

*COLONIAL CHRISTENDOM  
IN LATIN AMERICA*

Now we come to our own version of Christian culture. For our purposes here we may consider it still another version of Christendom. It is the "Christendom of the Indies" of which Toribio de Mogrovejo spoke in his letters around the start of the Third Council of Lima in 1582-83. And our version of Christendom, unlike that of the Byzantine empire and that of the Roman empire, has been a colonial one. We have been on the periphery, while the previous versions of Christendom have been in the center.

THE ONLY COLONIAL VERSION  
OF CHRISTENDOM

It is important for us to realize that our version of Christendom is the only colonial or dependent version. To discover in what sense it is "colonial" is to discover-theologically, philosophically, and historically-who we are as Latin American Christians. To cease being "colonial" is to liberate ourselves and become part of the larger world-without imposing on the rest of the world the oppressive bonds of a single culture. In my opinion this has become possible only since Vatican II. We are now in a position to get beyond the

limits of Mediterranean culture and to truly evangelize the world of Africa and Asia.

Almost against its will, Christianity is being stripped of its cultural baggage. Leaving "Christendom" behind, it is beginning to get back its freedom. To some people this process of secularization seems to spell decline and disaster. But in all likelihood the Old Testament prophets would explain it as a punishment for sin and a process of



liberation-which is how they described Israel's exile in Babylon. The secularist persecution of the Church in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries may have reduced the Church to dire poverty. But that very poverty will now free the Church to truly preach the Gospel message. Once again the hand of the unbeliever has been



God's instrument for liberating his Church so that it might carry out its true mission. As we shall note along the way, the process of expropriation has not been confined to property and possessions. It has also affected pastoral attitudes and the theological and exegetical structures of the Church.

Let us begin back in 1492 when Columbus arrived here just about the same time that the Catholic rulers of Spain were recapturing their country from the Moslems. Columbus set foot on the most primitive part of America, landing in the Caribbean region. It was the most primitive part of America in the sense that the Indians there were planters living in a paleolithic setting. They had no great urban civilization, and the initial impact of European conquest would be decisive.

When the lookout shouted "Land ho!" Columbus already had a name picked out for this land-even before he set foot on it. He called it San Salvador. Our destiny was decided for us from the very beginning. Columbus did not come on land and ask the inhabitants: "Who are you? What is the name of this place?" He gave it a name. In the biblical understanding of this process, to give someone or something a name is to gain dominion over what is named. So our destiny was taken in hand with the first voyage of discovery.

Columbus also placed the natives under the charge of his own people, commending them to his regal patrons. The *encomienda* system began right then and there, although it would take time for it to be organized and legislated.

One might well say that Amerindia, the mother of Latin America, has been oppressed since the very start of Europe's arrival on the scene. The American Indian, the Other, was subjugated right at the beginning. It is a very important point and has very concrete manifestations. We must remember that it was Spanish men who came to America, and that they came alone. It was the Indian

women of America who served as their concubines, giving birth to the *mestizo*, who is the true Latin American. Yet little or nothing has been written about the Indian mother of America. She is one of the oppressed mothers of history, and she has been such for a very long time. It was she who had to endure the potency of the oppressive conqueror from Europe. Nietzsche spoke about the "will to power," but he had nothing to say about the other side of the coin. Over against the reality of the "will to power" stands the reality of the "oppressed will." We can see the latter reality very well because we can look at past, present, and future from the vantage point of the poor and the oppressed.

Spain's experience with Christianity was wholly an experience with Christendom. Great reformer that he was, Archbishop Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517) also possessed palaces and armies. The king had to deal with the Archbishop in order to enact his own plans. Thanks to Rome's weakness, on the other hand, the king had the right to nominate bishops and his nominations usually were accepted. Thus the king of Spain chose all our bishops during the colonial period. Moreover, the Latin American Church was governed by the Council of the Indies from 1524 on. This Council had charge of everything in America, and it passed laws on a wide variety of matters. It decided whether some enterprise would be initiated, whether a war would be undertaken, whether a diocese would be founded, whether missionaries would be sent, and so forth.

In many instances the head or director of the Council of the Indies was a bishop, but laymen actually did the work of administration. That was Christendom: a culture of which Christianity was a "part." And thus the equivocal nature of the whole arrangement, for the Church was one element in a cultural whole. It had to serve other ends, rendering obedience to the State and serving it in different ways. Bishops would report on the activities of viceroys, and viceroys would report on the activities of bishops. The

bishop had economic power because he collected tithes. This income was then taken over by the king, but he shared it amply. The bishop also had political influence because he had great authority in the eyes of the people. On the other side of the coin, however, the viceroy exercised spiritual faculties. He could decide where a cathedral would be located, and he sometimes had the right to jail ecclesiastics who had violated laws. Disputes and conflicts broke out repeatedly between the two sides. The king operated on a policy of divide and conquer.

In any case a new culture came into being. The important point I want to bring out here is that Christianity is a Church which transcends every culture. Christendom, on the other hand, was a culture which subsumed Christianity as one of its elements. Insofar as Christianity did not conform to its cultural requirements, however, it was attacked by the totality that was Christendom. Thus the Jesuits were expelled from America in 1767, because they were the only religious order which would not allow the king to have charge of the sending of missionaries. In the eyes of the king, the Jesuits were a fifth column, because they challenged: the power of his administrative organs. In addition, the Jesuit missions here were really States within the State, and regal absolutism could not tolerate that. When the Church chose to act autonomously, it suffered expulsion and persecution. When it did not choose to act that way, it became one more element in a cultural totality and thereby abdicated the Christian function of prophetic criticism.

Latin American Christendom had different periods too. The first period, from 1492 to 1808, was one of great expansion in the life of this colonial Christendom. The appearance of independence movements in 1808 heralded the start of a period of crisis for this culture, and the crisis continued right down to 1962. All of us have felt the impact of this crisis to some extent in our day-to-day lives. In fact I would say that our spiritual and theological crisis stems

from the fact that we have had to live through two different ecclesial experiences at the same time. A third period began for us, and for the Church around the world, in 1962. It is the period through which we are now living, and I will discuss it in some detail in the next chapter.

If we want to understand what is happening today, we must understand what happened in the nineteenth century. But we must also understand what happened before that. In an earlier book of mine (*Hipótesis para una historia de la Iglesia en América latina*) I noted certain trends in the number of religious in Chile over a period of time. In 1700 there were eight religious per 10,000 people; in 1800 there were ten religious per 10,000 people; in 1960-and the figures are now more exact-there was one religious per 10,000 inhabitants. That suggests what has happened to the Church in the course of time, and we must look at the situation with open eyes if we want to adopt the right pastoral approach. The considerable presence of the Church in an earlier day has diminished considerably, and we must make pastoral decisions on the basis of that fact.

Near Nazareth there is a small town called Cana. One afternoon, during my two years in Israel as a laborer, I met an old Orthodox priest in Cana. The bearded old man of seventy talked to me about his family. He had eight children, now grown, and many grandchildren. I asked him how he happened to become a priest, and he told me. When he was forty years old, he already had eight children and was working his land. The priest of Cana died, and the Christians of the town got together to choose a new priest. They chose him. He then spent six months in Jerusalem where he went back to studying the liturgy which he had learned in childhood. Once he had refreshed his memory on the details, he came back as a priest to the people of his town. This married man is part of the oldest tradition of the Church. The practice is not something new; it has been going on since the beginning. There is nothing new about

suggesting that married men be ordained priests, as a look at history will indicate. It is our oldest tradition, still carried on by the Byzantine Orthodox and the Catholic Melchites.

My point is that there was a large number of priestly vocations in Latin Christendom and the Spanish Church. Hence it was possible to impose stipulations which would cut down the number of candidates and which in effect turned priests into monks. Even with these stipulations, the number of priests was large. But our situation is very different today. Both theology and history offer us valid grounds for re-examining the whole question and going back to the older tradition of the Church. We no longer live in the age of Christendom. Our situation today is quite different.

This suggests that our solutions might also differ very much, from those of Europe. In France, for example, there are 45,000 priests. In all of Latin America there are only 30,000 priests. But Latin America is twenty times larger than France. So we must deal with our real situation in history as it is, not as others deal with their different situation. The number of priests and consecrated religious in Latin America is now infinitesimal. The whole question must be reconsidered from top to bottom.

## THE FIRST PROPHETS IN LATIN AMERICA

Before I discuss the various periods of Church history in Latin America. I should like to mention several important figures in our early Church history. We too have had our prophets, and the first great figure in that tradition was the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos. On the third Sunday of Advent in 1511 he cited the prophetic texts of Isaiah and John the Baptist to launch an attack on the way the native Indians were being treated by the Spaniards in the *encomiendas*. The Spaniards' behavior was a mortal sin, he said, and he would not give them absolution henceforth.



Montesinos thereby proclaimed that there was a real difference between Christianity and hispanic culture. He interpreted present history and gave it meaning in the light of the biblical texts. Prophetic re-reading of the Gospel led him to prophetic action. He realized that he, as a man of the Church, was not simply a tool of Spanish culture; he was something more. He took this position, and it would be defended and upheld by Pedro de Córdoba and the brothers of the monastery of Hispaniola. It would also be the banner carried by another great figure: Bartolomé de Las Casas.

We do not really know when Bartolomé de Las Casas was ordained a priest. He had come to the New World in 1502 with his father and was later ordained. At first he was just another priest who had Indians working for him. His real conversion began in 1514, after he had heard something of the preaching of Montesinos and read the biblical denunciation of injustice. Thanks to the charisma of prophecy, he was able to see that his style of life entailed a contradiction. So he began a mission that would last until his death in 1566.

First he went to talk with Montesinos, then he headed for Spain. He made contact with Jiménez de Cisneros, and ultimately the latter was persuaded to designate him as the "Universal Protector of the Indians of the Indies." Thus a clear distinction was finally made between Spanish culture and the missionary role of the Church, even though it would usually not be observed in practice or accepted by most people. Actually few missionaries took cognizance of the difference between being Spanish and being a Christian, although some did complain about the anti-evangelical impact of the forced amalgam. One bishop, for example, reported the raids of Spanish conquistadores into Indian settlements. He described to the king how they robbed the Indians and killed their women and children in New Spain and New Granada. This, he said, caused the

Indians to flee to the mountains and to identify Christianity with Spanish cruelty .

But for the most part the Church itself identified its life with that of Spanish civilization and its culture. This is the attitude which pervaded the colonial period and dramatically marked its life. When we talk about the separation of Church and State today, we can hear the echoes of our past history in the debate that rages. In my opinion we will be much better off when we finally manage to make a clear distinction between Spanish culture and Christianity-as Bartolomé de Las Casas did several centuries ago.

Las Casas prophetically espoused a new task: nonviolent evangelization. He wanted the Indians to be converted by the force of the Gospel message, not by force of arms. This is the course he proposed for the evangelization of Cumaná, in present-day northeast Venezuela. His project failed because the situation was already bad there. Certain Spaniards had been exploiting and killing the Indians before he arrived. Subsequently, however, Bishop Francisco Marroquín of Guatemala invited him to evangelize the Indians in his territory. Las Casas succeeded in converting the Indians with his peaceful approach, and his experience helped to lead up to the promulgation of the *New Laws* in 1542.

The point to be noted here is that Spanish "messianism" identified Christianity with Spanish culture. When the Church accepted this identification, it encountered great difficulties in carrying out its redemptive work. When the Church managed to separate itself and its work from Spanish culture, on the other hand, the Gospel message made great headway among the Indians. The Reductions are a case in point. The first to entertain the notion of Reductions was Vasco de Quiroga, who eventually became the bishop of the Tarascan Indians in Michoacán, Mexico. Vasco de Quiroga was a layman for most of his life. An official of the Mexican *audiencia* , he settled down among the

Indians after he had reached the age of sixty. He was a humanist who had been greatly impressed by his reading of Thomas More's works, of his *Utopia* in particular. He therefore decided to set up Christian societies outside the sphere of direct Spanish contact. He was a great civilizer and missionary, who was ultimately designated as a bishop by the king.

Vasco de Quiroga regarded himself as bishop to the Indians, not to the Spaniards. He never managed to get a cathedral built because he spent his whole time with the Indians. Under his direction, over 150 Indian villages were set up for the Tarascans. They were admirably organized, and thus the first contact of these Indians with Spanish influence was a relatively happy one. This was the start of the diocese of Michoacán.

There were many other men of the caliber of Vasco de Quiroga, and we shall mention some of them as we proceed. Right now, however, I want to briefly discuss the various stages of Church history in Latin America.

## THE FIRST STEPS (1492-1519)

I think it is most interesting and worthwhile to explore the distinct features and stages of our Church history, and I have done that to some extent in my book cited earlier.<sup>2</sup> But it is also worthwhile for us to consider the overall course of that history briefly here.

Church history began in Latin America with the arrival of the first evangelizers, and that took place in the Caribbean region. Hence it occurred among very primitive Indians. We must realize that it is impossible to teach history without advertent to social typology to some extent. One must know what kind of Indians were involved and whether they were really in a position to accept Christianity.

The Caribbean Indians encountered by Columbus and his crew were among the most primitive in Amerindia.

They included such groups as the Caribs, the Arawaks, and the Tupis, who had descended through Florida and spread out over the Caribbean. Some had gone farther, occupying the northern and central parts of Brazil. Using small canoes and ingenious navigation instruments, they moved about from island to island. Their standard of living was extremely low. They were vegetarians. Since it was difficult to feed young children, mothers nursed their young until the age of five or six years. As a result, there was a low birth rate. When the Spaniards arrived, these fragile people were stricken with the diseases imported from Europe: tuberculosis, syphilis, and so forth. The Indians were quickly decimated and the Spaniards did not meet with much physical resistance.

A great problem was the great diversity of languages and the absence of any political organization. There were no republics or kingdoms or empires in this immediate area, just a conglomeration of tribes or clans. The task of evangelizing was thus rendered impossible, and the first impression held of the Indians was a very negative one. The Indians either died or were forced into the *encomiendas*. If that had been all there was to America, then Spain would have done nothing and America would not have been born. The unfortunate thing, however, is that mistakes were made during this first period. The Indians died from diseases and ill treatment. This whole side of the picture is reflected by Bartolomé de Las Casas in the *Desfructation of the Indies*, where he describes the disappearance of Indian culture in the face of Spanish incursion.

The Spanish could not evangelize this culture because its extremely low level did not allow for dialogue. We are dealing with a completely negative period, which lasted until around 1517-1519. It was then that Diego Velázquez, the governor of Cuba, conceived the idea of organizing the conquest of the region that had recently been discovered.

## THE EVANGELIZATION OF MEXICO AND PERU (1519-1551)

Up to 1519 no great culture had been encountered in the course of Spanish exploration and conquest. This first epoch, however, was a decisive one and deserves to be studied very closely. For it was during this earliest period that the first form of many institutions took shape: the *encomiendas*, the *cabildos*, and the first outlines of the *audiencias*. The Church began to resign itself to the defects of the conquest, but it also began to voice its first prophetic denunciations.

A new and different epoch began in 1519. A lieutenant of Velázquez rose up in revolt. Daring as he was, the lieutenant then launched the conquest of the Yucatan. Thus Hernando Cortez happened upon the existence of an empire, and word began to spread about a mature and important civilization that was fabulously wealthy.

This would change the whole course of evangelization, because the newly discovered peoples had a solid culture of a much higher sort. The Spaniards were able to conquer much more in a short period of time, taking advantage of the structures which these peoples already possessed. The Spaniards conquered Mexico and set themselves up in the capital. Evangelization *en masse* began with the arrival of the so-called "Twelve Apostles" in 1524. They were the extraordinary Franciscans who set out through Mexican territory to convert the people to Christianity.

Today we can appreciate the caliber of those missionaries. They came from sixteenth-century Spain, the Spain in which John of the Cross and Saint Teresa flourished, the Spain which was flooded with noble ideals of holiness and gentlemanly knighthood. One of these missionaries was Motolinía (Toribio de Benavente). Barefoot, he traversed all of Mexico. The Indians called him "the poor one" because he was even poorer than they. He

learned the Aztec language quickly and preached fluently in that language. Indeed all those early missionaries learned the native idiom so well that other Spaniards complained about the fact that the Indians were not learning Spanish. They felt that the policy of the Church was hindering the spread of Spanish.

For some time it was the Church that held up the spread of Spanish culture and language in America. And it did so for the sake of its missionary endeavors. But millions of people were now involved, and some sort of political organization was necessary. It must be remembered, however, that only Castile was involved in the thrust towards America. Aragon was deeply enmeshed in European politics. Up until 1519 America was insignificant and did not produce a red cent.

The age of splendor began in 1519, and it was then that the first great ecclesiastics arrived on the scene. In 1528 Juan de Zumárraga arrived and salvaged Mexico from the disastrous first *audiencia*. Bishop Julián Garcés, a Dominican, arrived in the area of Tlaxcala. Vasco de Quiroga came to Michoacán and Marroquín to Guatemala. Many other fine bishops arrived on the scene, along with secular priests and thousands of missionary Dominicans, Franciscans, and Mercedarians. Much later the Jesuits would come also. Gradually the Church began to organize here. Florida was made a bishopric in 1520, Mexico City in 1530. Other bishoprics were gradually established, centered around Santo Domingo. This was the focal point in the first period, but gradually Mexico City gained preeminence,

Subsequently Pizarro discovered Peru. He was greatly supported by García Díaz Arias, who would become the first bishop of Quito. It was Arias who contributed much of the money for Pizarro's enterprise, encouraged him in spirit, and gave purpose to the undertaking. Once the Spanish had conquered those two great American empires, the situation was greatly changed. Now America had a

solidity of its own. Then the region of the Chibchas was discovered as the two exploring parties, one coming from the north and the other from the south, met somewhere in between. New Granada came into being with the help of Sebastián de Benalcázar and his companions. Other bishoprics sprang up also: Santa Fe de Bogotá, Santa María, and Coro; Panamá in Central America. In short order there were twenty-five dioceses with the organizational structure required for their maintenance.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH (1551-1620)

A new stage began in 1551. The first great attempt at evangelizing America had come to a close, although the primitive areas of Brazil and Argentina had not yet been touched. The Spanish element certainly did not disregard the Amerindian element. Instead it planted its root in what was already in existence. And there was good reason for going by way of the Pacific coast. It would have been much easier to move up along the southern Atlantic coast towards the Río de la Plata on southeast South America. But the Indians in that whole region were a wretched lot with an impoverished prehistory. The region with a great prehistory was centered on the Pacific coast, and it is there that the Church was set up in all its splendor.

The colonial Church had two great centers. One was Mexico City, the capital of the Aztec empire. The other was Lima, situated in the heart of the Inca empire. It is there that the Church established its great universities and its printing presses; from there its influence and life spread throughout the newly discovered region. In other words, the two most important archepiscopal sees were established on the sites of the two great American empires. The foundations of the Church in America were not artificial creations.

The interesting thing, of course, is that the areas on the

Atlantic coast would eventually prove to be the most prosperous ones. While Pizarro conquered the flourishing Inca empire at one fell swoop, the southern *pampas* would be conquered only slowly during the course of the nineteenth century. Yet the latter region is a richer one today.

Thoroughgoing organization of the newly established American Church began in 1551. The first provincial Council of Lima took place in that year. It was under the directorship of Jerónimo de Loaisa, who served as bishop and then archbishop for several decades. His function was a major one, and he received and dealt with many viceroys. Loaisa, in fact, is the great figure in Peru during this period. He is much more significant than Diego de Almagro and Pizarro, for example. After him will come Toribio de Mogrovejo, a truly imposing figure, who was the leading spirit in Peru from 1580 to 1606 even though the viceroy of the time, Francisco de Toledo, was also an outstanding man.

As I mentioned, the first provincial Council of Lima was held in 1551. These provincial councils are important in our history and deserve close study. The first meeting of this kind, as far as I can tell from my study in various archives, was the Synod of Guatemala in 1536. As far as I can reconstruct this matter, there were about seventy-two diocesan synods between 1536 and 1636. They were truly autochthonous in nature. They dealt almost exclusively with the evangelization of the Indians, with the languages involved, and with the needs and demands imposed on priests and catechists. In other words, it was in no way an "imported" Church. It was a Church making great efforts to face up to the real situation. The complexity of that situation surpassed its capabilities, but the Church worked harder and more earnestly then to face the situation than it ever has since—in my opinion.

The sixteenth century was a golden age, and the year 1551 was a momentous date for the Church. Loaisa set forth eighteen ordinances for his missionaries. In very con



crete terms these ordinances spelled out how they were to carry out their mission and what behavior was incumbent on one who sought to be an authentic missionary. Such was the realistic outlook of the bishops in this period as one council or synod succeeded another. There were two councils in Mexico and a second in Peru. Then came the third Council of Lima, which is now considered the great Church council of the colonial epoch. It was convened by Toribio de Mogrovejo, and we must consider him and his accomplishments.

Toribio was a young layman presiding over the Inquisition of Granada, and he had a deep acquaintance with the recently converted Moslems. He had been well educated at Salamanca, and he even entertained ideas about being a professor there. He had just been tonsured when Philip proposed that he succeed Loaisa in Lima. At the age of forty-two Toribio accepted the proposal, left his native country behind, and set out for the wilds of Peru. As soon as he arrived in Lima, he made contact with the Indians and began regular rounds of visitation that would carry him throughout the region. His trips would last five years; they say he covered 40,000 miles on foot, visiting many places where no Spaniard had been before. Besides these regular visitations, he convened twelve diocesan synods and three provincial Church councils. Toribio is one of the great holy men of America, a bishop who embodied the true missionary ideal. The Indians loved him like a father, regarding him almost like a divine Inca because of his total commitment and his absolute poverty. He hardly ever lived in his episcopal palace because of his long visitations, and he had nothing of his own to leave behind when he died.<sup>3</sup>

In my opinion, this period of Church history ends either with the death of Toribio de Mogrovejo in 1606 or else in 1620, because it is at about that time that the last large dioceses are set up—Durango in the north and Buenos Aires in the south. Missionary work will continue to some

extent, a few lesser dioceses will come into being later, but by 1620 the ecclesiastical organization of America was practically complete.

This was the third period in Latin American Church history as I see it. Missionary work had converted the vast mass of Indians who had been brought into contact with the Spanish, and various diocesan synods and regional councils had been held. But you may ask: To what extent had the Indians really been evangelized? There is no reason to minimize or make fun of this evangelization *en masse*. It is true that in many areas it was quite superficial, that it was not authentic evangelization at all. But as Robert Ricard points out in his book *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (Eng. trans., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), the areas that were well evangelized in the sixteenth century are those which have remained Christian, at least in name, right up to today—even though it is what we would call a folk Catholicism. The regions that were poorly evangelized, on the other hand, are the very regions that have been impregnated with paganism and other influences alien to Christianity. So one might well say that the early missionary work was not as superficial as it might seem, and that it had enormous effectiveness. In any case this era came to an end somewhere in the first part of the seventeenth century. One might date its close in 1620; or in 1623, with the death of Philip III; or in 1625, with the celebration of the first Council of Santa Fe de Bogotá; or in 1629, with the celebration of the first Council of La Plata de los Charcas, which was convened by Bishop Hernando Arias de Ugarte.

This bishop deserves a word too. He was an extraordinary man, who had been a member of the *audiencia* of Panamá. He served successively as Bishop of Quito, Archbishop of Santa Fe de Bogotá, Archbishop of La Plata de los Charcas, and Archbishop of Lima. He was of the same temper as Toribio de Mogrovejo. He travelled through the countryside of his people on the back of a mule, and

convened two great councils to confront the pastoral problems imposed by the poverty and hard life of his flock.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN HISPANO-AMERICA

A period of stabilization now began. It is the start of the colonial period as we tend to envision it today. The boundaries between the native Indians and the immigrant Spaniards began to harden. Missionaries stopped speaking to the Indians in their native Indian tongues as royal decrees forced the Indians to learn Spanish. Those who had been converted to Christianity in the sixteenth century remained Christian. Those who had not yet been converted to Christianity tended now to retreat to the isolated hill country and forest. They would revert to paganism such as we still encounter it today.

The seventeenth century is a distinctive period, marked by conflicting factions. Arguments arose between diocesan bishops and religious clergy, between the Jesuits and the Dominicans. The Jesuits had a policy of their own, one which I would say was somewhat separatist. It can be seen clearly in the establishment of the University of Lima. The Dominicans had set up a university in their monastery. Bishop Loaisa wanted to convert it into a great diocesan university in which all the religious orders would be involved, but the Jesuits refused to participate in the scheme. Eventually the university was set up as Loaisa had wanted—outside the Dominican monastery—but the Jesuits would not get involved in it. The Jesuits organized their extraordinary projects in many different areas, but they always stood apart from everyone else to some extent.

The bitter conflicts of this period help to explain why the Jesuits were eventually expelled. They took a strong stand for their own independence vis-a-vis the crown, a stand

which we today would regard as positive. It was the only religious order that was not under the control of the crown. Thanks to papal concessions, it was the king who set up missionary groups, provided for their training in Seville, and then sent them to America. In a sense they were envoys of the king. The Franciscans and Dominicans were under the authority of the Council of the Indies. The Jesuits never accepted this arrangement. They took their orders from their General in Rome. In the pervading atmosphere of exaggerated Spanish nationalism, the Jesuits represented an element of universalism and unwanted contact with Rome. The Spanish king could not accept this, although the attitude of the Jesuits was a laudable one in my opinion.

In America the Jesuits did not support the policies of the bishops. There was continuing conflict between the bishops and the Jesuits, and among the various religious orders themselves. The reason for this is that in this period we see the start of a process which I shall call "secularization," although I do not mean it in the sense that we use the term today. Here I am referring to the fact that the Christian missions, originally set up by religious missionaries, began to be turned over to the secular (or diocesan) clergy. These settlements had been established by the hard work of missionary religious. Now many of these settlements were Christian and prosperous, bringing in wealth to the Church. The bishops felt that these settlements should now be turned over to the secular clergy, that the proper role of the missionary religious was to keep pushing back the frontiers of paganism, to be the "advance men" of the Christian religion. This position was not accepted, and it gave rise to many arguments and disputes.

We must remember that there was no shortage of clergy at that time. At one point Toribio de Mogrovejo noted that he had more priests than he knew what to do with. So there was more than enough clergy to go around, and even the

remotest areas were visited by priests. This was the situation in the closing years of the sixteenth century and the early days of the seventeenth century. In Lima, for example, there were two language cathedras: one for Quechua and one for Aymara. To be ordained to the priesthood, a candidate had to know one of the two languages in addition to his theology. The Aymara cathedra was a very important one. In those days priests evangelized the people in their own language. Today many people in Peru still speak only their native language, but they are no longer evangelized in their native tongue.

Whether we like it or not, our history can be explained in part on the basis of events in Spain. (I do not say this as a Hispanophile.) The fact is that the sixteenth century was a golden age for Spain, when it boasted a lofty culture and held first place in Europe. All this came tumbling down in the seventeenth century, and we too felt the impact of the collapse.

#### THE BOURBON DECADENCE (1700-1808)

From 1700 to 1808 we find ourselves in the era of the Bourbons. America lost much of its importance and the Church fossilized even more. It was a sad era, in the sense that nothing radically new appeared on the scene. The only positive note might be the fact that missionaries continued to forge ahead in the north—first the Jesuits, then the Franciscans after the former had been expelled.

The expulsion of the Jesuits took place in 1767 in Brazil, 1769 elsewhere. To say that it was an event of critical importance would probably be an understatement. More than 2200 Jesuits left America, and they had been the elite in the universities and communities. It was they who had been studying physics and chemistry and trying to formulate a modern philosophy and theology. The places left vacant by

their expulsion were filled by Franciscans and Dominicans, but for the most part they could not fill the shoes of their predecessors. It was the first tremor of collapse in the system known as Christendom.

It is my belief that much that happened later, in the catastrophic nineteenth century for example, can be traced back to this blow. If the Jesuits had remained on the scene, things could very easily have taken a very different course. In Mendoza, for example, the Jesuits had operated a fine academy. Its closing left no educational institution of importance in Mendoza. Only after the movement for independence would we see the start of a National College sponsored by the State.

The missionary enterprise was continued throughout the eighteenth century. In the north of Mexico, for example, the Jesuits reached California as early as 1607. But not until the extraordinary Fray Junípero Serra (1713-1784) began his work was there missionary activity of the same calibre as "the early days." The Franciscans arrived in 1768 to replace the Jesuits. Working with amazing diligence, they established their mission outposts and *reducciones*. Starting at San Diego, founded by Fray Junípero in 1769, they reached San Francisco in 1776. The Dominicans as well founded reductions throughout Upper California.

## THE SOCIAL STRUGGLE AND THE MARTYR BISHOPS

Here I should like to mention a figure who stands out in my mind. The Christian, the saint, is a martyr. There is nothing better one can do than give one's life for the poor. Bishop Antonio de Valdivieso of Nicaragua, was undoubtedly a martyr in the colonial era. He was the Bishop of Central America, a contemporary of Bartolomé de Las Casas and several other great bishops. As the documents from that

period will tell you, the Indians of that region were being exploited terribly. Valdivieso took his life in his hands by seeking to take the Indians out of the encomiendas, as the New Laws of 1542 permitted, and place them at the disposal of the king himself as free people. The governor of Nicaragua at that time, a man named Rodrigo de Contreras, eventually had the bishop assassinated for his insistent defense of the Indians. Valdivieso, who is scarcely remembered now at all, died a martyr's death in defense of the native population.

Between 1540 and 1560 there were more than twenty bishops who dedicated their lives to the defense of the Indians. Pablo de Torres, the bishop of Panamá, was expelled from his diocese for that reason. Juan del Valle, bishop of Popayán, strove mightily to defend the Indians in his region. When his efforts seemed to be of no avail, he went to appeal to the audiencia of Santa Fe de Bogotá. When that effort failed, he headed back to Europe to appeal to the Council of the Indies. And when that venture brought no results, he packed up his documents on mules and headed for the Council of Trent. He died somewhere in France on the way to the Council.

His story is a bit like the course of Church history here in Latin America. He tried to make contact directly with Rome, but he never succeeded. Rome never spoke directly with Latin America; she spoke to it through the Spanish king and the Council of the Indies. Rome had no immediate presence here. When our wars for independence came, the new leaders pleaded directly with Rome to accept our political independence. But Rome was deeply involved with the Austrian empire and France. She could not accept Latin American independence, and condemned it in 1816. There is actually an encyclical condemning our revolution, our struggle for independence. San Martín was not only regarded as a traitor by Spain; he was also condemned by the Pope.

## COLONIAL CHRISTENDOM IN CRISIS (1808-1825)

With the rise of the movement for independence, the colonial Christendom that had existed since the arrival of the Europeans entered a period of crisis. Our independence was almost a gift, something we had not really earned. That is why we remained somewhat under the thumb of the ruling powers of the day.

We talk about the struggle for independence that took place between 1808 and 1825. It was not really a people's revolt, however. It was a revolt carried out by a Creole oligarchy who struggled to free themselves from Spain and then promptly fell under the sway of another empire. Today we talk about developed countries and underdeveloped countries. But the first and primary antithesis is really between traditional societies and developed societies. Traditional societies are those which are still independent because they have not yet felt the impact of a developed society. Such would be the Eskimos, the Pygmies, and the American Indians before the arrival of the Europeans. It is only when a traditional society is confronted with an advanced society that its people take cognizance of the gap that exists between the two. Only then do they begin to feel that they need something which they do not have. It is in this context that the notion of an underdeveloped society enters the picture.

Thus "underdeveloped" implies some sort of relationship with a "developed" society. It implies a situation where the "underdeveloped" party takes cognizance of the gap between it and the "developed" party. In that sense we can say that Latin America-not Amerindia-came into being as an "underdeveloped" society. When the conquistadores arrived, they realized that they were no longer in Spain, but they tried to re-create Spain here. Present-day Mexico was called New Spain, Colombia was called New Granada, and



so forth. The label "New" suggested the attempt to re-create something here. Paradoxically enough, it also indicated that they were not building something new at all but rather something "old." They were trying to *repeat* and restore what they had left behind in Spain. And the society they had left behind was a much more developed one, so an awareness of underdevelopment marked our colonial society from the very beginning. Our society was an underdeveloped, dependent one because the whole structure of our economic, political, ecclesial, and cultural life was dependent on that of the great urban centers of Spain.

Spain dominated our colonial version of Christendom. It took our gold and silver to finance its operations against German Lutherans. And this gold and silver was obtained from the blood of our native Indians. Tainted with the injustice in effect here, the Catholic rulers and their administrators pleaded for money to carry out the great Catholic crusade against "the Lutheran heretics." Latin America lived within the totality of Spanish culture-aware of its underdeveloped situation and of its powerlessness. Its people were "oppressed."

This was the basic situation of our colonial Christendom, and it pervaded every level of life. Our philosophical and theological books came from Europe, and our theologians and philosophers felt honored to have their works published in Europe through Spain's influence.

The struggle for independence signified the revolt of the Creole oligarchy here against Spanish dominance. This group suffered most directly from the influence of Spain and wanted to free itself from that influence. It possessed very little real power in a system where Latin America was governed by a bureaucracy under the control of Spain-i.e., by officials of the *audiencias* and the *cabildos* ("town councils"), by viceroys and governors and bishops. It was this Creole class which rose up against Spain. Our "independence" movement in the nineteenth century was

nothing more than a revolt by the Creole oligarchy. We must not forget that this Creole oligarchy also exercised domination-over the Indians and over the "little people" who were not part of its class. Thus most of the *mestizo* population possessed no power at all, and in the independence movement they served only as cannon fodder .

The Creole oligarchy broke with Spain because it was looking for a more advantageous pact, and it was the English who offered such a pact. Spain had taken gold and silver from Latin America and had offered wine and oil in return-even though these could be produced here. England, by contrast, offered manufactured products in return for our raw materials-under the basic system spelled out by Adam Smith. This new arrangement was agreed upon by our Creole oligarchy. Our "independence" was merely a switch from Spanish domination to domination by the new world power: industrial England. And our Creole oligarchy would take over the task of dominating people here.

This is the situation that prevailed in the nineteenth century. It continued into the twentieth century, although the name of the great foreign empire changed. Today it is the poor people of Latin America that hold our attention, for it is they who are now awakening to their situation. The process under way now is quite different from the one embodied in the revolutionary movements of the early nineteenth century, for it offers promise of effecting the liberation of the whole Latin American people from the dominance of foreign empires. We may be moving towards coexistence without dependence, towards a truly world culture in which each nation or people can contribute what is peculiarly its own.

What was the attitude of the Church towards the break effected in the early years of the nineteenth century? The bishops, for example, were realists to some extent. They tended to oppose the rupture with Spain and to opt for a

return to the old situation of Spanish control. The clergy underneath them, however, were Creole for the most part-some even belonged to the oligarchy-and they threw themselves into the independence movement. Some took up arms, some organized armies (Hidalgo, Morelos), some melted down church bells for cannons (Fray Luis Beltrán). Slowly but surely the way was paved for complete independence from Spain in a process that had several stages.

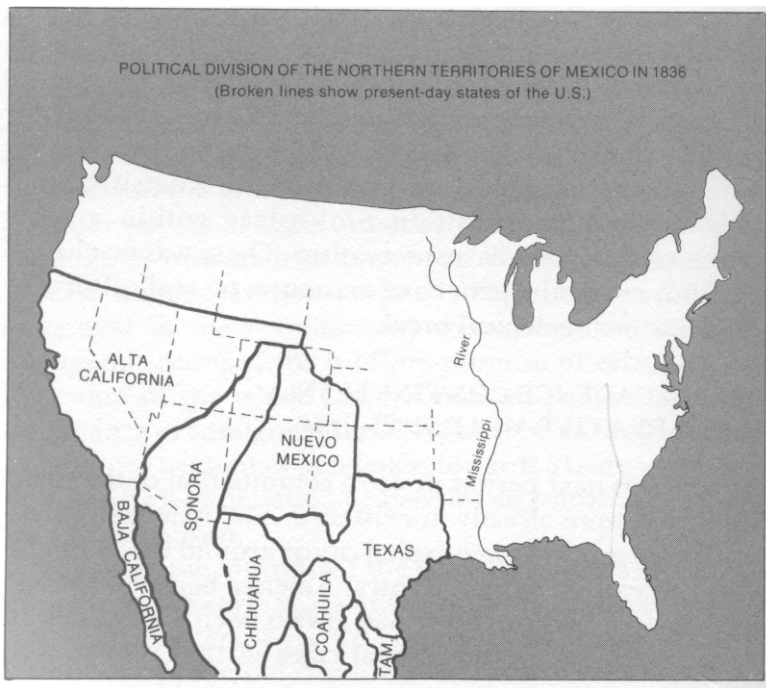
After the first stirrings of revolt, Spain reacted and regained much of its control. By 1814 the Río de la Plata region was the only area that still remained independent from Spain. If Martín Güemes had not defended the northern boundary of Argentina against the Spanish armies, the destiny of Latin America might have turned out quite differently. Then a second thrust for independence began, with Bolívar operating in the north and San Martín in the south. Ultimately they came together at Guayaquil. In Mexico, the conservatives declared their independence from Spain because the liberals had gained control over the bureaucratic machinery of government. What is clear is that this whole transition took place within a basic framework of Catholic conservatism. There was no change in culture or in the pattern of existence, no real cultural or religious or theological break.

#### THE DECADENCE CONTINUES IN A CONSERVATIVE MOLD (1825-1850)

During this next period we see a continuation of the structures that were already in existence. The new States were organized around some capital city or around the audiencias that had existed before. Central America began to split up into factions because there had always been a great deal of antagonism among the capital cities in that region. The

history of San Salvador is very different from that of Guatemala, that of Costa Rica, and that of Panamá. Panamá, for example, belonged to Lima rather than to Mexico.

In this period, then, we see the forging of national unity in Latin America. Deterioration increased in the Church. The coming of independence meant the end of the system of patronato, so no missionaries came from Spain. No longer did books and money come from Spain either. In many areas not a single priest was ordained because there was no place for them to get training and no one to ordain them. And gradually a real rupture was beginning to appear. In the northern part of New Spain, present-day southwestern United States was gradually taking form. Discov-



ered by Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, it came to include the regions of Nuevo México, Nueva California, and San Luis Potosí (today stretching from Texas to California, Utah, Nevada, and Colorado). In 1803 Napoleon ceded Louisiana to the United States, marking the beginning of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, under which the U.S. would extend its power all the way to the Pacific. The peaceful occupation of the area by the North Americans gradually occurred. The federalists of Mexico (including those of yucatan and those to the north of the Rio Grande) meanwhile opposed the Mexican president Antonio López de Santa Ana. The North Americans fostered the federalist spirit, and the Texan revolution broke out in 1835-36. Santa Ana crushed the weak resistance at the Alamo, which was the occasion for Sam Houston to begin war and declare the independence of Texas (1836-45). Finally Mexico ceded the whole area, including California, to the U.S. (1848). In this way there emerged a Latin American people within the United States: the nación of the Spanish-speaking, a people who practically speaking have no Church and have been left to their "folk Catholicism."<sup>4</sup>

#### RUPTURE TAKES PLACE (1850-1929)

The first liberal Constitution was promulgated in Colombia in 1849. A "new" America appeared on the scene and the colonial period was left behind. This Constitution proposed the separation of Church and State. Things had reached the point where certain minorities were able to implement doctrines that could not have been implemented previously. Real rupture with the Church began. The Church began to take a back seat, and even to fade out of the picture, because it could not respond to the challenges of the period. Yet the Church continued to have socio-political importance and to wield power. By virtue of their

influence-not their economic power-the bishops were still important figures. Everyone still considered themselves Christians, and in fact they were after a fashion. But the elite were not Christian. They were of a liberal cast, leaning towards what would later take concrete shape as positivism.

The new government in Colombia (1849) was the first liberal government in Latin America. It was the first to declare itself anti-Christian, and anti-Catholic in particular. It would repudiate the Spanish past and Christendom. The liberals would write a new history, presenting the Spanish factor as a negative thing, rejecting colonial Catholicism, and denying the folk past. This step was taken in Colombia in 1849, in Argentina in 1853, and throughout Latin America during the 1850s.

From 1850 to 1929 we see the unfolding of a whole new project in Latin America, a project sponsored by a liberal oligarchy rather than by a conservative one. In general we could say that it looked to France for its cultural ideals and to the United States for its technological ideals. It was in these places that it would find its concrete historical ideals, rejecting our past as a period of barbarism.

Around 1870 positivism became the dominant ideology, thanks to such men as José Ingenieros in Argentina and Miguel Lemos in Brazil. This "atheistic" materialism was actually an anti-creationist materialism which affirmed the divinity of matter. In short, it was pantheism. It imposed itself on our culture during this period (1870-1890), and our lawyers and doctors are still formed under its influence. This bourgeois oligarchy, which did not actually possess a great deal of power, was anticlerical and anti-Catholic. The crisis encountered by the system known as Christendom was thus due to a variety of factors: the Church's lack of resources, the absence of bishops, the disappearance of seminaries, the cessation of shipments of priests and books

from Spain, and a planned rupture put through systematically by the ruling oligarchy. The oligarchy in power was fundamentally anti-Catholic.

The Church could hardly respond to the new challenge. There was not only a missionary crisis but also a theo-logical crisis in Europe. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century would Mercier begin the work of philosophical and theological renewal that would usher in the third version of scholasticism. And even this was unable to respond to Darwin, Comte, and Marx. The Church seemed to be on the verge of disappearing. Indeed it may have been a more serious crisis than the one we face today.

The new and rising bourgeois oligarchy was a latecomer on the industrial scene, however. The crisis of 1929 proved to be fatal to it, and it lost its political power. Let us consider why this happened. When Adam Smith's book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, was published in 1776, the British bourgeois oligarchy enjoyed the advantages of overall social peace. They could organize industry and exploit the workers because the workers did not have the image of some other working class that was better off. The British worker labored eighteen hours a day in the factory, and so did all European workers. Thus the bourgeoisie had time to take advantage of this exploitation and to increase its capital. Business enterprises grew slowly and steadily, and so did the worker; industrial society had time to mature and develop into an affluent entity. By contrast, our industrial bourgeoisie arrived on the scene around 1890. The Latin American worker would not labor eighteen hours a day because he knew that workers elsewhere worked only ten hours. Thus a contradiction appeared in the system, because the Latin American worker would make demands which the Latin American industrial system could not yet afford to meet. If it met these demands, it would not be able to sink money back into the

system and keep it going. The crisis in 1929 proved fatal to this bourgeois elite in Latin America, and in 1930 a new power influence would break in.

## THE ATTEMPT TO BUILD A "NEW CHRISTENDOM"

1930 was a key year throughout Latin America. Catholicism gained breathing space when the anti-Catholic liberal class lost power. Catholic Action was gradually implemented throughout the continent, and an attempt to revive Catholicism as a "new Christendom" got under way. The laity appeared once again; and in place of the oligarchy that once had dominated, the military class came to the fore.

I refer to this new effort as an attempt to fashion a "new" Christendom. The revitalized scholasticism of the time permitted one to envision only a renewal or imitation of the Christian culture that had once existed. Maritain's *Integral Humanism* spoke in such terms. Since Latin Americans knew almost nothing about their colonial period, the only image they had was one of medieval Christendom. Writers such as Leon Bloy and Hilaire Belloc were read by many Catholics. People wanted to restore the Christendom that had almost disappeared during the period of liberal persecution.

Thus began the great effort at reconquest on the part of Catholicism. It sought to be triumphant and to dominate education, politics, and even economics. In effect it was a triumphalist effort. Catholic Action and the Christian Democratic Party would dominate until Vatican II. I am not going to suggest that the postconciliar Church is a different entity or Church. It is the same Church going through its inner process of growth. The essential elements would continue to grow during the course of time.

The effort to establish a new Christendom would gradually begin to show weak points. Both Catholic Action and the Christian Democratic Party would begin to falter. Writ-



ing from Brazil, Belgian theologian Joseph Comblin pointed out the failure of Catholic Action. Comblin's book (*Echec de l'action catholique?*) proved to be a bombshell, even though it really points up the limitations rather than the failure of Catholic Action.

## THE WORLDWIDE CRISIS OF CHRISTIAN CULTURES

The Russian version of Byzantine Christendom received a fatal blow in 1917. The rest of Europe had begun a process of secularization several centuries earlier. This secularization process gradually turned into "secularism." What started out as a process to give proper autonomy to the temporal sphere became an anti-Christian philosophy. Many men of the Church had been spending their time defending Christendom as a culture rather than Christianity as a religion. They defended the cultural influence of the Church and eventually the papal states. Defense of the papal states is deeply interwoven into Vatican I, the Council which took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Church was deeply concerned about the fact that Italian "libertines" wanted to attack the papal states. Today we have regained a healthy measure of liberty, much in the same way that ancient Israel did in the Babylonian exile: through poverty and persecution.

In Hispano-America, anticlerical liberalism and positivism were the instruments of divine providence. Secularization, laicism, and secularism helped to restore some degree of liberty to the Church.

## THE PRESENT SITUATION

As we noted earlier, Vatican II ushered in a third stage in Church history. Some people had anticipated this new stage in their thinking, and on the whole they fared badly. Lagrange, the great Dominican exegete, carried on his fine

biblical work in an atmosphere of persecution. Teilhard de Chardin worked in silence. And the case was much the same with Yves Congar.

In 1937 Congar wrote a book on separated Christians (Eng. trans.: *Divided Chmtendom*, London, 1939). If one picks up that book today, it seems hardly novel. But at the time it was a dangerous book and its reprinting was forbidden. The great school of Le Saulchoir was liquidated, and the *nouvelle théologie* was attacked. This "new theology" was really nothing more than a sound "historical" theology. But it was torn apart, as Congar himself has told me, and its proponents were scattered. The possibility of teamwork, centered around a great library, was wiped out.

With Vatican II we certainly enter a new stage: the manifestation of Christianity on an extensive scale to mankind all over the world, to all the cultures that had never yet been evangelized. European civilization, that is, technological civilization, is now worldwide, and this fact poses a serious question: Will all the cultures of the world be unified into one and only one culture—a culture based on the experiences of only one segment of mankind? There is no doubt that cultures are confronting each other as never before, and it seems possible that only one will survive the confrontation. It is a serious matter.

The Church exists in history, and it too is challenged by the confrontation between cultures. But it may well be that a process of pre-evangelization is going on even though we have not adverted to the fact. As we noted earlier, Ricci did not manage to evangelize China. England did not conquer China in the Opium War either. Suddenly we find, however, that a Chinese Marxist has Europeanized China. It is now difficult to read the works of Confucius in China, but very easy to read the works of Karl Marx, a European philosopher who grew up in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The same process may be at work in Hindu and Muslim culture. The introduction of Western technology into these

cultures may well bring about a theological crisis. What will Hinduism do if slaughterhouses are imported into its territories? What will the theocratic Muslim states do in the face of other contemporary governments which are lay in nature? The Christian religion does not have problems with these realities, whereas Hinduism and Islamism do.

Let me sum up my main point here. Christendom-that vast cultural, religious, and socio-political reality of the past-is on its way out. That is the reason behind all the critical problems we as Christians are now facing in Latin America. Some want to hold on to Christendom, but time spent on seeking to preserve Christendom is so much time lost for Christianity.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>. On Bartolomé de Las Casas, see the fine work of Manuel Giménez Fernández, *Bartolomé de las Casas* (Seville: EEHS, 1953-60).

<sup>2</sup>. See my *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*. Further bibliographical material can be found in that work.

<sup>3</sup>. See the two volumes on *Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo* by Vicente Rodríguez Valencia (Madrid: CSIC, 1956-57).

<sup>4</sup>. For a bibliography on the "Chicanos" or "Mexican Americans" (or simply "Hispanic groups," since some of the descendents of the Spaniards in this area do not accept the other labels), see Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren, eds., *A Documentary History of the Mexican Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Matthew Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); Rudy Acuna, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).