

Missions, Missionaries, and Native Americans

Long-Term Processes and Daily Practices

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Jesuits and Franciscans

Spanish contact with the Native people of Florida's coastlands preceded the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortes (1519–1521). Despite periodic attempts of missionaries to convert Native groups and the prolonged contact of shipwrecked Spanish survivors with Floridians, contact of Europeans with Florida's Native groups did not materialize into colonial settlements or missionary activities until the 1560s (Hann 2003, 12–13; Milanich 1998, 128, 136). The missionary efforts of Jesuit fathers Juan Rogel and Pedro Martínez and of Francisco Villarreal, a lay brother, began in 1567 with groups located on Florida's western coast. Father Pedro Martínez was killed before he could begin his work, but Brother Villarreal worked with the Tequesta and Father Rogel with the Calusa (Hann 1991, 220).

From 1697 to 1698 the Franciscans undertook a second period of missionary work among the Calusa, but the results were abysmal. The Jesuits returned in 1743 for a last attempt to convert the Calusa; that, too, was unsuccessful. Sequential efforts of Jesuits and Franciscans to convert the Calusa for short, well-defined periods of time provide useful contrasts to coeval missionary efforts and underline the variety of Native responses to the process of conversion. Although other missionary efforts with Florida's Native groups took place earlier (Bushnell 1994), this chapter focuses primarily on the well-documented dialogue between the Calusa and the first Jesuit missionary and spotlights the intellectual, theological, and pragmatic fencing strategies the Calusa used as they negotiated conversion.

The Jesuits: 1567–1568 and 1743

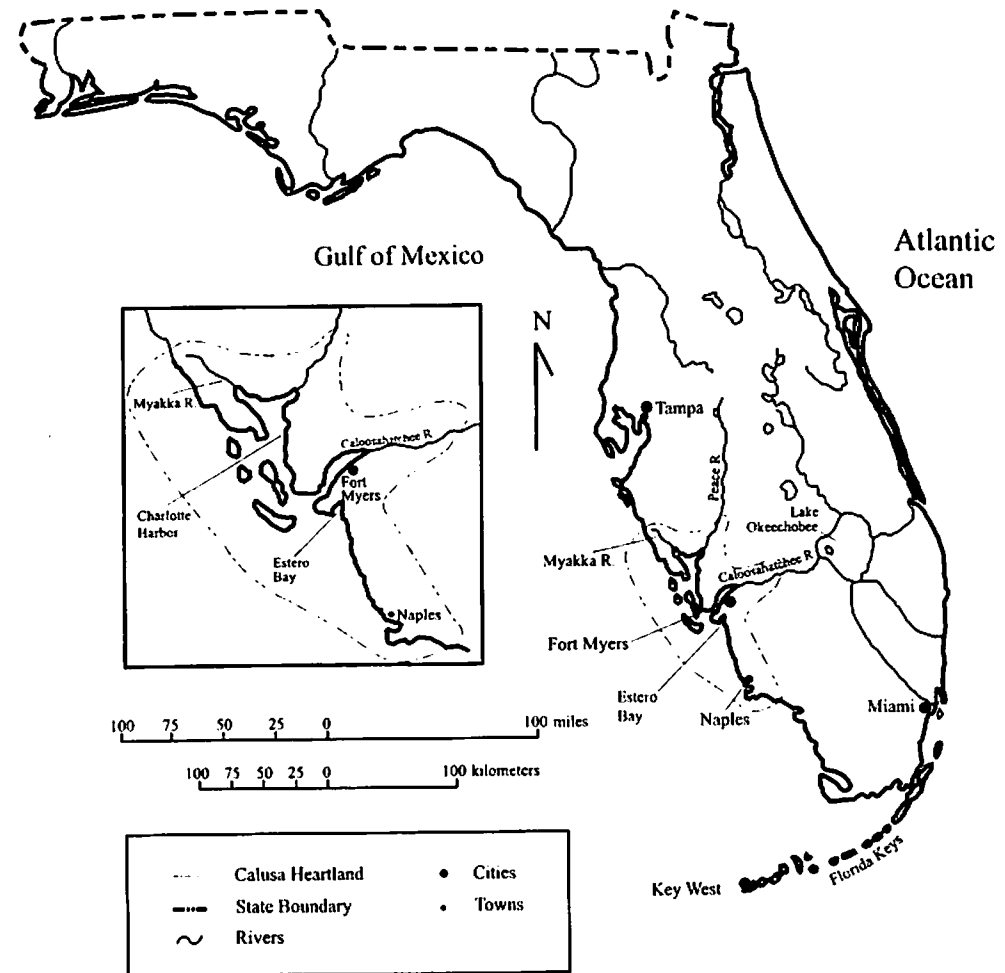
The Calusa were sedentary hunter-gatherers who developed a sophisticated socioeconomic system based on coastal fishing and tribute exacted from surrounding Native communities (Goggin and Sturtevant 1964, 183–85, 187–88; MacMahon and Marquardt 2004, 2–4; Widmer 1988, 224–76). The location of the Calusa settlements along major maritime routes and the

Calusas' knowledge of coastal waters and proximity to Cuba resulted in early contacts with French, Spanish, Dutch, and English colonizers and seafarers. These interactions primed the Calusa to have measured reactions toward the Europeans and sharpened their negotiating and cosmopolitan skills. Neither the army nor the Jesuits were matches for them; they exploited the relationships between both to their advantage. Even such a valiant fight was, in the long run, futile: disease, internal fighting, and colonial attrition eventually brought the Calusa to the brink of extinction.

The early period of conversion work the Jesuits undertook is atypical with regard to the type of interactions they had with Native groups and the setting. Father Rogel, who ministered to the Calusa, lived at the Spanish fort and so did the cacique (chief) of the Calusa. The Natives congregated daily with the permission of the Calusa cacique and, if they so wished, at a designated place marked by a cross. The missionary's activities were, however, largely dependent on the goodwill of the cacique and his vassals.

From the start, Father Rogel's contacts with the Calusa were based on a regime change. The Spanish murdered the principal Calusa chief, Carlos, in 1567, which eventually led to the chieftainship of Felipe, nephew of the slain Carlos. While Carlos had played a game of cat and mouse with the Spanish and the missionaries, Felipe masked his reluctance in philosophical arguments and postponements (Hann 1991, 266–67). Until Carlos was assassinated, Father Rogel lived at the Spanish fort and was greatly limited in his movements and ability to proselytize (Hann 1991, 248). Carlos, and later Felipe, treated apprenticeship in the Christian religion as an economic resource; the Calusa did not submit to doctrinal teachings unless they received adequate goods in exchange. The Calusas' attachment to the cosmological precepts and spiritual traditions of their forefathers notwithstanding, the price of political and religious allegiance to the Spanish had to be commensurate with their traditions: they would not sell themselves short.

The Spanish saw their enterprise as colonization: the Calusa were to accept, learn, and abide by Catholic teachings; labor for them; provide them with food; fight the French and other enemies of Spain; and be content with the gifts the Spanish thought appropriate to provide. The Calusa saw it differently; even though the alliance with the Spanish was unequal and difficult, it was still one to be negotiated. The Calusa insisted on their own sense of hegemony whereby their whole lived social process was articulated with "specific distributions of power and influence," which they experienced as traditions and practices (Williams 1977, 108–11). Several distinctive aspects of Calusa demands and expectations emerge from the historical record as



Map 5.1. The Calusa heartland of southern Florida. Map prepared by Claire Huie and Don Wade.

well as concerns and patterns of behavior that can be connected to other Native groups.

Firstly, the Calusa did not appear to mind other spiritual practices in addition to (but not to the exclusion of) their own (Hann 1991, 236). In fact, by the time Father Rogel began working with them in 1567, the Calusa children "knew the Christian doctrine in Spanish, that is to say, the four prayers" (235). The youngsters had learned the essential prayers through contact with Spanish soldiers. It also appears that the Calusa wisely appraised concepts and practices independently and debated the former while sometimes rejecting the latter. They pondered concepts such as the immortal nature of the soul, transubstantiation, the resurrection, and the Trinity and examined them in light of their own cosmological beliefs and the intrinsic logic of the Christian arguments, while they rejected outright the missionaries' bans on polygamy and incestuous marriages (237). Obviously, from the Catholic point of view, practices were the direct result of accepted concepts, but the Calusa took a "best-fit" approach to what could, or could not, be meshed with their beliefs. This means that the core of their cosmological and spiritual beliefs remained about the same; acceptance of Christian precepts was not based on a change of heart and faith but on reasoning and expediency.

Second, the contact generation¹ understood that changes in cosmological beliefs were bound to occur and might well be accepted by their children and grandchildren. But the contact generation was deeply invested in the accepted belief system that sanctioned and authorized a structure of responsibilities and duties with correspondent statuses and roles. The importance of this evidence is twofold. First, it indicates that the Calusa had encountered such situations before European contact, were prepared to deal with them, and could foresee the outcomes. Their cosmological beliefs were not static and may have undergone significant changes, albeit within commensurate spiritual and cosmological schemes. Second, they assessed, measured, and integrated some aspects of cultural change and retained some core beliefs. For instance, when the Spanish *adelantado*,² Menéndez de Avilés, arrived, cacique Carlos gave him his sister as a bride to establish a classic alliance between nations according to Calusa diplomatic rules (Goggin and Sturtevant 1964, 189). But when the Spanish demanded that Carlos and the Calusa make core changes in their spiritual and kinship structures by destroying their "idols" and changing marriage rules, Carlos was prepared to burn along with his "idols" (Hann 1991, 236). What seems to have been lost in translation was the type of alliance and settlement Carlos was bargaining for versus that which the Spanish wanted to impose. Faced with the external threat of the Spanish and with internal conflicts represented by his nephew's claims

to the caciqueship, Carlos steered a neutral political course that banked on a conservative policy and minimized change while profiting from the elements of the Spanish-Calusa alliance that enhanced his prestige and reinforced his authority. Yet there was a blind spot in Carlos's political reasoning: Felipe, his nephew and the pretender to the Calusa caciqueship, was part of the younger generation. Because of Felipe's complicity with the Spanish, the Spanish assassinated Carlos and installed Felipe as cacique. Felipe's alliances and behind-the-scenes political moves with malice aforethought led to a change in leadership but not necessarily in governance. Machiavelli would have been proud.

Felipe's bargain with the Spanish military did not ease his cultural conscience, nor did it pave the way to a compromise with his ancestral beliefs: his role and acceptance as cacique was still predicated on custom. Felipe found himself debating his cultural hybridity and struggling with the differences between learned principles and novel ideas. Enamored of the clothing, the goods, the weapons, and the status that connections with the Europeans provided, the Calusa feared a loss of prestige if their Native competitors superseded them with the Spanish. The hegemony and trading advantages of the Calusa were intertwined with polygamy and incestuous coupling, and with practices the Calusa cosmology undoubtedly sanctioned. Sociocultural change is never compartmentalized and its repercussions are generally exponential. To accept Europeans without Christianity was logical and feasible; to accept both was cultural suicide. "A lived hegemony is always a process," and the poignancy of the Calusas' dilemma and its modernity and relevance to the subject of conversion bears discussing (Williams 1977, 112).

Conversations about Conversion

Father Rogel began teaching the basic tenets of the Catholic faith to cacique Felipe through an interpreter. They agreed on a space defined by the erection of a cross, and for a while, Felipe and his entourage came to the appointed place to hear Rogel. After teaching them the basic prayers in Castilian, Father Rogel explained that those prayers were a way to talk to God and request favors. The missionary explained the essence of God: creator and almighty. The Calusa had no problem with the concept of a creator God or with his overarching power. As for the Trinity, they conceived of it as three people who governed the world, each with specific jobs (Goggin and Sturtevant 1964, 197). The first and most important person controlled the heavens and the seasons, the second ruled kingdoms, and the third controlled the world of warfare. The Calusa solved the mystery of the Trinity by

superimposing on it the grid of roles and statuses of their own officials: the numinous mediator, the secular ruler, and the war captain. Yet the Calusa appeared to place the king (cacique) above the head shaman (Goggin and Sturtevant 1964, 190, 192; Hann 1991, 246), and cacique Felipe stated that esoteric knowledge of God was unique to the caciques (Hann 1991, 241). Be that as it may, concepts of supreme power and assignment and division of ruling responsibilities were readily made commensurate with the Calusas' cosmology. The Calusa did not fail to challenge what they saw as the incongruity of the concept of one Creator God and a powerful Trinity (247). Rogel noted that they may not have believed in Christian ideas, but they were paying close attention to make sense of the teachings, to challenge them, and to determine whether to accept or reject them.

When Father Rogel explained the nature of the soul, Felipe discarded the notion of a single soul and explained that the Calusa believed that each person had three souls. The first was located in the pupil of the eye, the second was constituted by a person's shadow, and the third was the self-image in a reflective surface such as a mirror or a pool of water.³ Upon a person's death the last two souls left the person; only the soul residing in the pupil remained forever. It is noteworthy that all the souls were connected with the sense of vision, but only the one that resided in the body remained with it. When a Calusa died, one of the two souls external to the person entered an animal or a fish. If and when that animal was killed, the soul re-entered another lesser animal and so on, until the soul was reduced to nothing. People who were sick had lost one of their souls, which could be retrieved by shamans and made to stay in the body by placing fires at all house openings to bar the soul from fleeing. It appears that in Calusa cosmology, the soul was vulnerable to disease and could be lost. This loss of soul magnified the importance of epidemics well beyond the possibility of death. The Calusa mocked the Jesuits' concepts of the uniqueness of the soul and its immortality, and despite Rogel's multiple attempts to explain the concept, the Calusa could not, and did not, find a place for the concept within their cosmological framework. Obviously, belief in only one soul would abridge the Calusas' chance of cosmological renewal.

Rogel did not relent: he rhetorically cornered Felipe by asking him if he believed that God was omnipotent and truthful, to which Felipe answered he did. The missionary continued that if Felipe believed this and if God had revealed these truths to the world, why would Felipe not accept them? In turn, Felipe asked how Rogel could know that those were the words of God. Rogel explained that the word of God had been written down long ago and preserved. For Felipe, evidence in writing superseded evidence obtained

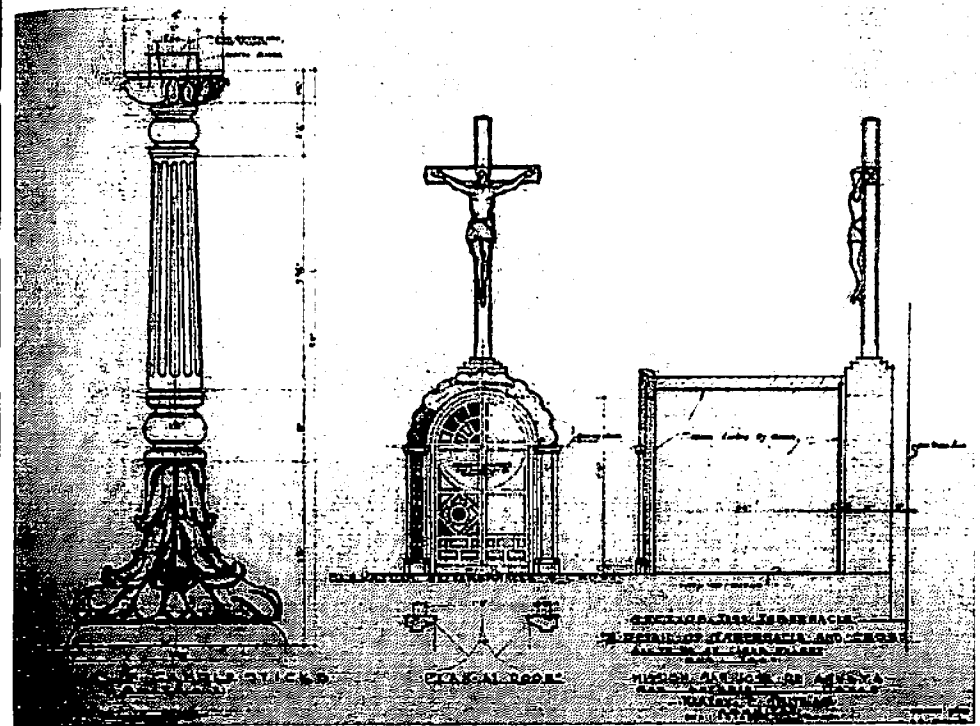


Figure 5.1. Detail of tabernacle and cross at Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, San Antonio, Texas, 1948. Harvey P. Smith Drawings of San Antonio Missions. Courtesy of Alexander Architectural Archive, University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

by oral tradition, which, according to Rogel, Felipe considered to be liable to change as it was transmitted through generations (Hann 1991, 241). In an ironic modern twist, Felipe questioned the validity of tradition because he believed that unlike oral tradition, that which had been written was unchangeable.

Father Rogel chastised the Calusa for their adoration of wooden "idols" and was rebuked by them for his adoration of a wooden cross, whereupon the Jesuit explained the symbolic value of the cross as the symbol of Christ's death and the expiation of mankind's sins. To this the Calusa responded with the faith of tradition. As Father Rogel stated, "They said to me that their forebears had lived under this law from the beginning of time and that they also wanted to live under it, that I should let them be, that they did not want to listen to me" (Hann 1991, 239). The Calusas' continued refusal to believe denied Father Rogel a community of believers, and without that he had no mission.

The Calusa consulted the deceased, who continued to see after death, forecast future events, and provide counsel to the living (Hann 1991, 238). The deceased's privilege to see beyond earthly bounds could be related to the chthonic capabilities of shamans acquired through hereditary positions and practice. The Calusa told Father Rogel that their forefathers saw God "on their burials" (242), whereupon Rogel explained that God did not have a body and that what they saw was the devil in his attempts to deceive them. The Calusa rejected this understanding of the nature of the conflict between God and the devil, and neither Felipe nor his subjects were willing to part with their traditions. When pressed by the Jesuit's admonitions, Felipe retorted that he "had permission to live according to his rites until the *Adelantado*" returned (243). Felipe, who lived at the Spanish presidio, must have been struggling with changes because Rogel noted that he sometimes was found kneeling before the cross. Apparently Felipe told Rogel that in the evenings he offered the Christian God a sacrifice like the one he customarily offered his gods.

If Felipe maneuvered through turbulent waters, so did Rogel. While Felipe was trying to mesh his spiritual traditions with the teachings of the Catholic faith, the Jesuit was shaping the tenets of the faith to make them acceptable to the Calusa (245–46). In this struggle, neither remained untouched. Father Rogel admitted that Felipe "in his own fashion" offered himself to God, but the Jesuit was perturbed by Felipe's version of conversion (243). Rogel wanted visible proofs of conversion. He repeatedly asked Felipe to burn the idols, cut his hair, and dress like a Spaniard or, as Father Rogel saw it, to don "the clothing of a Christian" (261). To Rogel, practices were signs of belief, as if the former signified comprehension and acceptance. His presumption was that actions spoke louder than words, but the entire confrontation was based on words.

The stakes were even higher. According to custom and in order to fulfill the requirements of his caciqueship, Felipe married his blood sister and kept many wives given to him by allied nations. When confronted with the Catholic prohibition against such behaviors, Felipe reiterated that he had asked for permission to live according to his cultural customs until the return of the *adelantado*. More important, Felipe stated that his subjects demanded that he follow custom and in his position as cacique he was required to satisfy them (Hann 1991, 244–45). This was a delicate issue, as the Spaniards' position among the Calusa depended on Felipe's goodwill and protection as much as it did on the attitude of Felipe's vassals and neighbors. In turn, Felipe's subjects, when pressed to comply with the precepts of the Catholic faith, stated that they could not abide by them unless and until their cacique

did so (246–47). While these statements reflect a structural social reality and a colonial conundrum, they nonetheless served to deflect decision making and bought precious time.

Felipe and his vassals frequently seemed eager to decry the falsity of their beliefs while contending that the legitimacy of the caciqueship depended on the performance of appropriate practices (Hann 1991, 247). In spite of Felipe's assurances that conversion would be forthcoming and that he and his subjects would give visible proofs of change, when Felipe's daughter became seriously ill, Felipe refused to have her baptized and instead cured her using traditional medicines and shamanic practices (246–47). This rejection of Christian solace at life's liminal moments, such as birth and death, appears sometimes in the historical record, raising doubts about the commitment of Native neophytes to their professed conversions.

On one occasion, unable to evade Father Rogel, Felipe discouraged the priest from trying to change the behaviors of the contact generation and encouraged him to concentrate on the young people, as they knew little of the customs of their elders and were likely to be more amenable to the new doctrine. As for the older adults, however, the missionary "could not strip them of everything" and leave them culture-bare (Hann 1991, 245). Felipe bluntly stated that Rogel should be satisfied that he was willing to forsake his "idols" and shamanic practices, remove sodomites, abolish the custom of sacrificing children at burials, stop decorating his body with black paint, cut his hair, and do other things Rogel had requested. However, he adamantly refused to have only one wife. The Jesuit capitulated: "And thus I see no impediment to the implantation of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in this entire heathendom" (246). A hegemonic face-off came to a draw.

The example of the Calusa is important for our understanding of the permutations and ambiguities of the process of conversion. This case demonstrates the effort of the Calusa to learn, evaluate, and carefully consider which Christian concepts could be grafted onto their beliefs without destroying fundamental spiritual-social structures. This process provides a window into the interweaving of Calusa cultural concepts and discourses with those of the colonizer, pinpoints some of the Calusas' essential tenets that did not allow compromise, and demonstrates just how far the Calusa were willing to go to appropriate and use the benefits provided by the colonizers.

The Calusa anticipated and outlined patterns of behavior that were later visible among other Native groups. The conflicts between Carlos and Felipe and the options each chose exemplify the gap between the contact generation and later generations and demonstrate how the different generations as

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The Calusa anticipated and outlined patterns of behavior that were later visible among other Native groups. The conflicts between Carlos and Felipe and the options each chose exemplify the gap between the contact generation and later generations and demonstrate how the different generations as

well as the missionaries explored that cleavage. Generational power shifts such as the shift from Carlos's leadership to that of Felipe resulted in reversals and alterations of statuses and roles. In other words, cultural change occurred along generational lines and likely along gender lines. Add to that the incalculable effects of disease, and one can surmise that generations were skipped and that sociocultural patterns of organization and transmission of knowledge were greatly disrupted or became maladaptive.

By 1568, the tiny Jesuit contingent had realized the futility of its conversion efforts. The Franciscans had tried their conversion methods among the Calusa in 1697–1698, only to be forcefully expelled. Forgetful or undaunted, the Jesuits tried again in 1743, 175 years later. By then the Calusa had been whipped by waves of wars, epidemics, migrations to Cuba, social disruption, and an unhealthy appetite for rum. Two centuries after contact with the Europeans, the Calusa were still living by hunting, gathering, fishing, and trading. Despite the fact that the Calusa once more requested the presence of missionaries, Father Joseph de Alaña discovered that they continued to stipulate conditions for conversion. Calusa who agreed to be baptized were not to perform any work and the crown was to supply them with food, clothing, and rum. They were to continue their traditional spiritual practices, and the missionaries were not to punish their children (Hann 1991, 421). If the missionaries wished them to build a church, they were to pay them wages to do so, and if the Spanish decided to settle within Calusa territory they were to pay tribute to the cacique, as the lands belonged to him and not to the king of Spain. Indeed, as Father Alaña fully realized, the Calusa were convinced that “in admitting our religion in any manner, they are doing us a great favor” (421). When the priests refused to supply them with rum, the Calusa berated the missionaries about using wine for Mass, appropriated a Catholic status by calling their shaman bishop, and refused Catholic burial practices while maintaining their own (422–25). The Calusa neither melted nor melted.

The Franciscans: 1697–1698

But did not you or your caciques ask the señor bishop to send ministers so that they might baptize them? They replied that the old chief had made this request, but that he was no longer in charge, and that just as the Christians could not cease to be Christians and live without the rosary, neither could they abandon their law and become Christians.

Fray Miguel Carrillo, quoted in Hann 1991, 174–75

After the Jesuits departed in 1568, the Calusa had frequent contact with the Spanish through trade, shipwrecks, and voyages to Cuba. In 1688, the son

of the Calusa cacique declared that they were ready to accept the Catholic faith, and in 1689 the cacique visited Cuba to ask that missions be established on his lands (Hann 1991, 36–38). The Calusa experience with the Jesuits in 1568 had taught them useful lessons about Spanish behavior and how far they could push the missionaries and the army, yet their desire for trade goods and favors from the Spanish was matched by the resiliency of their spiritual beliefs and traditions.

In September 1697, the Franciscans finally reached the Calusa. The friars were lodged in a section of the cacique's dwelling for thirteen days while the Calusa constructed a structure of palm thatch to house them (Hann 1991, 165). Eager to start missionizing, the six Franciscans erected a cross and some poles with bells to demarcate the sacred place for prayer. The Calusa were curious but noncommittal. In October the friars moved into their own dwelling, which they divided into a place for worship and living quarters (174). The friars set up an oratory but apparently minimized the display of sacra such as the baptismal font and the ciborium,⁴ fearing depredations by the Calusa. The Calusa submitted some children for baptism, but when they did not receive what they deemed adequate gifts in exchange for those baptisms, they complained (166). In doing so, the Calusa inverted the terms of salvation; the price of admission was to be borne by the Christians.

Unlike Father Rogel, who attempted to explain the mysteries of the Catholic faith and engaged in vibrant discourse with the Calusa, the Franciscans adopted a policy of intervention and attempted to disrupt and destroy the Calusas' “idols.” When the friars said that the “superstitious” practices of the Calusa offended the Christian God, the Calusa replied in kind: *su santo* (their saint) was offended by the presence of the friars and angry with the Calusa for allowing the friars' presence (Hann 1991, 167; for similar statements in Brazil see Metcalf 2005, 101, 203). The Calusa requested and accepted the missionaries while presumably inviting the wrath of their own gods, a dangerous spiritual game. It could be that their spiritual precepts permitted other spiritual mediators if they did not displace traditional spiritual entities or that bargaining with the spiritual realm was permissible. On the other hand, the Calusa might have been playing their customary game of tit for tat.

When the Franciscans led a procession to the Calusas' “synagogue” on the hill to disrupt their spiritual practices, the Calusa manhandled and insulted them and removed them forcefully from the area. These confrontations continued, and according to the testimony of the friars, the Calusa urinated on the friars and rubbed feces on their faces, either a demonstration of the Calusas' view of waste and humiliation or their perfect understanding of the

western abhorrence of bodily excretions (Hann 1991, 166–68). By December 1697, the Franciscans had been evicted from Calusa lands and left naked and starving on the shore, presumably to perish. A Spanish ship passing by the Florida Keys rescued the desperate friars.

Throughout the short period of missionization, the Calusa displayed keen knowledge of Catholic concepts, specific language, and pointed argumentation. They demonstrated that it was not lack of knowledge or incomprehension that dissuaded them from becoming Christians but rather a clear and determined preference for the structure of their spiritual beliefs and traditions. The Calusa called their temple the “house of Mahoma”; they told Fr. Feliciano Lopéz, the Franciscan head of the missionary group, that the Calusa god was as powerful as the Christian God; and they addressed their god as *santo* (Hann 1991, 158–60). In doing so, they positioned themselves outside the Catholic faith, as de facto heretics, while at the same time equating the validity of their beliefs with those of the Christians. Likewise, it is significant that friars and civilians referred to the Calusa temple as a “synagogue” (170, 196). The Spanish use of such terms and particularly the adoption by the Calusa of the heretical terminology shows that the Calusa were aware of the links between and implications of the terms “synagogue,” “Mohammed,” and “heretics” and located themselves within that discourse. Indeed, their use of such terms underscores the extent to which stereotypes of the Inquisition had permeated colonial discourse. The Calusa mistreated and degraded the friars through physical and mental means but did not kill them, always refraining from the ultimate act of disrespect.

The Calusa coveted Spanish goods and clothing but did not change their hunting and gathering way of life. They never congregated around the mission church, few received baptism, and what prayers they learned appear to have been learned more out of curiosity than an intent to adopt Catholic practices. Nevertheless, they may have learned more about the tenets of the Christian faith than many other Native groups. The Calusa understood well the coupling of knowledge and power: to overpower the Christians, they had to know Christian culture.

Conclusion

During the early Jesuit conversion period, the Calusa, quite genuinely, I think, engaged in discussion, assessed the value of adopting Christianity, and chose to refuse the price to be paid for it. Once the Calusa realized the importance of the conversion program to the Spanish, they requested that the Spanish pay a price in exchange for the mere possibility that the

Calusa might consider accepting Christianity. The request for missionaries that resulted in the presence of the Franciscans was an overt attempt by the Calusa to obtain goods and food in exchange for flirting with Christianity. It is possible, however, that the Calusa had envisioned another period of debate about religious practices like the one they had enjoyed with the Jesuits and were not prepared for the interventionist proselytizing of the Franciscans. It is also possible that the Calusa were actually engaged in attempting to convert the friars to their spiritual beliefs. Father Rogel realized that the Calusa tried to convince the Jesuits of the validity and true nature of their gods (Hann 1991, 285, 287–88).

The Calusa provide a useful comparison to other hunter-gatherer populations made sedentary by entering a mission. Their behaviors also draw attention to the similarities and differences between them and settled horticulturists, such as the Hasinai. The processes and models of conversion used in northeastern Mexico and Texas and discussed in the next two chapters highlight how missionaries adapted to the local social and environmental circumstances and how their models of conversion work shaped the lives of Native Americans.