# Christianity in Latin America: A Short History

## 1:2:1: Prologue

Latin America unites in itself the European, African, and American streams of civilization. Similarly so, Christianity did not develop in an airtight, pasteurized package but was influenced by the religions and worldviews of the cultures in which it took root.

### 1:2:1:1: The Iberian Background

Spain and Portugal on the cusp of the age of exploration were the result of centuries of struggle between the emerging Christian kingdoms in the north and the Muslims in the south of the peninsula, known as Al-Andalus. Conquered in 711 by Arab and Berber forces, Al-Andalus became a center of learning, art, poetry, industry, and, to a certain extent, tolerance toward Christians and Jews; for the latter, such tolerance was unknown in the rest of Europe. As the Islamic caliphate splintered into smaller, independent, but weaker *taifas*, Christian rulers pushed southward in the Reconquista. By the time that Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon conquered the last-standing Muslim kingdom of Granada in 1492, Spain was enthralled to myths of divine election for the preservation and expansion of Christianity, which was accompanied by a militant Catholicism, already in the process of reforming itself and intolerant of any vestige of unorthodoxy, let alone other religions.

#### *Royal Patronage*

Known as the *patronato real* in Spain and the *padroado real* in neighboring Portugal, the royal patronage consisted of the right to name bishops to empty offices. Throughout the Middle Ages it was long debated who rightfully held that privilege, the pope by virtue of being the vicar of Christ or the secular ruler for his support, financial and otherwise, of the church's mission within the realm. Was this power inherent in the right to rule or was it a privilege given and revoked by the See of Peter? What was clear was that whoever named the bishops effectively controlled the church. In a series of papal bulls in the late fifteenth century, the privilege was ceded to the

Catholic monarchs over whatever territories they came to by conquest or discovery. By the reign of Philip II (1554–1598), Spain would effectively rule over the Latin American church through the selection of bishops, the calling of councils, the implementation of policy, and control over communication between the Vatican and the dioceses. To this union of altar and throne one can add the Spanish Inquisition, begun in 1478 and solely under the control of the monarchs, as a means of establishing orthodoxy, morality, and submission. It would be an invigorated, zealous, and state-controlled Catholicism, convinced of Spain's manifest destiny in the face of false religions, that would come to be planted in the New World.

### 1:2:1:2: African Cosmologies

The people who were forcibly removed to the Americas from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries came from a number of politically and culturally sophisticated kingdoms of West Africa, among them the Yoruba, Bantu, Fon-Ewe, and Kongo. Their religious worldviews included belief in a supreme deity—Olodumaré (Yoruba), Nazambi Kalunga (Kongo), or Onyankopon (Akan)—who rules the universe through hundreds of lesser gods, spirits, and ancestors. In general, worship and sacrifice are offered to these beings in order to appease them, bring health, ask for favors, divine the future, or restore harmony to the world. Among the Yoruba, whose religious influence is especially pronounced in Afro-Latin religions, the individual spirits (*orishas*) hold sway over particular spheres of influence (iron tools, storms, disease, and so on). Through ritual dancing, offerings, and the aid of a medium, the *orishas* make their desires known in spirit possession. In some groups, ritualized objects can be used to bind and control the spirits. The goal of human life is to collect *ashe*, or power—the same that energizes the spirits and runs through the cosmos—while maintaining ordered relationships toward other people, the ancestors, and the spirits.

### 1:2:1:3: Amerindian Religion

The American continent was populated by people who began to enter it over the Bering Strait (and possibly over the Pacific Ocean) in waves of migration that began between fifteen and twenty-five thousand years ago. They developed into a myriad of people groups with a diversity of cultures and languages unknown in the Old World and whose civilizations ranged from nomadic hunter-gatherers to the Maya, Aztec, and Inca empire builders. Brazil alone had fourteen hundred distinct peoples and forty linguistic families. Similarly, their religious worldviews defy easy generalizations. Some aspects of indigenous spirituality include the intersection between sacred time, place, and human life. Deeply connected to the rhythms of nature, the seasons, and the stars, time was seen as cyclical and creation as a continual process of birth, life, death, and rebirth. Story and ritual connect humanity to the forces of nature, which are often theomorphized into spirits and gods. Space, time, humanity, and the gods are seen as interdependent. The gods may create, sustain, and renew the cosmos but are in need of sustenance and appeasement through sacrifice, which may take forms such as feathers and butterflies, ritual bloodletting, or, as in the case of the

Aztecs, human lives. A cosmic harmony would be the outcome of this give-and-take relationship between people, gods, nature, time, and space.

For the two great powers that the Spanish encountered, the Aztec and the Inca, religion served as an ideological prop to their expansion, interweaving with social, military, and economic might to justify their control over broad swaths of the continent. The Aztecs incorporated their history into the mythologies of previous civilizations in order to legitimize their rule. Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli, gods of war, served as patron deities for the capital city of Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City). Continuous sacrifice in their honor would serve to guarantee not only the future of Aztec military success but also the stability of creation. Meanwhile, the Inca, ruling from the sacred city of Cuzco, held to Virachocha, the creator, and to Inti, the sun, in addition to numerous minor deities and spirits. The royal family was considered to be descended from the sun, thus making the emperor, *the* Inca, semidivine. Upon the emperors' deaths, their mummified remains (*huacas*) were venerated. As the Inca empire expanded, the worship of Inti was grafted onto the religion of the conquered peoples, who were expected to give the sun god preeminence of sacrifice. This, of course, served as a daily reminder of their subjugation under the children of the sun.

## 1:2:2: Christianity in Conquest and Colonization (1492–1810)

The planting of Christianity in the Americas was an endeavor of both imperialist greed and evangelical self-sacrifice. As Christian institutions and spiritualities developed in Latin America, they took on forms and emphases that continue to inform faith and practice today.

### 1:2:2:1: Cross and Sword

Christopher Columbus sailed forth in search of a back door to the wealth of Asia, convinced of a divine mandate to take Christianity to whatever lands he encountered and to return with the means for a final crusade to liberate the Holy Land from Islam. He encountered more than what he bargained for, and his exploratory successors quickly determined that this was a New World filled with people, cultures, tongues, flora, and fauna never before known to any Europeans. In the meantime, Pope Alexander VI in 1494 divided these "discoveries," potential or real, between the Spanish and the Portuguese in the Treaty of Tordesillas. A year earlier, the papal bull *Inter caetera* had admonished the Spanish sovereigns to spread the Christian faith wherever they went.

As the Spanish ventured further into the West Indies and eventually the mainland, they encountered new civilizations. At first, they thought that these people did not hold any religious beliefs, seeing as they did not worship in ways recognizable to Europeans. However, as they came face-to-face with the intricate mythologies and religious systems of the Maya and the Aztec, they concluded that these natives worshipped some sort of Satanically-inspired false gods. The blood-soaked altars of the temples in Tenochtitlán that Cortéz witnessed in 1519 did not help. Reactions varied. Some conquistadors, using interpreters or rudimentary signs, sought to convince the rulers to abandon their gods and accept Baptism. To the Spanish, this implied vassalage to the king of

Spain. To the Indians, the Spanish were potential and powerful allies against their enemies. Other conquistadors, in horror and shock of the "idols" and accompanying rituals, would tear down the altars. In either case, whether by cajoling or by force, the images of Mary and the cross would replace the traditional deities atop the sacred sites and the native priests commended to care for them. As the Europeans gained victory after victory through force of arms and force of germs, the appropriation of indigenous temples by Christian symbols would carry an additional message: the defeat of the old gods and the rise of the new world order.

### *Religious Justification for Conquest*

The existence of a new continent peopled by hitherto-unknown civilizations posed a conundrum to the Spanish. How could a new world even exist that had not been mentioned in the Bible? How could it be reconciled with the Genesis stories of creation, the flood, and the disbursement of the nations? Were these new people fully human? Did they possess souls? Their cultures, social customs, and religions were so foreign as to create doubt in the European mind as to their faculties of reason, morality, and humanity. Even though Pope Paul III declared the Indians to be fully human in *Sublimus Deus*, the matter was not fully settled. These questions were framed within both the economic context of the conquests—namely, the expectation that the colonies would produce wealth for the royal treasury—and the philosophical framework in which theological reflection was being done. According to Aristotle's *Politics*, some people (and nations) are meant to rule over others who, by nature, are inferior and/or destined for slavery. This was the argument presented by theologians such as Juan Gínes de Sepúlveda. It spelled forth the prerogatives of empire while justifying the violent and cruel treatment of the Indians, already in the process of being decimated by slavery and disease. One of Sepúlveda's contemporaries, Francisco de Vitoria, proposed a universal law of nations wherein all people were fully human, could attain salvation, and possessed an inherent right to their lives and property. In this instance, the Spanish would have to possess the legal right to deprive the Indians of their lands, as in the case of a just war. Francisco Pizarro's attack on Atahualpa, the Inca ruler, in response to his desecration of a breviary can be seen in such a light. More significantly, the establishment in 1513 of the Requerimiento, a document to be read aloud placing the discovered lands under Spanish rule and demanding submission to the throne and the acceptance of Christianity, provided the legal cover to declare a just war, even when proclaimed without an interpreter or read aloud to empty beaches.

### *Resistance*

Though individual priests or friars accompanied the first voyages of exploration to minister to the Spanish, it would not be until 1510 that members of the religious orders arrived in the New World for the express purpose of evangelizing the Indians. Friars of the Dominican Order were the first to the island of Hispaniola and while, throughout history, many clerics would subscribe to and benefit from the imperial theology, these newcomers quickly decided they would not. Led by Pedro de Córdoba, they became the first voices of conscience in the New World. The fiery Advent

sermon of Antonio de Montesinos questioned the Christianity of the settlers in light of their exploitation of and cruelty to the Indians. In his audience was a young priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas, who himself held an *encomienda*, or grant of Indians, to work his farm. After being present at the brutal and bloody conquest of Cuba he would have a change of heart in 1514 and dedicate the rest of his life to bringing justice to the Indians. Becoming a Dominican himself, he would crisscross the ocean several times to present the natives' case before the king. The New Laws of 1542 abolishing the *encomienda* were the result, although they were enforced only temporarily. Las Casas defended the full humanity and dignity of the Amerindians in debate with Sepúlveda in 1550, and he propounded a revolutionary theory in missions, arguing that the only way to spread the gospel was through peace, persuasion, and love. Though a child of his era and ever seeking to reconcile the rights of the indigenous with the expanding Spanish empire, he could on his deathbed only see the judgment of God upon Spain for the death they visited upon the Indians. Others, though lesser known, would strive to resist the power of the sword. For example, Bishop Antonio de Valdivieso of Nicaragua was assassinated by the colonists for his defense of the Indians and Vasco de Quiroga, bishop of Michoacán in Mexico, sought to separate the native peoples under his charge from the Spanish and create a peaceful community inspired by Thomas More's *Utopia*.

Yet just as violence takes on more than simply physical forms, so does resistance. Cultural decimation was faced by the native peoples as missionaries upended their religious rituals, destroyed their sacred books and artifacts, and dismissed and attacked their belief systems and mores as demonic. Franciscan missionary Bernardo de Sahagún was one of the few who sought to preserve the Aztec past in codices and histories. Yet others went further to vindicate the indigenous worldview within the Christian faith now dominant. Blas Valera, a sixteenth-century mestizo Jesuit, was disciplined for daring to suggest that Inca religion and culture were the equal of Christianity. In the early seventeenth century, Guaman Poma de Ayala, born of Indian royalty, penned a lengthy tome addressed to Philip III seeking justice from the abuses of the Spanish and arguing that the religion of his Inca ancestors was compatible with the Christian faith. The rebellion led by Túpac Amaru II in Peru in 1778 sought to overthrow the Spanish in the hope of establishing Christian Inca rule.

## 1:2:2:2: Expanding the Church

Having encountered a "new" continent and "new" civilizations, the Catholic Church desired to bring people to the faith and establish itself within American society. Yet even in the New World, old habits die hard.

### *Evangelization*

The task of evangelization fell mainly to the members of religious orders (whereas secular clergy were more concentrated in urban areas and ministered to the colonists and others within the diocesan system). Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, and Augustinians were the earliest and most numerous of the orders. In the early part of the colonial period, friars learned the Indian

languages, often being the first to put them into written form and to create grammars and dictionaries. Not only were these valuable for those missionaries setting forth to work among the natives, but they have enabled future generations of linguists to study the development and preservation of these languages. Catechetical instruction often used pictograms, as well as the natural drama of the Mass, sermons, music, and religious theater. Early on, schools were established in Mexico to train the children of Indian nobles to be priests, but eventually those efforts were suspended due to prejudice. However similar some of the orders' tools were, often their perspectives and methodologies varied. Franciscans had been highly influenced by the apocalyptic visions of medieval teacher Joachim of Fiore. They came to believe that the "discovery" of a New World heralded the end of days and hurried to bring as many into the kingdom of heaven as possible. As a result they tended to baptize first and catechize later. Dominicans, the Order of Preachers, took the opposite approach, focusing on teaching the natives the rudiments of the Christian faith and practice first. These differences led to clashes between the orders in areas where their ministries overlapped. Franciscans, Jesuits, and to a lesser extent Dominicans also took part in the *congregaciones*—that is, the removal of nomadic or scattered Indian groups into protected villages. This served several purposes: it facilitated evangelism by having the people in one place; it separated the natives from the predations or the influence of the Spanish, who were considered bad examples; and, finally, it removed them from their traditional lifestyles, lands, and practices in order to "civilize" them into farming, manufacture, and trade as well as Christian faith. The most famous of these were the Jesuit reductions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in what are now Paraguay, Brazil, and northern Argentina. The Jesuit attitude toward indigenous lifestyles was more sympathetic than those of the other orders or the diocesan church. Though often paternalistic, the Jesuits tried to maintain traditional social and political structures as much as possible. In removing the Guaraní from their seminomadic lifestyles, the *reducciones* have been criticized as an example of cultural violation. However, they also served to protect them from Portuguese slave-raiders. The independence of the order, and consequently its mission, enraged and terrified colonists fearful that the Jesuits were raising an army. The economic success of the missions through their agriculture, livestock, artisanship, and manufacturing was yet another reason for colonial envy. After the Guaraní War of 1756 and the subsequent expulsion of the Society of Jesus in the 1760s, the reductions were eventually abandoned.

The situation in Brazil differed in that the Portuguese did not set out to build colonies as the Spanish did but to establish trading posts along the coast as they had done in Africa in order to exploit the area's resources. Not until the latter half of the fifteenth century was any effort put into establishing permanent settlements devoted to sugar production. It was then that the king, under the powers of the *padroado*, favored the Society of Jesus to serve as the chief agents of evangelization. The Jesuit method of congregating Indians into missions for the purposes of evangelization and acculturation, however, had the effect of removing them from the Portuguese labor force, enraging both colonists and some members of the secular clergy.

### *Consolidation*

*Universalis Ecclesiae Regimen*, a papal bull issued by Pope Julius II in 1508, granted the Spanish monarchs full rights of patronage over the church in the "Indies." This allowed Fernando, and Charles I after him, to establish dioceses and supervise the development of the American church with the aid of the Council of the Indies in Seville. Santo Domingo was the first diocese created, originally under the archdiocese of Seville until 1546 when it was elevated in rank. By 1620 more than thirty dioceses dotted the New World. Santo Domingo, Mexico, Lima, Charcas de la Plata, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires served as archdioceses in the urban centers of the Spanish viceroyalties and important provinces. Already by midcentury, the archbishops of Mexico and Lima, representing the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, began to call forth provincial councils to organize the task of evangelism, standards for the clergy, and the consolidation of the diocesan structure. In the 1570s and 1580s, the bishops, in particular Toribio de Mogrovejo of Lima, began implementing the decrees of the Council of Trent, resulting in a more bureaucratic and structured church. Both the religious orders and the secular church established universities and hospitals for the minds and bodies of the colonists. The first printing presses were introduced in order to produce catechisms, books, and devotional literature for their edification. Women's religious orders began to increase in number, and the Inquisition in New Spain and Peru arrived to root out heresy and immoral behavior.

## 1:2:2:3: The Colonial Church

The colonial church was one of the central pillars of Iberian society. Its power and influence were felt throughout all levels from the religious to the economic to the social. Its spirit and influence continue to reverberate across the continent in its churches, its piety, and its worldview.

### *Age of the Baroque*

Baroque Christianity posited a world where the sacred was profoundly immanent. There was little distinction between a symbol and the thing signified. Therefore, the divine was both material and reachable through the senses. Post-Tridentine Catholicism, both in Europe and in the Americas, emphasized the role of emotion drawn forth by art and liturgy. Opulent churches, particularly in rich urban centers like Lima, Cuzco, Puebla, and Mexico City, sought to draw the eye ever upward in awe and contemplation of God triumphant in the church and the world. Elaborate liturgies and festival celebrations, entertaining sight, sound, smell, and hearing, were used to inspire and reinforce social structures. The Corpus Christi processionals, for example, not only commemorated the body of Christ present in the Eucharist but also underlined the established body politic by mirroring the social hierarchy. Everyone in their place and a place for everyone. Confraternities, imported from Spain and Portugal, established smaller communities based on race or occupation under the patronage of a favored saint. These brotherhoods—part union, part welfare, and part funeral insurance—performed charitable works and sponsored religious festivals, fortifying social connections under the auspices of heaven. On a more personal scale, the immediacy and

palpability of the divine meant that, for the believer, miracles and healing could be as close as the nearest relic, holy site, or mystic. The cult of saints, the friends of Christ and benefactors of the devout, were among the most intimate of intermediaries between the human and divine in reflection of the imperial order. Lavish gifts, whether to the image of a saint or to the functioning of a Mass, were seen as visible signs of one's devotion. This sense of physicality, immanence, and relationship with the sacred through pilgrimage, emotion, offering, and sacrifice dovetailed with indigenous and African spirituality and symbolism, which in turn made themselves known in the art, architecture, and popular religion of the era.

### *Popular Religion*

Popular religion—that is, the beliefs and rituals of the masses—developed strongly in Latin America for a number of reasons: the lack of clergy available to sufficiently catechize isolated groups, the false assumption that people came to Christianity with a tabula rasa devoid of their own religious worldviews, the retention or adaptation of previous religious beliefs as a form of resistance to the colonists, and the fact that many clerics preferred to work with the European population and paid scant attention to the needs of the indigenous or, more often, the Africans. Popular religiosity in Latin America often reflected colonial society itself, a combination of European, African, and American elements into something new. In these creative variations to Christianity, the native and the African were placed on par with the European. The Virgin of Guadalupe, appearing to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin in 1531, appeared as a dark-skinned Indian and used Nahua religious symbols and terminology to proclaim acceptance to the Indians. Black Christs were not only popular among the Central American Maya for whom the color carried religious meaning, including death and rebirth, but also among African populations in South America who saw the Christian God as identifying with their skin color and pain. Along Lake Titicaca, the Virgin of Copacabana became identified with the Earth Mother and, like the Pachamama, is called upon even today in times of harvest.

### *Women*

Women generally had two proper places in colonial society: in the home or in the convent. Until the seventeenth century the church generally favored individual choice in marriage, giving shelter and performing marriages even when parents disapproved of the union. Wealthier women entered marriage with a dowry, giving them some degree of independence and allowing them to become benefactors of churches or charities. Convent life varied from the strictly observant to the lax, from the simple to the extravagant. Women of well-to-do families entered the religious life with dowries as well, which in some cases were invested, allowing convents to become prosperous landowners or to serve as essential lending institutions in the city. (Unlike men's religious houses, which were generally rural, convents were urban and, in the case of wealthy ones, could span several city blocks.)

Though the life of a religious could be heavily regulated, some found it to be an avenue for expression, independence, and even rebellion in the absence of a husband. The spiritual autobiography, usually written by mystics under the supervision of a confessor priest, is a genre that afforded women self-expression and allowed them to voice sometimes unconventional opinions directly or indirectly. Sometimes though, as in the case of Catarina de San Juan in Mexico, it could provoke the scrutiny of the Inquisition. The Hieronymite convent in Mexico City, however, afforded women more freedom. Those with some degree of wealth owned private cells, retained property, and entered the convent with slaves. Here, the seventeenth-century polymath Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz found the liberty to write poetry and drama, and even to defend a woman's right to study theology. There were some women who defied convention. Catalina de Erauso went to war disguised as a man before being discovered and sent to a convent. After escaping, she successfully petitioned the pope to allow her to continue living under a male identity. In the mid-1700s, Rosa Egipcíaca was a former prostitute and slave whose mystic experiences made her the first black woman to be published in Brazil before her controversial visions and rituals led to her judgment by the Inquisition in Portugal. A century earlier, the young mystic Rosa de Lima refused marriage and lived a severe, ascetic life as a Third Order Dominican in her parents' house before becoming the Americas' first canonized saint.

### *Africans*

Slavery was introduced into the Spanish and Portuguese colonies largely as a result of the decimation of the Indian population and subsequent legal protections against their exploitation. In general, the institution, accepted throughout the Mediterranean world, was never questioned. The church and the religious orders, especially the Jesuits, availed themselves of slave labor to work their estates, colleges, and missions. Concentrated in the Caribbean and Brazil, the church engaged in no concentrated evangelistic outreach toward the Africans. The efforts of Alonso de Sandoval and Pedro Claver in Colombia are the exceptions that prove the rule. Oftentimes Africans were baptized as they were led aboard the Portuguese slave ships or upon disembarking. In Brazil, plantation owners were held responsible for the religious instruction of their slaves, which was conducted not by catechesis but through exposure to the prayers, festivals, and rhythms of the Mass and the church calendar in the plantation chapel or local church. Slaves and free blacks formed brotherhoods for mutual support under the patronage of a saint. Blacks and mixed-race people were generally not permitted in the priesthood or religious orders but could serve as *donados*, living under the monastic rules but working as servants. Martín de Porres of Peru was such a *donado* until later in life when the Dominican friary in which he lived permitted him full orders as the result of his reputation for sanctity, piety, and miracles. In the early nineteenth century, José Nunes Garcia was ordained to the priesthood and achieved prominence as a musician in Brazil despite racial prejudice and opposition.

A lack of religious instruction, the high mortality rate of blacks necessitating a steady influx of new slaves, and the determination to maintain their culture and religion led many Afro-Latin communities to adapt their religious customs. Combining elements and practices from Catholicism and traditional religions, Santería, Candomblé, and Palo Monte were often practiced in secret so as not to arouse suspicion. These and other Afro-Latin religions became a source of resilience for many black communities and have since drawn adherents from all colors and classes.

### *The Catholic Enlightenment*

The Bourbon Reforms enacted by the kings of Spain in the eighteenth century were designed to increase the wealth returning from the American colonies and to centralize power, including that of the church, in the monarchy. Charles III was especially interested in improving the state of the church and the educational levels of the clergy in both Spain and its colonies. Naturally, he appointed bishops sympathetic to his goals. The Catholic Enlightenment, both in Europe and abroad, was an effort to reconcile rationalism with revelation, to pursue Enlightenment thought in science, politics, philosophy, and theology without abandoning Catholic orthodoxy. In the Americas, enlightened bishops revisited university curricula, exchanging Aristotle for the natural sciences. As a result, knowledge of the continent's geography, flora, and fauna were enhanced, as were astronomical observations. In the life of the church, the extravagant adornment of the churches and images of the saints were discouraged in favor of works of charity. Preachers were admonished to cease obsequious, Latin-ridden sermons and to speak plainly for the spiritual edification of the people. Popular religious festivals became highly regulated or even suspended out of concern for immorality as well as to stem attitudes and practices now considered "superstitious." The emphasis on the saints and their devotion was downplayed; instead, clerics were encouraged to emphasize the Bible, Christ, and his presence in the Eucharist.

One distinctly New World effect of the Catholic Enlightenment was a consciousness of American identity and pride among American-born Spaniards in response to European prejudices. Considered inferior or unreliable for having been born in the colonies, Creoles were often denied access to the highest positions of society in favor of the European-born. A renewed interest in the natural sciences led to an appreciation of the New World's resources. Some, including churchmen, began investigating the indigenous civilizations of the past and comparing them favorably to the civilizations of Greece or Rome. The old question about the role of the Americas in salvation history came back to life in light of similarities between indigenous religions and Christianity, with some theorizing that the hero-god Quetzalcoatl must have actually been the apostle Thomas bringing the gospel to the Americas long before the Spanish arrived. Others pointed to the miraculous Marian apparitions as proof of God's providential favor on these shores. Whatever the argument, the results were jaw-dropping. If the Christian message was introduced to the New World by a first-century apostle or the Virgin Mary herself, what justification was there for the conquest and colonization of the Americas? And if God had so blessed these lands, then who is to say that its citizens are second-class and unfit to rule them?

## 1:2:3: Christianity and the Independent Republics (1810–1930)

As the Spanish and Portuguese colonies struggled toward self-determination, the church endeavored to maintain its influence, oppose the challenges of Protestantism and secularism, and define its place on the continent.

### 1:2:3:1: Insurrection in God's Name

Most of Latin America, with the exceptions of Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, began shaking off European rule at the beginning off the nineteenth century. In many places throughout the colonies, from Mexico to Argentina, parish priests led or joined the insurrections. Most were Creole or mixed-race and so identified with their native lands and the people they served rather than faraway Spain. Many were well-read in the Enlightenment thinkers of the age, including Rousseau and Locke. Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808 and the overthrow of Fernando VII presented the opportunity to rebel. The insurrectionists based their actions on the natural right of freedom for human beings and on a continued allegiance to the rightful Spanish king. With very few exceptions, the bishops opposed the independence movements. For one, most were European-born Spaniards, and all owed their positions to the Spanish throne. Secondly, of course, was the traditional antipathy for rebellion against the divine right of kings. As the battles for independence waged back and forth across the several arenas of the continent, religious symbolism and coercion were used to rally the contestants. In Mexico, the Dark Virgin, Guadalupe, flew on the standards of the rebels while the royalists clung to the Virgin of Remedies who had accompanied Cortéz into conquest three centuries prior. Colombian priest and later bishop of Bogotá Juan Fernández de Sotomayor authored a catechism describing the revolution as holy and just. At the same time, Our Lady of Mercies was declared patron of the Argentine army, and in Uruguay in 1825, the Thirty-Three, patriot heroes against then-Brazilian rule, swore fidelity to the Virgin now known by their name. The bishops thundered excommunication and anathema against the rebels but to no avail. In the end, many of them fled to Spain, creating an ecclesiastical crisis of authority for the new republics.

Brazil's road to independence struck a different path. As Napoleon's forces marched towards Portugal, the royal court fled to Brazil, elevating it from colony to kingdom upon their arrival. The Brazilian church benefited from their presence and investment. In 1817 the failed Pernambucan Revolt against the Portuguese Court included fifty-seven liberal priests. However, on King João VI's return to Portugal in 1822, the prince, Pedro, declared Brazilian independence with the full cooperation of the church. Under a legitimate ruler of the royal house, there was no danger of the sin of rebellion.

### 1:2:3:2: Church and State

By the mid-1820s, the colonies of Latin America had achieved independence. Several nations sought to unite under a single banner, creating the Federal Republic of Central America and

Gran Colombia, but political divisions between their component parts doomed this effort early on. With regard to the Catholic Church, several issues were immediately at hand. To the relief of the church, practically every one of the new independent states acknowledged the central role of the Catholic Church, guaranteeing it a spiritual monopoly in their early constitutions (along with control of education and the civil registry) with very few voices offering support for freedom of conscience at this early stage. The next major crisis for the church was the *patronato*. Namely, did the right to appoint bishops to vacant sees revert back to Rome upon the sundering of royal rule or did the governments of the new nations inherit it? The result was a tug of war between the Americas and the papacy with the fate of the Catholic Church at hand. Many bishops, loyal to the Spanish throne, had fled across the Atlantic, and in several cases they were exiled for their lack of patriotic support to the nationalist cause. Considering that he who controlled the bishops controlled the church—the largest landowner, a repository of wealth and knowledge, and a voice of influence throughout the continent, the stakes were high indeed. The Vatican at first refused to recognize the independent states and did not begin to do so until after the death of Fernando VI, the Spanish king, in 1833. This alone hampered the recognition of national patronage. By mid-century, many countries had hammered out concordats with Rome, each side trying to reap the lion's share of benefits. Most usually, these agreements allowed the Catholic Church to remain the official religion of the state, to retain its properties and traditional privileges (ecclesiastical courts, collection of the tithe), and to control the registry of births and deaths and the system of education. In return, the papacy would recognize the government's right to choose and present nominees to vacant dioceses. As the century wore on, many of the concordats were broken or dissolved as national governments instituted liberal freedoms or abrogated terms of agreement. In a few countries, the agreements were revisited and renegotiated and remain in place, as in Venezuela.

### *Conservatives and Liberals*

Behind these struggles to negotiate the role of the Catholic Church in the independent republics lay battles over the very nature of these countries. Throughout most of Latin America, two major groups, led by the landed, white elite, emerged in the 1820s. Conservatives sought a system of government that would retain as much of the colonial structure as possible, including the centrality of the church. Liberals looked to a federal form of government along with the institution of modern freedoms and reforms such as liberty of conscience and secular education. The church, weakened by a lack of priests and bishops, the persecution of religious orders, and the destruction or elimination of many of its schools, libraries, and seminaries during the emancipation process, was seemingly caught in the middle. Both parties sought to control the church to their own ends, one by using it as an arm of the state and the other by undermining its powers. Anticlerical elements existed among both, even while paying lip service to the church. Faithful Catholics existed among both, even if that meant a Catholicism adapted to the modern world. The fortunes of the church often swung back and forth as the political winds blew. In general, church leaders

sided with the Conservatives well into the twentieth century. Under Liberal rule, the bishops saw their power diminished. As the century progressed, Catholicism was forced to adapt to new circumstances. No longer a powerful state church, it grudgingly had to contend with the modern challenge to the model of Christendom as, in various degrees, country after country began to experiment with freedom of conscience and even separation of church and state.

### 1:2:3:3: First Protestants

The cultural, philosophical, and religious context of Latin American independence was different from that of the religiously pluralistic English colonies to the north. Ideas of freedom did not translate into equal civil rights for all. In general, with independence the Iberian colonies had traded one oligarchic rule for another. Freedom of religion was barely a blip on the radar for most of the region's leaders. Eventually, liberty of conscience was enacted throughout the various republics as a practical solution to the challenge of stimulating economic and political relationships with other countries. Whereas the occasional unfortunate Protestant would wash up on shore during the colonial period, Protestantism as a whole did not begin entering Latin America until after independence. Some of the first Protestants were members of Bible societies and Bible colporteurs whose goal was to spread the knowledge of the Scriptures. The most famous and peripatetic of these was James "Diego" Thompson, a Scotsman who traveled from Argentina to Mexico to the Caribbean, often at the invitation of political leaders and with the support of some of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy. In some circles, the Bible and Protestantism were seen as the key to the economic and political success of Great Britain and the United States; to gain parity with those nations meant introducing those pillars of Anglo-American power. Echoing the Enlightenment Catholics of the prior century, they believed that ignorance and religious superstition were causes of Latin American stagnation. In several countries religious freedom was extended only to foreigners, and chaplains arrived soon afterward to serve them and in some cases extended their ministries to the surrounding population. As religious liberty was promulgated throughout the republics, missionaries, primarily from the United States, came. To grasp the beginnings of the Protestant missions, it is important to understand their context—namely, a triumphalist, postmillennial revivalist evangelicalism that existed within the larger framework of US economic and political expansionism inspired by convictions of Manifest Destiny. This was especially apparent after 1898 when Spain lost Puerto Rico and Cuba in the Spanish-American War and the major Protestant denominations divided up the islands between themselves to establish churches and save people from Roman Catholicism. Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, Episcopal, and Lutheran missionaries generally began working among the poor and laborers but soon began to concentrate on the emerging middle classes who tended to be more critical of Roman Catholic clericalism and would be more receptive to the republican values the missionaries espoused. In some areas, such as Mexico City, the missionaries worked among reformist clergy and religious groups. Nascent congregations built churches, schools, clinics, seminaries, and other charitable institutions. At this stage, though, the US missionary enterprise tended toward paternalism and sometimes outright

prejudice. Despite the development of native leaders, the missionaries and the denominations they represented maintained control.

Another source for the Protestant presence in Latin America lay in national efforts to stimulate industry by inviting immigrant groups to settle underpopulated areas. German Mennonites arrived in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay while their Russian counterparts settled in northern Mexico. Italian Waldensians also found new homes in the Southern Cone. Until later in the twentieth century, these communities tended to be isolated, forming their own churches and hiring pastors from abroad. Only later, as the second and third generations identified more with the New World than the Old, were services and ministries formed that also extended outward.

### 1:2:3:4: At Century's End

In the late nineteenth century, throughout parts of Latin America, the Catholic Church had to contend with several Liberal regimes ruled by powerful *caudillos*. Their approach to the church varied from the relatively benign, such as in Porfirio Díaz's Mexico where he allowed the church to regain some of its former prestige and power, to the persecutory and domineering, as was the case in Paraguay. Here President Carlos Antonio López and later his grandnephew Francisco Solanos López outlawed traditional acts of reverence, such as kneeling toward the bishops, and prohibited them from using the episcopal throne or official vestments. Antonio López named his own brother archbishop of Asunción. The Lópezes cut off all communication between the Paraguayan church and Rome, isolating and turning it into a personal fiefdom. Teaching the divine right of the president became mandatory, especially as Francisco Solanos dragged the country into a suicidal war against Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, during which the bishops were forced into complicity by preaching obedience, holy war, and heavenly recompense for those who would give their lives for their country. The weakening of the Catholic Church continued apace as government after government forbade the payment of the tithe that traditionally supported the church and its functions and instead placed the clergy on the state payroll. The symbolism of those actions would be clear as day. Civil marriage became the law of the land, allowing even Protestant unions to be recognized. The state took control of the civil registry and education. By the early twentieth century freedom of conscience had been established throughout the continent.

Despite this, the Catholic Church nonetheless recovered some of its former strength in part thanks to a revival in pious devotions, some of which, such as the consecration of the nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, connected to nationalist sentiments. The fact that the church was essentially a department of the state in many countries was of benefit to the extent that the governments, especially in periods of Conservative rule, rebuilt churches, allowed foreign priests to replenish the meager clergy, opened universities and seminaries, and permitted the religious orders to return. Usually coming from France, Spain, Italy, and the United States, orders such as the Passionists, Salesians, Claretians, and Hospitallars were integral in the establishment of schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the elderly. Missions to isolated Indian groups recommenced, though unfortunately, as in the case of Chile and Argentina, they were sometimes

used by the state as the groundwork for conquest and genocide in the interests of Europeanization and economic expansion. An effect of these policies among the rural poor, the indigenous, and the former slaves (in Brazil) was the rise of utopian and messianic movements that sought to resist secular encroachments, dissolution of traditional piety, or forced modernization.

Moreover, in the last decades of the century the Catholic Church itself began to swing in an ultramontane direction, repositioning its axis from the local bishops to the papacy, a process culminating in the Vatican I decree on papal infallibility (which was supported by all of the council's Latin American bishops). In 1858 the Latin American Pontifical College was founded in Rome, providing Latin Americans a quality and Romanized education. Even the agenda of the Latin American Plenary Council, which convened bishops from throughout the region to Rome in 1899, was dictated by Europeans set on conforming the Latin American church to a Vatican-centered model.

The status and power that the church had in the nineteenth century, even when weakened, was greatly diminished by the first third of the twentieth. In Cuba and Puerto Rico, church and state had been sundered by the power of that great theologian, the US military, and in the case of Puerto Rico the church's hierarchy, formerly Spanish, was now American. The Catholic Church in Mexico emerged limping out of a bloody revolution whose anticlerical 1917 Constitution left it virtually marginalized, officially silenced, and without property. The government would continue to see the church as an impediment to progress and sought to control and limit it, actions that culminated in the bloody Cristero War of 1926 to 1929. In Uruguay the transition to secularism, while smoother, was no less abrupt, as disestablishment even transformed the calendar's traditional holidays; Christmas became Family Day, for example.

## 1:2:4: Christianity and the End of Christendom (1930–1964)

Populist governments and a changing world order challenged the churches. Long accustomed to power, some sought to remain in the center. Others remained on the margins seeking to influence society in starkly different ways.

### 1:2:4:1: Christianity and Social Doctrine

Even as the 1864 Syllabus of Errors informed Catholic leaders of the dangers of the modern world, the church's social encyclicals, beginning with 1891's *Rerum Novarum* on capital and labor (and later *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931), would illumine the Latin American church's path as it entered a new century. In this new era the laity would take on innovative roles. Awakened to the challenges of modernism, socialism, and the growing disparities between the rich and the poor in an increasingly industrialized society, women and men were inspired by the social doctrines of the church that sought to address these new realities. Laypeople from the middle class and lower portions of the upper class looked for ways in which society could be Christianized without necessarily returning to the days when the church dictated policy as well as conscience. They joined

movements such as Catholic Action in order to influence politics and social mores. In many countries this movement served as the precursor to modern Christian Democratic parties. Hospitals, schools, and other benevolent organizations were founded, efforts that became more crucial as the region entered the Great Depression. Catholic universities multiplied, allowing intellectuals the opportunity to reflect on the role of Catholicism within their national contexts. Many social and political leaders were graduates of these institutions.

### 1:2:4:2: Piety and Practice

In this modern version of Catholicism, faith became more introspective, nurtured by popular devotion, religious knowledge, and access to the sacraments. Since education, marriage, and other aspects of the public sphere had become secularized, the church began to stress the importance of the family unit in order to transmit religious instruction, stave off the challenge of Protestantism, and influence greater society. A renewed emphasis on the Eucharist, as exemplified in the introduction of regular local and national Eucharistic congresses, fed into individual piety while also fostering a sense of the body religious that was now distinct from the body politic.

### 1:2:4:3: The "New Christendom"

The relationship between church and state in this period should be approached through the global perspective of economic insecurity, a world war, and the specter of communism. The efforts of the papacy to preserve its structures and institutions amid totalitarian and Soviet-style states throughout Europe from the 1930s to 1950s was reflected through similar anxieties in Latin America. The church had long maintained an anticommunist stance. The fear of atheistic revolutions, including Mexico's anticlerical dalliance with socialism, informed its position, as did its traditional alliance to conservative politics and traditional oligarchies. After World War II, US concerns and economic and military power dominated the hemisphere. In the midst of anticommunist, Cold War sentiment, the Catholic Church wound up making strange bedfellows with populist and often authoritarian dictators who promised protection, prosperity, and a return to traditional values. And so, in the name of security and peace, the church discovered itself waking up next to the likes of Perón (Argentina), where the church supported his rule at least in the beginning, Vargas (Brazil), Trujillo (Dominican Republic), Stroessner (Paraguay), and Somoza (Nicaragua), to name a few. This "New Christendom" of forming advantageous alliances with the powerful in government and industry was both complemented and undermined by a slowly growing faction of those who sought to move the church in a direction of social responsibility.

### 1:2:4:4: Evangelicals and Pentecostals

Evangelical missions continued apace throughout the beginning of the century. They never grew in significant numbers and so never truly posed a challenge to Catholic dominance. Their social footprint in the form of schools, hospitals, clinics, and other charitable institutions would not become significant until later in the century. Yet, they remained the perpetual other. Evangelicals

placed themselves outside the traditions of many communities; they did not participate in patronal celebrations, they did not honor the Virgin, and their code of personal morality was often stricter, with an abhorrence of drinking or smoking, for example. To make matters worse, evangelicals most often sympathized with the Liberal party, especially in matters of religious liberty and the secularization of national institutions such as marriage. This placed them at odds with both the Catholic Church and the Conservatives, and it became all too easy to target them as agents of liberalism and enemies of the faith. In Colombia from 1948 to 1958, this kind of suspicion and enmity resulted in the persecution, slaughter, and dispossession of many Protestants. While it represents an extreme reaction, evangelicals throughout the continent nonetheless continued to be viewed with suspicion, originally as traitors to their (Roman Catholic) culture and later as agents or dupes of the United States as that nation took a greater role in the political, economic, and military life of the region.

Pentecostalism emerged in Latin America through various streams. It first manifested itself within the Methodist Church of Chile in 1909, predating many US denominations. In Argentina, it was introduced via European missionaries, whereas in the Caribbean and Mexico it resulted from the aftershocks of the Los Angeles Azusa Street revivals of 1906 that inspired Spirit-baptized Hispanics to return to their places of origin to spread the message. American missionaries, sometimes acting independently but most often through now-established denominations, were the first to bring Pentecostalism to Central America, Brazil, and the Andes region. The movement proved divisive and controversial to the older evangelical churches in which it emerged, its fervent believers often forced out of their churches to form their own congregations and denominations. With their exuberant worship, glossolalia, and physical manifestations of spiritual ecstasy, these early Pentecostals were often shunned, challenged, and even violently persecuted within their communities, sometimes at the instigation of local priests. During these early decades Pentecostalism spread mainly among the poor, immigrants, laborers, and the dispossessed. Though overall the movement did not experience significant growth until after the 1950s, denominations began to proliferate nonetheless. Concerns over doctrinal purity and worship, the autonomous nature of the individual congregations, and the reliance on Spirit-led charismatic leaders quickly led to factions that resulted in church-splits and the establishment of competing denominations.

Within both evangelical and Pentecostal mission churches, conflicts arose over the nature and control of these congregations. Native leadership had developed through the many schools, seminaries, and distance education programs established by foreign missionaries. However, in many cases ultimate control was retained by the missionaries and their home denominations. From the 1930s onward, a new generation of national leaders began to question this assumption. Were the churches to reflect the values and traditions of the United States or would they be permitted to develop within the contexts of their own communities and countries? What legitimate reason was there to exclude native pastors and teachers from controlling their own denominations, their institutions, and finances? These divisions, often bitter, resulted in the formation of new denominations

and organizations under the control of native-born leaders. Oftentimes these acrimonious splits would not be healed for decades, and the new churches suffered from a loss of financial and infrastructural support that remained with the foreign missionaries. Nonetheless, as these churches arose and as efforts began to cross denominational lines to form organizations for mutual support and cooperation, it marked the beginnings of a truly Latin American Protestantism.

## 1:2:5: Christianity in the Modern World (1964–present)

The last several decades of the twentieth century were a time of often-violent upheaval in Latin American society. They also marked a point of change and revolution within Christianity as old institutions reinvented themselves and new expressions of the faith came to the forefront.

### 1:2:5:1: Effects of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council redefined the Catholic Church in the modern world. The conception of the church as the entire people of God, a reconfiguring of relationships with Protestants, Jews, and members of other religions, and the reformation of worship and piety have all been front and center in the description of the council. Furthermore, the loosening of the centripetal force tying the global church to Rome and the mandate to root the mission of the church within national and local contexts and needs allowed bishops, clergy, and religious orders to avail themselves of already percolating powers at the grassroots, pastoral, and academic levels.

#### *Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR)*

The charismatic movement is a global phenomenon that began in the late 1950s and early 1960s within Roman Catholicism and historic and evangelical Protestant denominations. It emphasizes experiences typically associated with Pentecostalism such as glossolalia, healing, spiritual gifts, and ecstatic worship. The movement was introduced first into Bolivia and Peru in 1970 by Father Francis MacNutt, a US priest who led teams of Catholic and Protestant leaders to hold spiritual retreats. Through their efforts, renewal spread throughout Latin America, becoming a source of revitalization within the Catholic Church at a period when the churches, fresh from Vatican II, were experimenting in novel forms of outreach, catechesis, and dialogue. In 1973 the first Latin American Catholic Charismatic Conference was held in Bogotá. The CCR has taken on a variety of forms since its inception. In Colombia, for example, the focus is on social action, whereas in Mexico it is on education and catechesis. The movement has been strongest in Brazil but now, despite early hesitation, has enjoyed the support of all the Latin American bishops' conferences both because of its role in attracting marginal or disaffected Catholics and as a counterweight to the attraction of Pentecostalism. In fact, though the growth of conservative Protestantism has drawn the lion's share of scholarly and media attention, it is estimated that at over seventy-five million adherents the CCR outnumbers self-identified Pentecostals in the region.