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## Old World Precedents and New World Directions

### *Trans-Atlantic Pillar*

#### Old Ferment in the New Christendom

The stalemate with Islam ensconced in its redoubtable Mediterranean strongholds induced Europe to turn its attention from land routes to the sea-lanes that would henceforth bear much of the world's trade. Europe would thus overtake the Muslim world by colonizing distant societies in pursuit of global economic supremacy, and in that pursuit missions would not be allowed to stand in the way. Accordingly, an ebullient Europe declined the opportunity of open cultural exchange and reciprocal relationship. Instead, officials sent down Olympian orders requiring the compliance of subjects and subordinates without regard for local interests, and without the papacy to create moral obstacles.

Accordingly, in a letter to his viceroy in New Spain, Philip II, whose reign from 1556 to 1592 coincided with the era of Spain's greatest power and influence, recalled that by virtue of papal bulls granted to him and to the Catholic sovereigns who were his ancestors, the right of establishing and directing Christianity in the New World belonged to him. He declared:

We desire and order that no cathedral church, parish church, monastery, hospital, votive church, or any other pious or religious establishment be erected, founded, or constructed, without our express consent for it, or that of the person who

shall exercise our authority; and further, that no archbishopric, dignidad, canonry, racion, media-racion, rectorial or simple benefice, or any other ecclesiastical or religious benefice or office, be instituted, or appointment to it be made, without our consent or presentation, or that of the person who shall exercise our authority, and such presentation or consent shall be in writing, in the ordinary manner

Philip II's interpretation of the papal bulls had the popes implausibly abdicating to him in ecclesiastical affairs, and so he buttressed the power of the crown over the church with administrative sanctions to secure Christendom abroad. Yet even so, was Christendom abroad viable or defensible?

It did not take long for cracks to appear in the contrived structure presented as Christendom. In Brazil a system of economic exploitation was created in the form of plantations, called *fazendas*, on which lived some 90 percent of the colonists. The owners of these plantations possessed far more power and authority than the bishops, a situation rather inauspicious for the church, not to mention for the Indian laborers. Accordingly, missionary morale took a toll, prompting the archbishop of Mexico to write to Seville in 1556 bemoaning the state of the church. "There is great rivalry among the Orders," he noted.

Each defends its territory as if the villages were its own property. There has been and is great feeling between the Orders, not about which can best care for the flock, but which can have the greatest number of places and provinces in its hands; and so they go, occupying the best centers, building monasteries close together . . . not wishing to live in the difficult and needy places. . . . So great is the fear which the Indians have of the friars because of the severe punishment they practice upon them that they do not dare to complain. And if this is true of the province of Mexico, what of the mountains? [On account of this,] very little fruit, it may be suspected, has come of the gospel among the people.<sup>1</sup>

Gerónimo de Mendieta, a Franciscan missionary living in Mexico, corroborated the archbishop's gloomy view when he wrote in 1562 lamenting what was happening under Spanish occupation, and describing the situation as desperate and deplorable. "From what we see and hear in our congregations, everywhere the superiors are resigning. In visiting the convents one hardly finds a single monk who is content and happy. Discontent is manifest everywhere; many are seeking leave to return to Spain. It is a miracle to find a friar who is seriously trying to learn the language, for those who know it use it with

so little satisfaction and profit. . . . The old fervor and enthusiasm for the salvation of souls seems to have disappeared. The primitive spirit is dead."<sup>2</sup>

With abuse on such a wide scale, it was only a matter of time before local reaction set in. One reaction took the form of a remarkable eyewitness account by a leading Indian convert, an account in which he gave a rare, intimate, and detailed record of the abuses, but also in this case details of Peruvian society and Spanish colonial life. The writer was Felipe Huamán Poma de Ayala (1532-1615), a descendant of an Inca chief. His matter-of-fact style takes away nothing from the scandals he witnessed.

"The priesthood," he noted caustically, "began with Jesus Christ and his Apostles, but their successors in the various religious orders established in Peru do not follow this holy example. On the contrary, they show an unholy greed for worldly wealth and the sins of the flesh and a good example would be set to everyone if they were punished by the Holy Inquisition.

"These priests are irascible and arrogant. They wield considerable power and usually act with great severity towards their parishioners, as if they had forgotten that Our Lord was poor and humble and the friend of sinners. Their own intimate circle is restricted to their relations and dependants, who are either Spanish or half-caste.

"A favorite source of income for the priesthood consists in organizing the portage of wine, chillies, coca and maize. These wares are carried on the backs of Indians and llamas and in some cases need to be brought down from high altitudes. The descent often results in death for the Indians, who catch a fever when they arrive in a warm climate. Any damage to their loads during the journey has to be made good at their own expense. The priests make a practice of confiscating property which really belongs to a church, a society or a hospital and putting it to their own uses. In the same way they often overcharge for Masses for the dead.

"When these holy fathers are living as husband and wife with Indian girls and begetting children, they always refer to the half-castes as their nephews. With the aid of a little hypocrisy they make sin seem more attractive, so that it spreads and corrupts one girl after another." To show that he was even-handed, Poma included in his account reference by name to some good priests he knew, ones "who treated people of all sorts with respect."<sup>3</sup>

Described by Eric Williams as "among the greatest gifts of Spanish civilization to the Caribbean and the world,"<sup>4</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566)

took up the cause and mounted a campaign to save the Indians from their colonial tormentors. Arriving first in Hispaniola in 1502, Las Casas served in many parts of the Caribbean. He offered firsthand account of the treatment of Indians, saying, with regard to Spanish atrocities, that he had seen with his own eyes "cruelties more atrocious and unnatural than any recorded of untutored and savage barbarians."<sup>5</sup> He reproduced a sermon preached by a Dominican friar, Montesinos, who denounced the Spaniards for their conduct toward the Indians, determined, as the poet put it, "to frighten into hooded shame a money-mong'ring, pitiable brood." Montesinos further demanded:

Tell me by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in such cruel and horrible slavery? By what right do you wage such detestable wars on these people who lived mildly and peacefully in their own lands, where you have consumed infinite numbers of them with unheard of murders and desolations? Why do you so greatly oppress and fatigue them, not giving them enough to eat or caring for them when they fall ill from excessive labors, so that they die or rather are slain by you, so that you may extract and acquire gold every day? And what care do you take that they receive religious instruction and come to know their God and creator, or that they be baptized, hear mass, or observe holidays and Sundays?

Are they not men? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? How can you lie in such profound and lethargic slumber? Be sure that in your present state you can no more be saved than the Moors or Turks who do not have and do not want the faith of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The reference to Moors and Turks shows that fear of Islam survived the journey to the New World, as we saw also with Columbus.

Indigenous reaction to the bruising encounter with Spanish colonization took many forms. One form we just saw with the caustic observations of Felipe Huamán Poma de Ayala. Another was resistance at any price. The context here was the catastrophic decimation of the population of Hispaniola. When Columbus first set foot on the island in 1492, it had a population estimated at some three hundred thousand. By 1508 it had fallen by tragic proportions to 60,000; in 1510 the figure was 46,000; in 1512 it was 20,000; and in 1514, 14,000.<sup>7</sup> When the Indian chief of Hispaniola, Hatuey, was captured in Cuba—where he fled before the invaders—and compelled to embrace Christianity or else be burned alive at the stake, he asked the Franciscan friar in attendance, who urged him to relent and save his soul from eternal damnation, whether any Spaniards were in paradise. When told that only the good

Spaniards were, Hatuey is reported to have replied: "The best are good for nothing, and I will not go where there is a chance of meeting one of them."<sup>8</sup> He went down in flames, his defiant words a stinging indictment of his Christian tormentors. As Adam Smith noted, "The pious purpose of converting [the Indians] to Christianity sanctified the injustice of the project."<sup>9</sup>

Local reaction took a different and surprising form in the guise of a poor Mexican Indian peasant, Juan Diego, who testified in 1531 to seeing an apparition of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe. Yet this vision, while in conformity with the common experience of Christians elsewhere, was striking in its identification of the Virgin as an Indian peasant woman whose "beautiful countenance is grave and noble, and rather dark." It was a momentous claim that changed (and charged) the face of Mexican religious and national life, and altered for good Mexico's place in the Catholic world. Given the experience of a suffering people and their systematic alienation from their land, the vision was proof of a special protection for native populations. The shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe became a national symbol, Mexico's Runnymede, where the magna carta of its spiritual freedom was proclaimed. As a result, the merchants of misery and the agents of absolute power, together with the defenders of the religious status quo, were understandably wary.

Luis Lasso de la Vega, who first published the story in 1649, reported the words addressed to Juan Diego that became the charter of Our Lady of Guadalupe: "Know the Mother of the True God in whom we live. . . I greatly desire that a temple be built me here, that in it I may manifest and give to all my love, pity, help, and defense, for I am your mother, yours and all the dwellers in this land and the others who love me and call upon me and trust in me. . . Go to the palace of the bishop of Mexico and tell him that I have sent you."<sup>10</sup> Incredulous at the report, the bishop, reputedly Fray Juan de Zumárraga (d. 1548), demanded a sign to prove the veracity of this vision. He duly received this sign in the form of Castilian roses that the Blessed Virgin sent Juan Diego to gather from a hillside in the freezing December weather, though the bishop might have saved himself the trouble and applied, just as plausibly and decisively, Antony's test of joy as final proof that it was the true God who inspired the vision rather than the devil. When Juan Diego brought the bishop the roses wrapped in his blanket, the image of the Blessed Virgin appeared on the blanket, to the consternation of bishop and audience alike, because on the threadbare blanket of a poor, country peasant was etched a particularly poignant vindication of native populations against their new overlords. A shrine to the Blessed Virgin built at Tepeyac has existed from as early as 1555.

Juan Diego's vision showed how a tribesman, or, as described himself, "one of those campesinos, a piece of rope . . . a leaf [blown around at the whim

of others],"<sup>11</sup> with little cosmopolitan advantage, could be a persuasive symbol of the faith to the honor of church and nation. Whatever the critical verdict on its historical veracity,<sup>12</sup> Juan Diego's reported experience wrests Christianity from its metropolitan frame of the bishop's palace and puts it firmly in the hands and hearts of the people. In the final analysis, the people's faith breached official Christianity's walls of authorized access to fix the religion in the soul of a nation. It may explain the vibrant resilience of popular Catholicism in Mexico in spite of anticlerical measures later adopted by the state.<sup>13</sup>

That civil pattern of New World religious naturalization was repeated in many places across the world, and its cumulative effect drew Europe out of its intellectual isolation. When it succeeded in breaking free of crown control, the Western missionary movement in both its Catholic and Protestant forms carried the intellectual seeds that transformed Christianity into a world religion, though the mental habits of Christianity as Christendom, of Christianity as political kingdom or as cultural domain, concealed from people the force of that fact. The changes following Columbus's New World explorations were soon reflected in new geographical maps of the world, but the mental maps remained unaltered for many centuries afterward. Globalization meant then, as it has tended to mean now, the corralling of the world's resources by dominant powers, and traversing the globe for that purpose. Intercultural dialogue was out of the question.

### Colonial Ascendancy and Missionary Engagement

The rise in modern Europe of missionary associations represented a significant turning point, for Christianity entered its epochal crossover into non-Western cultures. The missionary associations developed the principle of free association outside state sponsorship to carry Christianity abroad into the non-Western world, though this principle was at odds with the calculated strategy of colonial hegemony, and, at first, missions worked within the framework allowed them by colonial governments. It proved an irksome arrangement, however, and as a result Roman Catholic missions slipped from under the terms of the 1514 Padroado dispensation in which Pope Leo X granted the Portuguese crown control of its "conquests" in Africa, Asia, and Brazil.

It was that colonial impediment that drove St. Francis Xavier (1506–52) to cut his ties with Portuguese-controlled Goa—and eventually contributed to the papacy itself denouncing outright the Padroado.<sup>14</sup> Goa was a neglected island within the domains of the Mogul Muslim Empire. Its Hindu inhabitants were smarting from the exactions of the Bijapurese Muslim overlords, eager just as

soon to cast off the Muslim yoke. It placed Goa's ultimate loyalty in serious doubt. That gave Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese agent, the pretext he needed to launch an attack in 1510, and after initial serious setbacks from stiff resistance mounted by combined local Muslim and Turkish forces, Albuquerque withdrew, only to return unexpectedly with heavy reinforcements. Goa was taken triumphantly on St. Catherine's Day, November 25, 1510. Positioned midway up the Indian peninsula, with its strategic deepwater harbor safely insulated at the confluence of the Mandovi and Rachol rivers, and boasting a flourishing international trade, the capture of Goa transformed Portugal into a commanding Asian imperial power. As Albuquerque crowed to Portugal's King Manuel, "The capture of Goa alone worked more to the credit of your Majesty than fifteen years worth of armadas that were sent out to India."<sup>15</sup>

Goa gave Portugal overseas a blanket political and moral immunity to colonize in Asia without being accountable to anyone in the field. Culturally cut off from the Indian mainland, with scarce any need to acknowledge or defer to local needs and rights, Goa saw itself tied directly to the court in Lisbon. Missionaries and their converts were accordingly conceived as clients of Portuguese power. Xavier found that colonial environment intolerable, saying he would "flee" to Japan because he could not stand the corruption of the Portuguese officials. He said he felt distressed beyond endurance that it was for him like personal "martyrdom" to see the good work of missionaries being destroyed by official greed and immorality. "Everywhere and at all times," he lamented, "it is rapine, hoarding and robbery.... I never cease wondering at the number of new inflections which, in addition to all the usual forms, have been added in this language to the avarice of conjugation of that ill-omened verb 'to rob'."<sup>16</sup> More than a century later, the situation in Goa had not much improved, for we find the Jesuit chronicler, Padre Francisco de Sousa, reporting in 1698 that the Portuguese were at serious risk of losing the respect of the people on account of their failure to administer justice properly. "The Portuguese may well despair of securing the favourable opinion of Oriental natives, in so far as our administration of justice is concerned, until we decide cases in the law-courts with greater brevity and dispatch, like the nations of the North do, who accordingly get on much better with the rural folk."<sup>17</sup> Portuguese power would remain insecure without justice, de Sousa warned, while, as Xavier had contended, mercantile greed made justice all but an unknown commodity.

Prodded by appeals from the field, including the Kongo, the papacy in the 1620s broke with the tradition of imperial sponsorship and created the Propaganda Fide to assume responsibility for missions, though as late as the 1680s Portugal was still resisting any papal interference in its overseas empire. It did not help that the papacy did not recognize the Portuguese Crown,

after its separation from Spain, until 1668. Combined with distress calls from the field, such realities disposed the church in mission to commit to shedding its imperial baggage. Eventually, field experience of both local rulers and serving missionaries in South America, Asia, and Africa vindicated the papacy's decision to cut ties with sponsoring maritime European powers, as illustrated by the protests and decisions of figures like Las Casas, appointed "Protector of the Indians"; Xavier, known as the "Apostle of the Indies and of Japan"; and, later, Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1825-92) of Algeria. Historians, however, refused to bury the hatchet.

### Righteous Indignation and the Anachronism of Christendom

The Christian message sowed seeds of critical social consciousness in the minds of new converts and missionaries alike, enough to challenge the idea of uncontested foreign imperialism. The thought is warranted in the light of South America's complex history, and justifies examining whether the claim of total and comprehensive victimization of native populations can be upheld, and whether there were exceptions with examples of resistance and renewal.<sup>18</sup> Such examples might indicate the limits non-Western cultures set for the cosmopolitan assumptions of Western Christendom.

The case today for an alteration in our mental maps, and in our corresponding cultural sensibilities, has never been more urgent and necessary. The Willkien one-world implications of New World colonization required an all-embracing global moral language that Las Casas, for example, attempted valiantly to put in place. "No nation exists today," Las Casas affirmed, "nor could exist, no matter how barbarous, fierce, or depraved its customs may be, which may not be attracted and converted to all political virtues and to all the humanity of domestic, political, and rational men."<sup>19</sup> Las Casas returned to the subject on another occasion when he observed that the Christian religion is destined for all the nations of the world, being open as it is to all in the same fashion. Christianity, he declared, took from none its freedom nor does its truth depend on its promoting a specious distinction between the free and servile status. The entire world, and not just Europe, should, therefore, have a share in adjudicating the religion's standing.<sup>20</sup>

Jesuit chronicler Francisco de Sousa's remarks about the imperative of the common people's right to justice appealed to the same issue of cultural sensibility. A geographically united world should oblige people to accept the solidarity of a common human inheritance, and the mutual ethical responsibility that went with it.<sup>21</sup>

As was clear in the mercantile system, economic processes can repress talent and freedom.<sup>22</sup> It led Adam Smith to propound his famous thesis of the "invisible hand" as a thoroughly domesticated mechanism rather than as one of deliberate global design. He argued that persons acting in a free economic system generally intend neither to promote the public interest, nor know how much they are promoting it. In fact, such persons prefer the support of domestic industry to that of foreign industry; they intend only their own security and their own gain by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value. Smith concludes that people as such are led by an invisible hand to promote an end that was no part of their intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that the end was no part of their intention. By pursuing their own interest, people frequently promote the interest of the society more effectively than when they really *intend* to promote it.<sup>23</sup> The good of the market system lies in its side effects.

The question, as I misleadingly put it earlier, is not whether Christendom was viable or defensible, but that given the fact of global awakening and increased intercultural contact, how soon Christendom's civilizational mandate should be abandoned as outdated. In spite of Columbus, the failure to shift Eurocentric perspectives continued to wreak havoc on non-Western cultures and societies. Globalization was about competitive advantage; the weak, the nonwhite, and the poor became fair game. Theophilus Conneau, a New England slave trader, noted that the cause and course of the slave trade were many and various, but that none was more complicit than the avarice of civilized nations whose commodities caused the wars and injustices that fed the slave trade. The world was no less effectively globalized for paying scant attention to moral or human values. As a driving force, competitive advantage was need blind and culture proof. Apart from speed and spread, it is hard to know what makes it different now. It brings to mind the words of John Maynard Keynes (d. 1946). "The modern capitalist," he wrote, "is a fair-weather sailor. As soon as a storm rises, he abandons the duties of navigation and even sinks the boats which might carry him to safety by his haste to push his neighbor off and himself in."<sup>24</sup>

### Catholic Potential in Premodern Africa

Aware of the impetus Iberian maritime explorations had given to the expanding frontiers of Christianity beyond Europe, the papacy became active in pursuing the missionary path in Africa. Yet there would be obstacles to overcome, chiefly the reality of the rising mercantile power of Portugal. In earlier