

CHAPTER VI

AN ANALYSIS OF THE EVANGELISTIC WORK
CONTINUED BY THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

We believe that the major difficulty in this type of value judgment is the lack of a comprehensive method that permits the consideration of the phenomenon in its totality and not merely in a single aspect. It is necessary, therefore, to review briefly certain elements outlined in the Introduction regarding methodology.

All human communities have at certain times instruments that we regard as indicators of civilization. The same is true of a religion, especially the Roman Catholic faith. Religions maintain analogically a system of *mediations*, which we have designated as sacramentality, ecclesial corporality, the organizing instruments instituted by Jesus Christ in time, and the presence of his universal, salvific grace. At the intentional level, that is, the level of understanding, civilization has a structure or an "ethico-mythical nucleus" contained or revealed finally in the actions of the group. Meanwhile, the Church possesses an existential understanding which in the last analysis is faith in the person of Jesus Christ and in the Trinity functioning by divine economy in sacred history.

In order to evaluate the level of the evangelization of a community, it is necessary to know at which level one is now situated and to what point the evangelization has been achieved. Otherwise one can confuse the secondary for the essential, and vice versa.

I. THE "MEDIATIONS" OF THE PRE-HISPANIC RELIGIONS AND THE
CLASH WITH THE "MEDIATIONS" OF THE HISPANIC CATHOLIC CHURCH

We designate as "mediations" the institutions, writings, rites, liturgies, and sacraments, that is, the corporality of a religion. This stratum, although essentially constituting the Catholic religion, is situated at the level of communication, comprehension, and symbolism. It is necessary to speak a truth or transmit a grace to the conscience, and the conscience should in turn understand the proposed sign. The sign or symbol should be introduced through a catechetical process designed to enhance understanding, that is, initiation is requisite. Not unlike the people of Israel, the Church in the cultural Greco-Roman environment adopted many symbols of the world in order to communicate the content of the Christian faith, and thus was born the sacramental mediation of the Oriental, Latin, and much later the Mozarabic liturgies.

The evangelists of Latin America were in the same manner required to select — among the means of expression of the lower or higher pre-Hispanic civilizations —

certain expressive elements or symbols that permitted communication with the Indian and allowed him to comprehend and learn the content of the faith that was presented.

Indigenous religion in the Americas was basically agrarian. All the rites and gods as well as the cosmology of the Indians had the earth as the primary point of reference. One should recall however, that the Hebraic religion, being an expression of a people essentially nomadic, incorporated many agrarian elements such as the great feast days of the Jewish calendar, Pentecost being especially significant in sacred history. Conversely, because of having lost completely the profound and real sense of the liturgy, the missionaries attempted to superimpose or at best adapt the liturgical cycle from the European hemisphere to America. Even more regrettable, they did so without any consideration of the relation of man to nature. The Indian, as a result, felt devoid of support and of the sacredness which his ancient religion provided. The rebound of idolatry among the neophytes may be explained in part by the inflexibility of the Spanish religious system that ignored the roots of the Indian existence in its most intimate originality.

The Church —organized to counteract the Reformation —possibly became more rigid in its missionary approach, though it must be admitted that this rigidity appeared early in the Middle Ages, in the Crusades, in the struggle against Islam, and above all, in the *Patronato* itself, which limited freedom in missionary activity. The missionary, unable to reorganize the liturgical year in Latin America, created innumerable *para-liturgies*. These secondary manifestations offend the European, but he should recognize that his own Christianity was profoundly affected by pre-Christian liturgies.

An example of the liturgical innovations that took place in the Americas can be seen in the custom of the Indians of Tlaxomulci who celebrated each year in their village the Day of the Epiphany. The following is a description by a nineteenth-century historian.

They construct a facsimile of the entrance to Bethlehem in the patio of the Church and place against the bell tower the stable of the Christ Child along with Mary and Joseph. On a hill high above the village the Kings descend ever so slowly on horseback, their pace indicative of the seriousness with which they portray the Magi, and also because the road is very rough.... In the interim before they arrive, there is a dance of angels who as they perform sing various stanzas in the Indian dialect with many bowings and genuflections to the Child. ...This is followed by the participants fighting with each other, and when some are knocked down, they roll around in the dirt frenetically embracing each other with such agility that it is shocking. If someone wants to stop those who are rolling on the ground, he merely places his shepherd's crook in the dirt in order that the participants go no farther. They in turn begin rolling in the other direction, embracing each other all the while. ...Present for these ceremonies are the friars as well as many secular Spanish priests along with five thousand Indians. Thus is the Day of Epiphany celebrated in Tlaxomulci as well as in other villages.¹

This dancing, leaping, and juggling were evidently forms of expression, mediations, or symbols that the Indians utilized in order to communicate to their god their reverence, devotion, and submission. A contemporary European spectator would have been shocked by these proceedings, as doubtless a primitive Jewish Christian would be scandalized at seeing the Basilica of St. Peter. One must understand, however, that the same motive that prompted the primitive Christian to select certain elements intrinsically neutral, that is, neither good nor bad in themselves, from the Greco-Roman civilization is the same motive that prompted the missionaries to Latin America to

accept many Indian forms which were neither illicit nor immoral for expressing their devotion to God.

Moreover, it should be noted that the post-Tridentine Roman Church prohibited the development of a liturgy adapted to the American reality. Consider, for example, the fact that in the Southern hemisphere, Easter, the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, is celebrated at the beginning of the Fall season when everything in nature is dying. This is a liturgical contradiction that has remained unchanged even today.

The responsibility for the lack of adaptation cannot be ascribed exclusively to Spain; rather, it was the fault of the whole European Catholic Church, not unlike the French position in regard to the question of the rites in China during the time of Matteo Ricci. Conversely, the often-heard criticism that the failure to adapt the liturgy and doctrine to the indigenous situation by the use of the *tabula rasa* method confirms the deep fear that the missionaries had of any kind of syncretism. The Inquisition in the Latin American Church pursued with a vengeance any admixture of paganism, magic, or sorcery.

Unfortunately, as can be seen, every missionary method has its drawbacks and intrinsic dangers.

If certain elements of the primitive rituals are admitted —as they were in Latin America —one runs the risk of developing syncretistic religion; which in fact has existed in Latin America, but only at the level of the “mediations.”

If the *tabula rasa* method is utilized in order to avoid syncretism, one runs the risk of impeding a genuinely profound evangelization simply because the symbols of the culture that permit the transmission of the message are destroyed.

The Latin American missionaries did not adopt either of these methods exclusively. Rather, knowing the situation, they moved in a very prudent manner. On the level of the “mediations” we can say that the Christian mission in Latin America essentially involved the introduction of Catholic sacramentalism of a Hispanic type that accepted, on the level of the paraliturgies and popular devotion, a wide margin for the incorporation and mixture of the pre-Hispanic “mediations.” This does not in itself negate the value of the evangelization. Rather, it demands of the spectator or critic a great deal of circumspection and care before making a value judgment.

II. THE "COMPREHENSIONS" OF THE PRE-HISPANIC RELIGION AND OF THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARY RELIGION

What we call the "existential comprehension" of the pre-Hispanic religion should be identified as the "ethico-mythical nucleus" of the Indian cultures in that the religion of these primitive cultures, whether superior or inferior, had its own nucleus. To transform this nucleus, the missionaries would have been required to engage in extensive dialogue with the culture just as the Apologists and Church Fathers did in respect to the Greco-Roman civilization. It would have been necessary for the Latin American missionaries to have known firsthand the elements that constituted the Indian mind and conscience. But this was extremely difficult. First, it was difficult because studies of the collective indigenous conscience became increasingly scarce with the passing of time. We can divide the whole process into four stages. During the first stage the missionaries attempted to obliterate the mythical conscience of the primitives, thinking that it was intrinsically and absolutely perverse. The second and third generation of missionaries —among them José de Acosta and Bernardino Sahagún —understood that in order to be effective it was necessary to have a thorough understanding of the

Indian system of thought. By this time, however, it was too late. The ancient traditions had already been recast in new molds. The Indian rites had been virtually obliterated, the ancient "wise men" had for the most part died, and the "mimicry of protection" of the Indian conscience was virtually impossible to investigate. The third stage extended from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, but the authentic Indian conscience was ignored by the Spaniard, the Creole, and the urban dweller. The final stage began in this century with the indigenous movements, especially those related to the study of the phenomenology of religion. Perhaps in these developments the Indian conscience will be recovered, at least as an organic, living, dynamic system with its own intrinsic value.²

Our sources of information are threefold: the reports sent to or requested by the kings of Spain, the judgments and written works of the colonists and governmental authorities, and the studies done by the missionaries for the purpose of knowing the Indians in order to evangelize them more effectively. For the most part these aforementioned studies dealt with only certain aspects of Indian mentality and overlooked some of the more crucial issues. The Crown, for example, was interested in the intellectual, moral, and manual capacity of the Indians, as were the colonists. There are very few descriptions of the Indian mentality as such or of the mythical structures, the systems of thought, or the reasons and ultimate causes of their theogonies. Few of the colonists had the ability to make these kinds of investigations, and the missionaries—because of their scholastic orientation—were ill-prepared for this kind of analysis. It was asked, for example, if the Indian were really a human being, but it was never asked what kind of human being the Indian was. This vast ignorance in regard to the indigenous people led to a minimizing and devaluation of the importance of the primitive mythical element. As a rule the missionary did not bother to refute the Indian beliefs; rather, missions concentrated on teaching directly the exposition of Christian doctrine.

The second and third generation of missionaries, as has already been pointed out, attempted a serious investigation of what can be called the "soul of the American Indian." Cristóbal de Molina in his *Fábula y ritos de los Incas*,³ Juan de Tovar,⁴ José de Acosta,⁵ and especially Bernardino Sahagún⁶ were very diligent in their studies of the Indian religions and cultures. Sahagún, for example, spent two years with the Indian tribes in his area dialoguing with the elders who had been designated as the most knowledgeable, and with interpreters and other helpers he was able to gain a working knowledge of the hieroglyphics and of the Nahuatl language. Sahagún, with the help of these Indian elders, spent more than a year editing the first draft of his *Historia general (General History)*, which is a significant scientific contribution to our knowledge of the indigenous peoples.⁷

The truth is, however, that the great mass of missionaries—even those who knew the Indian languages—neither made this kind of investigation nor availed themselves of the works of those who did. Sahagún's *History*, because of the persistent opposition of his Franciscan brothers and of the Crown, was not published until the nineteenth century. The missionaries proceeded in their evangelization with the knowledge that they themselves gained from the contact they had with the Indians. The basis of this attitude should be well understood. Spain in general—because of the long struggle with Islam, the contact with Judaism, and its unbending opposition to Protestantism—had developed an integralist mindset that was intransigently antisyncretistic. The accusation that the Church in Latin America promoted or permitted syncretism, that is, the admixture of primitive Indian mythology and rites with Christianity, is an ill-

founded assumption, although a kind of syncretism did result for other reasons. The Church was, conversely, uncompromisingly opposed to all forms of syncretism. The knowledge of and the publication of books that contained descriptions and expositions of the ancient rites and myths, in the judgment of the kings and many members of the Church, risked the possibility that certain responsible elites would retrieve these myths and ceremonies. In their passion for Christian purity —poorly understood to be sure, but explicable in view of the times —studies of the Indian “ethico-mythical nucleus” were not encouraged.

Because of ignorance and the rapidity with which the conquistadores destroyed the structures of the Indian civilization and the “ethico-mythical nucleus” of the pre-Hispanic cultures, a slow passage (*pesach*) or transition from the pagan “ethico-mythical nucleus” to the acceptance of the Christian faith and understanding —as occurred, for example, in the Greco-Roman empire —was not achieved. Rather, what occurred was a rupture, a severing, and an annihilation of the heart of the ancient cultures. This lamentable turn of events impeded a normal and authentic evangelization.

The situation, however, should be closely examined. One must admit that the Indian communities, deprived of the basic contents of their cultures, should have by all logic disappeared as cultural groups and should have been progressively assimilated into the superior civilization that invaded the Americas.

Uninterrupted evangelization of the Indians took place almost as a necessity from the sixteenth till the nineteenth century. Little by little the Indian communities, deprived of the ultimate bases of their culture, began to adopt the culture of the Spanish. Some Indians accepted the Christian existential understanding at the cultural level possible for them to comprehend. This is to say that at the most profound level of the group —that of the ultimate intentional structures —the missionaries arrived too late and with limited success were able to implant within the Indian mind the great truths or elements of Christian understanding: the creation, the Person of Jesus Christ as Redeemer, and the contingency of things. There were, therefore, great areas in which paganism continued in a pure state and broad zones in which many of the intentional pagan structures were not completely purified. We can say, nevertheless, that where the early evangelization took place —that of the sixteenth century —Christianity has remained firmly established. “The spiritual geography of contemporary Mexico, to the degree that it can be measured, corresponds to the map of the primitive missionary expansion.”⁸

The Spanish or missionary culture worked at the fundamental level of comprehension that, when the *tabula rasa* method was applied, rejected the pre-Hispanic “ethico-mythical nucleus” without discussion, thereby initiating the slow formation of a Latin American Christian conscience.

III. WHAT HAS CONSTITUTED A MIXED RELIGION?

Writers in the past and in our own time have adopted differing positions in regard to the encounter of Christianity with the primitive pagan religions in Latin America. Some believe that the Indians only accepted Christianity *externally*. This is the position of Jiménez Rueda who says, “The Indian was able to capture only the external aspects of worship —the plastic art of the ceremonies, the choral music, and the organ.”⁹ Mariátegui insists that the “missionaries did not impose the Gospel on the Indians; rather what was imposed was the cult, the liturgy. ...Aboriginal paganism meanwhile continued to survive below the surface of Catholic worship.”¹⁰ This same position has been adopted by many other thinkers in France, Germany, and even in North America.

George Kubler, for example, also believes that the Christianity of the Indian is only external and superficial.¹¹

Others contend that the Indians are *essentially* Christians, although they manifest, according to geographical region and the attention given to them by the missionaries, major or minor deficiencies. This is the position of Constantino Bayle and of Fernando de Armas Medina in their work, *Cristianización del Perú (The Christianization of Peru)*.¹²

Finally, there are some who believe that the indigenous religion that developed after the arrival of the missionaries was a mixture of or the juxtapositioning of the two religious traditions, although these two points of view are obviously distinct. Borges justifiably says that there was no mixture or fusion of religion. Rather, he contends there was a “coexistence of two juxtapositioned religions by which the Indians attempted to combine Christianity with paganism.”¹³

It appears to me that one cannot evaluate correctly the Christianity of the Indian by separating the two religions —the pre-Hispanic paganism and Christianity —as if they existed independently from the *subject*. For the Christianity of the Indian is not exclusively exterior, nor can one know directly the essence of the Indian soul. Neither is Indian Christianity a mixture or a juxtapositioning of religions.

We should begin with the individual and collective conscience of the Indian, the mythical conscience, and observe the slow conversion that has taken place by degrees and after great effort and difficulty. Our point of departure, therefore, should be the mythical cosmovision of the Indian where the *sacred* invaded his whole existence, where every act was regulated by examples that were located in the original time of the living gods who dwelt alongside men. We should, therefore, understand this ahistorical existence where the world view did not include the abstract and where everything had theological significance.

In this mythical world, pregnant with significance and value, there appeared the Spaniard with his astonishing instruments of civilization —his ships, arquebuses, dogs, horses, and armor. Into this mythical world came the missionary with his purity, benevolence, and magnificent services of worship. The Indian accepted all this as a *theological novelty*. The gods who protected the Spaniards had to be great, thought the Indian, much more powerful than our own, for the power of a people is nothing more than the expression of the power of their gods. Many times the Indian sought to become a Christian in order to ingratiate himself with the Christian gods, to participate in and receive the benefits of their power, and finally to make a peaceful alliance with them.

It was, therefore, by necessity that the Indian was attracted to Christianity. It was the logical result of his primitive and mythical cosmovision. It could not have been otherwise. Christianity as a religion was, it must be admitted, accepted by the Indian for reasons which were essentially pagan.

The demythification, the “atheization” of all that existed in the Indian mind, was a process that could not be hurried. The Greco-Roman culture, for example, needed no less than six centuries of contact with Christianity before any significant transformation of the basic theological outlook of that world occurred.

There existed in the Indian mind, therefore, gradations of lightness and darkness, a *chiaoscuro* which at one extreme could be considered as purely pagan while at the other it could be regarded as purely Christian. The transition from paganism to Christianity, if it is achieved *en masse* without excluding major segments of people, will of necessity require many centuries. To accelerate the process, the missionaries and the bishops adopted the practice of isolating the Indian community that had accepted

Christianity. The *reducciones* were specifically for this purpose, namely, for developing a Christian mentality within the space of a generation.

The Indian made sacrifices to his gods because he feared them, and his fears stemmed from his belief in their existence. Now the fact that the Indian believed in the gods did not mean that he believed any less in Jesus Christ, at least insofar as it was possible for him to understand with his semipagan awareness of the significance of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, as the Indian discovered the demands of Christianity, there was created for him a deep conflict of obligations. Such a conflict, nevertheless, was not absent in his primitive religion. As a matter of fact, all primitive religions are marked by a sense of tragedy, but the contradiction and the conflict are accepted as inevitable. The tragedy in the Indian soul would, however, remain for a long time. When the conscience was not sufficiently enlightened or strengthened by Christian practice or living, it was only in the *reducciones* that this sense of the tragic would be uprooted for a brief time.

May we conclude, therefore, that the religion which resulted in Latin America among the Indians was superficial, mixed, or juxtapositioned? This does not appear to be the case. The problem was much more complicated. On the level of the "mediations," as has already been said, there was an accumulation of Hispanic Catholic liturgy with its many gestures, symbols, and attitudes that were rooted in the pre-Hispanic religions. At this level one can see not so much a *mixed* religion as an *eclectic* accumulation, that is, the missionaries simply selected those aspects of the rites, dances, arts, and symbols which they deemed acceptable in the paraliturgies for the architecture, catechism, and the Eucharistic mystery plays. In this sense one can say that the missionaries consciously and officially attempted a transformation of the basis of the primitive ritual while at the same time they accepted many secondary forms of the primitive religions. This was, in fact, inevitable. The Indian people were, therefore, able to follow for a longer or shorter period, depending upon the geographical regions, their ancient cults in an Americanized Christian form. There resulted slowly, nonetheless, a substantial change, a progressive catechumenization.

On the level of fundamental comprehension, that is, of faith itself where authentic evangelization takes place, a *chiaoscuro* resulted which is almost impossible to discern but which avoids two obvious extremes:

1. The extreme of confusing *religious ignorance* with *paganism*. Many Indian people lived on a very primitive level culturally, and their faith, if one can put it thusly, was on the same incipient, primitive, undeveloped level.

2. The extreme of concluding too readily that the Catholicism of the Indian was valid simply by his having received baptism and by possessing various notions regarding Christian dogma.

Between these two extremes one should attempt a realistic evaluation. The Indian is more or less at the stage—as much in the eighteenth century as in the twentieth—of an initial but unfinished catechumenate. Every community or person is somewhere between these two extremes: that of simple catechumenal initiation or that of mature Christianity. At times the Indian appears to be at the point of "recent catechumenal initiation" with the pagan elements of his consciousness strongly evident. Is his religion therefore a mixed faith? It does not appear to be so, for a truly syncretistic religion should express in the form of dogmas or doctrines its "mixtures," such as the case of Spiritism in Brazil where oftentimes individuals from the middle class manifest characteristics of an undeniably mixed religion.

IV. THE TYPOLOGY OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE CONTINENT WITH RESPECT TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS DISCERNED IN THE COLONIAL ERA

We will outline in six groups the various positions that the conquerors, missionaries, and Indians adopted with respect to the person of Jesus Christ, which was, as has been said, the proper objective and essence of the faith and of Christian existence.

1. A few nourished a clear and conscious faith. This group has always been a minority in the history of the Church and will be until the end of time. It includes the great individuals in whom we are able to discern clearly in the quality of their virtues the liberty of Christianity regarding civilization. We refer here to the saints, certain great theologians or missionaries, some bishops, and some Indians.

2. Some leaders of the Church, principally the bishops, missionaries, and priests, along with a few laypeople, attempted to evangelize, but in their efforts they unconsciously mixed Hispanic and Christian elements as if they were identical. This group includes the great majority of missionaries to the Indians as well as some laypeople and Indians themselves.

3. The great majority of conquistadores, colonists, and Spaniards—who along with the Creoles and later the mestizos—united completely the goals of the Spanish Empire with those of the Catholic Church to the point of possessing a narrow *Hispanic messianism*. One was a Christian by virtue of being a Spaniard, of being baptized, and by observing certain precepts of the Church, but without any existential linking of conduct and the gospel.

4. The great majority of the Indians were baptized without being thoroughly catechized or genuinely converted—much less being part of the life of a Christian community—the exception being evidently the Indians who were organized into villages, curacies, missions, or *reducciones*. Their existential attitude on a moral or cultural plane, their faith and comprehension, were not sufficiently developed to allow them adequate understanding of Christian doctrine and its demands. Thus moral degeneration, drunkenness, and concubine could coexist with the belief in the existence of *huacas* (spirits that resided in various places) along with sorcery, magic, and the belief in Jesus Christ as Savior.

5. There were also areas wherein the Indians were only indirectly touched by Hispanic civilization or by Christian missions and which remain until today substantially pagan.

6. Some Indians continued to be essentially pagans without any contact with Christianity and by the end of the eighteenth century represented a marginal group isolated from the pre-Hispanic as well as from the Latin American civilization.

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from this summary?

1. One should keep in mind the fact that at the end of the sixteenth century there were only 120,000 Spaniards living in Latin America surrounded by at least 12,000,000 Indians. The Spanish population constituted barely one percent of the total population. Moreover, the Spanish were dispersed over an area of more than 12,000,000 square miles (20,000,000 square kilometers). The conquistadores were not theologians—even though for the glory of Spain they were faithful in religious observances—neither were they saints, although they did not lack for saints (images). The majority of the Spaniards who came to the New World were from the rural areas of Spain and Europe where some paganism remained. Furthermore, one should remember the enormous influence of Islam on Spanish culture. The Christian conscience was already contam-

inated with paganism from its own culture as well as from humanity in general when the conquistadores came to the New World, and it grew in America in an environment essentially pagan. The result was the release of a pent-up paganism in the Hispanic population. The immigrant, having broken the sociological mold of the Christianity which he knew —this phenomenon is easily observed in every immigrant from Italy, France, or Germany, if the immigrant came from areas deeply Christian — lost the empirical supports of his faith and experienced the sensation of having lost his faith altogether. This weakening of religious experience together with the impact of an overwhelmingly pagan environment led to the development of a new Hispanic and mestizo urban society which is now referred to as “Latin American Christianity.”

The Spaniards, Creoles, and mestizos were the foundation of the Latin American culture. They were the most astute of the elites who have in fact been the major protagonists in the history of Latin America. Until the eighteenth century they remained for the most part Christians, and at times they even moved to the second level of Christian understanding. The ideological monopoly that the Latin American metropolis enjoyed in the colonies, especially through the power and influence of the Tribunal of the Inquisition, impeded the efforts of Protestants to penetrate the society and also retarded the influence of the French and English philosophies of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. (In the University of Córdoba, nevertheless, Descartes’ philosophy was being taught as early as the eighteenth century.)

The Spanish and Creole citizens, each in his own way and in his own time, were truly Christians. Consider, for example, the illustrious testimony of Francisco de Miranda, the precursor of the American emancipation, written in 1805:

To the University of Caracas send in my name the Greek classics from my library as an indication of gratitude for the sound principles of literature and Christian morals with which I was nourished during my youth and which became the basis for my ability to overcome the great dangers and difficulties of these present times.¹⁴

2. The great mass of Indians proceeded to incorporate features of the Hispanic-Creole urban culture and thus developed their own forms of Christianity. But they continued their semiprimitive lives remaining at a level of catechumenates more or less aware of their faith and to a greater or lesser degree utilizing the instruments of sacramental Christian structures along with those essentially pagan. This phenomenon we have chosen to designate as the *eclectic accumulation* at the level of the “mediations.”

We repeat, therefore, the question: Can we rightly speak of the Indian religion as being superficial, mixed, juxtapositioned, or substantially Christian simply on the basis of the outward appearance? It would seem that the matter is much more complex, and that univocal and global judgments are really impossible. In summary: (1) On a deeper, more comprehensive, and existential level the Indian masses have adopted Christianity neither superficially nor otherwise. Rather, they have begun to adopt Christianity radically, substantially, and authentically. But this adoption is neither essentially a juxtapositioning nor a mixing of religions. It is rather a *chiaoscuro* faith in which no one is able to determine where Christianity begins and where paganism ends. (2) Lamentably, the great masses do not participate in the Catholic liturgy because of the lack of priests and missionaries or because of the great distances and other impediments. What expressions do exist, therefore, are surrogate paraliturgies: professions, cults to the saints, and local shrines built on the ruins of ancient religious rites and ceremonies, as occurred also in the Greco-Roman and Canaanite worlds. Thus the elements, expressions, and symbols —that is, the “vehicles” and “mediations” of the ancient religions —are still very much present. But can these supplementary forms be rightly called *mixed* religions? This does not appear to be the case. What all this may be called is the creation or mixture at the popular level of that which was inevitable in view of

the vacuum left by the *tabula rasa* missionary method, and these substitutionary creations will disappear with the finalization of the period of rudimentary Christian instruction, that is, at the conclusion of the catechumenal stage. The so-called folk Catholicism is not, therefore, a mixed religion. Rather, it is a temporary, supplementary manifestation by a people who long for the completion of evangelization. This popular form of faith can hardly be said to be unvarnished paganism. No, it more rightly can be considered the manifestation of an awareness of conscience not yet entirely Christian.