Introduction

THE NEW WORLD AND THE OLD

It is said that Charles V, annoyed when someone blocked his carriage, asked who dared stand in the way of the Holy Roman Emperor, the King of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and the Two Sicilies – and a dozen other titles of lesser importance. The man impeding the king's progress – Hernán Cortés by name – responded, "One who gave thee more lands than did thy father!"

The story may not be absolutely true, but the point it makes certainly is. The "discovery" and conquest of the "New World" forever changed the "Old." As a result, the Irish would eventually become known for their potatoes, the Italian for their polenta and tomato sauces, and the Swiss for their chocolate. Such dietary changes are but a sign of the profound impact of the Americas on Europe. Even traditional religion and theology were challenged, forcing theologians to rethink much that they had considered settled. According to ancient traditions, before leaving Jerusalem the apostles divided the world among themselves, so that the Gospel would be preached "to every creature." But now there were millions of people in lands where apparently no apostle had set foot. Were they excluded from the grace of God? Were they actually human? Did they have souls? Were they rightful owners of their land? As we will see in Chapter 2, these debates – with far-reaching economic and political consequences – soon raged in Europe.

As we know, the Americas would never be the same after that fateful 12th of October, 1492, when Columbus first set foot on these lands. But Europe as well would never be the same after Columbus returned on the equally fateful but less known March 15, 1493. Hernán Cortés not only destroyed the Aztec empire, but he also disrupted traditional economic and political patterns in Europe. He not only gave Charles V more lands than did his father but also provided him with gold to pay the enormous debt he had contracted in

order to become Holy Roman Emperor. American gold and silver also made it possible for Spain to imagine that it was economically prosperous while in fact providing capital for the rapidly developing industrialization in other European nations from which Spain found it easy and convenient to purchase goods rather than producing them itself.

While the changes in Europe were momentous, those in the Americas were cataclysmic and may still be felt. Entire civilizations were destroyed in a matter of years. European diseases, forced labor, and social upheaval destroyed much of the population. Besides their diseases, Europeans brought with them animals and crops that would eventually change the entire landscape of the hemisphere. The buffalo practically disappeared, and their place was taken by cattle, horses, sheep, and hogs. Early in the sixteenth century, sugar cane came to the West Indies, and the ancient hardwood forests rapidly receded before the cane fields. Then came coffee, and the remaining forests were thinned in order to plant it under their shade. In the vast plains of North America, buffalo grass was supplanted by another grass – wheat. If it is true that Mexican and Peruvian wealth contributed to Spain's underdevelopment as compared to northern Europe, it is also true that the riches of the southern sections of the western hemisphere prevented their industrial development, while its northern reaches, originally much poorer, would develop their industry to the point of becoming the richest area of the world.

AN OLD WORLD RELIGION IN A NEW WORLD

Europeans did not bring only their diseases, crops, and livestock; they also brought their religion. They could not do otherwise, since for them, religion permeated all of life, to the point that there was no practical distinction between religion and politics or religion and economics. In the lands now known as Latin America, it was the Spanish and the Portuguese who settled first and most permanently. The form of Christianity they brought with them was Roman Catholicism. But this was a particular brand of Catholicism – one forged in the Iberian Peninsula over the centuries. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, Spanish nationalism had been on the rise and was blended with religion in the myth of the *Reconquista*. This myth claimed that ever since the Moors invaded the Peninsula in 711, Christian Spaniards had been resisting them and regaining lost territory. It was out of this myth of the Reconquista that Spain was born as a nation convinced that God had entrusted it with the defense of the Catholic faith against all Muslims, Jews, heretics, and other unbelievers. Thus, when the New World was "discovered," and then as it was

explored, invaded, and exploited, Spaniards were convinced that this was a sacred trust so that they could bring their religion to the benighted people in these lands.

And they brought their religion and its institutions. The latter were patterned after what had developed in the Old World as new territories were conquered. The invaders brought their religion in much the same way as they had earlier brought it to southern Spain during the Reconquista and to the Canary Islands – by force of arms. The conquistadores were not only men in armor riding horses and carrying firearms. They were also men in clerical garb riding mules and carrying crosses. And it was not only the men in armor who became rich; there were also clerics who invested in various enterprises of conquest and thus became wealthy.

It is important to realize that these men – soldiers as well as clerics – were not hypocrites. They truly believed that they were serving God. They became incensed when the inhabitants of the land could not perceive the superiority of Christianity. They had masses constantly said for the salvation of their souls. As he lay dying, a victim of a conspiracy among his fellow conquistadores, Francisco Pizarro, the cruel conqueror of the Inca empire, drew a cross with his own blood so he could die contemplating the cross. Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, kissed the hem of the robes of the first Franciscan missionaries arriving at the newly conquered land. Obviously, to say that they were sincere does not mean that they were good – and even less that what they did was good. It does mean that they were convinced that in their deeds they were serving not only their greed and lust for violence but also God.

THE TWO FACES OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

It was not difficult for many to become convinced that they were indeed doing good, not only for themselves but also for those whom they called "Indians."[1] They were certain that the ultimate goal of all life is the salvation of one's soul, and therefore as they saw people flocking to church – even though often under coercion – they were prone to believe that this justified the violence, oppression, and destruction that had led to such results. Furthermore, after

[1] The term "Indians" was given to the indigenous populations of the Americas by Columbus, who believed he had landed in the Indies. Although recognizing that this is a misnomer and implies a cultural uniformity that did not exist, for the sake of simplicity we will follow standard usage.

the very first encounters, most of the original inhabitants of these lands whom the colonizers met were people already severed from their ancient way of life, broken by abuse and oppression, trying to adjust to a new way of life, and floundering in that attempt.

However, there were those – mostly friars – who had opportunity to see the original inhabitants in their own setting, to observe their family life, and to understand the enormity of what had been done to these people. Many of them became staunch defenders of the Indians and their rights. And soon they found support among the faculty in the most prestigious university in Spain – the University of Salamanca – where a number of Dominican theologians defended the right of the Indians to their property and their freedom.

Thus, almost from its very outset, the church in Latin America had two faces. The dominant face was the one that justified what was being done in the name of evangelization. In the chapters that follow, we will see frequent examples of unleashed greed, wanton destruction, and outright exploitation – all of them justified by ecclesiastical authorities. Conversely, we will also encounter those who protested against injustice – and particularly against injustice in the name of Christianity. This is the other face of Latin American Christianity. While it is true that for a number of reasons – demographic, political, economic, and religious – the initial British colonization of North America was generally accomplished with less cruelty to the native population than its Spanish and Portuguese counterparts, it is also true that there have always been in Latin American Catholicism voices of prophetic protest that were seldom matched in the British colonies.

As we will see, these two faces of Christianity in Latin America have persisted through the centuries. When Spain's American colonies began their quest for independence, most leaders in the institutional church opposed that quest. Yet there were also priests – such as Hidalgo and Morelos in Mexico – who became leaders of the movement. In the late twentieth century, when the entire region was convulsed by the struggle between those who defended the status quo and those who sought radical change, most of the Catholic hierarchy defended the existing order, but there were others who became ardent supporters of change. Some did this through theological reflection, resulting in a 'liberation theology' that had an impact on Christian theology throughout the world. Others did it through denunciation even to the point of death – as was the case of Archbishop Romero in El Salvador.

Even the coming of Protestantism, and the explosive growth of Pentecostalism in the second half of the twentieth century and early in the twenty-first, did not immediately change this situation, for by the early twenty-first century there were Protestants – Pentecostals as well as others – who were convinced

that the struggles for social justice and national identity were central to their Christian convictions. There were those who took the opposite tack, insisting that Christianity had nothing to do with such struggles – and even in some cases, that since their faith came from the United States, they should be faithful to the goals and systems established by that nation.

Thus, as we study the history of the church in Latin America, we must be careful, lest we see only one of these faces and forget the other. Latin American organized religion has much of which to be ashamed, but it also has much of which to be proud.

RELIGION IN DAILY LIFE

The story of the institutional church – and even of struggles within it – is only one element in the history of Christianity in Latin America. While the institutional church has always played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in Latin American Christianity, the history of that Christianity must also take into account the manner in which ordinary believers lived out their faith in their daily lives. Too often we confuse the institutional church with Christianity and thus tend to think that when we study the history of the former we have also studied the history of the latter. But that is not the case. Official ecclesiastical documents tell us when a monastery was founded or when a particular bishop arrived at a diocese. They also tell us of the theology of the organized church and how it conceived of its mission. But they say little about the actual religion of the masses. How was religion reflected in daily life? What did people do in quest of their own salvation? What did they do on behalf of others, as acts of Christian charity? Did Christian teaching actually influence their morality? What concrete forms did devotion take in particular areas? How did the ancestral customs and beliefs of the original inhabitants of these lands affect the way they understood and practiced Christianity?

In this context, one must look at society at large and try to assess how and to what degree Christian teachings were expressed in everyday life. How did this society deal with orphaned children? What role did women play in the religious life of the family and the community? What impact did Christianity have on how society was organized?

Therefore, in each of the following chapters, rather than limiting ourselves to the institutional history of the church, we will also take a look "behind the scenes" and try to discover some of the flavor of Christianity as it was lived and practiced in actuality – and not only in the institutional plans and decisions of the church.

POPULAR AND OFFICIAL RELIGION

As we study the actual religious life of people, we soon discover that it does not always match or express official church teaching. Until relatively recent times, saints were acclaimed by popular decision rather than by any official decision of an ecclesiastical body. In Latin America, as elsewhere, people have always received and interpreted Christianity within the framework of their own world view – much as in northern European lands, where the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus came to be combined with ancient fertility rites involving eggs and bunnies, and the Nativity was associated with Christmas trees and mistletoe.

Catholic missionaries to the New World had to face all the difficulties usually connected with any cross-cultural missionary enterprise, augmented by the enormity of the task before them. Even though, beginning in 1516, it was expected that every ship leaving for the "Indies" carry at least one priest, there were never enough priests or other religious workers in the New World. Although a few men with horses, gunpowder, and Indian allies sufficed to conquer mighty empires such as the Aztec and the Inca, this was not the case when it came to the evangelization of the native population. Even more difficult were the conquest and the evangelization of less centralized civilizations, such as those of the Mayas, Chichimecas, and various nomadic peoples. Over the objections of Dominicans and others, Franciscans in Mexico were known to baptize millions, often requiring only that their "converts" know the Lord's Prayer.

Unavoidably, many of these converts came to identify some of the saints of the church with their own gods and brought to their worship and piety some of the practices they had learned from their ancestors. At first some of the stricter bishops, priests, and inquisitors objected to such practices – some to the point of torturing, maiming, or even executing those considered deviant in their faith. But eventually the ecclesiastical leadership became reconciled with much of the popular belief and practice, arguing that these were means of evangelization and that the natives would slowly learn a purer form of Christianity.

Something similar happened when slaves were brought from Africa. They too brought their world view, gods, and traditions. The task of evangelizing them and teaching them the rudiments of the Catholic faith was usually left in the hands of their masters, who were legally mandated to take this responsibility but often paid little attention to the matter. Once again, while most slaves and their descendants became Christians and were baptized, ancestral customs and beliefs survived and were combined with the faith

taught by the church. Ancient gods were identified with the Virgin and the saints, and ancient forms of worship were now directed toward these specific saints.

Furthermore, many of the descendants of the original inhabitants, as well as many of African descent, resisted Christianity and continued practicing their ancient rites and religions – usually in secret. Thus, these ancient beliefs persisted for much longer than the authorities of the church thought – even into the twenty-first century.

When Protestant missionaries first arrived, mostly in the nineteenth century, they condemned all these practices and beliefs as "paganism" and accused the Roman Catholic Church of promoting syncretism and even pagan superstition. And yet, as time went by, it became increasingly clear that at least some forms of Latin American Protestantism reflected and continued ancient worship practices.

In relatively recent times, it has become customary to refer to the religious practices of the masses, sometimes encouraged by the church and sometimes not, as "popular religion" – which in itself is a change from the former name of "popular religiosity." While not strictly orthodox and often little informed by theology and doctrine, much of Latin American Catholicism has actually consisted of this popular religion – a religion that accepts the dogmas and rites of the church but in actual practice assigns them a secondary role.

Partly as a response to Protestant criticism, partly as a result of increased biblical and historical studies, and partly in response to the Second Vatican Council, in the second half of the twentieth century efforts were made in some Catholic circles to eradicate such practices and beliefs. However, after a number of failed attempts to do this, and after some theological and sociological criticism of such attempts, by the late twentieth century many had become convinced that most popular religion does not contradict the Catholic faith but is actually an expression of it.

In any case, it is clear that as Christianity established itself in Latin America, it was not limited to the official church and its teachings or even to the religious practices and devotions recommended to the laity by the clergy but actually combined in a variety of ways with other religious practices and beliefs. Many of these were accepted by the church as popular expressions of the faith, while others were rejected as deviant or heretical.

Thus, in most of the chapters that follow we will look not only at the institutional history of the church and at expressions of the Christian faith in everyday life but also at what could be called "variant" forms of religion – some of them accepted, or at least allowed by the institutional church, and some rejected as heretical.

THE MAIN TURNING POINTS

Although life is not really divided into periods, we find it convenient and even necessary to speak of childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, maturity, and so on as if the lines separating them were clearly defined. Likewise, any history has to be divided into segments or periods, even though the historian knows quite well that the story being told is most often a continuum and that the dates set for the end of one period and the beginning of another are seldom as clear-cut as one may be led to imagine. The chapters in this book will follow a chronological outline, beginning with Chapter 1, which deals very briefly with pre-Columbian American and Iberian societies and their religions, thus setting the stage for the cataclysmic encounter between the two, and also with the cultural and religious background of those who were brought as slaves from Africa. In Chapter 2 we will discuss the actual arrival and the first steps of Christianity in this New World – what steps were taken for the Christianization of the indigenous population; how patterns, institutions, and expectations brought from Iberia influenced the nascent American church; and other similar subjects. Then Chapter 3 will look at Christianity during the formative period of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, as the church and its institutions were consolidated and Christianity in its various forms took a firmer hold among the population. Chapter 4 will deal with a series of movements of reform and of outside influences that had an impact on Latin American Christianity in the late colonial period and eventually brought about the independence of most former colonies – roughly, the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

Chapter 5 will look at the momentous changes that took place in the life of the church, and in religion at large, as a result of the breakdown of the Spanish and Portuguese empires and the birth of new nations early in the nineteenth century. Here again, the two faces of the church in Latin America, and even their clashes, will become apparent. The result of these clashes, as well as of an unprecedented political situation, led to a period of turmoil and of reshaping both in the life of the church and in the actual religiosity of the people. Just as in Chapters 2 and 3, in which we consider first the new situation after the conquest and the resulting religious life and then how the church and religion adjusted to their new setting, in Chapters 5 and 6 we will discuss first the immediate impact of independence on religion and then how the church and its institutions – as well as various religious practices – responded to the new situation in the nineteenth century and during most of the twentieth century – until Vatican II.

Chapters 7 and 8 will deal with the coming of Protestantism, first through Protestant immigration promoted by governments seeking to counterbalance the political conservatism of traditional Catholicism and then by missionaries from Europe and the United States – sometimes invited by governments with the same political anticonservative agenda. In these chapters we will discuss how Protestant Christianity adapted to Latin America and how it impacted the region.

In Chapter 9 we will pick up the history of Roman Catholicism after Vatican II and its follow-up in the regional meeting of bishops in Medellin in 1968. We will discuss the new forms that Catholic life and thought took, particularly in 'base ecclesial communities,' liberation theology, and the "preferential option for the poor." We will also consider some of the attempts on the part of more conservative elements to counteract the more radical consequences of Vatican II and Medellin – liberation theology in particular

Chapter 10 will deal with the most remarkable phenomenon in Latin American Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the growth of Pentecostalism and of autochthonous churches. Although Pentecostalism has its roots elsewhere, in Latin America it has taken its own shape, often influenced – both positively and negatively – by the dominant presence of Roman Catholicism, as well as by religious practices that have deep roots in Latin American and African religious history. Autochthonous churches – some arising out of traditional Protestantism, others out of Pentecostalism, and even some out of renewal movements within Roman Catholicism – have come to be an important presence in the Latin American religious scene.

Finally, Chapter 11 will summarize some of the main threads woven throughout Latin American religious history and make it clear that the impact of this history is no longer confined to the geographical boundaries of Latin America. We will discuss the influence that Latin American theology is having in the entire theological enterprise throughout the world. We will see Latin American missionaries leaving their native lands to go to various parts of the world. And we will try to discern what this may mean for the ongoing religious life in Latin America and elsewhere.

LOOKING AT HISTORY OUT OF BOTH THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

History is much more than the mere narrative of past events. It is that narrative told from the perspective of the present in which the historian lives and of the future for which the historian hopes – or fears. The reason North American

schoolchildren are taught about the Declaration of Independence is not mere antiquarian curiosity. It is rather that those who teach it believe that this document and the events surrounding it are important for the present life of the nation and will hopefully be important also for the next generation. Likewise, the reason we study Latin American religious history is not merely to know how Roman Catholicism was established in Mexico or who the first Protestant missionaries to Guatemala were. It is rather that those who research and tell the story are convinced that it is relevant for today – that it is shaping and will continue to shape our world in ways we should understand.

What has been said previously regarding the content of Chapter 11 is much more than a way to wrap up the story. It is rather the central clue as to why the authors – as well as countless others – are convinced that Latin American religious history is important. Latin American culture and religion are no longer confined to the lands south of the Río Grande. Latin American theology is now being studied and discussed by theologians in the United States, Germany, and South Africa. This is one of many signs of the impact of Latin American religion on the rest of the world. So is the presence of Latin American missionaries and teachers in various regions of the world. And – most particularly for our purposes here – so is the presence of millions of Latin Americans in the United States.

Both through immigration and through the heritage of people conquered in the Mexican-American and the Spanish-American wars, the United States now includes millions of Latinos – people of Latin American origin or descent. In fact, in terms of the size of its Spanish-speaking population, the United States ranks fourth, and perhaps even third, in the entire western hemisphere – after Mexico, Argentina, and perhaps Colombia. Roughly half of all Roman Catholics in the United States are Latinos. And the process continues, for Hispanics are now one of the fastest growing segments of the population in the nation – in terms of percentage, rivaled only by Asian-Americans. While most of them are and remain Catholic, large numbers are joining existing Protestant churches – and some are creating their own churches.

What this means for the religious history of the nation is obvious. A few decades ago, it was possible to tell the religious story of the United States with very little reference to Latin America and its religion. This is no longer the case. How can one speak of North American Catholicism while ignoring the religious and cultural background of half its membership? How can one study the history of the Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of God, the Southern Baptists, or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) without taking into account the leadership that Hispanics are providing for these denominations, and in many cases the explosive growth of the denominations