing of a Saint (saint's picture) or Image.
- (12) *Coronación de la Santísima Virgen*. Coronation of the Holy Virgin.
- (13) *Escapulario*. Scapulary.
- (14) *Graduación*. Graduation. (Including graduation from: *kinder* [nursery school], *primaria* [grade school], *secundaria* [junior high school], *preparatoria* [high school], *enfermería* [practical nursing school], *taquimecanografía* [secretarial school], and *comercio* [business school].)
- (15) *Parada de Cruz de Actiopan*. Erection of a Cross at the Communal Spring of Actiopan.

- (16) *Quince Años*. Celebration of a Girl's 15th Birthday.
- (17) *Sacada a Misa*. Taking a Mother to Hear Mass on the 40th Day after Giving Birth.
- (18) *Compadrazgo de Evangelios*. Presenting a Child in Church at Age Three.
- (19) *Compadrazgo de Limpia*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted by the Ceremonial Cleansing of a Sick Person.
- (20) *Compadrazgo por Bendición de Obras de la Iglesia*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted by the Blessing of Church Repairs or Improvements. (Including the following additions or improvements: *pisos nuevos* [new floors], *ventanales* [windows], *atrio* [atrium], *altares* [altars], *bautisterio* [baptistry], *banquetas* [benches], etc.)

*Compadrazgo No-Sacramental Secundario:*

- (21) *Bendición de Casa*. Blessing of a New House. (Including also the blessing of a new *sitio* [house site], *tienda* [shop], *baños* [baths], *panadería* [bakery], *taller de costura* [sewing shop], and *peluquería* [barber shop].)
- (22) *Bendición de Coche o Camión*. Blessing of a New Car or Truck.
- (23) *Bendición de los Misterios*. Blessing of the Holy Manger.
- (24) *Parada de Cruz*. Erection of a Cross. (For a variety of occasions, including the inauguration of a certain item of property, ceremonial object, or thanksgiving or intensification rite involving the following: *horno* [baking oven], *molino de nixtamal* [maize-grinding mill], *tienda* [shop], *pozo* [well], *lavadero* [washing place], *campo* [cultivated field], *campanario* [belfry], *sementera* [first seeds], *almiar* [first haystacks], etc.)
- (25) *Primera Piedra*. Setting the Foundations of a House.
- (26) *Compadrazgo de Amistad*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted for Reasons of Close Friendship.
- (27) *Compadrazgo por Apadrinación en Bodas de Plata*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted for the Occasion of a Silver (25th) Wedding Anniversary.
- (28) *Compadrazgo de Aretes*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted When the First Pair of Earrings is Given to a Baby Girl.
- (29) *Compadrazgo por el Estreno de Objetos Nuevos*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted by the Handsel of New Utensils. (Including primarily *coche* [car], *camión* [truck], *muebles* [furniture], *televisión* [television], *estufa* [stove], *instrumentos musicales* [musical instruments], *arado* [plow], *pala* [shovel], etc.)
- (30) *Compadrazgo de Fruta Cuata*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted When a Person Finds a Twin Fruit or Vegetable.
- (31) *Compadrazgo de Jícara o Jarrito*. Compadrazgo Relationship Contracted by Drinking Partners.

Although each of these 31 types of compadrazgo has specific social,

economic, religious, and ceremonial aspects which vary in intrinsic and symbolic importance and in the degree of institutionalization of the event and its required activities, they can be broadly divided into two classes, prescriptive and preferential. Prescriptive types (1, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 30), are characterized by the necessity to comply with them, and by the religious, social, and sometimes economic sanctions which individuals incur if they do not comply. Preferential types, as the term indicates, do not elicit social or economic sanctions if they are not complied with. Moreover, *compadrazgo* types are ranked in overall importance, and sacramental types (1-7) do not necessarily rank higher than all non-sacramental types (8-31). There has been a persistent theme in the ethnographic literature that sacramental *compadrazgo* types are intrinsically always the most important (Paul 1942; Mintz and Wolf 1950; Foster 1953; Ravicz 1967). This is not so in rural Tlaxcala – and probably in many other areas of Latin American, as well – where there are non-sacramental types which are socially, religiously, and symbolically more important than sacramental types.

All of the 31 types share – *inter alia* – the structural feature of being relationships that are established between *primary actors* (two individuals, couples, or a fixed number of related personnel) through the link of a *mediating entity* (a person, image, object, or occasion). The latter is the necessary cause of the *compadrazgo* relationship, which cannot be established without the mediation of a person, image, object, or occasion. But central as it is to the system from a structural viewpoint, the mediating entity is not in itself of primary importance. Indeed, when all the functional attributes of *compadrazgo* are assessed, this aspect shrinks to relative unimportance. Beleños express this quite clearly when they point out that even in those types of *compadrazgo* that involve persons as mediating entities, once the *compadrazgo* rites and ceremonies of initiation have been terminated, the godchild becomes a passive figure in the ensuing social and economic network, which is dominated entirely by parents and godparents and their extensions. This structural feature is much more obvious, of course, in all *compadrazgo* types in which the mediating entity is a religious image or a material or symbolic object or occasion; here, the mediating object is clearly a mere instrument for establishing the relationship. Formally speaking, then, we can say that the subject-object link (the *padrino(a)-abijado(a)* dyad) of *compadrazgo* plays a structurally passive role, while the subject-subject link (the *compadres-compadres* dyad) plays the more prominent role in the web of *compadrazgo* behavior (cf. Mintz and Wolf 1950; Gudeman 1975)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The terms for the several relationships of *compadrazgo* require some explanation for non-speakers of Spanish. For illustration, let us take baptismal *compadrazgo*, the primary participants of which are: *padrino* (godfather), *ma-*

*drina* (godmother), *abijado* (male godchild) or *abijada* (female godchild), *padre* (godchild's father), and *madre* (godchild's mother). The *padrino* and *madrina* can be designated together as *padrinos* (godparents), just as the *padre*

The structural form of *compadrazgo* involves a large measure of what may be called mechanical aspects, that is, the component parts of every *compadrazgo* type are well integrated, thoroughly known to the people, and highly institutionalized. In addition, the behavior of actors of every type also involves a high degree of uniformity, and people invariably know how to behave in every event and action associated with each type of *compadrazgo*. The norms and ideals regulating the selection of *compadres*, the time and occasion of establishing a *compadrazgo* relationship, the duties and obligations involved in the relationship, the extension of patterns of behavior and ritual kinship terminology, the alternate options of discharging rituals and ceremonies, and in general all structural aspects of *compadrazgo*, are always clearly in the minds of the people, and deviations from these norms are governed by the maximization of specific goals or aspirations of the primary actors involved. In this context, the people make a sharp distinction, with regard to the functions of *compadrazgo*, between primary actors (those immediately involved in the «contractual» arrangement) and secondary actors (the personnel – kin and non-kin – who by extension are affected by the relationship). This is a very important dimension in the analysis of the institution, given the fact that Beleños cannot ask kinsmen to enter into *compadrazgo* relationships.

This brings us to a paramount distinction that Beleños make regarding *compadrazgo* relationships: the great difference between asking someone to enter into a *compadrazgo* relationship, and being asked by someone to enter into a *compadrazgo* relationship. The structural position of an individual asking another to become his *compadre* and that of the individual being asked (and by extension, all related personnel associated with the primary actors) is quite different. When A asks B to enter into a *compadrazgo* relationship, A is requesting that B incur certain economic, social, and religious obligations which will later be reciprocated by A, but which at least initially are often higher for B than for A, and this initial inequality influences the future of the relationship. Further, the person requesting the initiation of the *compadrazgo* relationship must by definition place himself in the debt of the person being asked and this also plays a prominent role in molding the future of the relationship. It should be clear that these two aspects of *compadrazgo* relationships are more or less balanced in any individual's total web of *compadrazgo*, for in the average *compadrazgo* career in Belén an individual is asked to become a *compadre* approximately as many times as he asks others. But how is the system regulated, for it may seem obvious that one could easily refuse to become involved in the obligations of compa-

and madre can be designated together as *padres* (parents). The madre and the *madrina* address and refer to each other by the term *comadre*, and the padre and *padrino* similarly

use the term *compadre*. As a couple or a collectivity, one's *compadre(s)* and *comadre(s)* are referred to with the masculine form, *compadres*.

drazgo relationships? The system is regulated by two interrelated principles: no one can refuse to enter into a *compadrazgo* relationship of any type; but, second, it must always be known in advance that the people who are to be asked will accept. People adhere faithfully to these principles, and it is considered extremely bad manners to violate them. In Belén, the institution of *compadrazgo* is regarded as one of the most important regulatory mechanisms of social control and behavior, as well as a sacred institution, and Beleños are careful not to deviate from this mechanical structural form.

This last point brings us to a consideration of *compadrazgo* as a system, and not simply as an ensemble of types. From this viewpoint, another distinction of paramount importance emerges in Belén, namely, the distinction between private-individual and public-communal types. The distinction is explicitly recognized by Beleños, who consciously manipulate it in structuring community action and behavior. Briefly, private-individual types involve a relatively small number of primary and secondary actors (anywhere from five to 25 individuals) in the web of ritual kinship. Moreover, private-individual types, as the name indicates, bind to the relationship only a fractional portion of the total community. In contrast, public-communal types (9, 10, 12, 15, 20, 23) affect Belén as a whole, and during the three-day to two-week period in which the principal rites and ceremonies are conducted, and in their recurrent discharge, the people of Belén constitute symbolically – and to some extent in practice – a global ritual kinship unit with specific behavior patterns, its own terminological usages, and well delineated duties and obligations. It is in the context of the public-communal types that the systemic dimensions of *compadrazgo* are most clearly exemplified.

Analysis of 100 *compadrazgo* careers covering the last 70 years shows that married couples in Belén contract a mean average of 98 asking and 101 being-asked *compadrazgo* relationships throughout their *compadrazgo* careers, that is, from approximately ages 25 to 75. Moreover, there is a mean average of 48 couples with whom these 200 relationships are contracted, so that approximately 4.1 *compadrazgo* relationships are contracted with each couple. This is a statistical average which varies in actuality from 2 to 8, depending on the type and the stage of the average couple in the developmental cycle of their *compadrazgo* careers. Here again, when these facts are analyzed, it becomes evident that *compadrazgo* is far from being simply a dyadic arrangement between two individuals or couples (cf. Foster 1967) – and perhaps a number of extensions – but a more complex institution endowed with exocentric as well as egocentric dimensions. In fact, we can properly speak in the case of Belén of networks and webs of *compadres* which clearly transcend egocentric structuring and persist over two or three generations. In such a context, *compadrazgo* may be viewed as an exocentric system.

The systematic aspects of *compadrazgo* are almost totally absent from the ethnographic literature (see Gillin 1945; Beals 1946; Lewis 1951; Foster

1969). This slighting of the systemic aspects of compadrazgo is due primarily to an over-emphasis on the egocentric viewpoint and to the fact that the institution has been studied exclusively from the synchronic perspective, without regard for its developmental cycle. The egocentric bias undoubtedly derives in part from the strong influence exerted upon Mesoamerican ethnography by the « culture and personality » school of United States anthropology, with its strongly psychiatric bent (see, for example, Gillin 1951), but surely it reflects as well anthropology's persistent, prescientific tendency to concretize, personalize, psychologize – even anthropomorphize – the sociocultural realm at the expense of an analysis of sociocultural systems *qua* systems (see White 1975). But the conduct of field work is also an important contingency in this regard: underfunded, underexposed, lone anthropologists working against time in unfamiliar (and sometimes hostile) surroundings often have little recourse but to concentrate on the lowest denominator – the individual – of the institutions selected for hurried observation. Given the constraints of time, money, and personnel – as well as the pressure to gather data in slices that can be quickly packaged into article-length publications – the field worker's only alternative to microscopic fragmentation is likely to be the superficial investigation of several or « all » local institutions, with the hope of discovering some grand functional tautology or facile configuration upon which to hang the disparate facets of the study before press time. But whatever the reasons for past deficiencies of field work and analysis in the Mesoamerican literature, the study of compadrazgo provides a good illustration of the necessity for combining egocentric and exocentric, and synchronic and diachronic dimensions in future field studies.

#### THE SACRO-SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF COMPADRAZGO WITHIN THE SUPERNATURAL BELIEF SYSTEM OF BELÉN

We are now in a position to analyze compadrazgo within the framework of the supernatural belief system of Belén and in terms of its sacro-symbolic functions in the relationship between humans and the supernatural. If we look at the nature of compadrazgo mediating entities, we realize that they involve secular as well as sacred events and occasions associated with the object of the relationship. These are important occasions in which the mediating entity, be it religious or social, requires the intervention of the supernatural in one form or another in order to achieve certain results inherent in the compadrazgo relationship itself. We must, however, carefully separate the compadrazgo relationship itself – that is, the establishment of a compadrazgo type – from the religious or social event which embodies it. These are quite different things, and in the present analysis we are referring primarily to the former. Let us take, for example, the baptism and marriage

compadrazgo types. The former is a prescriptive event in the religious cycle of the individual, without which he cannot become part of the Catholic brethren; the latter is an essentially prescriptive social event in the life cycle of the individual, without which he is denied full participation in community life. From the strictly socioreligious viewpoint, the average individual in Belén can go through the rites and ceremonies of these events without contracting a compadrazgo relationship, thereby making the latter a separate, higher belief complex which may or may not be ideologically coterminous with the former. It is the contracting of the compadrazgo relationship itself that has primary sacro-symbolic functions (hence its prescriptive nature) whereas the occasion for the relationship may or may not have sacro-symbolic functions (even if it is likewise prescriptive by virtue of belonging to another complex) – and if it does, they will be secondary. For example, the rites and ceremonies of baptism, confirmation, first communion, blessing of a new house, blessing of a saint or image, and most of the religious compadrazgo types have significant subsidiary sacro-symbolic functions in themselves, but these can usually be accounted for separately from the primary sacro-symbolic functions of the associated compadrazgo relationships. On the other hand, we find that the rites and ceremonies associated with most secular or generally non-Catholic compadrazgo types – such as Erection of a Cross, Setting the Foundations of a House, First Pair of Earrings Given to a Baby Girl, and Twin Fruit compadrazgo – are in themselves so heavily laden with sacro-symbolic functions that these are hard to separate from those of the associated compadrazgo relationship itself (see Nutini 1976a: Part II). Nevertheless, it is possible to arrange all compadrazgo types in Belén along a continuum on which each type is placed according to the degree to which its intrinsic sacro-symbolic functions blend with those of its rites and ceremonies. It is, then, the degree and level of efficacy that we must consider in assessing the sacro-symbolic functions of compadrazgo types. As a corollary, the greater the blending of the intrinsic sacro-symbolic functions with those of the rites and ceremonies, the more temporary is the compadrazgo type, that is, the more nearly is the efficacy of the sponsorship confined to the immediate propitiatory or intensifying occasion. Thus, the Scapulary, Twin Fruit, Erection of a Cross, and Ceremonial Cleansing compadrazgo types are unquestionably among those in which sacro-symbolic functions and values are greatest, but they are also the most temporary. At the other extreme are such compadrazgo types as Silver Wedding Anniversary, Graduation, Celebration of a Girl's 15th Birthday, and Friendship compadrazgo, the associated events of which have little sacro-symbolic value. Between these two extremes are the majority of the compadrazgo types, whose associated events have sacro-symbolic functions which are distinguishable in varying degrees from the compadrazgo relationship itself. This is, of course, tantamount to saying that in the middle range of the continuum we are dealing with two overlapping complexes – compadrazgo itself, and religious and

social bundles of occasions – which participate in the relationship between humans and the supernatural, but which represent different levels of interaction. We should add that, in general, the more non-Catholic the *compadrazgo* occasion, the more primary sacro-symbolic functions it has, and conversely.

In the socioreligious, supernatural belief system of Belén there are many occasions which require the performance of certain rites in order to create rapport between humans and the supernatural so as to make the world of social relations secure by reaffirmation of the established order. It is within this context that we must place the *compadrazgo* system in its most ideological of sacro-symbolic aspect. Most fundamentally, then, from the purely ideological standpoint *compadrazgo* may be regarded as a sacro-symbolic system in which there is a series of customary, well-specified rites and ceremonies designed to achieve certain desired ends by means of highly structured behavior (the symbolic component). These rites and ceremonies may be characterized in terms of protection, propitiation, intensification, and thanksgiving. The ceremonies of all *compadrazgo* types in Belén are characterized by one or more of these four attributes, which bind humans and the supernatural into a covenant, holding them together and specifying their rights and obligations. From this viewpoint, the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* may be re-defined so as to state that failure to comply with the appropriate *compadrazgo* rites redounds not only in an absence of individual protection, propitiation, intensification, or thanksgiving, but also in a collective decrease in the degree of rapport between humans and the supernatural. This strong belief that the performance of *compadrazgo* ceremonies achieves both individual socioreligious ends and collective well-being is what we refer to as the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo*.

But we have not really explained why these particular 31 *compadrazgo* types have been singled out in Belén as occasions for activating the latent and manifest mechanisms for achieving individual socioreligious ends and collectively strengthening relationships with the supernatural. It is not sufficient to say that these 31 occasions represent significant developments in the social, life, and religious cycles of the community, for that merely begs the question of their importance. Nor do purely historical considerations – important though they are to an understanding of the social, life, and religious cycles of the community (see Nutini 1976a: Appendix 1; Nutini n.d.) – account fully for the *compadrazgo* system as it exists today or for the still very strong desire of Beleños to comply with *compadrazgo* requirements, the *mayordomía* system, and other aspects of traditional religion in view of increasing pressure toward secularization (see Nutini and Isaac 1974: 420-444). We must turn, rather, to the sacro-symbolic component of the supernatural belief system of Belén in order to understand why Beleños comply so readily and so fully with all of those events in their relationship with the supernatural that involve any of the four main attributes of

protection, propitiation, intensification, and thanksgiving. Interviews reveal that Beleños worry constantly about whether they have done their individual and collective best to maintain the supernatural powers happy and predisposed to be helpful. The asking of favors and the creation of conditions for granting them are involved in all four mechanisms of supernatural intervention. Thus, one propitiates the supernatural for the best conditions under which a certain request may be granted; one may ask for direct supernatural protection on the basis of what one has done in the past to bring oneself and the collectivity closer to the supernatural; one undertakes ceremonies of intensification to prepare the way to propitiation, protection, and direct requests, and in general to keep in close touch with the supernatural; and finally, one undertakes ceremonies of thanksgiving to keep the supernatural predisposed toward one's kinsmen, compadres, and friends, and toward the community as a whole. The key principles of behavior which regulate this human-supernatural covenant are the Beleños constant unconscious fear that the supernatural may cease to look favorably upon them; and their constant, conscious preoccupation with the adequacy of the rites and ceremonies.

In summary, then, compliance with *compadrazgo* types as well as with every ritual and ceremony in Belén is designed to keep the human-supernatural covenant and to keep alive the forces which are propitious for human existence. This is a subtle, largely unconscious process, but once in a while it is lucidly expressed by an informant: « Los santos, fuerzas, y espíritus que velan por nosotros son por lo general buenos, pero a veces caprichosos. Es por lo tanto necesario mantenerlos contentos, hacer lo que ellos quieren, y aun más, ir más allá de lo que piden. Solo así, se puede más o menos vivir en este valle de lágrimas » (The saints, forces, and spirits who watch over us are generally good, but they are sometimes capricious. It is therefore necessary to keep them happy, do whatever they want, and even more, go beyond what they ask. Only thus is it possible to live more or less in peace in this valley of tears). This statement strikes at the heart of the supernatural belief system of Belén and all of rural Tlaxcala: The supernatural is essentially good, but people cannot take any chances, and it is better to do more rather than less; the customary, necessary rites and ceremonies are the means of communication between humans and the supernatural; the world is the best of a bad job, which is made bearable by the intervention and good offices of the supernatural. Here we have the stabilizing, conservative force which has kept the traditional socioreligious system going for the past 40 years in the face of powerful forces from the outside. Let us note also that the success of this fundamental force in Belén culture and society is a matter of statistics. Obviously not all inhabitants of Belén adhere to this belief complex, and there are also degrees of adherence. An educated guess is that nearly all people above the age of 50 adhere to it entirely, whereas about 75 percent of those between 30 and 50, and significantly less than 50 percent below the age of 30, adhere entirely to this traditional belief system.

Adherence or non-adherence is not necessarily a function of age alone; there are several other factors involved, such as education, labor migration history, and contact with the outside – perhaps especially the latter (see Woods and Graves 1973: 35ff).

Two more points need to be discussed, one of which is the temporary dimensions of the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo*, which have two principal aspects. The first of these consists of the temporary aspects of the syntagmatic chain of events through the last event of the central core of rites and ceremonies (see Nutini 1976a: Part I). This is obviously the most important temporary sphere of the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo*. The rites and ceremonies in this part of the syntagmatic chain are the immediate, ostensible motives for the *compadrazgo* relationship, that is, the prescriptive behavior that will produce the desired effect individually or collectively. This is the most prescriptive dimension of all *compadrazgo* types, and every step is carefully followed according to custom. The second aspect of the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* consists of the intended results of the *compadrazgo* relationship; these survive the central core of rites and ceremonies, for the functions of *compadrazgo* in creating supernatural rapport are cumulative and may last for a long time – theoretically, for as long as the *compadrazgo* relationship is kept alive. This is especially evident in the case of recurrent rites and ceremonies, which must be interpreted as reinforcing mechanisms (Nutini 1976a: Part II). Thus, the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* are structurally the most temporary and are confined to the principal ceremonies and recurrent events, but they are intended to have permanent results. These more permanent results, however, are not translated into any kind of structural behavior, but remain in that subtle ideological domain which is the human-supernatural covenant. We can readily see why the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* are the most universal, for they arise directly from its most universal feature – its ideological basis. At this juncture we can assert that the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo* are present to one degree or another in all *compadrazgo* situations described in the literature; that the elements of propitiation, protection, intensification, and thanksgiving are present singly or together, in varying degrees, whenever a *compadrazgo* relationship is established; and that basically the same operational principles described here are in effect.

The second point that must be discussed here has to do with the roles of the mediating entity or *abijado* and the sponsors or *padrinos* within the sacro-symbolic context. Within the context of the varied functions of *compadrazgo*, the *abijados* or mediating entities have played a rather passive role (see Nutini 1976a, 1976b). For example, in the general configuration of personnel and intended results of any of the significant social or demographic functions of the institution, the mediating entity is often little more than the original pretext for initiating a series of functional actions, the results of which involve or affect the mediating entity little – especially

when it is an image, object, or event. But with regard to the sacro-symbolic functions of *compadrazgo*, the intrinsic importance of the mediating entity is significantly increased, and it plays a more central role in the total configuration of functional actions and results. Structurally, of course, the mediating entity is most important during the central core of rites and ceremonies, which also constitute the most efficacious part of *compadrazgo*'s sacro-symbolic functions.

Indeed, we can characterize the mediating entity as both the necessary and the sufficient condition for real effectiveness of the sacro-symbolic functions. The *abijado* not only embodies the central ideological motive for the *compadrazgo*, but is also the structural basis for undertaking it, for the intended results are centered on the *abijado*. Thus, in the Blessing of a Saint or Image *compadrazgo* type, an image is the ostensible reason for the relationship, which is also contracted in order to propitiate the image and assure the *compadres-compadres* dyad (and its extensions) of propitious conditions for their relationship to the image. The same can be said of virtually all *compadrazgo* types in Belén, be the mediating entity a person, image, object, or event. The only perceptible distinction is between persons and all other mediating entities, in that the protective, propitiating, intensifying, and thanksgiving attributes associated with persons are more easily identifiable and concentrated.

In contrast to the individual dimensions of the *compadrazgo* system – the individually beneficial results which people hope to achieve by establishing a ritual kinship relationship, and which center on the mediating entity – are its collective dimensions, which center on the *compadres-compadres* dyad. By collective dimensions we mean those elements which transcend the mediating entity and acquire a more permanent form, and which, above all, are an integral part of maintaining the proper human-supernatural relationship. From a slightly different viewpoint, we can say that it is the permanence of the *compadres-compadres* dyad that maintains the appropriate degree of rapport with the supernatural; at the same time, compliance with what the *compadres-compadres* tie involves structurally – rights, duties, rites, and ceremonies binding *compadres* permanently or leading to reinforcement – is seen as increasing the collective bargaining power of the community with respect to the supernatural. Hence, there is still a high degree of prescription with regard to compliance with the permanent dimensions of *compadrazgo*. In essence, then, the *compadrazgo* prescriptions associated with the first and second parts of the syntagmatic chain – its temporary and permanent dimensions – are based, respectively, on the individual and collective discharge of all *compadrazgo* types and their aims to propitiate, protect, intensify, and give thanks on behalf of specific persons, images, or objects; and on the general maintenance of the established supernatural order.

## THE MOST SALIENT COMPONENTS OF THE SACRO-SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF COMPADRAZGO

Although the sacro-symbolic functions of compadrazgo in Belén and rural Tlaxcala comprise a complex of attributes which transcend the Catholic/non-Catholic cleavage as well as the usual ontological distinction between religion and magic, the sacro-symbolic functions are nevertheless always more apparent in compadrazgo types which have overt non-Catholic rites and ceremonies and which are primarily folk rather than strictly orthodox-Catholic in general structure. One reason for this is that in the latter, sacro-symbolic attributes are often hidden behind the trappings of Catholic rites and ceremonies, which tend to obscure the elements of protection, propitiation, intensification, or thanksgiving which underlie many compadrazgo types. Thus, while there are no significant ideological differences between the pagan and the Catholic, *structurally* the former has more apparent sacro-symbolic attributes and, to some extent, for conceptual purposes their functions are easier to pinpoint.

But while it is easy to distinguish orthodox from folk Catholicism, and pagan from orthodox elements, it is often very difficult to differentiate the pagan from the folk-Catholic. In the first place, folk Catholicism itself has been strongly influenced by pagan elements of both European and Amerindian origin. And second, the items used by folk Catholicism in a variety of rites – for example, the offering of fruit, food, and other items to the dead, as in the Erection of a Burial Cross (Type 4) compadrazgo – are themselves highly charged with pagan meaning. Thus, it is more appropriate conceptually to regard orthodox Catholicism, folk Catholicism, and the realm of the pagan as a continuum rather than as truly compartmentalized spheres of action.

In this vein, we can classify compadrazgo in Belén in terms of folk-pagan, folk-orthodox-pagan, and folk-orthodox types. There are four folk-pagan compadrazgo types (15, 24, 28, 30); the rites and ceremonies of these types are primarily non-Catholic, or pagan, in the sense that they are pregnant with meanings that definitely transcend the standard practices of even the folk variety of rural Tlaxcalan Catholicism – even though two of the types (15 and 24) include significant Catholic elements. There are nine types (4, 8, 9, 13, 17-19, 21, 25) that are primarily folk-Catholic in nature but which include some significant pagan rites and ceremonies; these nine are the folk-orthodox-pagan compadrazgo types. The gradation within this class is significant, and the Ceremonial Cleansing of a Sick Person (19) and Scapulary (13) compadrazgos, for example, approach the folk-pagan category. Finally, there are 18 compadrazgo types (1-3, 5-7, 10-12, 14, 16, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 31) that we can call folk-orthodox, that is, they adhere most closely to orthodox Catholicism; their pagan elements, if any, are insignificant and latent.

We can also distinguish compadrazgo types on the basis of whether they

belong to the religious (mostly ceremonial), symbolic, or life (social) cycles. There are eight compadrazgo types (3, 5, 10-12, 17, 18, 20) that belong to the religious cycle, 10 types (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 14, 16, 26, 27, 31) that belong to the life cycle, and 13 compadrazgo types (8, 9, 13, 15, 19, 21-25, 28-30) that belong to the symbolic cycle. This breakdown is somewhat arbitrary, especially with respect to the religious and life cycles. For example, baptism compadrazgo is classified here as belonging to the life cycle, even though baptism is primarily a religious event. The primary consideration in this classification is the structural importance that Beleños attach to compadrazgo types, and not the events (mediating entities) for which the relationships are contracted. The preceding discussion makes clear what the life and religious cycles are and what they denote structurally and functionally, but the symbolic cycle needs clarification. We are using the term to include a rather large area of ritual kinship-religious behavior which cannot properly be included within the boundaries of the life and religious cycles. The best way to describe this area is to attach to it the symbolic attributes, for *per se* it is unquestionably the most symbolic complex of behavior in the compadrazgo system of Belén. A type classified as part of the symbolic cycle may sometimes appear to have important religious or social components, but its purpose is essentially that of symbolic evocation. This is the case with Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church (Type 9) and Bedding of the Child Jesus at Home (Type 8) compadrazgos, for example; superficially they may be classified as part of the religious cycle, but their symbolic meaning warrants placing them in the symbolic cycle (see Nutini 1976a: Part I).

Finally, we shall discuss the symbolic objectives associated with each compadrazgo type in Belén, and by extension, in rural Tlaxcala. Every compadrazgo type includes at least one such objective and, at least latently, that of intensification (present in Types 3, 5-7, 17, 19) is the least common; the objectives of protection (present in Types 1, 2, 4, 13, 15-19, 21, 22, 24-30) and propitiation (present in Types 4, 8-12, 20, 21, 23-25) are the most common; whereas the objective of thanksgiving (present in Types 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 20, 27, 31) is intermediate with respect to frequency. The symbolic objective of compadrazgo types is, of course, determined by the intrinsic nature of the mediating entity and by the position of the type within the social and religious domains. The functional objectives of protection, propitiation, intensification, and thanksgiving do not depend directly on the sacro-symbolic elements of the human-supernatural covenant, but rather on extrinsic variables which govern the activation of mediating entities. Hence, we can only determine the conditions under which these four functional objectives are discharged structurally.

With baptism, the individual is incorporated into the Christian community, his original sin is erased, and he is assured of entering heaven if he dies before puberty. Children who die without baptism go to limbo, a neutral place where there is neither suffering nor enjoyment. Hence, it is necessary to baptize children as soon as possible, and immediately if they become ill. If parents do not baptize a child within six or seven months and it dies, this is considered « un gran pecado » (a great sin); even though the child « murió angelito » (died as a little angel), his parents « cargan con la culpa » (bear the blame). The underlying belief follows orthodox Catholic ideology, but the ceremony of baptism in Belén involves rites with sacro-symbolic objectives through which supernatural protection of the child is sought. It also affords protection against « las tentaciones del demonio » (the temptations of the devil) and other evils that the devil could cause the child. To let a child go without baptism for more than the prescribed time is strongly disapproved, and social pressure is always brought to bear against malingering parents.

With baptism, Beleños not only comply with a sacrament of the church, but through the ritual sponsorship the luck (*suerte*) of the *padrinos* is converted into protection for the child. If a child dies before reaching the age of four or five, it is thought that the *padrinos* « no fueron de suerte » (lacked luck), and they are called *metepalca* (unlucky). Parents will seldom ask such *padrinos* to become baptismal *compadres* again, or as one informant put it, « Se le morian los ahijados y por eso lo cambiamos » (His godchildren died and therefore we changed godfathers). The *padrinos* share with their *comadre* (the child's mother) another risk until « la sacada a misa » (she is taken to church). Until this ceremony is performed, the mother finds herself « al borde de la sepultura » (at the edge of death); she must not go out of her house, or at least she must not go to church until she is accompanied by the *compadres* of *sacada a misa*. Thus, the sacro-symbolic functions of baptismal *compadrazgo* are not confined to the *ahijado* but extend also to protecting the mother until she is taken to church at the end of the post-partum period, which in Belén's belief system is the most dangerous time in a woman's life.

Confirmation (Type 3) and First Communion (Type 5) are best regarded as the intensification of baptism, as the way of sanctioning and reaffirming the participation and membership of the individual in the Catholic Church. In Belén they are not important intrinsically or in the life cycle of the individual. Although they are regarded as *compadrazgos de grado* (sacramental *compadrazgo*), they are not important ritually. All children are confirmed and receive first communion with the benefit of ritual sponsorship, but after the ceremonies there is no emphasis on their religious or ritual importance. Despite the constant exhortations of the visiting priest, most adult Beleños receive communion less than once a year, and the same applies to rural Tlaxcala as a whole. But whereas the ritual sponsorships at confirmation and first

communion do not seem to have any sacro-symbolic functions, these two compadrazgos are regarded as requirements in the human-supernatural covenant and so have latent sacro-symbolic attributes – otherwise, we could not explain their prescriptive nature. One informant explained it by saying, « Los compadrazgos de confirmación y primera comunión, y lo que representan, no serán muy importantes, pero siempre ayudan a mantener contentos a Dios y a los santos » (The confirmation and first communion compadrazgos, and what they stand for, may not be very important, but they always help to keep God and the saints happy).

In addition to the *padrinos de velación* (nuptial benedictions godparents), the ceremonies of marriage (see compadrazgo Type 2) can involve up to nine other kinds of godparents. Each of these individuals or couples have a symbolic function, but the most important are the *padrinos de velación*, whose presence is a necessary condition for the wedding ceremony. The ceremony sanctions the institution of marriage socially and religiously, and this must always be done according to the prescribed ritual and ceremonialism, through which supernatural blessing and protection are sought for the couple and for the new nuclear family which is being established. Illness, poverty, death in the family, and other misfortunes suffered by a couple living in free union or married only by civil ceremony are generally attributed to the fact that their union has not received the blessing of the supernatural<sup>6</sup>. From this viewpoint, the ceremonies of marriage and their compadrazgo sponsorship may be regarded as a form of propitiation to obtain protection for the couple, with the *padrinos* as intermediaries. The element of risk is explicit: The *padrinos de velación* (who usually double as *padrinos de arras* and *de anillos*) share with their *abijados* the dangers of the *años noviciados*, the first nine years of marriage, which entail suffering, bad luck, and struggle for the *abijados*. If the *abijados* do not experience these hardships, then the *padrinos* will suffer them. And, in the extremely rare case in which neither the *abijados* nor the *padrinos* experience the usual pains of the *años noviciados*,

<sup>6</sup> Individuals not married traditionally, that is, who are living in free union, cannot become *mayordomos* (religious stewards) or be elected to the *República Eclesiástica* (local religious government). This is the main reason why there are very few couples in Belén living in free union. It is interesting that religious marriage did not become prescriptive in the above sense until relatively recently in Belén and many other rural Tlaxcalan communities. In 1890, fewer than 20 percent of the couples in Belén and other area communities were married by a priest; by 1920, that figure had climbed to about 40 percent,

and by 1940, to around 80 percent (see Nutini and Isaac 1974: 418).

<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the symbolic characterization of the *años noviciados* as a « dangerous » period – characterized by tension, illness, death, and poverty – in the life cycle of Belén, it has high descriptive merit, for it is during this period that most infant deaths occur and the husband's economic struggles are greatest, and divorce takes place exclusively during these years. Beleños strongly believe that if a nuclear family survives this period, it will become a stable social unit.

it is said that the *padrinos* are indeed lucky people, and they become the most sought-after sponsors in the community<sup>7</sup>. The other marriage *padrinazgos* do not involve any apparent risks; they are simply elaborations of the wedding ceremonies, which have a certain social status value and symbolism but lack truly sacro-symbolic functions. « Dan lujo a la ceremonia » (they add luster to the ceremony), but they are not essential to the entire complex. As peripheral to marriage *compadrazgo*, the primary actors of *compadrazgo* Types (6) and (7) do not generate propitiatory or protective elements, nor do they incur any risks.

All of the rites and ceremonies which surround death, burial, and the Erection of a Burial Cross (Type 4) on the grave are full of sacro-symbolic meaning. In general, the burial rites are folk interpretations of elements of orthodox Catholicism, such as the wake, the *misa de cuerpo presente* (Mass with the deceased lying in state), the burial ceremony itself, the *novenario* (rosaries on nine consecutive days), the Mass on the ninth day after burial, the responsory, and the setting up of the cross. Nevertheless, all of these rites have as their primary objective the propitiation of the supernatural « para que el alma no sufra » (so that the soul of the deceased will not suffer). The *padrinos* of the Erection of the Burial Cross must be present when the cross is set up on the ninth day and must also participate in all the other ceremonies, which are carried out scrupulously in order to enhance their objectives in this delicate rite of passage. As the main symbolic and social personages of the burial rites, the *padrinos* also run a risk; if they do not perform to the best of their abilities (and this goes for the kinsmen of the deceased, also) in propitiating the supernatural elements which will determine the fate of the deceased, his soul will return to remind them of their obligations, or sometimes to ask them for specific favors to ease his unfortunate position in the afterlife. The return of the soul is not desirable, for it disturbs the human-supernatural order, and the burial rites and all the aspects of the Erection of a Burial Cross *compadrazgo* are always performed with utmost care. In fact, preoccupation with the deceased after burial involves all primary Erection of a Burial Cross actors, who take special care to continue offering Masses, prayers, non-Catholic rites, and other supernatural activities. For example, they remember the deceased often in consulting weathermen or sorcerers and most particularly in preparing and arranging the family altar for All Saints Day, when the deceased is remembered by the presence of a favorite article of clothing, or by a drink, food, or other item that he liked especially. The Erection of a Burial Cross *padrinos* as well as the deceased's immediate kin may maintain this concern for several years. The sacro-symbolic concern with death and burial accords with Beleños' belief that the dead have joined the supernatural and can, therefore, exert an unfavorable influence on the outcome of human affairs if they are not propitiated. Thus, the sacro-symbolic functions of Erection of a Burial Cross *compadrazgo* and the large ritual and ceremonial complex surrounding death

and burial are among the most explicit examples of the human-supernatural covenant. The sacro-symbolic functions of this *compadrazgo* type involve not only individual propitiation of the deceased mediating entity, but just as importantly, the generation of rapport between humans and the supernatural via the intercession of the dead. Functionally speaking, then, the great concern with the dead, shown not only in Tlaxcala but in most of Mesoamerica as well, can be explained as one of the significant mechanisms for keeping the balance of the human-supernatural order tipped favorably toward human existence.

The Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church (Type 9) and Coronation of the Holy Virgin (Type 12) celebrations have important sacro-symbolic attributes and functions, although the rites and ceremonies connected with them involve essentially Catholic elements and only tangentially a sprinkling of pagan elements. These celebrations purport to propitiate the Christ Child and the Virgin of Belén in order to obtain their protection throughout the year. The public-communal character of the Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church and Coronation of the Holy Virgin celebrations greatly enhances their sacro-symbolic value, for it is on such occasions that the individual and collective interaction between society and the supernatural is seen most clearly. At the same time, the Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church and Coronation of the Holy Virgin celebrations constitute forms of thanksgiving for individual and collective favors received during the year, or even for the mere fact that it has been possible to celebrate the occasion. This is a good illustration of the Beleños' basic attitude toward the supernatural, namely, some degree of uncertainty about the natural world and the need to keep the supernatural happy. As one elder of Belén said of ritual celebrations: « El mero hecho de que estamos aquí haciendo esta fiesta quiere decir que las cosas van regular y que nuestras súplicas han sido oídas » (The mere fact that we are here celebrating this fiesta means that things are coming along fairly well, and that our supplications have been heard). Inasmuch as the Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church and the Coronation of the Holy Virgin are celebrated annually, we can also regard them as rites of intensification. The *padrinos* of these two rites share with the *fiscales* (locally elected religious officials) and *mayordomos* (religious stewards) – whose duty it was to select them – and with the community in general, not only the responsibility for the rites and ceremonies, but also the risk that the functional objectives of the *compadrazgo* celebrations may not be achieved, an outcome that would affect them directly if they are from Belén, and indirectly if they are from another community. The overt manifestations of failure can be drought, bad crops, dissension within the community, intensification of disputes with nearby communities, and so on (see Nutini 1976a: Part I). This feeling of failure is projected not only onto the *padrinos*, but also onto the *fiscales* and *mayordomos* in charge of the *compadrazgo* selection; they are charged with causing the bad luck by not having fulfilled

their ritual and ceremonial obligations properly. This outcome reflects adversely upon the future religious and compadrazgo careers of all involved. On the other hand, if the ritual sponsorship is successful, Beleños – individually and collectively – cannot do enough for the *padrinos* and those who selected them. This attitude applies to all public-communal compadrazgo types, which – except for Sponsorship of Church Paraphernalia (Type 10) and the Blessing of Church Repairs or Improvements (Type 20) – always have significant sacro-symbolic functions. To a considerable extent, the attitude applies as well to private-individual types, in which the luck of the *padrinos* in past sponsorships may also play an important part in their selection.

The Bedding of the Child Jesus at Home (Type 8) and the Blessing of the Holy Manger (Type 23) compadrazgo types are essentially derived from the Bedding of the Child Jesus in Church type (9), although both of the former involve fewer sacro-symbolic elements than the latter. Although the rites and ceremonies of the Bedding of the Child Jesus at Home and the Blessing of the Holy Manger are fundamentally the same as those of the Blessing of the Child Jesus in Church, their sacro-symbolic functions are more latent. The Blessing of the Child Jesus at Home is important as a family fiesta; in a sense it must be regarded as a complement to the Blessing of the Child Jesus in Church, for although these types have separate sets of compadrazgo actors, many of their specific ceremonies are closely related (see Nutini 1976a: Part I). The risk involved in the Blessing of the Child Jesus at Home is low or non-existent because its propitiatory, intensifying, and thanksgiving objectives are modest and do not involve large numbers of people.

Sponsorship of Church Paraphernalia (Type 10) and the Blessing of Church Repairs or Improvements (Type 20) are the least important public-communal compadrazgo types in Belén. Furthermore, they have no apparent sacro-symbolic functions and involve no supernatural risks, either individually or collectively. Relatively new types introduced from the outside, they are essentially socioreligious compadrazgo types with a strong economic component from the communal viewpoint and on the part of the *fiscales* in charge of administering them.

With the Blessing of a Saint or Image (Type 11), Beleños ask protection from, give thanks to, or seek propitiate a particular Catholic supernatural, frequently a saint who is the particular devotion of the owner of the saint's picture. Ritual kinship sponsorship of this compadrazgo type does not imply a risk on the part of the *padrinos*; even though they, too, are propitiating the saint or image indirectly, the *padrinos*' ritual responsibility is confined to the principal ceremonies and any recurrent events. Whether or not the saint or image complies with a request is a matter resting with the owners of the picture or image, and it is they who incur all risks. Thus, the Blessing of a Saint or Image compadrazgo has few sacro-symbolic functions.

The sacro-symbolic content of the rites and ceremonies of Type 17, Taking a Mother to Hear Mass on the 40th Day after Giving Birth (*Sacada a Misa*),

is obvious and important. Until the ritual is carried out, the mother is in imminent danger (« a la orilla de la sepultura »), but once it is complied with, the danger disappears. The mother's risk is shared by the Sacada a Misa *compadres* (who most often are the baptismal *padrinos* of her child), but once her danger is past, so is theirs. The Sacada a Misa, as a derivative of baptism, can rightly be regarded as an intensification of the latter. It should be noted also that the sacro-symbolic function of leading-to or resulting-in *compadrazgo* types may involve all four objectives (protection, propitiation, intensification, thanksgiving) in sequence, as in baptism/Sacada a Misa or baptism/confirmation. Very seldom, in fact, do *compadrazgo* types stand alone. Beleños recognize the affinity of certain *compadrazgo* relationships associated in various ways with the life and ceremonial cycles, and that certain of the resulting clusters serve as a kind of natural paradigm for the selection of *compadres*.

*Compadrazgo* Type 18, Presenting a Child in Church at Age Three (*Compadrazgo de Evangelios*), seeks protection for the child upon his or her presentation in church. The *padrinos* are participants and mediators between the child and its parents and the supernatural to whom it is commended, usually the child's namesake saint or another Catholic supernatural of the parents' special devotion. The ritual sponsorship risk is minimal, and the *padrinos* share it to only a small degree with the parents of the *abijado*.

Presentation of the Scapulary, and its *compadrazgo* type (13), is one of the best examples of seeking direct aid from the supernatural, in which the sacro-symbolic functions are shown clearly in the general structure of the rites and ceremonies. The wearing of the scapulary insures that the bearer will enter heaven in case of sudden death; it is also protection against certain evils, such as *mal aire* (bad air) and *mal de ojo* (evil eye), and in general the bearer has a better chance of surviving adverse supernatural interference of any kind. Once the *padrinos* have handed over the scapulary they no longer participate in the risk; the scapulary itself has inherent protective properties over which the *padrinos* have no influence, so whether or not the *padrinazgo* objectives are achieved is beyond the scope of the sponsorship itself.

All *compadrazgo* types that involve setting up a cross – especially Setting the Foundation of a House (Type 25), Erection of a Cross (Type 24), Blessing of a New House (Type 21), and Erection of a Cross at the Communal Spring of Actiopan (Type 15) – have important sacro-symbolic structural elements and functions which include protective, propitiatory, and intensifying elements. This is especially the case when there are recurrent rites connected with the agricultural cycle, as in Type 15 and some varieties of Type 24. The *padrinos* of most of the above *compadrazgo* types incur considerable risk, and in Type 15, the risk is quite high. Types 15 and 24 are essentially folk-pagan *compadrazgo* types. They include a large number of ritual elements

that are clearly non-Catholic in origin, such as the ritual participation of weathermen (*teztlazcs*) or sorcerers (*tetlachibutcs*) after the conclusion of the folk-Catholic ceremonies at the spring of Actiopan, or the ritual manipulations of these non-Catholic practitioners after the Erection of a Cross has been carried out in a cultivated field. Structurally, the pagan and the Catholic are carefully kept separate, but the propitiatory, protective, and intensifying objectives are directed toward an undifferentiated supernatural which embodies, say, El Cuatlapanga (a tutelary mountain owner) as well as specific Catholic saints.

Compadrazgo Types 16 (Celebration of a Girl's 15th Birthday) and 27 (Silver Wedding Anniversary) have essentially social and formal religious objectives, although to some extent they can be considered to have the objectives of giving thanks and seeking protection for the future of the *abijados*. As relatively new compadrazgo types introduced from urban areas during the last 40 years, they do not have the sanction of tradition, nor are they of universal incidence. They have not yet become an inherent part of the ritual and ceremonial apparatus which surrounds the human-supernatural covenant, nor will they ever become part of it, because secularization will have destroyed the sacred nature of compadrazgo before this can happen. The same can be said of Graduation compadrazgo (Type 14), which is also a recent introduction.

Ceremonial Cleansing of a Sick Person (Type 19) is one of the compadrazgo types in which sacro-symbolic elements and functions can be seen most clearly. When a *limpia* (ceremonial cleansing) is undertaken, the cleansing implement (usually a bouquet of three different plants or branches) is thought to absorb the patient's illness, either when the implement is placed in front of the altar of the saint of whom the cure is being asked or when a weatherman or sorcerer buries the cleansing implement in a particular spot endowed with certain supernatural properties – to the same effect as the intercession of the saint. (Once again, we encounter the ideological monism but separate Catholic/pagan structural discharge that is a hallmark of Belén and rural Tlaxcalan religion). Through the benefit of sacro-symbolic propitiation, the *limpia* seeks termination of the illness and the future protection of the person being cleansed, this latter usually by presentation of a scapulary. The *suerte* (good luck) of the *padrinos* is important in achieving these compadrazgo objectives, and the *padrinos* share with the *abijado* and the parents the risk of the cure. Beleños believe strongly that the *padrinos* for Ceremonial Cleansing must be especially worthy individuals, from both the religious and social viewpoints, because their impeccable and traditional ritual performance will favorably influence the result of the *limpia*.

With the Blessing of a New Car or Truck (Type 22), protection is sought for the vehicle, to insure its proper functioning, as well as for the driver, as insurance against road accidents. The *padrinos* of this type incur no supernatural risk, but if the vehicle does not function properly, people will say

that the *padrinos* « no tuvieron buena mano » (did not have a good hand). Nor does any risk obtain in the Handsel of New Utensils compadrazgo (Type 29). If the implement or appliance does not work properly, its failure is attributed to the envy or greed of persons other than the *padrinos*; any envy or other ill will these latter might have felt has been neutralized by the establishment of the compadrazgo relationship.

Two points should be made in this connection. First, whether or not the ideology of a given compadrazgo type involves risk for the *padrinos*, Beleños always tend to blame the failure to achieve functional objectives on certain things inherent in the sponsors, or something that was left undone. Their faith in the efficacy of ritual kinship sponsorship is such that they must find a specific explanation for a failure. Second, Beleños also believe that ill feelings, envy, greed, antagonism, and in general, all anti-social behavior, are neutralized among *compadres* when a compadrazgo relationship is established. This belief is posited on the sacred nature of compadrazgo and the conviction that serious supernatural punishment may be visited upon *compadres* who violate this precept. Nevertheless, anti-social behavior does occur now and then among *compadres*, and if it becomes public it may have serious consequences for the culprits. *Compadres* who have fallen out with each other often prefer to feign *respeto* (respect, veneration, honor) and *confianza* (trust, reliability, rapprochement) than to formally terminate a relationship, for although a formal alternative is allowed by the system, this may exact a rather high social and religious price (see Nutini 1976a: Part I).

Friendship Compadrazgo (Type 26) and Drinking Partner Compadrazgo (Type 31) may or may not have significant sacro-symbolic elements and functions, depending primarily on the circumstances under which they are contracted. If either type is contracted between two persons (and by extension, their spouses) in order to avoid social or religious friction or to neutralize aggression, the relationship involves mutual protection and the shared risk is conditioned by the relationship itself.

Finally, *Compadrazgo de Aretes* (Type 28) and *Compadrazgo de Fruta Cuata* (Type 30) are essentially folk-pagan types; like Types 15 and 24, they have the highest degree of sacro-symbolic elements and functions, in both ideology and structure. For example, the metal (gold or silver) of the earrings protects the child against evil eye, bad air, and in general, against the machinations of sorcerers and other non-Catholic supernatural practitioners; and the ritual manipulations of the twin-fruit compadrazgo complex counteract the evil and dangerous connotations of the birth of twins (human, animal, or plant). In both of these compadrazgo types (28, 30), the *padrinos* to a considerable degree share the ritual sponsorship risk with the *abijado*. In the twin-fruit type (30), the risk is sometimes extended to the sacramental *padrinos* or the *compadres* of the person who found the twin fruit or vegetable. If the finder eats it without sharing it with another person or does not establish a

compadrazgo relationship by means of it, he or she will procreate twins – and so may some of his or her *padrinos* or *compadres*.

The birth of twins is regarded as an aberration of nature and is always associated with impending disaster. It must, therefore, be counteracted immediately with the appropriate ritual kinship sponsorship, which is the only way to neutralize the event and minimize the risk and bad omens. Twins in Belén and all of rural Tlaxcala are thought to possess « de nación » (by nature) certain supernatural powers, according to which « uno pone y el otro quita » (one inflicts and the other takes away). One of the twins may, of his own volition, adversely affect a living person – for example, cause a constant pain in the part of the body that has come into contact with him, or cause the symptoms of evil eye. Removal of the pain or neutralization of the evil eye can be effected only by the good twin, « el que quita »; however, he needs not be the brother of the bad twin, but just any good twin – that is, any twin « que quita ». To bring about relief, the good twin must rub the affected part of the body with his own saliva. Only by trial and error can the identification of good and bad twins be established.

These beliefs and practices associated with twinning are clearly of pre-Hispanic origin, for they have no overt associations with either orthodox or folk Catholicism, and they operate today in a manner quite similar to that of pre-Hispanic times. It is in cases such as this that the sacro-symbolic functions of compadrazgo are most clearly exhibited; the enhanced visibility of these functions does not necessarily mean, however, that a compadrazgo type endowed with them has a higher degree of sacro-symbolic functions within the general framework of the human-supernatural covenant.

#### THE ELEMENT OF RISK INVOLVED IN RITUAL KINSHIP SPONSORSHIP: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout our discussion of the sacro-symbolic attributes of compadrazgo types, we spoke of the risks involved in ritual kinship sponsorship – for the *padrinos* as well as for the mediating entity and its parents or, in the case of an image or other object, its owners. What we hope to accomplish in the remainder of this essay is to define more precisely the element of risk and what it involves ideologically and structurally.

Obviously, each of the occasions in Belén (and rural Tlaxcala in general) for which a compadrazgo relationship is established represents some significant event in the life, social, religious, or even economic cycle which must be sanctified and dignified with the addition of ritual kinship sponsorship. At the same time, such occasions almost invariably represent either well established rites of passage or propitiation for the mediating entity, or situations of imminent danger which may or may not make a change in the

social, religious, or symbolic status of the person, image, or object in question. In either case, there is always an element of uncertainty that can best be described as the actors' knowledge that unless things are done properly, the functional result will not be favorable. The danger, uncertainty, or apprehension which characterizes all occasions for ritual kinship sponsorship is generally greater for the mediating entity than for the *padrinos* and the parents or owners. Nevertheless, there is always an element of risk for all primary actors with respect to achieving the functional objectives of the compadrazgo. In essence, the risk run by primary actors in Belén's compadrazgo system is fundamentally that inherently associated with transitional stages in the life, social, and religious cycles – naturally dangerous rites of passage, involving symbolic, ritual, or ceremonial change of status. Of course, the element of risk varies according to the nature and relative importance of the occasion and according to the intrinsic nature of the mediating entity as involving *more or less* danger, change of status, and specific difficulties associated with certain aspects of the supernatural belief system. The risks of ritual kinship sponsorship notwithstanding, the sacred nature of compadrazgo compels a person or married couple in Belén to accept the sponsorship when asked.

Ritual kinship sponsorship exposes the *padrinos* not only to the risks inherent in the type or condition of the mediating entity and in the very occasion of sponsorship, but it also exposes them to an aspect of risk that centers on them personally, namely, the risk of their having or not having luck (*suerte*). Their luck or lack of it is shared by the mediating entity, as well as by the parents or owners of this entity. As we shall see, this *padrino*-centered risk has important repercussions for compadrazgo selection.

The clearest case of *padrino*-centered risk is the marriage *padrinazgo*, in which the *padrinos de velación* consent to share with the *abijados* the risks of the *noviciado* (the first nine years of marriage, which are fraught with suffering, bad luck, and struggle). The element of risk is less evident in many other compadrazgo types, but invariably it is there. For example, the baptismal *padrinos* share with the parents the real risk that the infant may die, in which case the *padrinos* invariably are blamed. People say that they are *metepalca*, a term which signifies « to break » and which applies exclusively to hapless baptismal *padrinos* whose *abijados* die before the age of five. If this happens more than once, the *padrinos* must be « changed », that is, substitutes must be chosen in order to prevent a third repetition of the tragedy. On the other hand, there are persons who have a reputation for being lucky, and who are said to have « buena mano » (a good hand). These people are thought to have inherent, beneficial powers that help the compadrazgos they sponsor to achieve their objectives; they serve as intermediaries before the supernatural and as protectors of the compadrazgo object. Such lucky people are much sought after for baptismal, marriage, and several other important compadrazgo sponsorships.

As we have said, all types of *compadrazgo* sponsorship involve some degree of risk. The sacro-symbolic risks fall primarily upon the *padrinos*, but the parents or owners of the mediating entity run certain other risks of a social, economic, or personal nature – for example, whether the *padrinos* will comply with the prescriptions or have the economic resources to fulfill their obligations or will be able to generate the proper degree of *respeto* and *confianza*. Considered in the aggregate, these risks clearly point to the highly significant structural and functional component of chance and uncertainty which permeates the selection, discharge, and permanent dimensions of the *compadrazgo* system in Belén and rural Tlaxcala generally.

Finally, it is interesting that in Belén and in much of rural Tlaxcala there is a series of *compadrazgo* types – especially those associated with the setting up of a cross, and in general those that we have classified as folk-pagan – which require the performance of a *tetlachihuic* or *tezitlazc*, in addition to ritual kinship sponsorship. In Belén, one of these non-Catholic practitioners is hired to perform certain rites of propitiation, protection, or intensification to non-Catholic supernaturals for the Setting the Foundations of a House (Type 25) and Erection of a Cross (Type 24) *compadrazgos*. In these cases, the *tetlachihuic* or *tezitlazc* shares the risks with the *padrinos* and the owner of the mediating entity, for if the objectives are not achieved, they are blamed. Thus, it is evident that the *padrinos* of many *compadrazgo* types may be regarded as functional substitutes for the *tetlachihuic* or *tezitlazc*. As spiritual sponsors, *padrinos* and *tetlachihuics* and *tezitlazcs* have the same basic relationship to the mediating entity, namely, to help it undergo the dangerous aspects of transformation and to serve as intermediaries between humans and the supernatural on its behalf. Structurally, of course, the folk-Catholic and the pagan rites and ceremonies are performed sequentially, not simultaneously.

We have saved until last the discussion of these *compadrazgo* types that require the presence of *tetlachihuics* and *tezitlazcs* as well as folk-Catholic personnel because they very effectively focus attention on three major themes we have developed in the course of this essay with regard to Belén (and rural Tlaxcalan) religion in general and the *compadrazgo* system in particular: (1) the ideological monism that underlies structural pluralism, (2) the importance of the sacro-symbolic domain, and (3) the element of risk involved with ritual sponsorship. Inasmuch as these are the more obvious and certainly the most universal themes or principles of the institution of *compadrazgo*, not only in rural Tlaxcala but also – we shall venture – in rural Mesoamerica as a whole, it is strange that they have not been analyzed exhaustively before. In our view, these three principles are the essential components for a model or theory of rural Mesoamerican *compadrazgo*.

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## SOMMARIO

Attraverso il materiale etnografico fornito dalla comunità mesoamericana di Santa Maria Belén Azitzimitlán (Tlaxcala, Messico) l'articolo si propone l'esame di un aspetto del *compadrazgo* che è stato sinora trascurato dagli studiosi interessatisi a questa istituzione: cioè l'aspetto sacro-simbolico che rappresenta l'ambito in cui si costituiscono e si stabilizzano le relazioni tra uomini e mondo soprannaturale. Aspetto che gli A.A. distinguono, per il suo carattere « inconscio », dagli aspetti simbolici e propiziatori della religione popolare espressi in una « conscia » accettazione di riti e cerimonie ad essa connessi.

Gli A.A. soffermano la loro attenzione sul sistema religioso di Belén, da loro definito « ideologicamente monistico » per quanto concerne la coesistenza di elementi cattolici e non-cattolici, che compenetra e definisce il comparativo così come articolato nell'area.

Infine, terzo aspetto considerato è quello dei « rischi » sacro-simbolici affrontati, nella creazione di un rapporto di parentela rituale, dai tre poli del rapporto di *compadrazgo*: padrini, entità mediatrice, genitori o proprietari (quest'ultima categoria quando l'entità mediatrice sia un oggetto o un'immagine).