

*PART III**THE AGONY OF COLONIAL  
CHRISTENDOM  
(1808-1962)*

In the course of a century and a half Latin America has been confronted with a growing number of problems which Europe earlier had encountered and was able to resolve during almost six centuries. Relatively young communities have had to face successively the crises of being new nation-states with growing nationalism, secularization, the injustices of the colonial system imposed by the great industrialized powers, and the development of a pluralistic society. On the other hand, the diverse social groups have had to attempt to recover their coherence, equilibrium, inspiration, and means of government. The Church has been situated amidst these conflicts attempting all the while to defend her ancient privileges to the point of having almost lost them altogether, and has had to begin a vigorous renovation of which the first fruits are only now apparent, and far from complete.

The beginning of this period in the history of the Church witnessed the transition from the *Patronato* system, in which the Spanish State and government officials actually had charge of the church and its mission, to a secular system in which the Church recovered its freedom of action and is now able to address itself to the modification of the unjust structures and thereby recuperate the support and confidence of the masses. At the Same time one can observe the transition from a Christendom in which the Church enjoyed the support of the political system —and where all other religious expressions were excluded from the body —to a pluralistic system in which the Church is required to depend upon its own resources and means in an environment of religious freedom. In this second stage the Church can no longer pull legal strings by its relationship to the State but must work by means of *Christian institutions*. And the birth of these *institutions* allows us to see the beginning of the renovation that we are contemplating in our day.

This also means that the Latin American Church began a direct relationship with Rome, contact that was interrupted by the *Patronato* system, which in turn allowed for an opening not only to Europe but to the whole world as the vestiges of the Spanish Empire were abandoned.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE CRISIS IN THE NEOCOLONIAL STATES

The political independence of Latin America from Spain produced a series of demands upon the new fledgling countries. The organization of the new nations absorbed the energies of the first generations, and later the struggle was with universalization, and finally with secularization.

## I. THE CRISIS OF THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION AND OF THE CREOLE OLIGARCHY

The independence of the Spanish American colonies did not signify merely the separation from the mother country; rather, it signaled a profound change in the level of civilization, of political technology, and of economic systems. Understandably, at the time of independence there was an enormous disorientation that required time for reorganization and consolidation into a new Latin American order. The latter did not actually begin until the twentieth century. The crisis produced by the revolution and independence seemed to run the gamut from one extreme to another. In time, however, the situation began to stabilize and to assume definite and discernible positions. Throughout the whole process the Church has been deeply involved, for throughout Latin American history the Church has been one of the basic institutions of the social order.

Colonial society was composed of several social classes that were distinguished as much by their functions as by the degree of their culture, economic power, or race. These classes were as follows: (1) The *peninsulares* (colonists born in Spain) who occupied all the chief posts in the government and in the Church, in the viceroyalty as in the courts, and for the most part in the episcopacy. (2) The Creoles (children born in America of Spanish parents) who controlled the town councils and at times gained responsible positions as government administrators. Among these were many who were quite rich, and some were even ennobled by the Crown. As in Europe, the most prestigious profession among this group was that of the law or jurisprudence. (3) The mestizos who little by little became the great urban masses. (4) The Indians who were and who remained principally the rural masses. (5) The Negroes and mulattoes who were able to gain their independence after the revolution. Prior to independence, however, the Spanish Crown controlled completely her American colonies, and after the revolution the Creoles gained power and replaced the Spaniards or *peninsulares* in the administrative and episcopal posts—a truly French-type revolution in which the Creole bourgeois gained control of the instruments of power.

This oligarchical elite, inspired by a liberal or physiocratic economic philosophy, began the legal and cultural organization of the new nations. They discarded all the trappings of the monarchy in order to establish a type of representative democracy,

and there ensued a bitter and in some cases a prolonged struggle between the federalists and the unitarians, the latter in the majority of cases gaining control of the national political systems.

In one sense the first revolutionary generation, constituted by men born in the colonies and integrated into the vital functions and professions of the Spanish, failed to implement their federalist ideology, as did Bolívar in the Panamanian Assembly of 1826. The powerful territorial body united by Bolívar, which could have been the heart of a future South American confederation, divided into three nations: Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. In 1839 the Central American Confederation had virtually dissolved, and during 1837 and 1838 Chile withdrew from a proposed union with Bolivia and Peru. This continental tendency toward proliferation into separate nation-states not only divided governments but also tended to divide the Church into separate national entities. The Hispanic colonial empire disappeared —and with it “Latin American Christendom.”

One should remember, as was indicated above, that at the time of independence only twenty percent of the people in Latin America were white, twenty-six percent were mestizo, forty-six percent were Indian, and eight percent were Negro. The vast majority of whites resided in the cities. The emancipation movement to free the slaves, essentially an urban movement, was fostered and directed exclusively by Creole whites. Bourbon centralism —as in France during the same period —produced a decrease in municipal life and the prevalent discontent. The per capita taxes decreed by Charles III benefited the wealthy and set them apart even more from the poor. By the end of the eighteenth century a classist society composed of whites and "the others," urban and rural, rich and poor —a society profoundly divided —was already evident. The Creole elite was not reluctant to ally themselves with a foreign power in order to achieve their objectives. They became, however, the suboppressive class.

By the end of the eighteenth and beginning with the nineteenth century, England became the focal point of revolution in the West: political revolution in its parliamentarianism, economic revolution in its capitalistic liberalism, technical revolution in its mechanization, and intellectual revolution in its scientific empiricism and political theory of the social contract. The growing British Empire supported in principle what has been called the neocolonial system. The Anglo-Saxon metropolis sold manufactured products to its colonies while at the same time purchasing from these colonies agricultural products and raw materials for use in the metropolitan community and industry. This system in itself created and promoted a disequilibrium of industrial development; at least the imbalance was real and not fictitious as in the Spanish mercantile economy, which depended on the exploitation of American gold and silver. The English nation, whose origin and tradition can be traced to the type of commercial government of Phoenicia, Carthage, Venice, and Genoa (and because of the economic technology and mechanized development that served as its base of industrialization), imposed on all the people an economic system which Adam Smith set forth in his *The Wealth of the Nations*. This system proposed that the regions that produced the raw materials open themselves to the markets of the more recently industrialized countries, and the result was a process of moving away from Spanish mercantilism. The Spaniard sold raw materials and agricultural products *which the colonies produced* in order to buy precious metals. The English produced manufactured goods in order to buy in turn agricultural products and raw materials for British industries. The British system pressured the buyers of its manufactured goods to increase their agricultural and mineral production. Spain, on the other hand, opposed agriculture, cattle, and mineral production or

organized it in such a way as to have a complete monopoly over it. This system impeded any real development of the economy of the colonies. The English system was superior, but in time, when the politics and economics of the colonies prompted attempts to begin industrial development, the Latin Americans encountered a twofold problem. First, there was the direct and indirect opposition of the oligarchies in the already industrialized and developed countries who enlisted the ready support of the neocolonial oligarchies in the Latin American countries. Second, goods could not be manufactured as cheaply in the colonies as they could in the already industrialized countries. Thus there was the impediment of unequal or unfair competition, which stemmed from the ability of the British to manufacture and sell goods in Latin America cheaper than the same goods could be produced and sold here.

Liberated from Spain politically and from its artificial economic monopoly, the new Latin American countries, for lack of other possibilities, became a part of the British and later the continental European and North American neocolonial system. The underdeveloped countries, from an industrial point of view, would see the prices of their raw materials controlled by the highly industrialized countries who could sell to these underdeveloped nations manufactured goods at constantly increasing prices. This system has dominated capitalistic liberalism on the international plane and is a type of economic colonialism based on industrial primacy. The Church, which was linked hand in glove with the monarchy during the colonial period, became closely tied to the new Creole and later bourgeois oligarchies of the new Latin American countries.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were for these new republics periods of struggle to develop their agricultural, cattle, and mineral production to the degree that they could enter the free market as equal participants. But the world market was dominated by the industrialized countries, especially Great Britain and later the United States, while the exploitation of the raw materials was directed by Creole or foreign capital, first British, but also North American in Central America, the Caribbean, and the northern countries of South America. Our countries in turn depended for their protection on these industrialized powers. But when we attempted to become a part of the community of nations as industrialized countries, that is, when we attempted to liberate ourselves from the *neocolonial system*, there began a struggle with two solidly entrenched and unified entities: the capital of the industrialized nations which saw their sources of cheap raw materials threatened, and the liberal Creole oligarchies who had been the beneficiaries of this system, working in perfect harmony with the foreign industrialized capital.

Many revolutions would be attempted to destroy the neocolonial system, and efforts would be made to prevent the industrialized countries from fixing the prices of the raw materials and thereby increasing the prices of the manufactured products. Efforts would also be made by the Latin American nations to overcome their internal crises by a very simple tax system that completely disorganized these industrially undeveloped countries. Furthermore, these revolutions attempted to displace the power of the Creole oligarchies who were so fond of foreign products and who possessed all the economic and political power that permitted them to maintain the Latin American republics in this state of being producers of raw materials at low cost for the highly industrialized countries.

All of this began in the colonial period as a part of the Spanish system that based its fictitious economic progress on the fluctuating resources of the precious metals and not on the technical efforts of the people. Spain chose the easy way: exploiting the American mines with the Indians rather than taking the narrow road that England

chose, namely, the hard work of an industrious people. The Spanish lack of economic vision was catastrophic for Spain and also for the Latin American countries. Spain could easily have had coal and steel in Europe, but this would have signified an austere, simple, daily industrial effort. Spain preferred to mine only gold and silver, which in the short run produced an ephemeral splendor, but in the long run produced economic catastrophe from which Spain as well as Latin America has never recovered.

The Church, more or less implicated with the conservative governments—in view of the fact that the *Patronato* system had been maintained and was closely tied to the Conservatives by family and social relations—represented, at least for a time, interests foreign to those of the more humble people, namely, the Indians, the workers, and the poor. Insofar as the liberal or semisocialist governments have liberated the Church, it can be a crucial factor in the reorganization of Latin American society.

## II. THE CRISIS OF THE UNIVERSALIZATION OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Organization was achieved at the level of *civilization*, and universalization at the level of *culture* and of the Latin American “ethico-mythical nucleus.” The Spanish Empire maintained a formidable barrier to all foreign ideological meddling: the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition. Latin America failed, therefore, to permit the entrance of any new world views and thereby began the crisis of universalization. At times the Church followed a traditional course, and at other times it was supposed that it would do so, all of which indicated the opposition of the reforming elites.

From a social point of view, at least in principle, immediate liberty was granted to Negro slaves (in Argentina in 1813 and in Brazil in 1888). The Indian was considered an integral part of the new society, but neither the emancipated Black nor the native American was permitted by the Creole elite to rise to any place of importance. The mestizos, on the other hand, achieved rapid social advancement. Racial universalization was, therefore, relative.

The Scholastics disappeared from the universities, that is, from those that had not closed their doors after independence, and the Church degenerated toward the end of the nineteenth century into a state of complete disorientation. “The nineteenth century was, therefore, for Spain as well as for Spanish America a century of philosophical decadence.”

Philosophical and political ideas were imported from Europe and mixed with those already existent in Latin America, producing foreign systems and at times a kind of Latin American mythology. These movements clashed with the Church in that European philosophical systems were anti-Catholic and anti-Christian. Encountering a situation already in total disarray and without any possibility of marshaling a satisfactory response, the Church during the entire nineteenth century assumed a negative or defensive posture.

We are able to compare in this opening process different levels that we will describe in the following manner:

1. The movement for emancipation was under the influence of Spanish and French liberalism but was basically conservative. The new nations discovered later alternative forms of government at the level of the instruments of civilization and eventually became aware of the new physiognomy of the marrow of their culture and the “ethico-mythical nucleus.” Civilization was easily transmissible, but the fundamental structures required more time to develop.

For example, an Argentine, Manuel Belgrano, graduated in 1789 from Salamanca

with his bachelor's degree, and in 1793 with a degree in law. He was clearly a Physiocrat in his philosophy. "Cattle raising," he said, "will produce far more than all the gold in Peru." Another indication can be seen in the "French party" that arose in Brazil as a result of influences from Portugal in Porto Bello in 1791 and in Bahia in 1797.<sup>1</sup> The truth is that French and English influence entered Latin America more by way of Spain than directly, and the basis of all these ideologies was an ambiguous *liberalism*. In Central America Pedro Molina declared, "The Supreme Creator created all men equal ... political liberty is absolute. ...I was born free, therefore, I should govern myself"<sup>2</sup> The famous priest, Hidalgo, in his proclamation from Guadalajara on December 6, 1810, demanded equality for the Indians in the Mexican society.<sup>3</sup>

Equally influential in Latin America were the encyclopedist movements, the sensualism of Condillac (Mont'Alverne y Gonçalves de Magalhaes in Brazil), the eclecticism of Victor Cousin, the economics of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, and the slow growth of technology as seen in Thomas Falkner of Argentina who was a student of Newton. The Masonic lodges functioned among the Scotch and Yorkshires in Mexico and were supported by Lucas Alamán and José María Mora. Slowly these movements began to take shape in an ideological environment strictly Latin American, and although they were still floating on colonial structures, they signified an authentic era of transition.

The Church was totally disoriented and could only oppose or support existing situations. Many members of the clergy and even one bishop became deeply involved in the movements of ideological emancipation, but the ecclesial body as a whole could not offer any coherent solution.

2. The constitutive moment of the new national forms took place in approximately 1850 when the most profound "revolution", "renovation", or "rupture" in the history of Latin America occurred. The Mexican Constitution of 1857 is a clear example, as is that of Colombia in 1853. The romanticism of Echeverría, the work of Alberdi and later of Sarmiento in Argentina, Lastarria and Esteban Bilbao in Chile, Sacco and José de la Luz y Caballero in Cuba began a preparatory movement. With them one can observe a clear separation from the past and the formation of new bases of national consciousness. The Church was always present, but in the majority of the cases only as a critic or combatant, a residue of the colonial era and of the disintegrating Christendom.

But the true ideological rupture by the bourgeois minorities who formed the Creole oligarchy—not yet aristocracy but really from the middle class—was first Krausism as is seen in the work of Arthur Roig and later in the positivist movement. F. Brandão wrote in 1865 his *Escravatura no Brasil*, but it was M. Lemos with his *Comte-Philosophie Positive* (1874) who really introduced positivism into Brazil. His disciple, Teixeira Mendes, continued Lemos' work. Positivism, especially in Brazil but also in all of Latin America, was really a religious philosophy, at least as it had been developed by Comte. Gabino Barreda was a student of Comte in Paris and in 1870 introduced positivism into Mexico. P. Scalabrini was the first from the River Plate area to teach the positivist philosophy, and it became very popular in Uruguay between 1873 and 1880. Porfirio Díaz decreed positivism as the ideological underpinning for his government (1876 - 1880, 1884 - 1911). Together with positivism the doctrines of Littré were universally espoused by the liberal bourgeois who governed in Latin America, which resulted in a laicised teaching toward the end of the nineteenth century in virtually the whole continent. Opposition to the Church was as widespread as it was intense, but only a few writers made any attempt to defend Christian institutions. For the most part, as

we indicated above, few were concerned with the lamentable state of the Church, and those who could have risen to the Church's defense remained outside the political or cultural arena.

3. A slow but radical change began in the twentieth century as a result of the influence of Bergson, Bretano, Husserl, Neo-Thomism, and later Ortega y Gasset. Positivism was subjected to ample criticism, and a position generically "spiritual" was defended in the university chairs, if not by the political parties that continued to be liberal. Slowly, however, new contemporary positions developed: socialism and Marxism along with the birth of Christian political parties. José E. Rodó in Uruguay and Jackson Figueiredo in Brazil both represented this transition from positivism to neospiritualism. The *conciencialismo* of Alexander Korn in Argentina was also a reaction against the doctrines of the nineteenth century. The work of Trinidad Sánchez Santos in the social arena was a position unknown in the previous century. The Church at this time was slowly receiving support from the experiences of certain "prophets" of the nineteenth century, and with the renovation of European Christianity the Church began to exercise a more prominent role. The stage of defending the faith began to give way to the discovery of new forms for diffusing the faith.

Latin America, because of the crisis that we call "universalization," can at the present time and in a global manner (through its elites, especially university, labor, and political leaders) begin a dialogue with the contemporary ideologies of the world, knowing their methods as well as the consequences. The "opening" from the Hispanic colonial to the total world and to humanity produced—during a century and a half, doubtless through much suffering, struggle, opposition, and lives—visible fruit that may be imperceptible to the foreigner who is not able to understand this secular revolution "from within."

Protestantism is, with respect to the "universalization," the only significant religious movement representing foreign influence in Latin America, especially North American influence. As one can see, the orientation at the level of *civilization*—technology, economic, and political philosophies—stemmed from the Anglo-Saxon world, first from England and later from the United States. The orientation at the level of culture and of the "ethico-mythical nucleus" stemmed primarily from France, namely, from the romantic, positivist, and antipositivist movements. The influence of Protestantism resulted from the expansion into Latin America of the North American civilization as well as the Anglo-Saxon and German immigration extending over a long period of time and affecting the development of the Latin American conscience, although it is one of the new elements of the contemporary conscience. Yet this did not prevent the Latin American culture from being alienated by a culture of domination for the benefit of the metropolitan powers.

### III. INSTITUTIONAL SECULARIZATION

This phrase, institutional secularization, covers two different concepts. In the first place, secularization can signify a movement *contrary to the Church*, that is, an attempt to confiscate the property or restrict the rights of the Church. This usage is incorrect, or at least inappropriate. In the second place, secularization can signify the awareness of the *autonomy of the State* with respect to the Church and the effective means by which this autonomy can be achieved. It is evident that many times the State can achieve autonomy by a defective or imprudent process such as the Church's refusing to allow such a process or postponing its realization. In both cases secularization is

antiecclesial. One should understand that the process of secularization is not, however, necessarily anti-Christian. Rather, it is the fruit of sound Christian theology. The anti-Christianity of many efforts toward secularization is more the effect of an irregularity on the part of the State or the Church than it is the product of the secularization process itself. In Latin America secularization has been achieved by every means possible—from extreme violence, as in Colombia in 1861 and in Mexico from 1917 onward, or peacefully, as in Chile in 1925. We are speaking at this point of the level of the relations between the Church and the various nation-states. Secularization has been operative on various levels.

1. The first step was the transition from the *Patronato* exercised by the Spanish Crown to the *Patronato* subject to the authority of the new national governments. In some cases the Church was at the mercy of the political leaders who at times were less than scrupulous and who in the majority of the cases lacked experience and prudence. The liberal governments and even the positivists did not renounce their political power over the Church; rather they pursued it in every area. The movement toward secularization, nevertheless, was intrinsically opposed to the *Patronato* and was eventually abandoned by the national governments in Latin America. In Chile the Church was separated from the State in 1925. More recently, in 1961, the Bolivian government renounced the right of the *Patronato*. But until the Church was separated from the State, the governments of the nineteenth century were able to prevent anything in the Church deemed undesirable and thus could impede any significant reform of the Church itself. The Latin American Church, nevertheless, did not become a “national Church” as many political and some ecclesiastical leaders attempted in the history of Europe. This in itself indicated a relative maturity and fidelity to Catholicity.

2. The Church was deprived of all the economic advantages it enjoyed during the colonial era. The new national governments, desperate for funds, were able to achieve a complete restructuring and seized many of the ecclesiastical properties, as did the Germans during the Reformation or as occurred after the French Revolution. Not only were diocesan properties seized, but also those of the religious orders. In Argentina, Bernardino Rivadavia is a good example of a leader in the movement toward secularization. Not only did Rivadavia attempt to create a national Church, he also confiscated the properties of the Church and attempted to reorganize the religious orders in 1824. Anticlericalism took a more violent form in Bolivia in 1826 with the plundering of the convents, and in Nicaragua with their confiscation in 1830. Much later, in 1861, Colombia expropriated the Church properties, as did Mexico after 1917. In most of Latin America the Church lost virtually all its agricultural properties as well as other lands and buildings which it would have inherited from the colony. In fact, one can say that the Church was reduced to real poverty in view of the fact that it depended and now depends in a majority of cases on only the financial contributions of the faithful. Bishops and priests no longer enjoy the income from rentals or salaries from the State in the majority of Latin American countries, but this allows the Church as an institution much greater liberty than it enjoyed during the colonial era.

3. Following the revolution the Church progressively lost its legal and political power and influence. During the struggle for independence the Church intervened actively, even to the point of helping frame the constitutions in many countries during the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet from 1850 onward the Church lost almost completely its political power, except in those cases where the government in a kind of trade-off allowed the Church certain rights in exchange for concessions in other areas. The Liberal parties were the most consistent opponents of the Church while generally the Conservatives supported the Church in its political and legal struggles.

There appeared at times confessional political parties such as the Catholic Party in Mexico in 1911. None of these parties, however, gained any effective power for themselves or for the Church. It has only been those political parties of Christian inspiration, not confession, organized at the beginning of the Second World War, that have had any real impact on Latin American politics. They have, however, signified the presence of the Christian conscience in Latin American society not only in the political parties themselves, but also in the trade union movements, among worker elites, and among Christian university students. This latter group has been very active, and on numerous occasions controlled student elections in the universities of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru. Thus one can say that the Church has become involved positively in secular society, and that the Christian conscience has begun to manifest a confidence in the new "mode of being."

The first occasion of the separation of Church and State occurred in Colombia in 1853 along with the government's approval of divorce. Colombia has been an especially sensitive country in regard to the religious question, and in all its history one sees a dialectical struggle between Catholic and anti-Catholic governments, between Liberals and Conservatives, each gaining power and proceeding to change the total structure of the country. In fact, Colombia is a kind of paradigm of the Latin American soul. In 1886 Rafael Núñez, elected as a Liberal president, reestablished the union of Church and State in Colombia, thus ending a period of separation that began during the regime of José Hilario López in 1849.

4. Finally, as a result of the influence of Littré, *secular teaching* was imposed in almost all of Latin America, although there were changes beginning in 1884 in Argentina and Costa Rica. There has been, however, a tendency to transplant Scholasticism and in certain countries to make religious teaching optional in the state schools. Catholic universities have grown alongside state and national universities, but theology is not accepted as a legitimate member of the sciences.

In some countries the Church has recognized the importance of working within the doctrine of the freedom of conscience but has insisted that this not be solely secularism. In these cases the tendency has been to avoid the utilization of the organisms of the State for achieving the goals of the Church. In contrast, the Church has supported freedom for the formation of a religious awareness within its educational structures, advocating a pluralistic system as a part of secular civilization, albeit a system that advocates respect for religion and is not antireligious as in the case of secularism. In the field of teaching, the Church has discovered several new media such as radio, television, newspapers, books, and other publications.

Secularization has slowly produced the freedom of conscience that signifies for the Church the discovery and creation of new ways and means by which to do its work in a pluralistic society. Protestantism, on the other hand, has recognized the possibility not only of its existence but of its growth within this system of secularization. At first this complicated and even worsened the relations between Protestants and Catholics in that liberal governments, secularists, positivists, and others who were struggling against the Church saw in Protestants ready allies. In time, Protestants and Protestantism have acquired a structure more nationalized, and the Church in turn has slowly adapted itself to reality and has been able to begin an ecumenical dialogue.

#### IV. THE CRISIS WITHIN "POPULAR CATHOLICISM"

In the conclusion of Chapter 6 we indicated that *folk Catholicism* does not represent a mixture of religion; rather, it is simply a religiosity or piety of a people in Chris-

tendom. With the disappearance of Christendom, piety of this *cultural* form no longer has the freedom to function and also disappears. The militant Latin American Christian today who has lived within the experience of the ideal of a “new Christendom” (1930 - 1962) suffers in his own soul a painful transition from a type of piety supported in Christendom—at least as a future ideal—to a type of piety that can only be exercised in a pluralistic, secular society. This is a crisis in the transition to the level of spirituality, of pastoral theology, of ecclesiastical institutions, and of the ways of carrying out the mission of the laity, priests, and bishops. In general, although the question is intensely debated today by Latin American theologians—for example, as a result of the investigations in Argentina regarding “folk Catholicism” and also in Ecuador in the IPLA, in Mexico City, in Cuernavaca, in Peru, and among university groups in many other countries—there is lacking a universal and historical perspective which in summary form we could propose immediately.<sup>4</sup>

The nineteenth century represents the agony of colonial Christianity. A poetic composition very popular during the period clearly indicates the end of an era.

Religion is done for; it is gone —  
 Along with virtue and devotion.  
 All one can hear now are the cries of passion,  
 The raising of the capricious sword.  
 There is now no Holy Father in Rome,  
 No one to bless us.  
 O, what a terrible disgrace!  
 There is no King, no Crown.  
 Only the sound of war is heard.  
 There are no virtues, not a single one.  
 This, in a word, is the situation.  
 There are now no bishops, no priests.  
 No one can deny this fact.  
 Religion here is done for....<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with the war of independence, one can see the state of colonial Christianity becoming progressively more precarious. The war was continued as a war of national organization. The Church and the believing masses in “folk Catholicism” began to drift. In a real sense, the war represented the end of an era, the termination of “folk Catholicism” as an adequate expression of the faith for the masses and of the Christian culture that had moved so far from the Christendom that began with Constantine in the fourth century A.D., and which, after a lengthy period of development, expanded into medieval Latin and Hispanic Christianity. The latter subsequently flourished in Latin America and entered an irreversible crisis beginning with the nineteenth century.

What was the origin of the piety of this “popular Catholicism”? Folk Catholicism is well known but has been studied very little, even in Europe where the phenomenon originated and was later brought to America. The Europeans of today are ignorant of the origin of this religious legacy. Israel had its “folk Judaism,” the religion practiced by the Jewish people during the kingdoms founded by Samuel and David. Moreover, the Jewish people drifted and deviated from the official cult of the Temple and of the demands of the Law into idolatry, magic, and witchcraft. The prophets in turn threw the cult to foreign idols into the face of the Jewish people. See, for example, Judith 8:18.

Pre-Constantinian Christianity, in contrast, possessed a liturgical vitality adapted to the demands of the diverse communities and did not insist on a *pia devotio* with

which the masses were dissatisfied and would in consequence go in search of a substitute. Before Constantine, Christianity had no “popular Catholic” manifestation, rather only a living “Christian piety” that differed from community to community, from diocese to diocese, from church to church, and from East to West.

Under Constantine, the liturgies and rites became unified, and the masses of the empire began to stream into the Church. The market places and the house churches became basilicas. Together with a liturgy no longer understood by the larger community, there appeared supplementary devotions among the masses of people in Christendom, namely Byzantine and Latin “folk Catholicism.” Thus the pagan celebration of *Natalis Invicti* of the sun came to signify the birth of Jesus, Sun of Justice, the 25th of December when in the northern hemisphere the sun has just passed an equinoctial point and the days become longer as Spring approaches. Latinized European “folk Catholicism” assumed special characteristics in Spain given the influence of the Visigoths, Arabs, and the local idiosyncrasies of the primitive Hispanic Roman province.

The Amerindian, meanwhile, developed his own primitive piety, which persists in vivid forms even until today. Note, for example, the Inca prayer:

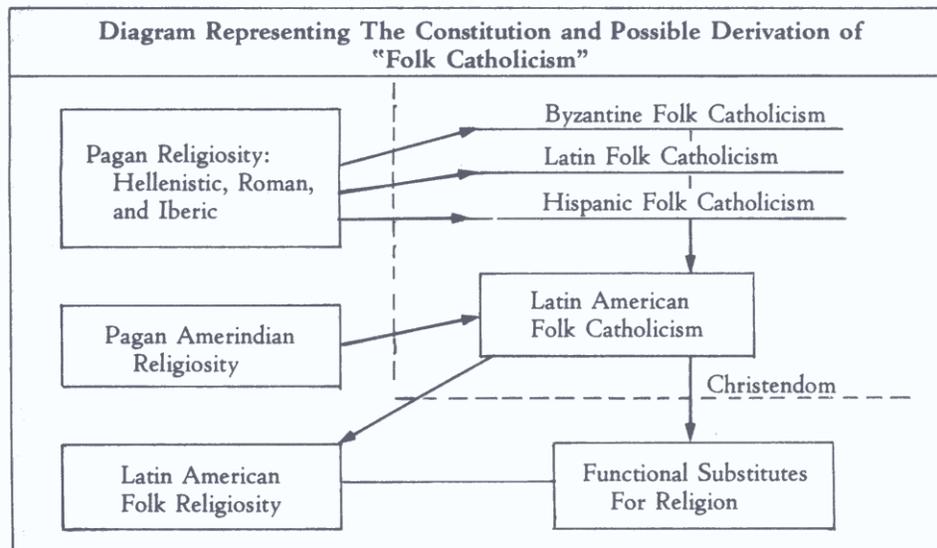
Pachamamá Santa tierra  
caita cocata regalaskaiki  
¡Amas apihuaspa!  
Pacha Santa Tierra;  
Amas apihuaspa,  
Ucui orco maicha.<sup>6</sup>  
Pacha mamá, Santa tierra  
de esta coca te regalo.  
¡No me hagas mal!  
Madre Santa Tierra,  
¡No me hagas mal!  
por todo el cerro.  
Mother Earth, Holy land,  
to thee I dedicate this plant.  
Do me no wrong or evil!  
Holy Mother Earth,  
Do me no wrong or evil,  
on any part of this hill.

When the devotion of Christendom through the Virgin clashed with this pre-Hispanic piety or religiosity, a certain mixture resulted, as can be seen in this invocation:

Pachamamita, Santa Tierra,  
Virgen, ayúdanos!<sup>7</sup>  
Mother Earth, Holy Land,  
Virgin, help us.

Thus were born the popular devotions to the virgins of Guadalupe, Copacabana, Luján, and others —devotions that manifested the same characteristics of the great cathedrals of Constantinople, Poland, Germany, France, or Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Along with the disappearance of Christendom there occurred the depopulation of the rural areas and a constantly increasing migration of people to the cities. “Folk Catholicism” of the rural type and colonial origin found refuge first in the cities, a visible survivor of the previous era, only to appear later in the secularized functional

substitutes in religion. To understand better the total process, we propose the following diagram:



In the Latin American culture of the twentieth century, the secular city has progressively deprived our society of the ambiguous unification between values merely cultural and profane with those religious. This deprivation of Christendom's unity is a process that has intensified since the 1960s. "Folk Catholicism" thus drifts at times into a mere popular religiosity as seen in the adoration given to various saints who signify the deification of certain unusual deaths or the apparent miraculous incorruption of corpses. Due to the technological media of communication through magazines, newspapers, and television, there are other widespread substitutes for religion such as horoscopes. Few people in Latin America, nevertheless, are completely devoid of religious inclinations. Moreover, at times, as can be seen in certain urban devotions, carry-overs from Christendom —such as the devotion to St. Cayetano in Buenos Aires —enjoy a very fervent following. This last example represents the final stage of "folk Catholicism," the remains of Christendom —especially among the Spanish and Italian immigrants not yet influenced by the impact of the secular city. The new era, however, has not resolved its contradictions. The solitary individual in the cities, a product of secularized and universal civilization, feels uprooted, devoid of any foundation. Existence appears absurd and without meaning. Having left behind the security of Christendom, and —as a result of the influence of the scientific spirit —having cast aside all superficial piety, the modern urban dweller is unable to confront resolutely the "absence of meaning." Thus recur the functional substitutes for religion, which are, as their name indicates, nothing more than substitutes, crutches for a crippled religious inclination. Underlying the horoscope one reads daily —believing that his or her destiny is somehow predetermined —there is an antihistorical, mythical attitude that attempts to free one from all commitments and that sets forth a secure prototype of physical-natural necessity of primitive man.

The disappearance of "folk Catholicism" is not only a religious and pastoral fact, it is a secular fact. The secularization not only of institutions but also of the intimate life of every human being proceeds along an irreversible course and direction. This

situation sets forth globally the entire question of the missionary and prophetic guidance of a Christian congregation in the secular, post-Constantinian, post-Tridentine and, in Latin America, the postcolonial city. The events of recent years should provide sufficient material to allow reflection in the light of faith and also an interpretation that will permit us to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the apparent chaos of developments. Within a forest one can only see trees, and it is necessary to withdraw some distance to enable one to see the forest as a whole. History, even the most recent, is this analogically prophetic perspective that searches for meaning, especially in the history of the Church practiced as theology from a living faith, the search for meaning that history has for God.

At the present, pastorally speaking, one should adopt a balanced and realistic position. Folk Catholicism by nature was and is an expression of the daily understanding of the life of the Latin American people and should not be depreciated nor evaluated from the perspective of the aristocratic, alienated Latin American elite or from an ahistorical, abstract, and Europeanized point of view. There is the need to know how to divest all the inauthentic structures that retard the process of evangelization from folk Catholicism as such, and having done so, begin a process of liberation. The popular consciousness will be re clothed in various manners; one of those —depreciated by the Europeanized Catholic liberal minorities —is folk Catholicism. One should not, however, accept this folk religion casually, as Frantz Fanon would say, and leave it as it is. What is needed is a prophetic critique in order that popular piety or religiosity will begin to move toward a new type of humanity.