

CHAPTER V

IMPORTANT STAGES IN THE HISTORY OF
THE CHURCH DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The basis for the division that we have adopted is simple, and at the same time it permits an understanding of the progress as well as the difficulties encountered in the mission and organization of the Church. We are able to discern five stages which parallel the conquest and the history of Spain in general.

I. THE FIRST STAGE (1492-1519)

No priest accompanied Columbus on his first voyage in 1492. Friar Bernard Boyl, confidant of the Catholic kings, was the first priest to arrive in America. Boyl was empowered with enormous authority by the papal bull *Piis fidelium* of June 25, 1493. Unfortunately, his authority—as was to recur frequently—clashed with that of Columbus who represented the Crown, and Boyl was obliged to return to Spain in 1494. Two other friars whom he had left in the Americas returned to Spain in 1499. Consequently, the evangelization of the island of Santo Domingo did not really begin until 1500 with the coming of a Franciscan mission, which was augmented in 1502 by the arrival of an additional seventeen religious. In 1505 the Franciscans created the Mission of the West Indies.

On November 15, 1504, Pope Julian II, without consulting the Spanish king, established the dioceses of Bayunense, Maguence, and Ayuguance. Ferdinand protested this action on the basis that the Pope had violated the terms of the *Patronato*. And much to the Pope's chagrin, the dioceses were never effective. Julian was therefore obliged to accede to the claims of the Spanish king. In 1511, then, the first three Latin American Episcopal Sees were established: Santo Domingo (which became an archbishopric in 1546), Concepción de la Vega (abolished in 1528), and Puerto Rico. The See of Santa María of old Darién (Panama) was created in 1513, Cuba in 1517, and Florida in 1520.

In 1510 three religious from Salamanca arrived on the island of Hispaniola under the guidance of Pedro de Córdoba, OP. One of them, Father Antonio de Montesinos, was designated as the preacher for the Sundays of Advent in 1511. Montesinos seized on the occasion to excoriate the colonists for their exploitation and oppression of the Indians. "*Vox clamantis in deserto*" began the preacher, using as his text John 1:23. "You are all living in mortal sin, and you will live and die in sin because of the cruelty and tyranny with which you abuse these innocent people." The Dominicans subsequently were able to talk with King Ferdinand, and as a result the Spanish Crown promulgated the laws of Burgo in 1512 in favor of the Indians.

Bartolomé de Las Casas, priest and *encomendero*, arrived in Santo Domingo in April

1514. Reading the biblical text from Sirach 34:22, “A man murders his neighbor if he robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee's wages,” Las Casas recognized the injustices that he himself was inflicting upon the Indians and consequently turned those in his charge over to Governor Velázquez on August 15, 1514. Almost a year later Las Casas preached his famous sermon in the Church of Sancti Spiritus, then journeyed to Baracoa, and left Cuba for Spain in July 1515, thereby setting his course in a direction from which he would not deviate until his death in 1566.

Las Casas had become convinced that it was useless to attempt to defend the Indians by trying to work from Santo Domingo. Thus, accompanied by other Dominicans, he departed for Sevilla in order to present the matter before King Ferdinand himself. Las Casas and his party arrived in the royal city on October 6, 1515, but to his dismay he found the king dying and the Court indifferent to the cause that Las Casas had come to represent. He soon departed for Flanders, hoping to gain a hearing from Prince Charles. Passing through Madrid, Las Casas felt himself fortunate to be able to present his case before Adrian, the future Pope, and Cisneros, the Archbishop of Toledo and future regent of Spain. The latter declared to Las Casas, “You have no need to proceed further because it is here that you will find the remedy for which you are searching.” It was, therefore, in Madrid that the *Plan for the Reformation of the Indies* was developed. Las Casas was named “priest procurator of the Indians” on September 17, 1516. Two months later, on November 11, Las Casas returned to America accompanied by some Hieronymite fathers. Little is known about the work of his companions with the exception that they were all failures. When Las Casas realized that their labor was in vain, he returned to Spain in 1517 and settled in Valladolid, where he began serious studies of the juridical questions regarding the Indies. Subsequently he had contact with the court of Charles V and there presented his *Petition in Defense of the Indian* before the Supreme Council of the Indies itself on December 11 of that same year. Step by step Las Casas developed a plan whereby he would be allowed to attempt a peaceful colonization of the Indies without the use of any arms and accompanied only by peasants. On December 12, 1519, Las Casas was granted the privilege of defending the Indian cause in the court of Barcelona, presided over by Charles V. Arguing against Father Bartolomé was Juan de Quevedo, OFM, Bishop of Panama. The king was greatly impressed by the spirit and reasoning of Las Casas and granted him the right to begin “villages of free Indians,” communities of Spanish and Indian peasants that were proposed as the initiation of a new civilization in America. The place selected for this ambitious undertaking was the north coast of Venezuela in the region of Cumaná. Las Casas sailed for the area along with several peasants on December 14, 1520. But the project was doomed from the beginning for several reasons: the questionable selection of colonists who accompanied Las Casas, his own concessions in the *capitulación*, the disaster which befell the Franciscan mission sent to Cumaná, the interests created by the *encomenderos* of Santo Domingo, and finally an attack by the Indians themselves on the settlement. The disaster was complete by January 1522, and Las Casas, together with a few remaining settlers, was obliged to withdraw.

In summary, during these first stages of the Christian mission in the Americas, efforts to evangelize the Indians were made on some of the smaller islands of the Caribbean and in various places on the mainland, but the Indians were subdued by force of arms. Subsequently the missionary and the *encomendero* arrived, the former attempting the enormous task of evangelization, and the latter proceeding in the agrarian exploitation of the indigenous peoples.

II. THE SECOND STAGE: CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN NEW SPAIN AND PERU (1519-1551)

Hernán Cortés began the conquest of Mexico from Cuba in 1519. Accompanying Cortés was the Mercedarian friar Bartolomé de Olmedo and the secular priest Juan Díaz, who together attempted to present the Christian message to the Indians. It was not until 1524, however, with the arrival of twelve Franciscan missionaries, that the systematic evangelization of Mexico began —the Indians having been subdued by force of arms.¹ These “Twelve Apostles of New Spain” were exceptional in their courage, determination, and ability, and they were later joined by twelve Dominicans who arrived in 1526. Almost seven years passed before seven Augustinian fathers arrived (May 22, 1533) as reinforcements. The Christian beginnings were at best modest, but each year after 1533 new missionaries arrived, and soon the Creoles themselves responded to the missionary calling. In 1559 the Franciscans had eighty houses and 380 religious; the Dominicans had forty houses and 210 religious; and the Augustinians boasted of forty houses with 212 religious.²

These early missionaries traveled by foot from the coasts and lowlands to the 2,200-meter altitude of present-day Mexico City. They crossed innumerable rivers — one missionary wrote of having forded twenty-five different rivers in a distance of only ten kilometers or six miles. They moved through dense jungles, parched deserts, and mountain areas covered with snow and ice. They survived innumerable fevers and insects by the millions, moving without the benefit of maps and oftentimes without guides. And as if these impediments were not sufficient to discourage them, they encountered innumerable peoples of different races, languages, and religions, all of which tested their determination to continue their work of evangelization. The Aztec Empire, as great as it was, had not been able to unify the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In fact, it was the missionaries who extended the area in which *Nahuatl*, the language of Mexico, was used, so they could avoid having to preach in Spanish. From gestures and mimicry the missionaries progressed to utilizing interpreters. But seeing the imprecision of the translations, the missionaries began a serious study of the languages and thus produced dictionaries, grammars, catechisms, confessionals, and sermons in *Nahuatl*, *Tarasca*, and other indigenous languages. The Diocese of Carolense was created in 1519, which from 1526 was known as *Tlaxcala*. There followed the Diocese of Mexico in 1530 (made an archbishopric in 1546), Comayagua (1531), Nicaragua (1531), Coro, Venezuela (1531), Santa Marta and Cartagena (1534), Guatemala and Antequera (1535), Michoacán (1536), Chiapas (1539), Guadalajara (1548), Vera Paz and Yucatán (1561), and Durango (1620). Thus in a single century the hierarchy of Mexico was established and progressively assumed responsibility for the Church as well as assuring the continuation of the missionary efforts. During this same period the Church was blessed with several notable bishops: Zumárraga in Mexico, Quiroga in Michoacán, Fuenleal in Santo Domingo, and Maraver in Guadalajara.

Francisco Pizarro arrived in Peru, according to the *Capitulación de Toledo* (July 26, 1529), with a group of Dominicans among whom was Friar Vicente de Valverde, Licenciante in Theology from the University of Salamanca. By 1531 the missionaries had begun to penetrate the Inca Empire, and on November 15, 1533, a Christian cross was raised in the plaza of Cuzco. Four years later, January 8, 1537, Pope Paul III created the Diocese of Cuzco and named Valverde as the first bishop. He arrived at his new See along with twenty other Dominicans on September 5, 1538. The Diocese of Lima was created in 1541, as well as Quito (1546), Asunción (1547), Charcas (1552), Santiago, Chile (1561), Bogotá (1562, an archbishopric in 1564), Concepción,

Chile (1564), Córdoba del Tucumán (1570), Arequipa and Trujillo (1577), then La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Guamanga, and finally Buenos Aires in 1620. All these dioceses were dependent upon Lima, which became an archdiocese in 1546. Two Colombian dioceses —Santa Marta-Cartagena and Popayán (1546) —were subject to Bogotá beginning in 1564.

The Dominicans were the first to initiate missionary work in Peru after Paul III declared in 1539 that the Peruvian province was the responsibility of the Preaching Order. By 1544 the Dominicans numbered more than fifty religious. Shortly thereafter a group of Franciscans began missionary work in the province, as did the Augustinians. The diffusion of these missionary priests throughout this region of South America was remarkable: from Quito to the River Plate. The Mercedarians, for example, had at least sixteen urban monasteries and nineteen Indian parishes in the province of Cuzco as early as the sixteenth century.

The missionary methods utilized by these representatives of the Church were similar to those employed in Mexico, and Francisco Solano was a typical missionary evangelist. He would walk from village to village, baptizing the Indians, preaching first through interpreters and later in the Indian dialect, following a pattern of mass Christianization. Every effort was made to eradicate idolatry and ancient cults, at least those most evident to the Christian missionaries. Friar Bertrán who labored faithfully in Colombia is another paradigmatic example of this era.

The general approach was that of assuming the Indian mind to be a *tabula rasa* — even though the preaching was done as often as possible in the indigenous languages. The reason is easily understandable: the Inca Empire did not provide a structure sufficiently advanced and organized on which the missionaries could build. Pizarro, in becoming the head of the Peruvian Empire, not only disrupted the political unity that existed under the Incas, but also undermined the spiritual unity that prevailed. As a result, the missionaries encountered diverse peoples who were separated from each other, introverted, and without benefit of a common language.

On the Day of the Epiphany, January 6, 1536, a school for the children of Indian noblemen, Tlatelolco, was begun in the suburbs of Mexico City. Bishop Zumárraga applauded its creation and strongly supported it during its early years. One would have thought that from this attempt indigenous missionaries would have come forth to work among their own people. Unfortunately, the Spanish lack of understanding in this regard made such a venture impossible.

Herein lies the second plateau of Christian mission work in the Spanish colonies. At times it involved the use of arms, that is, forced conversion. But primarily it was by missionaries who pacified the Indians through preaching, persuasion, and direct involvement. Nonetheless, one observes the growing influence of the Spanish civilization, and the newly baptized Indians became the integral components of the *encomiendas*. Many of them simply submitted to the system. Others, however, fled to the mountains, to the jungles, to the desert regions, or to the *sertão* —the Brazilian backlands —adopting anew their ancient paganism. The missionaries, nevertheless, followed them and in so doing inaugurated a new stage of missionary work which would serve as an example for future centuries.

One of the most beautiful but obscured stages in the history of Latin American missions was the struggle in behalf of the Indians led by a group of Spanish bishops during the period of 1544 to 1568.³ Americans should be as familiar with Latin American “Fathers of the Church” such as Las Casas, Juan del Valle, and Antonio de

Valdivieso who was Bishop of Nicaragua from 1544 to 1550, as they are with the Byzantine or Latin Church Fathers such as Basil, Gregory, or Augustine.

Bartolomé de Las Casas, for example, was invited by Bishop Marroquín of Guatemala (1533-1563) to attempt the evangelization of the feared Indians in that area. Las Casas had written in his *De único modo*, “The only way to win people to the true Faith” is not by force of arms but by the power of the gospel. Las Casas was remarkably successful in evangelizing these feared aborigines whose territory became known as “Vera Paz,” that is, the land of true peace. In 1540 he returned to Spain where Vitoria had read Las Casas’ outstanding work, *De indis recenter inventis relectio prior* (1538), in the University of Salamanca. The King, doubtless influenced by a wave of interest in Spain in the indigenous peoples of America, promulgated in 1542 the famous *New Laws*. Meanwhile, Pope Paul III had proclaimed in his encyclical *Sublimis Deus* on June 9, 1537, that “in virtue of our apostolic authority we declare... that the said Indians and other peoples should be converted to the religion of Jesus by evangelization and by the example of edifying customs.” Law 35 of Charles V’s *New Laws* ordered that Indians could not be maintained within the *encomienda* in perpetuity, nor could the rights of *encomienda* be inherited, and that within the course of a generation all the indigenous peoples should be set free. The Crown attempted to undergird the new law by naming bishops who supported the spirit of the new legislation. They were Bartolomé de Las Casas as Bishop of Chiapas (1544-1547), Antonio de Valdivieso of Nicaragua (1544-1550), Cristóbal de Pedraza for Honduras (1545-1583), Pablo de Torres for Panama (1547-1554), Juan del Valle for Popayán (1548-1560), Fernando de Uranga for Cuba (1552-1556), Tomás Casillas for Chiapas (1552-1597), Bernardo de Alburquerque for Oaxaca (1559-1579), Pedro de Angulo for Vera Paz (1560-1562), Pedro de Agreda for Coro (1560-1580), Juan de Simancas for Cartagena (1560-1570), Domingo de Santo Tomás for La Plata (1563-1570), Pedro de la Peña for Quito (1566-1583), and Agustín de la Coruña for Popayán (1565-1590).

A study of the lives of these heroic bishops reveals that they risked everything, committing themselves without reservation, suffering expulsion from their dioceses, imprisonment, deportation, and even death in behalf of the Indians who were being violently oppressed and exploited by the Spanish colonists. The lives of these pastors should serve as an example for bishops of our era where the majority of violence is inflicted—as in the time of the conquistadores—by “men of arms.” Because of this situation Las Casas advocated “evangelism without arms,” which signifies today liberation not as a struggle against subversion but in favor of the humanization of those unjustly treated: the Indian, the mestizo, the peasant, the laborer, the simple people, the poor, and the uneducated.

Ironically, the Mexican bishops who have been outstanding in their defense of the Indians, such as Zumárraga, Juan de Zárate of Oaxaca, the *Tata* Vasco de Quiroga of Michocán, and even Marroquín of Guatemala became more conciliatory, and because of their attitudes the *New Laws* were never enforced in Mexico. They were “pre-Lascasian” bishops, if I might use this expression. Las Casas and other bishops like him struggled for the integral freedom of the Indian not only in fact but also on the principle of their natural rights. A generation earlier bishops such as Loaisa in Lima defended the cause of the Indians in certain cases, but their defense did not touch the basic issue of the Indians’ rights. The ideologues who promoted liberation for the Indian were primarily theologians from the Dominican convent of Santiesteban in Salamanca, for only three of the above-named bishops were of other orders. It was

the Dominicans -from Montesinos and Pedro de Córdoba on the island of Hispaniola in 1511 until Bartolomé de Las Casas—who began the struggle for justice and liberation in Latin America.

In Central America the position of the bishops continued to be paradigmatic. The violence of the Conquest—no different in the region of Nueva Granada, present-day Colombia—was immense.⁴ Las Casas was named bishop of Chiapas in 1543 by the papal bull of December 10.⁵ He departed from Sevilla for his new See on July 4, 1544, and arrived at his new post during Lent of 1545. He was coolly received in the royal city of Chiapas, and he waited until the Sunday of Holy Week to preach in favor of the Indians. He followed this by canceling the power of the priests and religious to hear confessions and offer pardon, reserving for himself the power to forgive certain sins, especially that of maintaining Indians in *encomienda*—which for Las Casas was nothing more than enslavement. The three secular priests and the Fathers of Mercy opposed their bishop. Only the Dominicans supported Las Casas. The *encomenderos*, along with the Spanish colonists, retaliated by withholding financial support from the convent, and Las Casas and his supporters were forced to abandon the city and live among the Indians. Thus isolated, Las Casas journeyed to Guatemala in 1545 where he met with Bishops Marroquín and Valdivieso in the well-known Commission of Thanksgiving to God. Together these representatives of the Central American episcopacy attempted to draw up ways and means whereby the Indians could be defended against further exploitation. The presence of Las Casas in Guatemala so infuriated the Spanish population that they attempted to seize the prelate before he was able to leave the country. He returned to Chiapas but remained there for only two or three months before being expelled by the Spanish members of his congregation. In fact, Las Casas was able to remain in his bishopric for a total of only six months. Defeated by the *encomenderos*, Las Casas departed for Spain never again to return to his diocese, from which he resigned in 1550. He wrote in his testament as a sign of his unyielding fidelity to the struggle for liberation:

[It was] by the goodness and mercy of God that I was called into His ministry which I did not merit, that I might attempt to protect those multitudes of peoples who are called Indians ... from the unimaginable and unthinkable wrongs, evils, and injustices which we Spaniards inflicted upon them against all reason and justice.⁶

Even more important than Bartolomé de Las Casas was the Bishop of Nicaragua, Antonio de Valdivieso, who ultimately suffered martyrdom for his defense of the Indian. From the moment he arrived in Central America in 1544 he began correspondence describing the tragic situation suffered by the Indians.⁷ They were brutally abused and killed, he wrote, by Contreras, the governor, his brother, and the governor's wife and sons, who according to Valdivieso had under their control more than a third of the principal villages in Nicaragua. The governor's wife alone, declared the bishop, had charge of Nicoya, a village of Indians in which there were ten or eleven *repartimientos*.⁸ Valdivieso gave himself unstintingly to the Indians, but he eventually lost all hope of any improvement in their situation given the violent opposition of the governor.⁹

Valdivieso did not limit his efforts to Nicaragua, however. In addition, he sought to inform the King of the injustices which were being committed and of the danger which he felt for his own life. The president of the court (*Audiencia*) reported that the Nicaraguan bishop “feared each day that he would be killed.”¹⁰ Valdivieso wrote that he suspected that the letters which he was sending to the court were being intercepted and destroyed, and that he feared that there would soon be persecution against him

as well as against the Indians. "I write these letters hurriedly in order that Your Majesty might be aware ...of the great need that exists in these parts for justice."¹¹ And although Valdivieso labored continually for the welfare of the Indians, he reported that each day they were more oppressed.¹² He also noted that the situation was growing more critical each day as the climate of opinion turned steadily against him, and that he recognized the possibility that his congregation would force him to leave (as had already occurred in the case of Las Casas in Chiapas).¹³ Valdivieso indicated that he had sought to know personally all of his parishioners,¹⁴ and he continued to preach in favor of the liberation of the Indians and strongly reproached the Spanish community, including the conquistadores and governors, for the horrible treatment that they were inflicting upon the indigenous peoples. The latter in turn were so infuriated by the words and actions of their bishop that they determined to eliminate him by one means or another. A number of soldiers who had been part of Pizarro's conquest of the Inca Empire had come to Nicaragua from Peru. Among them was one Juan Bermejo, a "man of evil intent." He was soon recognized as one of the henchmen of the Contreras brothers and was often seen with them. One evening Bermejo, along with several others, went to the bishop's house, and, finding him alone except for a single colleague, they proceeded to stab him to death.¹⁵ Thus died Antonio de Valdivieso on February 26, 1550, in León, Nicaragua, martyred because of his love for and struggle in behalf of the liberation of the Indians in Spanish America.

Another hero in the cause for the indigenous peoples of Central America was Cristóbal de Pedraza, Bishop of Honduras. In him and his ministry one sees the enormous difference between European and American bishops. Those of Castilla, for example, could travel from Medina del Campo to Valladolid sleeping each night in a populated area in a bed with four mattresses beneath silk and satin. But a bishop of Central America who cared for his flock traveled by foot from mountain to mountain, sierra to sierra, through narrow ravines and gorges, fording rivers and streams, and struggling through swamp lands infested with millions of insects.

Honduras was a bishopric composed of seven Christian towns and four villages of twenty-five to thirty families each plus the city of Trujillo in which there were some fifty families. It required a full year to visit the various areas of population given the difficulties of travel.¹⁶ But the major problem for Pedraza was establishing contact and communicating with the Indians, for as he approached their villages they would flee. He soon learned that the reason for their fear was that the *encomenderos* had warned them that they would "be strangled, decapitated, and thrown to the dogs" if they spoke a word to the bishop of the treatment they were receiving from the Spanish. Pedraza, nonetheless, interceded for the Indians who had been enslaved, humiliated, and tormented. He wrote: "Is it not a disgraceful injustice that these indigenous peoples should be forced against their will to serve the Spaniards who in turn kick them, beat them, tie them to trees and posts as if they were slaves, and even kill them" when by terms of the law the colonists are responsible to protect them? Pedraza concluded his letter declaring, "I am the Father of the Indians."¹⁷ The worst aspect of this scandal was that the Spaniards were considered by the Indians to be Christians, and not a few of the indigenous men as well as the women committed suicide rather than submit themselves to the system of brutality and injustice.¹⁸ It is to Pedraza's credit that he labored for and spoke out against this violence on which Latin America was built.

The conquest of Nueva Granada (Colombia and Venezuela) involved violence of

unequaled proportions in that the Indians suffered indignities and physical abuse from the *encomenderos*, and subsequently it was in Colombia that the peasant endured the pain and injustices of a social and economic system controlled by the Conservative and Liberal oligarchy. Against the violence of the *encomenderos* arose one of the great bishops of the Latin American Church, Juan del Valle. Professor of Arts in the University of Salamanca and a colleague of Vitoria, Valle abandoned his post of security and prestige to become involved in the vibrant history of Latin America. As Bishop of Popayán, an area stained with the blood of the Indians by a former lieutenant under Pizarro, Captain Sebastián Belalcázar, Valle had his first contact with his congregation in Cali in 1548, and from Cali he wrote his first pastoral letter on November 20. He soon became painfully aware of the terrible conditions in which the Indians were forced to live, and he began a program for their defense, traveling from village to village carrying with him a lance for his own defense, which on certain occasions he was known to use against the colonists. Three years later he wrote that the Indians were being treated even more terribly than when he had arrived in Colombia, especially in the city of Cali where he reported that the Indians were more abused than in any other region of the Indies. As a result, he said, "I am, in the opinion of the conquistadores, the worst bishop of the Indies."¹⁹ Valle struggled valiantly and continually in defense of the Indians, risking his own life in the process.²⁰ He was responsible for calling, in 1555 and in 1558, the only diocesan synods in which the rights of the Indians to their own lands and their freedom were defended doctrinally. It should be noted in this regard that the Supreme Council of the Indies thereafter prohibited the celebration of this type of synod.²¹ In 1559, after eleven years of continual and debilitating labor during which time he was constantly harassed by the colonists, Juan del Valle left Cali and Popayán with a mule loaded with papers and dossiers with which he hoped to prove to the King himself the crimes being perpetrated against the Indians in Southern Colombia. Valle reached Santa Fe de Bogotá in 1560 and attempted to present his case before the court (*Audiencia*) who refused to hear his accusations against the *encomenderos*. In August of the following year (1561) he was in Spain for the purpose of laying his case before the Supreme Council of the Indies. To his dismay the Council did not receive Valle's protests warmly. Consequently he decided to present the matter before the Council of Trent, and with his mule burdened with the documentary evidence he crossed the border into France where he died without ever reaching his destination. Neither the Council of Trent nor that of Vatican I heard Valle's cry of injustice, and if they had, it would have been incomprehensible to them. His words would have to wait four hundred years before his protest would again be heard. Valle died in 1561—a valiant Segovian and staunch defender of the American Indian and of Christian doctrine—and was buried far from his chosen country and people.²²

Valle's successor, Agustín de la Coruña (1565-1590), took up the struggle immediately on behalf of the indigenous people because "for thirty-three years the Spaniards had been drinking the blood of the Indians."²³ Coruña was unable to govern his bishopric peacefully, and because of difficulties he was suspended from the post by the King during the years from 1570 to 1575. But the bishop did not accept his fate quietly. "Have I been banished because I have served and preached so as to uphold your just laws?" Coruña wrote. "Am I to return to my bishopric? I fear that I have been condemned because the colonists are so inured to the cruelties that they are inflicting upon the Indians that they are unaware of their sin, and they claim that in other areas there are bishops, courts, governors, preachers, and religious orders who

see what I see but remain silent, while I am the *only one who protests*.”²⁴ Thus did Coruña follow in the steps of his predecessor who declared, “If this situation is not remedied, I will continue to cry out even though they stone me.”²⁵ Coruña was allowed to return to Popayán in 1575, and he continued his campaign against the cruelty of the colonists. Seven years later, however, in 1582, while he was celebrating the Eucharist, a group of conquistadores on horseback entered the cathedral, took the bishop prisoner, and transported him to Quito where he was forced to remain until 1587. In the Provincial Council of Lima in 1583, Coruña was an example of simplicity, poverty, and holiness. He died three years later while visiting some Indian villages in Timaná. When his body was returned to Popayán, it was said to have been in a state of “incorruption.”²⁶ Coruña is another example of those who struggled against the violence of the ancient oligarchy who still oppress, intimidate, and kill the poor and defenseless whose ultimate relief will be postponed, it appears, until the Parousia.

In Panama Bishop Pablo de Torres also attempted to enforce the New Laws, but he soon clashed with the *encomenderos* by defending the Indian to the ultimate degree of his authority, even to excommunicating the offenders when it was necessary. But the local governor as well as the Supreme Council of the Indies nullified Torres’ actions. The saddest aspect of the situation in Panama was that the Archbishop himself, Loaysa, condemned Torres, a judgment confirmed by the Supreme Council. Pablo de Torres left his bishopric in 1554 not only saddened by his inability to defend the Indian, but also because after his return to Spain he was accused of treason and never permitted to return to Panama.

These few examples should be sufficient to provide a measure of understanding regarding the present era. The bishops herein cited were heroically committed not only to the gospel but also against the violence perpetrated by the civilized oppressors upon the defenseless natives of the Americas.

III. THE THIRD STAGE: THE STRENGTHENING AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH (1551-1620)

The events herein discussed begin with the first Provincial Council of Lima in 1551 and lead to the creation in 1620 of the Diocese of Buenos Aires in the South and of Durango in the North. During this time the Latin American Church proceeded to develop a functioning organizational structure. There were no councils on dogma such as Trent, but there were pastoral and missionary convocations. From the council convened by Jerónimo de Loaysa in 1551 to the Diocesan Synod of Comayagua in 1631, the Latin American Church manifested a profound desire to organize itself as a new Church, “the new Christendom of the Indies,” as Toribio de Mogrovejo expressed it. To achieve this end the bishops met in various places on the continent and after prolonged discussions promulgated the ecclesiastical laws by which the Church was governed until the nineteenth century. Yet one must wait until the Latin American Council of 1899 in order to see the norms adopted in the sixteenth century effectively applied to the Latin American situation.

Only fourteen days after their arrival in Mexico in 1524, the first twelve Franciscan missionaries met together to plan their strategy and work for the evangelization of Mexico.²⁷ During that same year, 1524—1525, the First Apostolic Commission met under the direction of the Franciscan friar, Martín de Valencia. Nineteen religious, five seculars, and several lawyers met for the purpose of discussing openly the problems related to the dispensing of the sacraments, especially Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, Marriage, and Extreme Unction.²⁸ At first these were denied the indigenous

peoples but later were permitted at the discretion of the confessors.²⁹ It was not until 1532³⁰ and again in 1536³¹ that a Church commission met with a bishop present.

After his return from Spain, Juan de Zumárraga consecrated the bishops of Guatemala, Michoacán, and Oaxaca, and met with two of these, Juan López de Zárate of Oaxaca and Francisco de Marroquín of Guatemala on November 30, 1537. The purpose of the meeting was to petition the King for permission to participate in the Council of Trent.³²

On April 27, 1559, Zumárraga met in Mexico City with Juan de Zárate, Bishop of Antequera, and Vasco de Quiroga, Bishop of Michoacán, along with the provincials or representatives of various religious orders. Together they reached the conclusions that have come to be known as the *Chapters of the Ecclesiastical Commission of 1539*.³³

The last public act of this first Bishop of Mexico was the convening of the Commission of 1546 in which Zumárraga, Marroquín of Guatemala, Alburquerque of Oaxaca, Quiroga of Michoacán, and Las Casas of Chiapas met together and adopted five points which bear the unmistakable influence of Las Casas.³⁴

The First Provincial Council of Mexico was convened on June 29, 1555, by Alonso de Montúfar, OP, Archbishop of Mexico.³⁵ Present were the bishops of Tlaxcala, Michoacán, Chiapas, and Oaxaca. (During the meeting of the council, Bishop Juan de Zárate died.) A reading of the Constitutions will reveal the crucial Mexican issues with which the prelates dealt.³⁶ They produced ninety-three chapters, each of which was laden with teachings. Montúfar convened the Second Provincial Council on November 8, 1565, but it was of lesser significance than the first.³⁷

Of all the councils which took place in Mexico, by far the most important was that convened by the third Archbishop of Mexico, Pedro Moya de Contreras. This "Mexican Trent" met from January 20 until October 16, 1585. All the bishops were present with the exception of the prelate of Comayagua who was in Spain. The council was approved by Pope Sixtus V on October 27, 1589, and by the King of Spain on September 18, 1591. Though there was formidable opposition to the conclusions reached by the council, they were finally published in 1622. The basic problem that the bishops encountered was related to their plea for the reduction of the privileges of the religious.³⁸

In South America, in the Inca territory, the first Provincial Council of the new kingdom was convened by Archbishop Jerónimo de Loaysa in the city of the kings, Cuzco, in the year 1551. The texts of this council—as was the case of Councils I and II of Mexico—were originally written in Spanish and not in Latin.³⁹ The constitutions of the council were of two types: the first forty were entitled *the Constitutions of the Natives* (Indians), and they proposed the organization of a "new Church of the Indies" in the ancient Inca Empire. The parishes were to occupy the same territory or region of the ancient tribes (*ayllu*) with their regional capitals. A catechumenate, that is, a period for instruction in doctrine and discipline for a convert to Christianity, was required before baptism for all adults, and instruction had to be given in the indigenous language (*Const.* 4, p. 9).⁴⁰ The second part of the constitutions dealt specifically with matters related to the Spanish colonists, and it contained eighty separate constitutions dealing with the steps for organizing Hispanic-Creole Christianity in the cities. The division of colonial Peruvian society into two communities is clearly evident: the white Hispanic urban dwellers and the rural Indian population living in mission territories.

Archbishop Contreras convened the Second Provincial Council, which met in 1567 and 1568.⁴¹ The pronouncements were, however, inverted. The first 132 chapters dealt with Christianity for the Spaniards in which by a thousand details everything related to the life in the colonies, the culture, public morals, and so forth was discussed.

The second part of the council's declarations consisted of 122 constitutions —*Pro indorum et eorum sacerdotum constitutionibus*—and reaffirmed the power of the episcopacy over the privileges of the religious in regard to the Peruvian mission to the Indians. Priests working with the Indians were to be chosen with great care (*Const. 1*);⁴² they would be responsible for the organization of the catechism and the parishes (*Const. 75 - 97*); and they were to be especially diligent in rooting out idolatry and superstition (*Const. 98ff*).

The most important of the American provincial councils was without doubt the one convened by Archbishop Toribio of Lima. This council met during 1582 and 1583 and was the Third Council of Lima.⁴³ As the Council of Mexico had proposed in 1585, the Lima Council declared: *In nomine Sanctae et individuae Trinitatis ...ad fidei exaltationem et novae Indorum Ecclesiae utilitatem, clerique ac populi christiani ecclesiasticae disciplinae congruentem reformationem rite ac legitime congregata...*⁴⁴ The first issue with which the council dealt was that of the catechism (*proprium Cathecismum huic Universae Provinciae edere*, Act II, cap. III, p. 266) and was written both in Quechua and Aymara, the ancient languages of the Inca Empire (*quam in cathecisme in linguam Cuzquensem, vel in aymaraycam aliam traductionem*, *ibid.*). The love which Toribio manifested for the poor, the Indians, the Negroes, and children is especially evident in the declarations of the council (*maxime rudiores Indi, Aethiopes, pueri ...*, *ibid.*, cap. IV, p.267).

Also clearly evident is the importance which the Council gave to religious instruction: *ut intelingat, Hispanicis hispanice, Indus alioquim quantumvis bene dica ... multoque melius sit, suo idomate pronunciarere...* (*ibid.*, VI, p. 268). Matters related to communion were left to the judgment of the parish priest.⁴⁵ The Sacrament of Orders was to be dispensed with discretion in view of the fact that it was better to have few worthy priests than many unworthy ones.⁴⁶ The bishops reaffirmed their title as “protectors of the Indians.”⁴⁷

Archbishop Toribio dispatched José de Acosta, editor of the Conciliar texts and of the Catechism, to Rome for the purpose of obtaining papal approval of the acts of the council. They were approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1588, and were published on September 18, 1591. Toribio convened two other provincial councils⁴⁸ in Lima of lesser importance, and multiple diocesan councils.⁴⁹ The complete list of the provincial councils convened during the colonial period are as follows:

Provincial Councils of Christendom in the Indies

Year	See	No.	Name of the Metropoli
1551 - 1552	Lima	I	Jerónimo de Loaysa
1555	México	I	Alonso de Montúfar
1565	México	II	Alonso de Montúfar
1567 - 1568	Lima	II	Jerónimo de Loaysa
1582 - 1583	Lima	III	Toribio de Mogrovejo
1585	México	III	Pedro Moya de Contreras
1591	Lima	IV	Toribio de Mogrovejo
1601	Lima	V	Toribio de Mogrovejo
1622	Santo Domingo	I	Pedro de Oviedo
1625	Santa Fe	I	Hernando Arias de Ugarte
1629	La Plata	I	Hernando Arias de Ugarte
1771	México	IV	Francisco de Lorenzana
1772	Lima	VI	Diego de Parada
1774	La Plata	II	Pedro Argandoña
1774	Santa Fe	II	Agustín Camacho y Rojas

Some of the diocesan synods of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were Popayán I (1555) and II (1558), convened by Juan del Valle; Santa Fe de Bogotá I (1556), convened by Juan de los Barrios, Santa Fe II (1576), convened by Luís Zapata Cárdenas, and Santa Fe III, convened by Lobo Guerreño (1606); and Quito I (1570), convened by Pedro de Peña. Also one should note Quito II (1594), those of Lima beginning with Lima I (1582), Imperial I (1584), Yucután I (1585), Santiago de Chile I (1586), Tucumán I (1597), II (1606), III (1607), Coro I (1609), Santiago de Chile II (1612), Puerto Rico II (1624), Concepción II (1625), Trujillo I (1623), Santiago de Chile III (1626), Guamanga I (1629), and Comayagua I (1631).

IV. THE FOURTH STAGE: CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MISSIONARY CHURCH AND THE HISPANIC CIVILIZATION (1620-1700)

This period began when those who saw the urgency of evangelization faced up to the deficiencies and aspirations of the *Patronato*. The white community and the Hispanic civilization whose representatives were determined not to lose a single one of their privileges became serious impediments for the missionary endeavor. The *Patronato* system had financed the mission work even while reserving for itself the ties of Spain and America, and the mendicant religious orders had cornered and cultivated much of the arable land, which they continued to control well into the eighteenth century in California. But the defenders of the *Patronato* and the mendicant orders jealously held on to the rights and privileges they had acquired. Two new factors, nevertheless, became very decisive during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the bishops and secular priests along with the powerful Company of Jesus. In addition, the *Propaganda Fide*, which proceeded to limit greatly the power of the Spanish and Portuguese *Patronatos*, was created in 1622.

An interesting example can be seen in the case of the University of Lima. The Dominicans decided to begin a university in 1548, and on May 12, 1552, the institution was created by royal decree. According to the proposal of the Dominicans, it was to function within the walls of the monastery.⁵⁰ The University was considered by the Dominicans to be their personal fiefdom.⁵¹ Archbishop Jerónimo de Loaysa, however, petitioned the King to place the University under the authority of the cathedral in order that it be the common charge of the diocese as well as the other religious orders. The Pope responded on April 25, 1571, giving the Universities of Mexico, Santo Domingo, and Lima the same rights and privileges enjoyed by the Universities of Valladolid and Salamanca, but he placed the University of Lima under the exclusive authority of the Dominicans. The Jesuits meanwhile declined an invitation to accept the responsibility for the schools of Arts and Grammar and continued striving for equivalent recognition and rights for their own schools in the University and in the School of San Pablo.⁵²

The Jesuits were already famous for their educational religious, and benevolent endeavors, but they were never able to be integrated into the Church organization and the episcopacy as were the other religious orders. In a sense this was their greatest strength and possibly their greatest weakness. Because of their fourth vow and the universal vision of Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuits regarded themselves as under the exclusive authority of the Pope and therefore not under the kings.⁵³ The struggle between the representatives of the Company of Jesus and those of the *Patronato* was intense and without respite. The attitude and *modus operandi* of the Jesuits was regarded

by many bishops as fully justified, and for this reason they invited them to be a part of their dioceses.

The first Jesuits came to Brazil under the direction of Father Manuel de Nóbrega who arrived in Bahía on March 29, 1549, as members of the expedition of Tomé de Sousa. They soon began a school for Portuguese and Indian children. Nóbrega, along with several other Jesuits, moved toward the South, and in 1551 arrived in Espírito Santo and proceeded to Reritiba where the celebrated Father Anchieta died. In 1553 and 1554 they participated in the founding of São Paulo and later of Rio de Janeiro. They advanced as far south as Santa Catarina and the territories of the Guaraní. As the Jesuits had done in Mexico, those in Brazil organized the Indians into villages or *reducciones*. Following the example of the work of the Jesuit Father Roque González in Asunción, the *reducciones* began to flourish also in Brazil. The method used by the Jesuits was that of the *tabula rasa*, for in Brazil no vestige of civilization existed. Studying the *Tupí* language, Juan de Azpilcuera Navarro produced a dictionary, and Father Anchieta developed the first grammar. The Jesuits also provided the first Christian martyr in Brazil, Father Ignacio Azevedo.

Later they labored in Florida,⁵⁴ and on October 11, 1567, the San Francisco de Borja Jesuits were asked by Royal Letter to begin a school in Lima, Peru.⁵⁵ Five years later they began missionary work in Mexico.⁵⁶ From there they spread throughout the entire continent, maintaining exemplary missions in the colonies of Nueva Granada—present-day Colombia and Venezuela—and in Paraguay.

The consolidation of the ecclesiastical structures was strengthened by the creation of the Inquisition in Peru in 1570, in Mexico in 1571, and later in Cartagena. Unfortunately, however, the hierarchy chafed under the old order of things but was impotent to free itself from the yoke of the *Patronato*, even though on several occasions there were concerted attempts to nullify it. In these cases the voice of the Pope would have been far more influential in liberating the Church, but it must be remembered that the Papacy, by virtue of the terms of the *Patronato*, had no direct contact with the Latin American Church—a situation that prompted Toribio de Mogrovejo to complain that the bishops sent to America were “elected” but not “consecrated.” He was severely reprimanded by Philip II who warned the good Archbishop that further outbursts of this nature would not be tolerated. The Spanish King had disallowed any correspondence between the bishops and Rome, instructing that nothing should go to the Holy See except what “His Majesty allowed.”⁵⁷ Indirectly, of course, the complaints of the American hierarchy reached Rome, and by the same token instructions from the Pope found their way surreptitiously back to the American Church despite the rigorous effort to prevent such interchanges. The Viceroy in turn denounced the American episcopates, allowing that the churchmen were guilty of gross ingratitude in regard to their Sovereign to whom they were all greatly indebted.⁵⁸

The seventeenth century was characterized by prolific and widespread missionary work, and the methods represented an improvement over the previous century, doubtless the result of experience. This was the period of the famous Franciscan *reducción* in Mexico and of the Jesuits not only in Paraguay but also in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela, among the Chiquitos and Moxos in Bolivia, as well as with indigenous tribes in Ecuador and the Amazon valley. It would be a mistake to conclude that the missions slowed their pace of labor during this time. The curates organized the best possible defense of the Indians. The Franciscans, for example, had eighty convents in the region of Mexico, fifty-four in Michoacán, twenty-two in Guatemala, twenty-two in the Yucatán, and twelve in Nicaragua, while the Dominicans had forty-one in

Mexico and twenty-one in Oaxaca—all by the end of the seventeenth century. The Jesuits could boast of 345 priests in Mexico alone in 1603, and they were already known for their dedication and efficiency. Also for the first time the Church was able to maintain exclusive contact with many areas without the presence of Spanish soldiers or the interference of commerce and economic exploitation. During this fourth stage of the Christian mission the dreams of Las Casas were being realized in many parts, and this period was by far the most impressive.

V. THE FIFTH STAGE: THE BOURBON DECADENCE (1700-1808)

The last of the Hapsburgs had lived in the glories of the past, and the end of the seventeenth century marked the termination of the reign of Charles II (1665 - 1700). France triumphed over Spain and imposed a Bourbon, Philip V, who reigned from 1700 until 1746. The Spanish decadence spelled isolation for the American colonies, a spirit of separatism in every region, and a severe decline in new missionaries. The English took Jamaica in 1655, and Holland and England soon replaced Portugal and Spain as the major world powers. By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Spain and Portugal resigned their control over the seas. Latin America suffered tremendously because of this Hispanic decline, for it also brought about the deterioration of the Latin American colonies. The Church especially suffered the European missionary crisis,⁵⁹ and the history of the Church in Latin America should be studied with these eighteenth-century developments in mind and not from that of assumed mistakes in the evangelization of the area. Historians have now come to recognize that evangelization did occur where Christians have remained until the present day.⁶⁰

Christian missions continued during the eighteenth century. A good example can be seen in northern Mexico. In 1607, for example, the Jesuits moved into California, but it was the genial Friar Junípero Serra (1713 - 1784) who promoted missionary work like that of the days of the Primitive Church. The Franciscans replaced the Jesuits in 1768 and did outstanding work in their missions and *reducciones* from San Diego—which Friar Junípero founded in 1769—to San Francisco, founded in 1776. The Dominicans also maintained *reducciones* in many areas of present-day California.

The most decisive event of the eighteenth century in the history of the Latin American Church was the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. They were suppressed by the Bourbons in France on November 26, 1764, replaced by the Jansenists, and suffered the same fate under the Bourbons in Spain on March 31, 1767. More than 2,200 Jesuit priests were obliged to leave Latin America that same year, and they represented the most capable, educated, and committed of the missionary force. Their *reducciones* were immediately grabbed by the colonists, and the work with the Indians was left in shambles. For the most part it soon disappeared. It is impossible to calculate the effects of the Jesuit expulsion on the destiny of Latin America although it is obvious that the congregation of *Propaganda Fide* was never able to fill the gap left by their departure.⁶¹

The Latin American Church, still young and undeveloped, had to face a number of difficult changes: the politico-economic depression in Spain, the risks involved in attempting to sail from Spain to America through seas controlled by the English, the lack of support from the Papacy, the conversion of an economy previously based on gold and precious metals to an undeveloped agricultural system, and the increasing resistance by the Indians—especially those who populated the jungles of the Amazon basin and Peru as well as the Araucanos in southern Chile. Furthermore, the colonial

Spanish society had degenerated into a state of lethargy, which was as spiritual as it was social and emotional.

The work of the Church continued, however, and in some respects was strengthened in that Hispanic America at the time was composed of certain cities united by roads across immense deserts, pampas, and territories yet to be colonized. From the capitals of the viceroyalties toward the interior there moved a growing stream of colonists who settled and began new cities, towns, and villages which became parishes manned by diocesan clergy that was totally Creole, mestizo, and in some cases Indian.⁶²

Another aspect of colonial life should be mentioned, namely, the daily life of the Christian laity.⁶³ It has been stated at times, without reason, that the Christianity of the Indies was composed almost exclusively of clerics. The very opposite is the case, for the Christian layperson —conquistador, Spanish, and Creole —participated actively in the life of the Church. One should not overlook the many flourishing Christian organizations and activities in which Spaniards, Creoles, mestizos, Indians, and Negroes participated without regard to office, sex, age, or social classes in the cities, in the countryside, in the parishes, and in the *reducciones* through which these laypeople exercised an authentic apostolate.

An aspect of ecclesiastical history often unrecognized was the access the people had to the Holy Scriptures in the Spanish language and at times even in Amerindian dialects —if one takes into account the number of Bibles in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Spanish that were sold and distributed in the capitals and the Indian villages.⁶⁴ The Church Fathers were also widely read,⁶⁵ and there were numerous books written and distributed on spiritual growth for laypersons. Outstanding were the *Regla Christiana Breve* written by Bishop Zumárraga and published in Mexico in 1547; a translation from Latin by the Príncipe de Esquilache, the Viceroy of Peru; the works of Thomas á Kempis such as *Prayers and Meditations of Jesus Christ* (1660); and the profoundly mystical work of the Bishop of Puebla, Palafox y Mendoza, *Varón de deseos, en que se declaran las tres vías de la vida espiritual*, published in Mexico in 1641. All of these were read and valued by the Catholic laity.⁶⁶ To a limited degree, all the people —including the discoverers, conquerors, colonists, men, women, and even children —were responsible to live uprightly and thereby promote the work of evangelization. School teachers, government auditors, fathers of families, and every member of society was to manifest by word and deed a certain apostolic intention. Even the most crude and violent of the conquistadores faced their hour of death with a certain Christian piety. It is said that even Pizarro “though suffering intensely from the attack of his assassins, took time to pardon them, and made his profession of faith with sufficient lucidness to give it solemnity. Few scenes are more dramatic than the agony of the fallen conqueror, making a large cross with his right hand and placing it upon his mouth and kissing it until he died.”⁶⁷ In his will he recognizes that “because of the malice, ignorance, and persuasion of the Devil, I have often offended God my creator and redeemer. I have broken his commandments and failed to do the works of mercy using neither my common sense nor performing those deeds which our Holy Catholic Faith commands. I repent of all these sins which I now acknowledge and confess and for which I now beg forgiveness.”⁶⁸ There is no better document to demonstrate the culpability of the sin of the conquest about which Bartolomé de Las Casas so passionately preached and wrote.