



SANTOS: CHRISTO WITH MESSENGERS

The most carved *bulto* image in New Mexico is the crucifix. 99.9 per cent of the *santero bulto* images of Christ display Him as either a changeable child (as in the *pieta*) or in His Passion and death. Further, the early *santero* crucifixes depict a Christ with blood flowing from exaggerated wounds. This was a result of the nearly 100 years of Franciscan influence from 1590 through 1680.

Franciscan friars came to New Spain and New Mexico in order to convert the inhabitants to Roman Catholicism. It was the “God” part of the “Gold, Glory, and God” goals of the Spanish monarchy in the 16th century. Holy Week offered the Franciscans a special opportunity.

Holy Week was the time of year in which the Franciscans held the upper hand versus the Pueblo medicine men in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Pueblo peoples. Unlike Christmas, which was conflated with the winter solstice, Holy Week had no Pueblo equivalent. The summer solstice occurred months later. During Holy Week, the friars could accentuate and demonstrate the suffering of Christ for the sins of humanity. They did so through self-flagellation, carrying heavy crosses through the villages, and through the sacred image of the crucifix. The Franciscans, under the influence of the counter-Reformation, concentrated on Christ’s crucifixion, not his Resurrection. The pain and suffering of the Passion was captured in crucifixes that exaggerated Jesus’ wounds on his chest, arms, and legs. Blood dripped from the incisions. All of these images were meant to match traditional Pueblo rights of self-flagellation and self-mortification in order to demonstrate that the power of Christianity was equal to or greater than the power of traditional Pueblo religion. These practices resulted in a “New Mexican Tradition” in *bulto* crucifix iconography in which the pain and suffering of the Passion is emphasized. After the revolt of 1680, as the church reentered New Mexico, the local *santeros* copied the images of the previous century and the tradition continued through the beginning of the 20th century.