

“This book is a ‘must read’ for those who want to understand how the church entered into the lives of its people in El Salvador after Vatican II and Medellín through the ministry of Rutilio Grande, SJ. When you begin with Rutilio, his life, his ministry, and his death, then you can understand the period of suffering endured by the prophetic church of El Salvador.”

—Jon Sobrino

*Author of *Jesus the Liberator* and *Witnesses to the Kingdom**

“Catholic theology walks the dusty roads of history, the same roads where Jesus walked and his first followers first met him. At its most elemental, Catholic theology is biography. Just so, the life of Rutilio Grande, beautifully narrated and interpreted in these pages by Professor Thomas Kelly, is more than a life: it is a dogmatic theology that shows us where and how the Gospel grows feet.”

—Kevin F. Burke, SJ

*Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University*



# When the Gospel Grows Feet

Rutilio Grande, SJ,  
and the Church of El Salvador

An Ecclesiology in Context

Thomas M. Kelly



A Michael Glazier Book

LITURGICAL PRESS

Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

A Michael Glazier Book published by Liturgical Press

Cover design by Jodi Hendrickson. Cover images: Thinkstock. Rucksack image courtesy of the author.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996 (Costello Publishing Company, Inc.). Used with permission.

Papal encyclicals and exhortations are from the Vatican's digital archives, accessible at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/index.htm).

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2013 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

---

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kelly, Thomas M., 1969–

When the gospel grows feet : Rutilio Grande, SJ, and the church of El Salvador : an ecclesiology in context / Thomas M. Kelly.

pages    cm

“A Michael Glazier book.”

ISBN 978-0-8146-8077-3 — ISBN 978-0-8146-8086-5 (ebook)

1. Grande, Rutilio, 1928–1977.    2. Catholic Church—El Salvador—History—20th century.    3. El Salvador—Church history—20th century.    I. Title.

BX4705.G61759K45    2013

271'.5302—dc23

2012048196

*This book is dedicated to the women, men, and children  
who lost their lives in the civil war of El Salvador  
and those who continue to mourn them.*



# Contents

Acknowledgments ix

List of Abbreviations xi

Introduction xiii

## **Part 1: Colonialism and Conquest 1**

Chapter 1: Church and State in Colonial Times 3

Chapter 2: Theological and Philosophical Roots of the Conquest 23

## **Part 2: Vatican II and a New Mission 47**

Chapter 3: A New Mission of the Church for the World 49

Chapter 4: Medellín: Latin America's Response  
to the New Mission of the Church 75

## **Part 3: Ecclesiology in Context: The New Evangelization 99**

Chapter 5: Rutilio Grande, SJ: Pastoral Formation  
and Early Ministry 101

Chapter 6: A Turning Point for Rutilio: Pastoral Formation  
at the IPLA 124

Chapter 7: Rutilio Grande: The Gospel Grows Feet  
in Aguilares (Part 1) 146

Chapter 8: Rutilio Grande: The Gospel Grows Feet  
in Aguilares (Part 2) 166

Chapter 9: The Road to Martyrdom: The Final Months  
of Rutilio Grande 191

## **Part 4: Lessons for the Church in North America 221**

Chapter 10: What Rutilio Grande, SJ, Can Teach the Church  
of North America 223

Appendix 241

Index 277



## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank many people for their help in making this book possible. I begin with Maria Teresa Gaston who first invited me to El Salvador, John Giuliano, the Tamarindos, and the community of Guarjila in Chalatenango, especially the family of Casimiro and Esperanza and in particular Luis, Gio, Cobra, and Chele who kindly hosted travel courses from Creighton for five years. There I learned about the church of El Salvador from the people who lived through the war and who were accompanied by the church.

For the academic research aspect of this book I want to thank the University of Central America, especially the late Dean Brackley, SJ. Fr. Brackley was instrumental in providing me access to so much in El Salvador and he is sorely missed. I would also like to thank Kevin and Trena Yonkers-Talz of Santa Clara's *Casa de la Solidaridad* program for both inviting me to teach in their program as well as making my family a part of their lives; thank you for the community and friendship over those six months. I would also like to thank John Thiede, SJ, who helped in numerous ways during the final month of my sabbatical in El Salvador—from the interview with Monsignor Urioste to the access of the UCA archives—you were instrumental. I would like to thank two professors at the Maryknoll Language Institute in Cochabamba, Bolivia, for carefully checking this translation during June and July 2012. Wilma Rocha Montecinos and Karla Rojas Cuba offered invaluable assistance and ensured that this translation was accurate to both the content and spirit of Rutilio Grande.

I would like to thank Creighton University for allowing me to teach summer courses in Latin America, and especially my dean, Robert Lueger, PhD, who has been generous in his support of my sabbatical, this book, and the theology which grounds all of it. I want to thank Kate Macan, Ben McCann, Caitlin Malone, Tim Leacock, and Effie Caldarola for being my readers who gave great feedback. Finally, I want to thank my wife of twenty years, Lisa, and our children Andrew, Michael, and Catherine for being willing to move to El Salvador and live for the six months of research—without you, none of this would have been possible.



## Abbreviations

ANDES	National Association of Educators of El Salvador
ANEP	National Association of Private Enterprise
ARENA	Nationalist Republican Alliance
CELAM	Latin American Bishops Conference
CEB	Christian Base Community
CISPES	Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador
CONAMUS	National Coordination of Salvadoran Women
CONSALCOA	Salvadoran buying cooperative used by peasants
ECA	<i>Estudios Centroamericanos</i>
FDR	Democratic Revolutionary Front
FAPU	United Popular Action Front of El Salvador
FARO	Landowner Organization against Land Reform
FECCAS	Federation of Christian Peasants of El Salvador
FENASTRAS	National Federation of Salvadoran Workers
FMLN	Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front
FPL	Popular Liberation Forces
GAM	Mutual Support Group
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPLA	Latin American Pastoral Institute (Quito Ecuador)
OAS	Organization of American States
ORDEN	Paramilitary Force of the Salvadoran Government and Landowners
PCN	National Conciliation Party of El Salvador
PCS	Salvadoran Communist Party
UCA	Central American University
UTC	Union of Rural Workers
UNTS	National Union of Salvadoran Labor



# Introduction

On March 12, 1977, shortly after five o'clock in the afternoon, a Volkswagen Safari left a small town in El Salvador known as Aguilares. In the vehicle were three people—an elderly man named Manuel Solorzano, a fifteen-year-old boy named Nelson Lemus, and a Roman Catholic priest named Fr. Rutilio Grande, SJ. On the way out of town, near the train tracks, the vehicle stopped to give three small children a ride. They were leaving Aguilares, a small dusty town roughly an hour north of the capital of San Salvador. Their destination was the town of El Paisnal, roughly three miles away, where Fr. Grande was travelling to continue a novena in celebration of the town's feast day. As the bell was tolling to gather the people near the small church situated in the central plaza of El Paisnal, Fr. Grande and his entourage made their way along the narrow dusty road that connected Aguilares and El Paisnal. "Rutilio liked the people already gathered when he arrived."<sup>1</sup> As they passed the small village of Los Mangos, the children recall seeing groups of two or three men located on the banks of the small canals on either side of the road. Behind the VW was a small pickup truck that had followed them from Aguilares. In a low voice, Fr. Grande is quoted as saying, "We must do what God wants."<sup>2</sup> As the pickup came closer to the VW, a hail of bullets fell from the sky, impacting the car. Later, a doctor who examined the bodies indicated that Fr. Grande was killed by bullets coming from both the front and rear of the vehicle. The weapons and ammunition used were common to the local police. The bullets from the front of the vehicle hit Fr. Grande's jaw and neck and penetrated his skull. From the rear and left, he was shot through the lower back and pelvis. Altogether, he was killed by twelve bullets.<sup>3</sup> When the bodies were found it appeared that seventy-two-year-old Manuel Solorzano tried, in

<sup>1</sup> Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: Vida de Rutilio Grande*, Colección Teología Latinoamericana 4 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2002), 573, translation mine.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Salvador Carranza, ed., *Una Luz Grande nos Brilló: Rutilio Grande, SJ* (Comisión de la Compañía de Jesús, 2007), 96.

vain, to protect Fr. Grande, as his body completely covered him. “Nelson sat quietly in his seat with a bullet in his forehead.”<sup>4</sup> The three children who had been given a ride were screaming in the far back of the vehicle. A man whom they recognized ordered them to leave, which they did, full of panic. They passed by the bodies of the three others, not even seeing them. As they ran down the road toward El Paisnal, they heard one final shot.<sup>5</sup> Covered in blood and dirt, they did not stop running until they had arrived in El Paisnal.

Immediately, the news of these murders was transmitted to Archbishop Oscar A. Romero of San Salvador as well as to the provincial of the Society of Jesus, who also resided in the capital. Three Jesuits from the provincial office, Archbishop Romero, and his auxiliary Bishop Rivera y Damas all travelled to El Paisnal. At seven o’clock President Arturo Molina called the archbishop to offer his condolences and promise a thorough investigation. Later, the newspapers would say that the archbishop had called the president first.<sup>6</sup> This discrepancy between the government and church accounts of what occurred continued to be a developing theme throughout the period of violence that followed (1977–92).

The three bodies were placed in front of the altar in the church of El Paisnal and the Jesuit provincial asked that a liturgy be offered that “gives hope to the community and avoids the temptations to hatred or revenge.”<sup>7</sup> At ten-thirty that same evening, Archbishop Romero presided over Mass, which lasted until midnight. The next morning, responding to a radio announcement by the archbishop, streams of peasants began walking into El Paisnal for a nine o’clock memorial Mass. They came from near and far to mourn the death of their beloved priest and his friends. The next Sunday, Archbishop Romero declared a “single Mass,” a memorial Mass for Rutilio Grande, as the only Mass to be offered in the country. During the final funeral procession, one that would ultimately inter these bodies in the floor of the church in El Paisnal directly in front of the altar, the slogan could be heard: “Rutilio’s walk with El Paisnal is like Christ’s journey with the cross.”<sup>8</sup>

The reality of Fr. Rutilio Grande’s death, as described in detail in the preceding paragraphs, leaves the reader with some very serious questions.

<sup>4</sup> Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 574.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Carranza, ed., *Una Luz Grande nos Brilló: Rutilio Grande, SJ*, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Cardenal, *Historia de una Esperanza: Vida de Rutilio Grande*, 575.

<sup>8</sup> Carranza, ed., *Una Luz Grande nos Brilló: Rutilio Grande, SJ*, 104.

How could powerful forces within the overwhelmingly Catholic country of El Salvador both plan and carry out the execution of a Roman Catholic priest and two innocent people in broad daylight in front of witnesses? Why would this same government deepen its confrontation with the Catholic Church until thousands of lay ministers, dozens of priests, and even the archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, were murdered? What was so threatening about the church and its ministry? Why would the government, and the oligarchy that supported it, believe it necessary to repress the church in such a brutal manner?

To gain insight to even provisional answers to these questions, it is necessary to start at the beginning, with what the Roman Catholic Church used to be, in order to understand what it became—at least in El Salvador. Only then can we understand the extraordinary transformation of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. Part of this transformation came from a method of doing theology officially sanctioned by both the Vatican and the bishops of Latin America. What follows is the story of how this method became real in the country of El Salvador through the life, ministry, and death of the first Jesuit killed there, Rutilio Grande. To be “church” in the manner realized by Rutilio Grande was to give one’s life in the effort to build the kingdom of God.

This work is organized more or less chronologically. The first two chapters begin with an illustration of the church’s identity and mission during the colonial period (1500–1820) as it participated in the conquest of Latin America. As that period is considered, it is important to understand the theological presuppositions which framed the church’s understanding of its identity and mission to the world it inhabited. Chapters 3 and 4 touch upon the transformative impact of Vatican II (1962–65) and how the Latin American bishops appropriated the teachings of that Council in their own context. Chapters 5 through 9 introduce Rutilio Grande, his life, his formation, his transformation, his ministry, his martyrdom, and his impact on Archbishop Oscar Romero. Finally, chapter 10 will ask, “What can Rutilio Grande and the church of El Salvador teach the Roman Catholic Church of North America?” This is especially pertinent if “church” is considered, according to Vatican II, as “the people of God.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Lumen gentium in Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), no. 9.



Part 1

# **Colonialism and Conquest**



## Chapter 1

# Church and State in Colonial Times

*Since its arrival [to Latin America] in the early sixteenth century, the institutional church has been marked by its wealth, power and privilege. As centuries passed, the church did little to change the daily hardships faced by the poor and powerless. During the conquest, millions of indigenous inhabitants suffered untold misery from war, disease, and slave-like conditions under Spanish conquistadores who claimed the name of Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

The Catholic Church played an important role in the colonization of the peoples of Latin America.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, this statement may appear too strong; surely the church was not responsible for the suffering and enslavement that occurred because of European colonization! How could it preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not see what was happening as native peoples were slaughtered or enslaved? In order to even partially answer this question, we first have to study how the church understood itself and its role in the world, how it related to the broadly conceived “state,” and, more importantly, how it stood to benefit from this relationship. Only then can we put the church’s actions in context.

It is important to remember that the conquest of what is today called “Latin America” began after a war between Christian Spain and Muslim North Africa, which lasted over seven hundred years. Of course, to those involved, that conquest was not merely a war but also an epic struggle between two worldviews, religions, and cultures. The church understood

<sup>1</sup> David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Boston, 2002), xi.

<sup>2</sup> With other scholars, I mean by “the church” “a message, an institution and its relationship to the Universal church and the state.” See Emilio Betances, *The Catholic Church and Power Politics in Latin America* (Plymouth, UK: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 15, note 1. Unless otherwise specified, any time a reference to “church” is made I intend to signify the Roman Catholic Church.

the Spanish victory over the Muslims of North Africa as a validation and instantiation of Christianity as the one true religion on earth. With that zeal and vindication of its own superiority, the church turned its attention to new lands and expansion. Hoping to spread its power and influence, as well as “save souls,” members of the church accompanied the conquistadores of both Spain and Portugal to what was then termed the “New World.”

One need only read the first few pages of Christopher Columbus’ diary (and underline each time the word “gold” is used) to see that the main motive for European exploration and colonization was not to spread the Christian faith but to profit from what they could and did take from indigenous peoples. Bartolomeo de las Casas, an early settler who became a Dominican priest, clearly stated what he thought was the foundational cause of oppression in the New World: “The cause for which the Christians have slain and destroyed so many and such infinite numbers of souls has been simply to get as their ultimate end, the Indian’s gold of them, and to stuff themselves with riches in a very few days.”<sup>3</sup> The church would directly benefit from this new source of wealth. Recall that the Vatican controlled lands and armies and participated in the political world in ways similar to any other nation-state at the time. If gold was not discovered immediately in a particular conquered area, each indigenous man, woman, and child was required to pay a quota to the Spanish. Failure to pay this quota resulted in the amputation of limbs, torture, and even death. Hispaniola, the first island to be exploited and devastated by conquistadors, lost nearly its entire population of roughly five hundred thousand Taíno people during the first fifty years of Spanish presence. Similar effects were recorded throughout Latin America.

It appears, from the various accounts of the Dominican friar Fr. Bartolomeo de las Casas, that the church not only condoned the violent takeover of native peoples and their lands in the pursuit of wealth but actually blessed it and participated in it. Prior to becoming a friar, las Casas himself was given land and slaves upon his arrival in Cuba. He benefitted from the very system he would later critique with so much determination. Shortly after arriving in the Caribbean, he began to study for the priesthood. Although he lived comfortably from the *encomienda* system in the New World, five years after his studies for the priesthood, las

<sup>3</sup> Bartolomeo de las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. Franklin W. Knight, trans. Andrew Hurley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 8.

Casas experienced a conversion that made him the most ardent defender of indigenous peoples during his lifetime:<sup>4</sup> “In 1514, as he prepared his sermon for Pentecost, the words of Ecclesiasticus 34:18-22 struck him with full force. The judgment of those who make sacrifice and other religious rituals before God and yet oppress their fellow human beings, spoke directly to his feelings about the ill-treatment of the Indians. He set free his Indian workers and prepared a special sermon for the Feast of the Assumption on August 15, 1514.”<sup>5</sup>

Las Casas was a bright light in what was otherwise a dark chapter for the church. While those who denounced the practices of the conquering Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores were almost always people of the church, it was never the church as a whole that denounced the injustices and actively struggled against them. Why was this so? It was partly due to the fact that the church had violated its own earlier reforms (the Gregorian Reform) through the arrangement with the Spanish and Portuguese crowns that ensured its participation in the conquest. Gregory VII (1028–1085) introduced a ban on the practice of lay investiture near the turn of the millennium. Lay investiture was the practice that allowed temporal rulers (kings, queens, etc.) to appoint abbots of monasteries or bishops of the church in their area of political control (i.e., to invest them with an office and the power that went with it). Gregory VII knew that allowing secular rulers to appoint church offices both undermined the independence of the church and affected its cohesion.

Nevertheless, the practice of allowing secular leaders to appoint church leaders was the cost of the church’s participation in the conquest. Spain, for example, allowed priests and other church officials to accompany the voyages to the New World in exchange for the power to appoint bishops in the newly discovered lands. These arrangements made it nearly impossible for the church to critique or denounce the brutality it witnessed as the state clearly had appointed (i.e., given great power and wealth to) those very church officials who should have been more critical of Spanish cruelty. A letter from King Philip II (1558–1598) to his governor in the Philippine Islands made it very clear who held and exercised power.

<sup>4</sup> David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, 14, note 33. The *encomienda* system granted free labor (indigenous slaves) to Spaniards of appropriate social status. Las Casas was granted this free labor in both Cuba and Hispaniola prior to his conversion.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

The King. To our viceroy of Nueva España, or the person or persons who shall, for the time being, be exercising the government of that country: As you know, the right of ecclesiastical patronage belongs to us throughout the realm of the Yndias—both because of having discovered and acquired that new world, and erected there and endowed the churches and monasteries at our own cost, or at the cost of our ancestors, the Catholic Sovereigns; and because it was conceded to us by bulls of the most holy pontiffs, conceded of their own accord. For its conservation, and that of the right we have to it, we order and command that the said right of patronage be always preserved for us and our royal crown, singly and in solidum, throughout all the realm of the Yndias, without any derogation therefrom, either in whole or in part; and that we shall not concede the right of patronage by any favor or reward that we or our successors may confer. . . .

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, bishopric, dignidad, canonry, ración, media-ración, 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.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the obvious benefits, this arrangement was willingly agreed to by the church; nevertheless, the moral cost was steep. “The royal patronage brought great benefits to both the monarchy and the institutional church, but it severely limited the church’s potential to oppose the state’s power. It meant that Rome would not have direct contact with the Latin American church, but would have to go through the mediation of the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs.”<sup>7</sup> Even when the highest levels of the church denounced the treatment of indigenous peoples, it was helpless to enact its own decrees in a substantive manner. For example, Pope Paul III issued the following pronouncement in 1537, a “papal bull,” which clearly affirmed the rationality, and hence the humanity, of indigenous peoples. Recall the Greek definition of a human being as a body inhabited by a rational soul.

<sup>6</sup> King Philip II, “Royal Instructions to Gómez Pérez Dasmarías Regarding Ecclesiastical Affairs,” in *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, ed. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, 18.

The enemy of the human race, who opposes all good deeds in order to bring men to destruction, beholding and envying this, invented a means never before heard of, by which he might hinder the preaching of God's word of Salvation to the people: he inspired his satellites, who, to please him, have not hesitated to publish abroad that the Indians of the West and South, and other people of whom We have recent knowledge should be treated as dumb brutes created for our service, pretending that they are incapable of receiving the catholic faith.

We, who, though unworthy, exercise on earth the power of our Lord and seek with all our might to bring those sheep of His flock who are outside, in to the fold committed to our charge, consider, however, that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the catholic faith, but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it.<sup>8</sup>

This pronouncement, without hesitation, "affirmed the rationality of the Indians and the importance of their evangelization."<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the opponents of las Casas who simply wanted to use these "animals" for free labor, Pope Paul III viewed the indigenous inhabitants of Latin America as fully human. It is for this reason that the papal bull was suppressed by Spain: they simply refused to promulgate it. Since Spain appointed local church leaders who depended on the state for status and power, only scattered opposition in the form of letters came from that quarter.

The problem deepened with the incapacity of the church to enforce the view of Pope Paul III. The church had given up its moral voice at the cost of inclusion. Some, though, did protest loudly. Going even further than the pope, the bishop of Santa Marta (located in the modern day Yucatan Peninsula in southeastern Mexico) stated the following in a letter to the Spanish crown in 1541:

Wherein Your Majesty will clearly see how those who rule over these parts deserve to be stripped of their ranks so the republics may have some relief. And if this be not done, it is my belief their sicknesses shall have no cure. It is also meet that Your Majesty know that there are no Christians in these parts, but rather demons, that there are no men who serve God or the king but only traitors to their law and their king. For it is true that the greatest obstacle I find, to turning

<sup>8</sup> Pope Paul III, *Indians Are Men*, in Penyak and Petry, eds., *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, 21.

the warring Indians to peace and bringing those at peace into the knowledge of our faith, is the harsh and cruel treatment that the Indians of peace receive from the Christians.<sup>10</sup>

### *Societas perfecta*

Why was the church impotent to change the situation in relation to the conquest? Partly this resulted from how it understood itself and its realm of operation in relation to the state. For many centuries the church had embraced a model of church-state relations known as *Societas perfecta*. Under this vision, two perfect societies correspond to two very different realities: the church and state. One society, the church, is responsible for the care of the divine or spiritual dimension of human beings. The other society, the state, is responsible for the earthly material dimension of human beings. Each society is the highest of its kind; each has certain limits within which it moves. Both maintain boundaries that emerge from the nature and purpose of each of the two areas of responsibility.<sup>11</sup> Later, this understanding of *Societas perfecta* would be formally instantiated by Pope Leo XIII in 1885.

Many scholars indicate that this understanding accurately captures the relationship between the governments of Spain and Portugal and the Catholic Church throughout the conquest. The church's primary role was to represent the concerns of the spiritual and divine, while the state had full control of the temporal order in the "secular" world. This manner of dividing up the world and understanding it from two (nearly) separate domains is called dualism. In the next chapter we will explore how such a dualism marked the church's involvement with the conquest—the church as the overseer of all things "spiritual," with the state as the overseer of all things "material." Additionally, we will explore some of the consequences that resulted from such division. But first, it is necessary to understand some of the cultural legacies left behind by the church-state conquest of the New World. These colonial attitudes and practices resulted in cultural preferences and patterns that are critical to understanding contemporary Latin America.

<sup>10</sup> Bartolomeo de las Casas, *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, 55–56.

<sup>11</sup> Until the Second Vatican Council, the doctrine of the two perfect societies of Leo XIII was held to be official in theological studies. During the Council itself, as well as in the new Code of Canon Law, the doctrine is no longer explicitly mentioned. In modern Catholic post-conciliar theology, it hardly has any role at all. Its abandonment was somewhat controversial.

## **The Cultural Legacy of Conquest**

The cultural values and social mores imposed upon the peoples of modern-day Latin America by the conquering European powers continue to have incredible force.<sup>12</sup> This is true not only in Latin America but in Africa and Asia as well. Social and economic patterns inherited from the time of the conquest continue to deeply affect the social reality of Latin America. Of the many legacies from this period of history, it is worth noting three particular patterns that emerged as a result of European conquest. First, there was colonial disdain for physical labor and a preference for exploiting native lands and peoples to do work. This disdain emerged from social and racial attitudes. Such attitudes are still prominent today. Second, there was an attitude that conquered peoples and lands existed to serve the needs of distant European (or other) peoples, especially by providing the conquering nation complete and total access to natural resources and minerals. While the exploitation has changed, this attitude continues to influence how wealthy contemporary Latin Americans both perceive and encourage outside intervention in their countries. Third, the conquest left behind a system of land distribution that created, or at least contributed to, the vast inequality of wealth and access to land among the peoples of Latin America. One way to understand these social mores is to compare and contrast them to attitudes formative of North American culture.

## **Poverty and Race in Latin America**

Contrary to the North American spirit, admired and promoted by folklore, about the equality of all people (though contradicted for many years in the slave-owning South), owners of land and industry in Latin America rarely worked alongside those who produced for them. Working with someone implies a basic equality, and from the beginning of the European conquest, the humanity of the indigenous peoples had always been suspect. Due to the vast differences in language, culture, and religion, European settlers were slow to view the indigenous in terms of equality, which is an issue even today.

Bartolomeo de las Casas spent the majority of his life arguing for and defending the humanity of indigenous peoples in Latin America within the civil and ecclesiastical (church) courts of Europe. Promoting the idea that native peoples possessed rationality and, thus, a soul, was difficult in a

<sup>12</sup> The main points of this are drawn from David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, 13–14, and related illustrations come from personal experiences of the author.

Europe so separated by language, culture, and distance. Even as recently as the mid-1700s the church in South America allowed the indigenous peoples only the sacraments of baptism and marriage. Until their status as human or sub-human was determined finally, Eucharist was generally withheld.

Most contemporary Latin American countries have an oligarchy, or upper class, with traditional Spanish or European racial characteristics, while those in the lower economic and social levels tend to look more like indigenous Latin Americans or Africans (depending on the country). It is not difficult to find shopping centers in Peru or entertainment establishments in the Dominican Republic that do not permit the entrance of someone who is darker or who appears indigenous. It is true that, from Haiti to Bolivia, distinctions of race still create and maintain deep economic and social divisions. Anecdotally, I have been introduced to country clubs in Latin America where membership is open to anyone, but one must be from Spain to sit on the governing board. This continued preoccupation with *pura sangre*, or “pure blood,” is reflective of concrete attitudes about racial and socioeconomic classification.

It is interesting to note the difference in how people in the lower classes of Latin America are perceived by the wealthy of their countries in contrast to North American attitudes. Of course, we have to generalize here, but (correctly or incorrectly) in North America many today believe that regardless of race or birth, people can, or should, try to work their way up and out of poverty through a combination of responsibility, hard work, and luck. Some would call this our greatest myth, while others would call it an achievable dream. Whether such opportunity exists or not in North America, its contrast with Latin American attitudes is stark. The lower class in Latin America is perceived to exist in order to serve the upper class—whether one is referring to *restavecs* (child slaves) in Haiti or *indiginas* (indigenous female house employees) in Bolivia. I have personally witnessed the prevalence of this phenomenon throughout Latin America. In many countries, *indiginas* are perceived as less than human by their employers. In Central America specifically, domestic helpers are often referred to as *muchachas* (girls), when they are often poor older women who work, out of necessity, in the homes of the wealthy. These linguistic titles reveal societal attitudes toward the poor, which understand them as being of value but only insofar as they serve the rich. As a result of this attitude, we will see in a later chapter that when the poor reclaimed their own dignity as human beings, it shocked the wealthy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For an interesting and informative discussion of how poor *campesinos* (rural peasants) are perceived by wealthy city dwellers in Guatemala, see *I Rigoberta Menchu, An*

## Whose Land? Whose Resources?

The attitude that the poor exist to serve the rich leads to a second cultural pattern established during colonization: Latin America exists to serve the needs of distant countries and, if strong enough, other peoples and countries can and should take what they want. Originally this began as a battle over colonies in the New World. For example, the island of Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and Dominican Republic) was occupied by no less than five separate nations throughout its tumultuous early history. Unfortunately, this attitude has extended itself into recent history as well. US intervention in Latin America, ostensibly behind the Roosevelt corollary of the Monroe Doctrine, is the practical fruit of this attitude. In theory, this doctrine would prevent a European (and later, Soviet) intervention in Latin America while the latter began its movements for independence from Spain, et al.

In practice, the United States was delineating Latin America as being within its sphere of influence and control in the context of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. It was determining who could and could not have influence over *other sovereign* countries. This was particularly true in relation to debt repayments and military intervention by the United States in the Caribbean and Latin America throughout the twentieth century. The Monroe Doctrine, initially welcomed by many Latin American countries, would later prove to be the rationale for countless US interventions. Most of these interventions were justified as responses to the meddling of foreign powers, while in actuality they were about preserving US economic interests.<sup>14</sup>

In nearly every case of US intervention in Latin America during the twentieth century, from Haiti to Chile, those in each respective nation's oligarchy (wealthy political elites) cooperated with outside powers to maintain and strengthen their positions of power and wealth within their own countries. Oligarchies are systems of governance managed by those with the wealth and power to determine how a country is governed. Anticommunism or threats to national security usually functioned as the justification for outside intervention. The oligarchy understood that the key to their own survival was to cooperate with those who saw their own

---

*Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright, chap. 5 (London: Verso Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> For an interesting overview of US intervention in the twentieth century, see Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006).

nation as a place which served the interests of greater foreign powers, whether in terms of economics (antinationalization) or global politics (the Cold War).

This was particularly true when Latin American countries began to nationalize the industries and natural resources of their own land. An industry is nationalized when a state seizes a private, and usually foreign, business. After compensating its owner(s) for its publicly declared tax value, the state makes it a public company owned by, and therefore benefiting, the citizens of that country. Many of these businesses are involved with cultivating and exporting natural resources such as agriculture, mining, oil, and gas.

Many Latin American nations implemented nationalization programs in the twentieth century. These were viewed as necessary for the public good as young nations emerged weak and in debt from their colonial histories. During the colonial period, conquered peoples had no control over, and little direct benefit from, the use of their own natural resources.<sup>15</sup> A brief overview of the history of US intervention reveals some startling facts about US resistance to nationalization programs in various Latin American countries.

For example, when the United Fruit Company (a US-owned company) was threatened with nationalization in 1954, the United States staged a coup to oust the democratically elected leader of Guatemala, only ten years into that country's experiment with democracy. The justification was that while the Guatemalan president Arbenz had no communists in his government, he did have "friends" who were communists.<sup>16</sup> When Bolivia was going to nationalize oil in 1970, the United States helped overthrow President Juan Jose Torres. The coup to overthrow Torres was led by US-trained officer and Gulf Oil beneficiary Hugo Banzer, who had support from Washington. When Banzer's forces had a breakdown in radio communications, US Air Force radios were placed at their disposal. In addition, the United States invaded the Dominican Republic twice (to guarantee debt repayment): once before and once after the reign of Dominican dictator Gen. Rafael Trujillo, whom the United States supported.

<sup>15</sup> It has been claimed, for example, that over approximately three hundred years, enough silver left the mines of Potosi, Bolivia, to construct a physical bridge from Potosi to Madrid, Spain.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent and easily accessible commentary on this, see the CNN *Cold War* series which has interviews with CIA station chiefs who explain the goal and rationale for US action.

Nicaragua was also invaded and occupied numerous times. When the openly socialist but democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, threatened a US company named ITT with nationalization (part of a program for nationalizing the entire telecommunications of the country) he was killed in a CIA-supported coup and replaced by the Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet, a military man who faithfully protected US interests in that country. The pattern was clear and consistent. The United States did not hesitate to protect its own economic interests—even when democracy and human rights had to be sacrificed in order to do so.

### **Land Distribution in Colonial Latin America**

The third and final cultural legacy that the conquest bequeathed to the peoples of Latin America was the pattern of land distribution adopted in the “New World.” The distribution of land during the conquest was modeled on the method used by the Spanish government when it reclaimed most of the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims during their seven hundred-year war. Those who were most powerful and successful militarily in winning back land were rewarded with large tracts of liberated territory. When this method was applied to the New World, it resulted in a small group of conquistadors receiving vast amounts of conquered land. In some places, this actually created the entrenched oligarchy that continued to have power well into the latter decades of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Land and its distribution have been at the center of many conflicts in Latin America. Civil wars, civil unrest, and even military action between countries in this region can often be traced back to the availability of land. Land reform has been attempted with varying degrees of success, but mostly failure, in Haiti, Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and other Latin American countries. Land was certainly a cause of El Salvador’s civil war as close to 90 percent of the land was owned and managed by fourteen families descended from the original conquistadores.

Recall that until recently, the key to wealth and social mobility throughout the Americas was land. One either had land or worked on someone else’s land. What one’s land produced was, and still is, in many cases, the key to wealth. Contrast this reality with the North American history of land rushes and homesteading where pioneers were assured a piece of

<sup>17</sup> We will see this as true in future chapters relating to the social and economic inequalities in El Salvador.

land. Though the land had been forcibly taken from Native Americans, it became available to many people in North America. With so much land for the taking, people moved west and established farms or ranches, which allowed for wealth to be more broadly distributed. In Latin America, all of the territory had been claimed shortly after the original conquest, leaving many indigenous people without land.

### **From Conquest to Democracy: The Church and Change**

Throughout the first three hundred years of European presence in Latin America and until approximately 1820, the Catholic Church constituted one of the three pillars of colonial society alongside oligarchic commercial interests and colonial governments. Recall that oligarchies are systems of governance managed by those with the country's wealth and power. In many contemporary Latin America towns, one can still find the mayor's office (or another government building), the cathedral, and usually a major business on most town squares or plazas. It is important to realize that the church not only participated in the colonial power structure but benefitted from it as well.

Prior to the national independence movements of the early 1800s inspired by Simon Bolívar, the church (after the state) was the second largest landholder in all of Latin America. The church benefitted from indigenous labor through the *encomienda* system—a system that allotted a certain amount of indigenous slave labor to each person of a certain social class. In some cases, even religious orders ran *encomiendas* and enslaved the native peoples for the profit they generated.<sup>18</sup> This system made it possible to take and manage *haciendas* (large ranches) set up to benefit European invaders. Thus, the colonial church was a highly conservative force, supporting and sustaining the status quo and firmly on the side of the powerful. Despite some prophetic exceptions (e.g., Fr. Antonio de Montesinos, Fr. Bartolomeo de las Casas, and Fr. Juan de Zumarraga), the church usually served as an uncritical chaplain to colonial power and encouraged its exploitive practices.

Nevertheless, the church in Latin America has always been an institution that has conferred legitimacy—directly or indirectly, actively or

<sup>18</sup> It seems that religious orders, including the Franciscans and Jesuits, had a proclivity toward this arrangement, at least in South America. See Jeffrey Klaiber, *The History of the Jesuits in Latin America, 1549–2000: 450 Years of Inculturation, Defense of Human Rights, and Prophetic Witness* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 22, 89.

passively—upon individuals, groups, and governments.<sup>19</sup> Over the past four hundred years, legitimacy from the church came either by way of tradition, by legal means, or, most recently, by embracing the fight for justice championed by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). According to noted Latin American and church historian Jeffrey Klaiber, SJ, at different times throughout the history of the church in Latin America, various understandings of church-state relations were envisioned and encouraged. The three that deserve further discussion here include Christendom, integralism, and liberalism.<sup>20</sup>

### **Christendom**

Christendom is an understanding of the church-state relation that emerged during the late Middle Ages. It is one in which the church acts as the senior partner and the state, essentially, does the former's bidding. Clergy wielded significant political power, from the pope down to the local parish priest. In medieval Christendom, issues such as whom one could marry, where one could both work and be buried, and whether one could own land or be permitted to worship in church were all decided by church authorities. Under this arrangement the church and the state should be one, unified, but always with clergy in positions of power or the church as the senior partner. Early in the conquest, certain regional leaders of the church in Latin America harbored ambition toward a Christendom-type model where the church would serve as the leader and wield considerable influence and power. Quickly this ceased to be a real possibility.

First, the rise of absolute monarchies in Western Europe from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries increasingly subjected the exercise of the church's mission to state control. By the nineteenth century, the time when popes would speak and emperors and monarchs would do their bidding had long passed. Christendom had come to an end and the medieval harmony (maintained in theory if not in practice) between church and state gave way to suspicion and controversy. The emergence of stronger nation-states led their monarchs to place more restrictive limits on the activity of the church within the boundaries of their state.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, chap. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> These three arrangements are put forth by *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Richard Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 3.

In the midst of this time period, the expulsion of the Jesuits from South America in 1767 put to rest any ambitions of the church as senior partner in the New World and established, quite forcefully, who was the power broker in Latin America.

### **Integralism**

Integralism understands the church and state as separate but envisions a privileged place for the church within the system and practice of national governance. For example, the Catholic Church would be the only national religion, church property would be exempt from taxes, and fees from the state would support numerous church projects, including hospitals, schools, and orphanages. From the original conquest and establishment of controlled regions to the Bolivarian revolution that swept through Latin America in the 1820s, integralism had been the dominant model for church-state relations. The benefits to the church as a socio-political institution were enormous: “The church became the wealthiest institution and the largest landowner in Spanish and Portuguese America. Tithes paid to the state and reapportioned to the church plus fees charged for services represented important income.”<sup>22</sup> The church’s status and wealth, of course, depended on European rulers and their particular policies. For this reason, the institutional church (though, not always individual church representatives) sided with the colonial government against nearly all movements for independence. This privileged relationship with the state allowed the church to acquire an enormous amount of wealth.

### **Liberalism**

According to Klaiber, “In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries liberalism emerged as a new and powerful political force and it constituted a new source of legitimacy. The church, which did not learn to change with the times, lost a measure of its own legitimacy in the eyes of liberals, positivists, and other reformers of advanced thinking. The church symbolized the old colonial order, while liberalism represented modernity and progress.”<sup>23</sup>

Liberalism is primarily characterized by a suspicion of centralizing power in one person or institution. Historically, this is the latest arrange-

<sup>22</sup> Penyak and Petry, eds., *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, 83. A “tithe” is a percentage of income given to a particular religious denomination.

<sup>23</sup> Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, 5.

ment of the relationship between church and state in Latin America. Deeply entrenched in the colonial order, the church did not embrace the diffusion of political power and economic activity for the greatest number of people until the middle of the twentieth century. Under this arrangement the church would wield little or no political *power*, but it could exercise great moral *authority* toward its own vision of how human society should be shaped in light of the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> The struggle between liberalism and Catholicism was really the struggle between both democracy and human rights and the old oligarchic colonial order that depended on real or imagined class distinctions. The church came dangerously close to irrelevance for its continued embrace of the older order.

Throughout the nineteenth century the church steadily lost influence among the upper classes, and in the twentieth it began losing influence among the popular classes as well. With industrialism, migrations from the country to the city, and an increased level of political consciousness among both peasants and workers, the popular classes soon fell under the influence of the new populist and Marxist doctrines. The church came seriously close to finding itself marginalized in the wake of these great changes, which were sweeping over Latin America.<sup>25</sup>

During the time between conquest and modernity, the church was always a purveyor of legitimacy. First it gave legitimacy to the colonial powers by upholding the status quo of church, state, and oligarchic domination. This “traditional” legitimacy would emerge from an understanding of history as static (unchanging) and the social order as divinely ordained. Later the church would legitimize peoples and institutions with a more democratic orientation as it emerged from its own colonial past. In the past fifty years, with a new commitment to peace and social justice, it has also offered legitimacy to marginalized groups who are challenging civil authority. Often these groups have been oppressed by dictators appointed by the oligarchy—traditional allies of the church hierarchy. By supporting these groups over and against their oppressors, the church paid a substantial price in terms of its own rights, as well as increased persecution and oppression of its people and institutions.

<sup>24</sup> If power is the ability to force people to do one’s will, authority is the ability to inspire others to do one’s will.

<sup>25</sup> Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, 5.

## Two Churches: One Latin America

There is an interesting contrast in what the Catholic Church represents if one visits the main cathedral in the Archdiocese of San Salvador, El Salvador. On the main level is a traditional cathedral constructed in the shape of a cross with huge side altars and a main altar some distance away from the front pews. The seat for the archbishop is situated as far back toward the rear wall as possible.<sup>26</sup> Liturgies in the main cathedral tend to be very traditional, with little input or participation from people in the pews.

In the basement of this cathedral is a place of worship referred to as the “Romero Chapel.” Situated near the tomb of martyred Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, there is a raised altar in the middle of a circular configuration of folding chairs set up every Sunday. The archbishop presides over the liturgy above on the main level, while below a volunteer priest from another part of the country says Mass every Sunday of the year. Upstairs the distance between the archbishop and the congregation allows for a solemn Mass with very little participation outside of the traditional parameters. Downstairs the homily is usually interactive, with parishioners engaging in dialoguing with the priest and each other as the meaning and application of the gospel is worked out between them. “Participatory” homilies, where multiple parishioners may stand and contribute to the reflection on the readings, are the order of the day.

In many ways, these two Masses within the one church epitomize contradicting ecclesiologies (understandings of the mission and identity of “church”). They also represent the two Catholic churches of Latin America and have coexisted for quite some time. The understandings of “church” are lived out differently in style, mission, and substance.

The two central events in recent Latin America church history were Vatican II and Medellín. Put somewhat simplistically, ecclesiastical leaders were guided by two different ecclesiologies or views of the church. Many bishops and priests in Latin America may be considered conservatives, because they still follow a pre-Vatican II ecclesiology. For them the church is essentially a spiritual monarchy that functions along hierarchical and paternalistic lines, from top to bottom. According to this model the bishops, who represent the magisterium (the teaching power) of the church, see themselves as teaching authorities commissioned to teach the truth to the faithful. The duty

<sup>26</sup> This was true as of 2009.

of the faithful is to listen to these teachings. Generally, *conservative bishops* and priests work closely with tradition-minded *cultural elites*. By way of contrast, the Vatican Council proposed the model of the church as community, which, without ceasing to be hierarchical, aims to encourage intercommunication, spontaneous participation, and fraternal dialogue. Bishops, priests, religious and laity who opt for this model see themselves more as pastors called to help the faithful to grow in maturity and to assume leadership roles.<sup>27</sup>

The differences between these two churches do not end there. Conservatives in the Latin American church strongly believe that faith and spirituality are individual, vertical, and ultimately personal realities that manifest themselves socially by worshiping with fellow Catholics. Progressives embrace the new Vatican II teaching that calls the faithful to actively work for the kingdom of God in and through the transformation of political, economic, and social realities. They believe the purpose of the church is to encourage societal transformation in a manner consistent with the ministry of Jesus and his preference for the marginalized, evident throughout the gospels. “For conservatives, unity and religious uniformity are positive values,”<sup>28</sup> which manifest themselves in unquestioning acceptance of abstract doctrine relating to faith and spirituality. This acceptance is concretized or contextualized through personal moral decision making. The type of education that both conservatives and progressives promote, while both Catholic, are markedly different as well.<sup>29</sup>

Progressive Catholics seek to understand and embrace religious and cultural pluralism and try to understand the Gospel and its demands in the actual world of men and women *where they live—socially, economically, and politically*. Context becomes the lens through which the Gospel is understood; it is part of how one reads and integrates one’s Christianity. If one

<sup>27</sup> Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, 15, emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> See Jeffrey Klaiber, “The Catholic Church, Moral Education and Citizenship in Latin America,” *Journal of Moral Education* 38, no. 4 (December 2009): 407–20. “On a formal educational level, the church runs private schools for the wealthy, the middle class and the poor. In some schools for the wealthy, such as those run by Opus Dei, a pre-Vatican II mindset prevails and emphasis is placed on individual advancement. But in others, especially those run by the Jesuits, solidarity with the poor is emphasized. On the popular level, the Fe y Alegría schools for the poor stress civic participation and commitment to building the local community. The same divisions may be found in Catholic universities: some incorporate the ideals of social responsibility in their programs, but others simply foster an individualism that is more in tune with neo-liberalism” (407).

is poor and indigenous, will he or she see and understand the Gospel in the same way as someone wealthy and from the cultural elite? Progressive Catholicism in Latin America—that is, Catholicism in the spirit and tone of Vatican II—believes that context deeply affects how one appropriates religious faith. This question of context and how it is addressed has seriously challenged the unity and message of the Catholic Church in Latin America.

The differences between conservatives and progressives go even deeper on other levels. Early in the colonial enterprise, bishops and other church leaders were almost always wealthy Europeans. It is true that the church had some Creole bishops (from the upper class of the colonial caste system), *mestizo* priests (mixed-race), and a few indigenous missionaries in the frontier areas, but the church was fundamentally a foreign and largely Spanish institution.<sup>30</sup> After the initial conquest, priests who came from mixed or indigenous ancestry were mainly formed and trained in their own country where they shared very similar conditions with those whom they served. Thus, the leadership came to be defined by its Roman or European ancestry (and later training), while the priest and his parishioners were perceived to share the same context. Bolivia, for example, has only recently had a cardinal-archbishop from Bolivia; the Vatican used to import them from Italy. Conversely, most diocesan priests from the lower classes were trained in their own country when seminaries began to form. The lower classes, in general, would come to participate in what would later be characterized as “popular” Catholicism, a blending of Christianity with certain indigenous beliefs.<sup>31</sup> These two types of Catholicism, “official” and “popular,” have existed side by side for centuries.

Popular Catholicism tends to emphasize the intersection of the human and divine in everyday life in ways that would appear magical to the North American or European imagination. Intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints, for example, is central to many people’s faith in this area even today. God works in and through nature, and in other noninstitutional ways. As some would say, the highway between heaven and earth is very busy.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, official Catholicism focuses on the institution as the exclusive conduit between the human and divine, which is centered on sacramental practice—particularly Sunday Mass and frequent confes-

<sup>30</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of this topic, see Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America*, chap. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> For some interesting examples of this, see Menchu, *I Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*.

<sup>32</sup> Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America*, 6.

sion—and a clearly defined set of ethical demands. One's soul and its spiritual state are the main concerns here, not one's material state of being or even the suffering one may encounter in this world.

It is important to note how the division between a popular church and an official church emerges from two separate and distinct cultures interacting. Usually, this does not happen between two cultures of equal power. "This is what is meant by *transculturation* or the imposition of one culture over another whereby one culture considers its way of life superior to the others."<sup>33</sup> The abstract and traditionally Latin formulated "truths" of the faith were imported by the Roman Catholic Church and uniformly imposed on a plethora of cultures, peoples, and indigenous religions in a way that made their acceptance nearly impossible. The still unfinished task of the church is "to participate in the Holy Spirit's work of *enculturation* where the local church makes the Catholic faith its own." This means that the local church needs "to embrace the pain and the joys of the process of *acculturation* in meeting a new culture on a playing field that is never fully equal, accepting some of its premises, rejecting or resisting many others and finally, coming into a fuller acceptance of it with its strengths and weaknesses."<sup>34</sup>

The division between official and popular Catholicism has resulted in deep divisions within the church, and its consequences are far-reaching. One can only generalize here, but the official church is usually comprised of members of the cultural elite (oligarchy) and senior clerical leadership (bishops, archbishops, and cardinals), who embrace an institutional Catholicism concerned with cultic obligation and doctrinal orthodoxy. Popular Catholicism comprises "the people" (poor) and clerics who emerge from this under-class who embrace a form of religiosity which addresses the very real and direct challenge of living life in an oppressive, dangerous environment. "These two ecclesial models are, of course, stereotypes; in between there are many variations and nuances. The important point is that differing theological orientations must be taken into account in order to understand the divisions that existed in many Episcopal conferences."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Address by Stephen P. Judd, "Acculturation and Learning a Second Language in a Missionary Context at the Maryknoll Language Institute," Cochabamba, Bolivia, March 2005. The Maryknoll Order is visionary in its respectful engagement with diverse peoples and cultures.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, 16.

## **Conclusion**

What is at the root of these ecclesial divisions? One could argue that whether or not one takes into account the context in which Christianity is lived really depends on the importance one assigns to the world. Imagine the complexity involved in bringing a particular religious faith to different peoples and cultures in languages that are totally different from one's own, not to mention bringing this faith to those who are radically poor. Is not Christianity simply a disembodied truth which hovers over the world and is valid throughout history regardless of where or when? Isn't God to be found most reliably only through the cultic practices of the sacraments and in a formal church setting? Do Christians have an obligation to challenge the world when human society causes suffering and death? It is toward these theological questions that we now turn.

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What is lay investiture and what consequences did it have on the prophetic role of the church in the "New World?"
2. What was *Societas perfecta* and how did it concretely affect the role of the church in the conquest?
3. Why did the church react to independence movements in the manner it did?
4. Explain the various systems of Christendom, integralism, and liberalism.
5. Why were there "two" churches within the Catholic Church of Latin America throughout the colonial period?