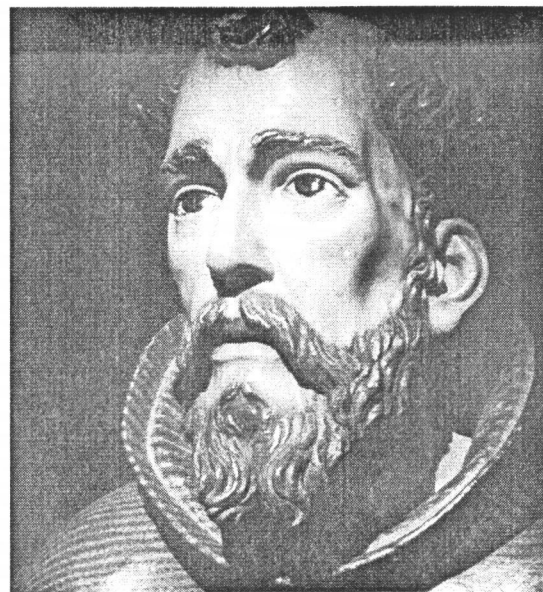


Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



The
Franciscan
Dream of an
Amer-Indian
Church

Lesson Unit 18

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our "cloister," we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.

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Go, Rebuild My Church!

*A Comprehensive
Course on the
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Charism*



The Franciscan Dream of an Amer-Indian Church



Lesson Unit 18



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The Franciscan Dream of an Amer-Indian Church

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How St. Francis was seized by the Spirit of God on Mount Machu Picchu

In Brazil, a rumour goes around that Francis of Assisi is not dead, but lives somewhere in the north eastern parts, hidden away by the Franciscans. And so, it is not surprising that he appeared to me in a dream. The day before, I had observed an eclipse of the sun in Lima – the fascinating embrace of sun and moon. And now – in the night – St. Francis comes to me, in order to take me along through different Latin American countries. In Machu Picchu, the old Peruvian Inka City, he stands in front of me, in the “Temple of the Wind”, in that part, which is protected by three walls, but where the fourth side is completely open to the wind. Francis places himself in the wind, allows the Holy Spirit to take hold of him and begins a fiery speech:

Praised be God through this country and these stones which still to this day speak of a culture that is deeply akin to me. See! The “Temple of the Sun” in which the cry of the human being for warmth and light can be heard to this day.

And here, in the “Temple of the Wind” feel the wind, how it blows, how it penetrates us, feel the Divine inspiration, the Power that moves everything.

And there below: the “Temple of the Fire” that warms up the cold

nights and gathers the people around the fire.

There behind: the “Temple of Mother Earth” who carries us, sustains and nourishes us.

Feel this sacred ground and join with me in the praises of the Creator of heaven and earth, of Viracocha, as she was called here.

I feel like a brother of the Inkas and of all the peoples of this southern continent.

See, how sun and moon kiss each other here, how the wind and the water love each other, how the fire and the earth are a pair together.

This is why I, Brother Francis, have chosen this part of the earth for my second earthly home.

(Anton Rotzetter)



Ruins of Machu Picchu, Peru.



Introduction

A



Franciscan mission attempts

The celebration of 500 years of Evangelisation in America has given rise to contradictory reactions. These have their root causes already in the variety and difference of the sources. Often the historical facts are contradictory in themselves. There should be a sincere historical awareness at the beginning of a consideration of the 500 years of Franciscan presence in the "New World." Only if the whole spectrum of the different elements from which the events developed is perceived, will an appropriate judgement be possible.



"The new found people..."

Much could be said about the multi-faceted work of the Franciscans in America. In this Lesson Unit, we wish to consider in what way those first friars entered into a relationship with the indigenous population among whom they were thrust so unexpectedly.

The "year of reflection" 1992 has not merely given rise to questions concerning the missionization of America. It has also brought about a critical judgement of the confrontation between the ancient American peoples (for example, the Aztecs, Maya, Ketchua, Aymara, Mapuche and Guarani peoples) together with their religions, and the Spanish western culture.

Therefore, it seems of particular value for the Franciscan movement, to deal with the little known missionary attempts that were undertaken by the friars in America in the course of the 16th Century.

This history can be looked at from the perspec-

tive of the winners or the losers. A great difference is apparent, if one describes the history of the conquest of America from on board the Spanish ships or from the point of view of the peoples affected by the conquest. As Franciscans, we will give priority to the viewpoint of the Indígenas. But it is difficult to reconstruct their perspective after all the destruction.

Even the opinion the Indígenas themselves held of the Franciscans is ambiguous: an Indígena who was tortured by Franciscans will have a different opinion of them from an Indígena who has learned to read and write in a Franciscan school. From the culture of the Nahua (Aztecs) we know texts which the people sing lovingly to "Totahtzin San Palacizco" (our little father Saint Francis). On the other hand, other texts of the aboriginal peoples express their lack of understanding of these strange beings.



Survey

B



n alternative culture

In the first place, we will point out certain characteristics of the Franciscan charism and corresponding distinguishing features of the aboriginal American peoples, with whom the first friars came into contact. The "*Franciscan utopia*", which is our theme here, first met with fertile soil in the native American cultures. From this insight the hope of founding an alternative Amerindian-Franciscan culture and Church was born.

In the second place, theological influences that marked the attitudes of the first Franciscans will be singled out, as well as the historical limitations of their plans and projects.

Finally, the contradictory kind of Franciscan proclamation of the faith in the 16th Century will be shown.

Information

C



he beginning of a Utopia

1.

Encountering the *Other* as a threat

1.1.

For Europeans, numerous and difficult problems arose with the discovery of the American continent. Normally they resolved such problems by taking refuge in old thought-patterns. When coming into contact with others, the European peoples almost always felt that their own thought patterns and way of life were questioned. This brought about an attitude of insecurity. In order to overcome this, the European

conquerors belittled and depreciated the culture of the newly discovered people. This mechanism of self-defence, based on the fear of the new and unknown, allowed them to emerge as heroes from the test. The, all too easy, resort to the "*devaluation of all that is alien*", means that one closes oneself off against the culturally and religiously *other* and does not even try first to understand their otherness.

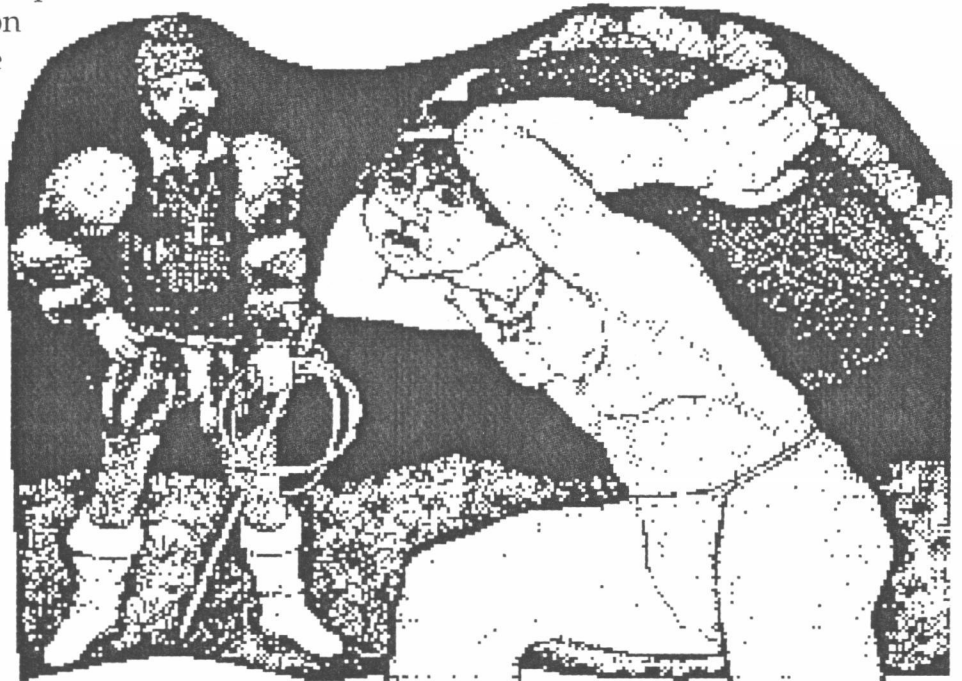


Whoever acts in this way arrives at the conclusion: "If I am the superior party then it is the other one who must change; the other must imitate me and must listen to me." Such an attitude is neither original nor exclusive to the Spanish conquistadors. In classical antiquity Greeks and Romans reacted in a similar fashion. For them it went without saying that the others were "wild people" and "barbarians", and were often caricatured as deformed beings, terrible in appearance.

In the 16th Century, a typical exponent of this attitude of rejection and devaluation was the theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. In one of his books he taught that pagans, because of their inferiority, could be subdued legitimately. He was of the opinion, "that the Spaniards have the perfect right to rule over the barbarians of the new world and over the islands situated there; these barbarians are surpassed by the Spaniards in cleverness, virtue and humanity as boys are by adults, women by men, cruel, raw

people by very gentle people, prodigal and uncontrolled people by abstinent and self-controlled people, finally, I would almost say, like monkeys by people" (Strosetzki 234).

It is significant that - as proof for the inferiority of the Indígenas - he pointed out their lack of interest in money, as well as their lack of ambition to enrich themselves. Besides, he ridiculed their disregard of the concept of private property.



The Franciscan encounter with the Other

1.2.

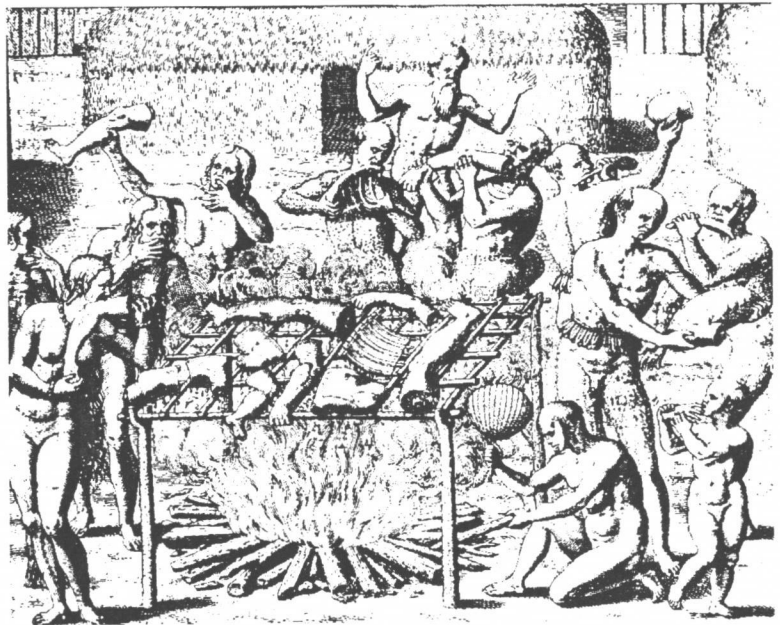
The encounter of the Friar Minor with the so-called *barbarians* is certainly conditioned and limited by the intellectual and mental categories of thought he was used to and that had neither been invented by the Spanish nor by Christianity itself. Therefore, it is valid to relativize somewhat the reproach of the *ethnocentrism*. A certain *ethnocentrism* of course, is unavoidable, but it is

another matter if one forces one's own cultural-religious standards on others in a violent way.

It is astonishing to note how Franciscan missionaries were able to break away from such preconceptions described above. This break is an essential part of the Franciscan charism. Francis and Clare wanted to possess nothing. They wanted to be "*pilgrims and strangers*" on Earth.



This enabled the Franciscans to discover values in the *Others* that were not seen by the majority of the Spanish conquerors. But it must also be mentioned that there was no Franciscan who would have questioned the conquest, as such, and would have been against it. Most Franciscans interpreted the conquest of America in their time as God's work. According to their way of thinking, the devil, in the shape of the reformers, had begun to lure the Catholic souls in Europe away from the papacy. Therefore, the Franciscans regarded it as a special sign of God's providence that the newly discovered continent had been entrusted to their mission. The prophetic criticism of many Franciscans was not aimed against the conquests themselves, but rather against their violent excesses, the enslavement of the *Indígenas*, forced labour, exaggerated taxation and murder.



It is certain that the Friars Minor were not able to overcome completely the ancient convictions and criteria proper to a European mentality of their times; but in spite of this, and because of their Franciscan origin, they managed to achieve an ability to transcend such points of view and judgements by and large. Thus, they were able, among other things, to discover cultural values among the Amerindians (language, theatre, writings) that were normally considered worthless by the European society. Of course, they would fight the *idolatri* (*idolatría*) ruthlessly, especially as it was partially connected with ritual human sacrifices. The Franciscans would not or could not tolerate certain *barbaric* customs that were connected with such sacrifices. Through laborious research we know today that the numbers of human sacrifices that the Franciscans reported with disgust and abhorrence are highly exaggerated. The truth is: the more cruelly the foreign religion was represented in its customs and rituals in Europe, the more one's own Christian religion could be celebrated as a triumph over *barbarism*. At the same time, the atrocities committed under the Christian sign were covered up.

In Franciscan spirituality there is an almost natural inclination to be open towards the culture of foreign peoples (see LU 7). This attitude enabled many Friars Minor to be ready to learn from others, to understand themselves as the poor who can be enriched by the *Others*. The Franciscan Jerónimo de Mendieta, a chronicler of the 16th Century, reports on the arrival of the Franciscans, who were greeted solemnly by the conqueror Hernán Cortés and were led into the capital city of Mexico. On that occasion Mendieta also mentions how one of the brothers, called Toribio de Benavente, was given the name *Motolinía* (the poor) by the Aztecs:

*They (the twelve Franciscans) waited for the market-day, where most of the people of that province gathered together to procure food for their families. They were surprised to see such a great number of people in one place as they had never seen such before in their lives. They praised God with great jubilation when they saw the rich harvest that He spread out before them. Since they could not tell them anything, because they did not yet know their language, they pointed to heaven with signs, (like dumb people). They wanted to make them understand that they had come to show them the treasures and the glory that existed up there. The *Indígenas* followed them (like children who follow those who awaken their curiosity).*



They were surprised to see them in such ragged garments that contrasted the stately and elegant way in which the Spanish soldiers were dressed. And they said to each other: "What poor men are these? What kind of clothing is it that they bring along? They are not like the Christians from Spain." And they repeated often a word in their language: 'Motolinia! Motolinia!' One of the priests, who was called Toribio de Benavente, asked a Spaniard, what was the meaning of that word that they kept repeating. The Spaniard answered: "Father, motolinia means 'poor' or 'the poor'." To this Toribio said: „This shall be my name for the rest of my life;" and from then on he took this word as his name and never signed his name other than as Brother Toribio Motolinia (Mendieta).

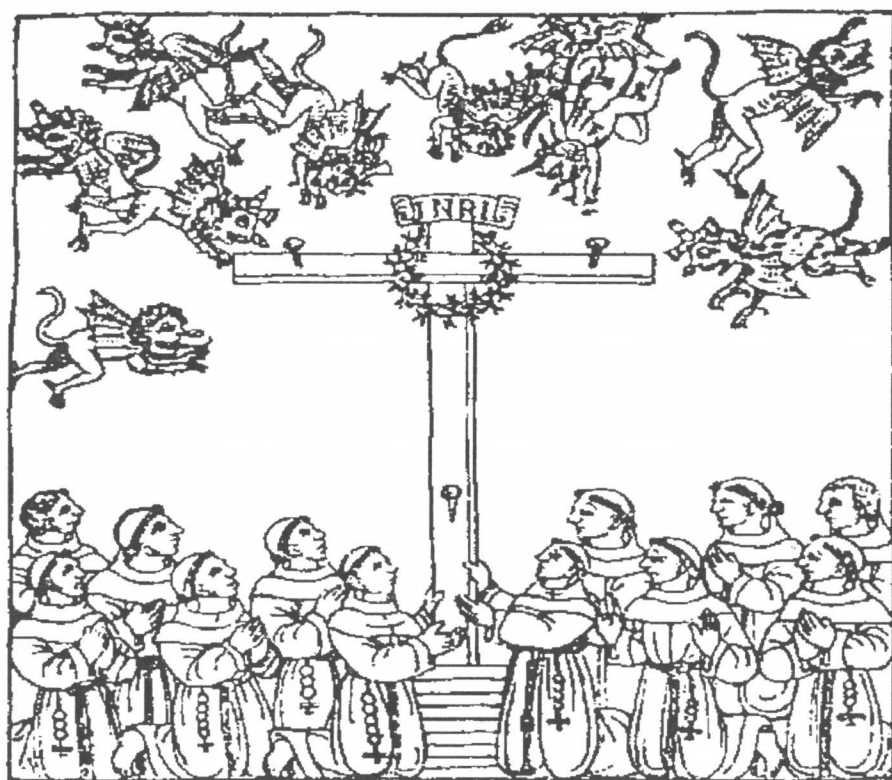
arrived and because of their special way and manner in which they began to preach the most sacred and revered Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Since they didn't know the language, they said no more than that there were fire and toads and snakes in hell, whereby they pointed to the earth. When they had said this, they raised their eyes to heaven and, pointing with their hands to heaven, said that there was one single God in heaven. They always did this in the market places and wherever people had gathered. They knew no other words to make themselves understood by the natives but through signs. While they were speaking, one of them, a venerable old bald-headed man, stood in the full power of the midday sun and taught them in the Spirit of God. With the zeal of charity he said these things, and with a loud voice he

continued that they must be converted to God by midnight and should give up their idolatry.

While these things were being preached, the Chieftains said: "What do these miserable poor men want? Look, if they are hungry, and if they are in need, give them something to eat." Others said: "These poor people must be sick or mad. Let these poor ones cry out; they are seized by the evil of mania. Leave them in peace and let them endure their illness as they can. Don't harm them, because finally they and the others must die of this mental illness. Have you noticed how they shout and cry at noon and at midnight and at the fourth hour of the morning, when all the others are enjoying themselves? Without doubt, it is a great evil that must have attacked them, because they are men who have lost all their

senses, as they seek neither pleasure nor contentment, but sorrow and loneliness (Diego Muñoz Camargo).

What appears laudable in the Franciscan self-representation, meets with bewilderment and a lack of understanding when looked at from the Indígenas' point of view.



Twelve Religious of the Order of St. Francis erect the first cross.

There is also another story from the point of view of the Indígenas about this event; it allows us by way of a direct comparison to recognise the difference of perception. From the perspective of Diego Muñoz de Camargo, the arrival of the brothers sounds like this:

As we continue in our report, we will speak of the great admiration that the natives felt, when these religious men



Through their contact with the Indígenas, the missionaries discovered in these peoples numerous praiseworthy qualities.



The friars admired in indigenous peoples their sense of solidarity.

The nature-loving life of the Indígenas, the absence of every form of avarice, their almost natural inclination to share even the little they possessed, their sense of community life and solidarity - these were some of the characteristics which the friars admired in the Indígenas. The Franciscan chronicles surely idealise these characteristics.

The more romantic a picture is drawn of the Indígenas, the more repulsive the Spanish conqueror appears.

The friars compared the lifestyle of the Indígenas with that of the Europeans and they found it much closer to the Franciscan ideal than the bourgeois-Spanish Christianity of the 16th Century. All this awakened the hope in the brothers of establishing a Christian community after the model of the early Church of Jerusalem in the New World.

The Franciscans thought that - thanks to Divine Providence - they had been offered the hoped for opportunity of realising the project of a life according to the Gospel. Their enthusiasm was exuberant. This is expressed in the commentaries of well-known chroniclers of the Order (Motolinía, Jerónimo de Mendieta) who wrote about the "natural goodness" of the Indígenas.

When their "utopian ideal" came under attack by the "Sons of Mammon", as he called the Spaniards, Jerónimo de Mendieta turned to the global vision of Joachim of Fiore which was wide spread in those days: "The history of mankind develops in a continuous fight between good and evil: The good (= Jerusalem) is often corrupted by the evil (= Babylon)." Jerónimo de Mendieta describes in his "Ecclesiastical History of the Indians" all the disasters

that his beloved Indian people (= Indígenas) had to suffer and then goes on to look forward to a *Messianic* future. He admitted the possibility that the "utopian project" could fail, but - and he was sure of this - it would certainly rise again some day.

Strictly speaking, one can't claim that a real dialogue had taken place with the Indígenas. What happened was probably an encounter between the two cultures. Thereby, the Franciscan principles came in many ways into clear conflict with the interests, values and lifestyles of European Christianity.

The Franciscans shared their day-to-day life with the Indígenas. When these were interrogated by Sebastian Ramirez de Fuenleal, the President of the Royal Court of Mexico, they took the side of the Franciscans. When he questioned them in-



dividually and asked them why they sided with the friars, they responded:

Because the brothers go around poor and barefoot like we do. They eat what we eat and talk to us meekly and without pride.

An implacable critic of the Conquista and a most bitter chronicler of the monstrosities committed by the Conquistadores, the Inka Guzmán Poma de Ayala, describes the Franciscans as follows:

The Reverend Fathers of the Order of the Lord St. Francis, all of them are holy and most Christian, of great obedience and humility, charity and love their neighbour. They are givers of alms, and they love the poor in Jesus Christ very much.

With their love and charity, they attract the rich as well as the poor in the world, and to a much greater extent the poor among the Indians. Never has been heard anything of lawsuits nor complaints against these blessed Friars.



"The friars are givers of alms, and they love the poor."

The Amer-Indian-Franciscan Utopia: An Alternative

1.4.

The brothers had a different vision in comparison to the lifestyle of other Europeans and they were ready to say so in an unequivocal manner. They respected the customs and the nature of the people. They wanted an Amer-Indian Church with its own structures, its own Canon Law and its own priests and bishops, who would have to be poor and not accept 'tithes' for taxes. This "New Church," of which the brothers spoke again and again in their reports and letters, is radically patterned on the early Church. Therefore, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) meant a bitter relapse for the utopia of the Franciscans. The Council of Trent fixed a Western form of Church and demanded that this should be universally valid.

The Franciscans gave much thought to new and alternative models of Church which should deliberately be different from the "Old Church" in Europe. Nevertheless, inculturation remained ignored in principle, because indigenous religion was always seen as idolatry (idolatría) by the Franciscans. On the level of religion, the frontiers remained hard and immovable. The price for it was that around the middle of the 16th Century, they gave up their dream of an Amer-Indian Church and had to admit that the Indígenas still adhered to their ancient religions. This led to the use of force by Franciscans – something which we still have to talk about.

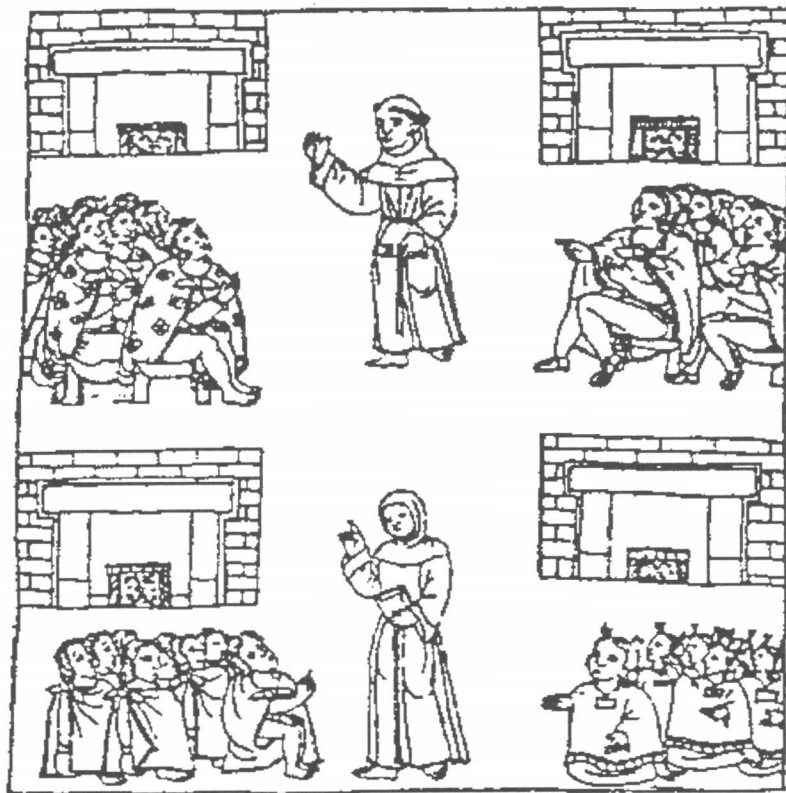


The first Franciscan missionaries refused to identify the Christianization of the indigenous cultures with a Hispanization. This is the reason why many of them refused to teach the Spanish language to the Amer-Indians, and in this point they continued disobeying again and again the explicit instructions of the Spanish crown. At a later period, when the task of evangelization was already widespread and the Franciscans had lost influence in the new Church of America, they were obliged to comply with such orders. However, it is believed that no Spanish was taught in the famous Franciscan College of Tlatelolco, although it had professorships for Latin and Náhuatl.

This college tried to open the Mexican culture to the wealth of insights based on the Humanist ideals, without losing the customs and traditions of the indigenous cultures. The Chair of Medicine was a very obvious proof of this. It was occupied by an Amer-Indian doctor, a former student of the College. Here the syllabus was taught in accord with the ancient traditions of healing. Amer-Indian doctors were put in charge of the hospitals in their communities.

However, many brothers became angry when the indigenous peoples, in order to designate the Spanish, referred to them using exclusively the general term *Christians*. A good example is the Franciscan Jerónimo de Mendieta:

It is quite clear: If the Indians hear and see (and that happens continuously), how the Spaniard is called a 'Christian' in contrast to them – how one says, for example: "Call that Christian over there to come to me! – Tell this Christian... should a Christian be looking for me, that I am not at home," then it will come



*Proclamation of the Gospel
in the houses of the people.*

about that, if one uses this language (and in general that happens among all Spaniards, Mestizos¹, Mulattos² and Blacks and among some men of the Church), that many Indios think about it and say to each other: "So I am not a Christian. If they call a Spaniard and each mestizo a Christian only because he is not an Indio, then the Indio is not a Christian. I am a pure Indio, therefore I am not Christian." [...] whoever doubts that, as the Indios have seen many Spaniards and see them still (and they see them every day) who lead a bad life with evil manners, without respect for their neighbour and without charity, who chase the Indios purposely with their dogs and abuse them, take their wives and daughters, rob them of their possessions and humiliate them, and if they experience then that such people are called Christians - then

¹ Offspring of a Spanish American and American Indian.

² A person having one Afro-American and one White parent.



the Indios will have good reason to say: "If you call these Christians, although they live like this and do what they do, I rather want to be an Indio, just as you call me, and not a Christian." And so they develop hatred and aversion against the name 'Christian' and consequently against the name of Christ Himself, from where the name 'Christian' is derived; and this has actually been happening to the word 'Christian' in all parts of the West-Indies, where they had not yet heard the full message of faith in Christ.

[...] I praise my God for having given me insight into this error when I arrived in this country, so that such words never came to my lips, to call a 'Spaniard' a 'Christian', rather call him a 'Spaniard', and call 'a mestizo, a mestizo', and 'the mulatto, a mulatto' and the 'Indio, an Indio'; and I considered them all to be Christians, good Christians or bad Christians, but Christians, because they are baptised.



2. Theological and historical influences

2.1. The origins of the Franciscan vision

The positive attitude taken by the first Franciscans towards the indigenous cultures of the Americas was, in reality, made easy by certain theological currents to which the Franciscans in general were committed. They came from the time of the Reform Movements in Europe. The prophetic spirit, predominant in all of them, made them question a power-oriented Church which considered itself, even in its form, the ultimate and definite expression of Christendom. This called the reformers in Europe (Martin Luther and others) into action. At the same time, the Franciscan Order was divided into Observants, Conventuals and Capuchins (see LU 2).

The spirit of protest, discernible in many contemporary Franciscan texts, must be seen in connection with the idea of an age of the Holy Spirit, in which people expect a purely *spiritualistic Church*³ (Joachim of Fiore), and the rediscovery of the antique philosophers (humanism). St Thomas More tried to criticise and change the society of his time with his visionary work *Utopia*.



Quetzalcoatl, "The Feathered Snake",
The Protection-God of the Aztec people.

³ This means a purely spiritual Church, which is critical towards the existing form of the Church or even rejects it.



The Franciscan friars were committed to this way of thinking when they encountered the native cultures. They wanted to lead these into the common future they hoped for, and not adapt them to European cultures. Thus, the European idea of an age of the Holy Spirit and an utopian society and the Amer-Indian vision of the return of *Quetzalcóatl*⁴ melted into one great dream.

Of course, it would be wrong to include all Franciscans who arrived in the New World among the followers of such prophetic visions. However, that group of Franciscans that supported the Indígenas, was sufficiently strong and coherent to be given due weight and consideration.

The Spirit of the Time and Intolerance

2.2.

After decades of missionary endeavour, the Franciscans had to recognise that the Indígenas still met in secret places to practice their traditional belief. As we already know, we have to distinguish between the attitude of the Franciscans towards the culture of the Indígenas and the attitude towards their ancient religions.

A clear separation between religion and culture becomes all the more problematic, if one knows how much religion is at the core of the cultures of the indigenous peoples to this day. Although the brothers shared many ideas of the Christian humanists, they nevertheless didn't identify themselves with them completely. For instance, the idea of *tolerance*⁵ was still foreign to them. It took centuries and many painful experiences until this thought could become generally accepted in the theology of the Church and in the culture of modern peoples. Even today there are relapses into racism, nationalism and religious intolerance in the regions of Franciscan missionary activity.

In the 16th Century, no European nation had the idea that one should respect the religion of other peoples. The Aztecs, too, destroyed the temples and sanctuaries of their subservient peoples, burned their sacred books and forced their own religion upon them. The Spanish Franciscans scarcely acted otherwise at that time. In addition to that, they had their experience of

history: centuries of fighting against Islam on the Iberian Peninsula.

Thus, among the Franciscans in the New World, an attitude developed that must appear inconsistent. On the one hand, they lived an extensive tolerance on the cultural level. They fought for the rights of the Indígenas and demanded their political and cultural identity, even two separate republics for Spaniards and Indígenas each having their own structure and form of organisation. On the other hand, the Franciscans were intolerant on the religious level.



The burning of cloth, books and idolatrous ornaments by the friars.

⁴ Aztec god, whose return the Aztecs expected, according to their chronology, in the year of the arrival of the Spanish (1519).

⁵ Quality of tolerating beliefs, customs, cultures etc. different from one's own.



We have to see the difference between mere intolerance and progression to actual violence. The violence applied by the Franciscans is fiercest where they employ political power to destroy idolatry. The authority for such actions they took from the papal bull "*Exponi nobis fecisti*" (1522), in which Pope Hadrian VI. bestowed on the Franciscans "*every papal authority in the spiritual and secular sphere.*" Some Franciscans regarded this as a right to force the political authorities to assist them in the prosecution and condemnation of idolaters (*Inquisition*⁶).

A letter of the Franciscan bishop of Yucatán, Francisco de Toral, from March 1, 1563 condemns the violent excesses of his Brothers and gives a vivid impression of the grave aberrations of that time:

It is the case that among the Fathers there is no scholar, and that they do not know the Indios and have even less love of God and of neighbour that would enable them to endure their misery and their faults, some kind of faults that one heard only rumours about, because some of the Indios had returned to their old rituals and idolatries. Without further reconnaissance and proof, the fathers begin to torture the Indios, they hang them up above the ground with ropes, and some of them even with heavy stones tied to their feet. They poured boiling wax on the stomachs of some others and flogged them. They questioned them about whether they possessed idols or whether they had sacrificed human beings and had tortured them on crosses like Christ our Lord, and had pierced their hands and feet.

In an interrogation that the devil taught them, the Indians begin to confess that they had idols and were guilty of the death of many people, and consequently they condemn themselves and many other unfortunate people. And if they are released later, they announce to the whole village that the people should confess as they have done, so that they would be given back their



An executioner priest beats a naked man with leather strings.

freedom. Therefore, they confessed anything that just happened to be on their tongue, for fear of the torture. Because of these confessions, the fathers later condemned them to pay many 'Reales'⁷ to many lashes, and to servitude in the houses of the Spaniards. They made themselves inquisitors; the Provincial [Diego De Landa] was the chief inquisitor, and another three were fellow inquisitors, who passed judgement together with him. They organised two public 'autodafés'⁸ with all ceremony, with Church flags, processions etc., in which they clothed the newly baptised Indios in penitential robes. They flogged them all and shaved them bald and sentenced them to servitude and slavery for three, six or ten years. They

⁶ Introduced by Phillip II, and transferred to Latin America; an institution or court appointed by the Church of Rome to suppress heresy.

⁷ Silver coin of the Spanish colonies.

⁸ The show trials of the inquisition and public burnings of the accused at the stake.



took their bones from the graves and erected twenty statues of their gods and burned them together with the bones, without having tried to get more information or further proof except the statements of those who had been hanged, statements that I have found to be all falsification and lies. They kept more than 100 chieftains imprisoned in the monastery of this city and wanted to imprison even more to make an 'autodafé' and burn them all, which is a gross injustice and impertinence.

[...] All this I have said, so that Your Majesty may know that these accursed have introduced torture instead of teaching the faith; instead of making God known to them, they have driven them to despair. Instead of bedding them in the lap of our Holy Mother the Church in Rome, they have driven them into the jungle. And what is worse: they claim that the Law of God cannot be preached without torture, which Holy Mother Church proves...

There is also a rhetorically polished letter of 1567 referring to the same treatment the Indígenas had to suffer. In this letter some Maya Chieftains complain to King Philippe of Spain about the Franciscans:

We had once experienced the happiness that lies in getting to know Our Lord God as the only true God, and Your Majesty as our secular Lord. Therefore, we gave up our blindness and idolatry. However, before we could even open our eyes properly to take in the knowledge of the one and the other alike, a persecution hit us in 1562 from the side of the members of the Franciscan Order: the biggest persecution one can imagine. We had brought the friars here so that they might teach us, but instead, they began to torture us. They hung us up by the hands, whipped us cruelly, fastened heavy stones at our feet, tortured many of us on torture benches and forced us to drink large quantities of water. Many of us died of these tortures while others became cripples.

[...] We were close to despair, because of the cruel tortures that had caused the death of many. We found ourselves crippled and robbed of our land. Yes, even more: we saw, how they dug out the bones of our



"We found ourselves crippled and robbed of our land..."

baptised dead, although they had died as Christians. Not satisfied with that, the religious and the judiciary of Your Majesty, carried out a solemn act of the inquisition in Mani. They brought many pictures of the gods, exhumed many dead and burnt them publicly. Apart from that they sentenced many to eight or ten years of slavery which they spent in the service of the Spanish. They also distributed penitential robes. All these events filled us with great wonder and terror as we didn't know, having been baptised only a short time ago and not been taught the faith, the meaning of all these things. When we returned to them to plead for a hearing and for justice for our subjects, they arrested us, imprisoned us and transported us – in chains like slaves – to the monastery at Merida where many of our people died. There we were also told that we would be burnt at the stake. We didn't know the reason for it.

[...] In spite of all our sorrow and tribulation we love the Fathers and give them all that they need. We have built them many monasteries and equipped them with ornaments and bells – everything at our own expense and that of our native subjects. As a reward for our services they treat us as subjugated people to such an extent that they even rob us of the dominion that we have inherited from our ancestors. We never suffered anything like that when we were still pagans.





Franciscan Mission in the America of the 16th Century: An attempt at Inculturation?

Defending the culture of the conquered peoples

That we have concrete information about the defeated Old-American peoples, is owed mainly to the work of the Franciscans. The numerous linguistic and ethnological works of the friars witness to extensive work for the protection of the indigenous cultures. They wrote in many indigenous languages and published books, composed petitions and applications to political authorities, induced the writing of chronicles which the Amer-Indians themselves wrote with great diligence.

This includes also religious literature: sermons in vernacular, pictorial catechisms, hymns and theatre plays. The friars also developed teaching methods which were imbued with the thinking and feelings proper to the indigenous cultures, such as popular and para-liturgical religious devotions. But all these writings and actions were based on the conviction that in Christianity, as the only true religion, there was no place for the

indigenous religions.

That the Franciscan approach to the indigenous cultures was nevertheless far-reaching for their contemporaries, is shown by the fact that they had to face suspicion, open persecution and even the destruction of their work through other Spaniards. The refusal of the Franciscans to teach the Spanish language to the Indígenas made it almost impossible for the *conquistadors* to command their services. In 1533, Jacobo de Tastera told the Spanish who criticised this practice of the Franciscans:

If they (the Spanish) do nothing in order to learn the language of the Indios and to know of their suffering, then let them cease to talk and stop their mouths with rock and mud.

But it would be exaggerated to define this missionary endeavour of the Franciscans theologically as *inculturation*.



In the end, most Franciscans in the Old-American cultures were at the service of spreading the Western form of Christianity, and not a truly Amer-Indian Church. Their mission was paternalistic: they treated the Amer-Indians as children and cared for them. In spite of that the Amer-Indians came to know St. Francis through the friars. "San Palacizco," the Náhuas called him lovingly.

Today... a new miracle-working image was carried around for the first time. The substructure was covered by red damask, on which the symbol of the fire was painted. The rulers, who governed Mexico, were also depicted on it, and an eagle as a sign of authority. The image of our beloved father, St. Francis was erected, as if he was riding on horseback. He held a cross in one hand and made a gesture with the other as if he handed us a book.

We should learn to decipher this book which "San Palacizco" handed over to his indigenous sisters and brothers so that we can meet them as Franciscan people.



Exercises

D



Exercise

An excerpt from the Memorial, part of the religious Rules governing the life of Franciscan friars in a Spanish community in the 16th Century:

They must neither accept excessive and unnecessary alms nor ask for them. Rather, they should refuse such alms whole-heartedly, convinced that such rich alms have been robbed from the poor; and that they will have to give an account of it as thieves and robbers. Even if such donations have been passed on to them through a third person, they have to tell the benefactors to distribute this money among other poor people.

They must consider such donations as of no more value than the dung of animals and humans.

Questions and tasks

1. What impression does this text give you?
2. Compare this text with Chapter 9 of the Early Rule of 1221.
3. What does this text tell us today?





Exercise

Read the following texts:

(In Utopia) people possess invaluable riches (= gold and silver) without considering their value. They keep an inestimable treasure, not as a treasure, but so they have it and use it, as in good faith I am ashamed to show, fearing that my words shall not be believed. And this I have more cause to fear, for that I know how difficult and hardly I myself would have believed another man telling the same, if I had not presently seen it with mine own eyes.

For it must needs be that how far a thing is dissonant and disagreeing from the guise and trade of the hearers, so far shall it be out of their belief. Howbeit, a wise and indifferent esteemer of things will not greatly marvel perchance, seeing all their other laws and customs do so much differ from ours, if the use also of gold and silver among them be applied rather to their own fashions than to ours. I mean, in that they occupy not money themselves but keep it for that chance which, as it may happen. So it may be that it shall never come to pass.

In the meantime gold and silver, whereof money is made, they do so use as none of them esteems it more than the very nature the thing deserves. And then who does not plainly see how far it is under iron, as without which men can no better live than without fire and water? Whereas to gold and silver nature has given no use that we may not well lack if that the folly of men had not set it in higher estimation for rareness' sake. But of the contrary part, nature, as a most tender and loving mother, has placed the best and most necessary things open abroad, as the air, the water, and the earth itself, and has removed and hid farthest from us vain and unprofitable things.

Therefore if these metals among them should be fast locked up in some tower, it might be suspected that the prince and the council (as the people is ever foolishly imagining) intended by some subtlety to deceive the commons and to take some profit of it to themselves. Furthermore, if they should make thereof plate and such other finely and cunningly wrought stuff, if at any time they should have occasion to break it and melt it again, therewith to pay their soldiers' wages, they see and perceive very well that men would be loath to part from those things, that they once began to have pleasure and

delight in. To remedy all this they have found out a means which, as it is agreeable to all their other laws and customs, so it is from ours (where gold is so much set by and so diligently kept) very far discrepant and repugnant, and therefore incredible, but only to them that be wise. For whereas they eat and drink in earthen and glass vessels which, indeed, be curiously and properly made and yet of very small value, of gold and silver they make commonly chamber-pots and other vessels that serve for most vile uses not only in their common halls but in every man's private house. Furthermore, of the same metals they make great chains, fetters, and gyves wherein they tie their bondsmen. Finally, whosoever for any offence be infamed, by their ears hang rings of gold, upon their fingers they wear rings of gold, and about their necks chains of gold, and, in conclusion, their heads be tied about with gold. Thus by all means possible they procure to have gold and silver among them in reproach and infamy. And these metals, which other nations do as grievously and sorrowfully forego, as in a manner their own lives, if they should altogether at once be taken from the Utopians, no man there would think that he had lost the worth of one farthing.

(From: "The second book of Utopia" by Sir Thomas More, in: Everyman's Library)

The manner of life of the Indios is what I would call 'Epicurean' (...) i.e. riches, gold and pearls, all the things that are precious to our eyes, are for them things of no value. Yet though they possess them, they do not work in order to acquire them, neither do they ascribe to them any value (...) They do not have any property but what they have they all possess together.

(From a letter of Amerigo Vespucci)

Questions and tasks

1. What resemblance can you find in the two texts cited above?
2. Compare the above texts with Early Rule 8, 1-6.





Exercise

Read the following four ancient texts of the first Franciscan missionaries in "New Spain":

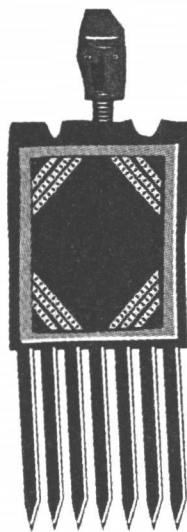
- a) *They (the Indians) are not on the look-out to acquire and keep wealth, nor do they overwork in order to acquire estates and honours. They go to bed wrapped in their poor blanket, and on waking up they are immediately ready to serve God... Their mattress is the hard earth, without any bedclothes. These Indians live in their little huts together, parents, children and grandchildren. They eat and drink without much noise and ado... They go out to seek the necessary maintenance for human life and no more.*
- b) *On the other hand, observe how sluggish a Spaniard gets up from his voluptuous bed, after first trying hard to banish the brightness of the sun from it. Then he immediately puts on a dressing gown, so that the wind will not touch him, and he asks to be clothed, as if he had no hands to do it himself; and thus they have to treat him as though he were a cripple.*
- c) *Many of the Indios, men and women, especially the old men and women, and more of the latter than the former, are of such simplicity and purity of soul that they do not know how to sin. This hap-*

pens to the point that their confessors find themselves more embarrassed than with other great sinners, seeking out some sinful matter so that they might then be able to give them the benefit of absolution. And all this not through sloth or ignorance, because they give very good account of the Law of God.

- d) *The Indio vis-à-vis a Spaniard is like a small crab in front of a lion. It is quite evident that the Spaniard harbours bad intentions and the resolution to put an end to all Indios of New Spain, if they fall into his hands. And the Indio maintains his equanimity and mildness, to the point that he would not even think of hurting a fly. Thus, when there is any doubt, one can always assume that it is the Spaniard who did wrong, and the Indio who had to suffer it.*

Questions

How would you comment these observations made by Toribio de Benavente and Jerónimo de Mendieta?





Exercise

For those who are not from Latin America:

Questions

1. Are there similar texts from the early times of the work of the Order in your country?
2. Are there similarities, differences? Which? Why?



Adoration— The dream of an Amer-Indian Church.



Applications

E



Application

Aztec-Franciscan dialogues:

A group of twelve Franciscans came to Mexico in 1523. Already a year later these twelve brothers began a religious dialogue with leading personalities of the Aztecs. The text of the discussions was reconstructed from records by Bernardino de Sahagún OFM in 1564. The words in cursive print mark Aztec deities and are the attempt of the Franciscans to introduce their Christian concept of God with Aztec concepts. Below are some sections from this conversation:



(The Franciscans speak:)

Let us not confuse you!
Do not regard us as some higher beings,
Because we, too, are human beings like you,
in no way are we gods,
we are also at home here on this earth,
we drink water and eat,
we suffer cold and heat,
we, too, are mortals and pass away.
We are only messengers,
sent to your worthy homestead,
to your water, to your mountain (VV. 26-39).

Only because of compassion for you, for your salvation and for your sake:
it is nothing earthly
that the great spiritual man wanted,
no green jewels nor valuable metal
nor green Quetzal-Feathers

nor other precious things,
he wanted nothing but your salvation.
This he desired (VV. 128-136).

... only out of love, only out of compassion he is doing good to you.
For this is what our God and Lord asks of us:
that we may love one another,
(that) we have mercy on each other and do good to one another,
as we are human beings,
living here on earth not for our own sake or for our own advantage (VV. 245-254).

Ages ago the true God, the Lord (*tlatoni*),
the Lord who is close to us,
the Lord Who-Is-with-us (*tloque navaque*),
through Whom we live (*ipalnemoani*),
deigned to appear to His loved ones
(VV. 288-293).

His holy name is Jesus Christ, true God (*teotl*)
and true man,
He, through Whom everything lives
(*ipalnemoani*),
Lord with us and near us (*tloque navaque*),
and redeemer of the whole world (VV. 544-550).

He created us human beings, who are his subjects,
he created also the devils, those whom you now regard as gods (VV. 556-559).



(The answer of the Aztecs:)

Where should we still go then?
We (are) subjects, we (are) transitory, we (are) mortals,
well, let us die then, well, let us perish then!
As the gods have died, too (VV. 922-927).

You said (to us), that we don't know, the Lord of the With and Near (*tloque navaque*),
the Lord of Heaven (and) Earth.



You said, that our gods are not true gods.
It is a new (unheard word), what you speak,
and we are shocked about it,
we take offence.

Because our fathers, who had come to live on
earth, to be, did not speak like that.
They gave us their custom (their law),
they believed in the gods,
they served them, they showed reverence to the
gods (VV. 933-950).

It is the gods, through whom everything lives,
they showed us mercy.

When? Where? It was still the time of the night.
And they said:

It is they who sustain us, (who give us our
evening and morning meal),
and altogether drink (and) food,
The food, maize, beans, orach and sage.
To them we pray for water, for rain, through
which the earth thrives.

They are rich, blessed, in possession of goods.
Continually and eternally the trees sprout,
resplendent with green (is) their home.

Where? How?

In the empire of the Rain God *Tlalocan*
(VV. 960-978).

And now we, shall we destroy the old law, we?
The law of the *Chichimekes*,
the law of the *Tolteks*, the law of the *Colhuacan*,
the law of the *Tepaneks*?

We understand that which we were born into
and live in,
what we were reared in, through they (our an-
cestors) called upon the gods
for which they are worshipped.

Listen! O my Lords!

Do not do anything to your people,
what causes all the more disaster,
and will all the more destroy
what the old man, the old woman had been
reared in and grown up with.

Let us not anger our gods,
let us not fall victim to their wrath!
And may the people not rise up in front of us
because of this, and turn against us.

May we not upset them,
may we not confuse them by what we are say-

ing to them: that they may no longer honour
and call upon the ancient gods,
that they may no more adore them
(VV. 1005-1034).

Enough then with all that we lost,
that we were deprived of,
all that has been taken away from us!
that we were deprived of the power
and of the seat of the reign.

If we remain living in the same place,
we shall be nothing but restricted,
imprisoned.

Do with us what you like!

That is all we can say, that is all we can
reply to the breath of your speech,
O you, our Lords! (VV. 1048-1060).



(Excerpt from the closing-
speech of the Franciscans:)

... because you have never heard
God's word,
because you don't have God's book,
the Word of God,
you had never been reached by the breath of
the Word of the Lord of Heaven (and) Earth.
And since then you have been blind,
and deaf,
as if you live in the night, you live in darkness.
Therefore your sin is not too big.
But if you do not want to listen to the breath of
God's Word (who gives it to you now)
you will run into great danger.
And God, who has already started with your
destruction, will bring it to an end.
Thus you will be completely destroyed
(VV. 1128-1148).



Questions

1. What do you say about this religious dialogue?
2. What does it say to you in relation to your personal image of God?
3. What can we learn from it?





2.

Application

Lifestyle of the Church:

Observe what Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) desires for the lifestyle that the bishops of the Indio Church would have to maintain:

It would be greatly to the advantage of this land of yours and these humble people of today, if the bishops were to behave as they did in the Primitive Church, remaining poor and humble without seeking profit, but rather souls. They should not arrogate to themselves the trappings of office, so that the Indios would not see their bishops getting presents, being clothed

in delicate shirts, sleeping wrapped in linen sheets and on mattresses, and dressed in soft garments. Because all those who have the care of souls have to imitate Jesus Christ in His humility and poverty, they have to carry His cross on their shoulder and to be ready to finally die for Him.

Question

What validity could this text have for the entire Church?



3.

Application

Catechetical methods:

The following text is taken from the book "Siembras entre Brumas" (Sowing in the Fog) written by Mario Cayota (pp. 419-422):

Taking care not to fall into Syncretism,⁹ the Franciscans of the Pro-Indio party distinguished themselves particularly in their promotion of a varied and rich range of mediations. A typical case is the work accomplished by Fray Jacobo de Tastera. On arriving in Mexico in 1529, he immediately tried to communicate with the natives in their own language. While he was learning to speak their language, he made efforts to establish some kind of relationship with the Indios. For this reason, he resorted to an ancient system of writing that the Náhuas possess, the famous glyphs.

In one of his letters, written in 1533, he refers to the efforts that he had made to study "the secrets of these people, their innermost sentiments," until he managed "to break down this barrier in order to enter into their souls to see, scrutinise and illuminate the marvellous gifts of God at work in their hearts." Finally, in a sentence aimed at those who despised the Indios, he wrote: "If they do nothing to learn the Indios' language and to acquaint themselves with their sufferings, let them keep silent and fill their mouths with pebbles and mud.

Out of this respect and love for the Indios a form of writing, which today is called "test-Amer-Indian," has been developed. It was created by the Indios, under his direction, based on their own cultural models.

⁹ Mixture of different religious forms.



When, in general terms, reference is made to the destruction of the native culture, it is good to remember such examples as they were neither few nor isolated.

Quite a different example of catechesis is described by Jerónimo de Mendieta. This method is based on finding an expression or term in the indigenous language that sounds as similar as possible to the term that one wants to get across to the people, and that can then be written down in these glyphs. In order to learn the Latin "Our Father" (Paternoster), one used the following approach:



The Indios would use words of their language that resembled the pronunciation of Latin words and put them down on paper one after the other – not the words, but only the meaning of the words – as they did not have real letters, only pictographs at their disposal. So, they made themselves understood by signs. Here is an example:



Application

Bernardino de Sahagún: the Father of Ethnology

The following text is taken from the book "Siembras entre Brumas" (pp. 431-434). This text describes the ethnological working method of the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún:

As a salutary reaction against the 'official versions' scholars studying ancient Indio cultures have begun in the last ten years to reconstruct the history of the conquest of the Indies by relying more and more on the few still existing reports written by the defeated, instead of those of the conquerors. In this research, one of their main sources is the famous 'Codex Florentino'. Much is being written and said about this book, but very little or nothing at all about its main author, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.

Fundamentally, it can be said that – thanks to this Franciscan friar and his monumental 'General His-

The word that in their language comes closest to the Latin word 'pater' for 'father' is the word 'pantli' which means 'small flag' and also the figure twenty. In order to remember that word 'pater' they therefore drew the picture of a small flag, and thus they memorised the word 'Pater'. For 'noster,' they took the most similar sounding word from their language 'nochtli'; that is the word used for what the Spaniards call a 'cactus-fig'. Thus they remembered 'noster', by drawing a cactus fig next to the little flag and called it 'nochtli'. And so they carry on, right to the end of the prayer.

Questions

1. What impression does this catechesis give you?
2. Which possibilities and limitations do you recognise in it?

4.

tory of the Things of New Spain' – it is possible nowadays to consider the events of the 'Conquista' from a perspective that differs from the official one. Of course, the indictments prepared by the missionaries against the misdeeds of the Conquistadors can also be used as testimony, but they have been written with a European mentality.

Visiting remote and isolated villages (= Pueblos) and interviewing the oldest and most respected Indios there, Sahagún was able to reconstruct the painful history of the subjected people while conscientiously using strict methods of investigation. In this work of reconstruction he took care neither to mitigate nor to alter the reports made by the natives. The critical method he used, in order to examine the reports, guarantees the truthfulness of these versions.

However, in his important work, Sahagún did not



limit himself to collect testimonies on the Conquista. Impressed by the cultures of the defeated people, he dedicated himself with never flagging enthusiasm, to the study of Mexican archaeology and architecture, to the scientific analysis of Aztec astrology, its calendars and feasts, to a methodical investigation of the country's animals, vegetables and minerals, the people's customs and rites, their social classes and professions, their family organisation and many other aspects of Mexican life.

Not being able to rely on written books, Sahagún used modern methods still being applied by modern researchers today, the so-called 'encuesta' (opinion poll). Fray Bernardino himself took the trouble to explain his method while describing a trip he made with some friars to the village of Tepepulco:

"In this 'pueblo' (Tepepulco) - it must have been in the year 1598 - I asked them to call together all the important persons, including the chief of the pueblo, whose name is Don Diego de Mendoza, an old gentleman of great experience and ability, who knows all things concerning law, war and politics, as well as the worship of idols. When they were assembled together, I proposed to them what I wanted to do and asked them to name some able and experienced persons, with whom I would speak and who would be capable of answering my questions. They said that they would ponder my suggestion and that they would answer it on the next day, and so they left me.

On the next day the chief, accompanied by his main counsellors, came back. They held a very serious parliament as they are accustomed to do. Then they indicated twelve elders and told me that I was allowed to communicate with them and that these men would answer all my questions. There were also four who knew the Latin language and to whom I had taught Grammar only a few years earlier at the College of Santa Cruz of Tlaltelolco.

I talked with these elders, and the ones who knew Latin, who were also considered important personalities, for almost two years, following the guidelines I had previously prepared. All the things we discussed, they gave me in pictographs, as this is the writing they had used since ancient times. The four persons who knew grammar, explained my questions to them in their language, and wrote what they said under the pictures".

As Sahagún was one of the most important teachers at the renowned College of Tlaltelolco, it is no wonder that - in order to finish the enormous work he had taken on himself - he took recourse to the invaluable help of a group of his disciples. Thus, scholarly *Indios* who had formerly been students at the College, collaborated with Sahagún and formed a group, which nowadays would be called an 'interdisciplinary team.' With their help, Sahagún was able to write this vast encyclopaedia of Aztec culture, composed of 12 large volumes.

Laurette Sejourne, archaeologist of the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico, said about Sahagún: "It is not possible to make a more coherent historical reconstruction than Sahagún did." She continues: "With absolute fidelity his work reflects all aspects of Pre-Columbian life; and thanks to these volumes, it is possible now to resolve the ambiguity of the texts and to elaborate a new synthesis". Her opinion has been corroborated by Luis D'Olwer who said of Sahagún that "he was the creator of the method of anthropological investigation and the first authority in all aspects concerning the culture and religion of the Aztecs".

In the preface to his work, Bernardino de Sahagún responds to possible critics of his involvement with members of another religion:

A medical doctor cannot prescribe the right medication for the patient without first knowing what causes the illness. Therefore, it is desirable that a good doctor is well-versed in the knowledge of medicine in order to apply the corresponding remedy for each illness. The preachers and confessors are doctors of the soul in order to heal spiritual illnesses. It is advisable that they are experienced in medications and in spiritual illnesses. For the one who preaches against the vices of the State, in order to strengthen his teaching against them, and for the confessor, in order to know what is appropriate to ask, and to understand what they could say about his work, it is very advisable, that both know what is necessary for the fulfilment of their tasks. It is also not right that the priests become negligent concerning conversion, justifying themselves by reason that these people have no further sins but drunkenness, theft and sensual pleasure, because there are even many other even more serious sins among these peo-



ple that need to be overcome. The sins of idolatry and of idolatrous rituals, superstitious beliefs, omens, abuses and ceremonies of idol worship have not yet vanished completely.

In order to preach against these things and to know of their existence at all, it is necessary to know how they practised these things in the time of their idolatry. For, as we do not know about it in our time, they still practice many idolatrous rituals today, and they can do so, because we don't understand what they are doing. And some excuse them saying that it is follies or childishness, but they do not know the roots of these practices (what is pure idolatry). And the confessors don't ask them about it, nor do they think that such things exist: neither do they know the language in order to be able to ask questions, nor would they understand them, even if they were told about these things.

[...] This work is like a drag-net which can bring to light all the words of their language with the mean-

ing of the pictographs and all their manners of speaking and the biggest part of their ancient customs, the good and the bad ones. It is a pleasant work because it means much less work for those who wish to get to know the language and many ancient customs of this Mexican people, than it had cost me. This whole work is of great use to all who want to get to know the high degree of perfection of this Mexican people...

Questions

1. What impression do you get of the work of Bernardino de Sahagún?
2. What consequences do you see for an inter-cultural dialogue?
3. What understanding of mission and what kind of a self-image is expressed in this text?



Application

The following text is taken from a declaration by the Scientific Commission of the Mission Centre of the Franciscans (Bonn) on the occasion of the 500-years' commemoration of the Christianisation of Latin America (1992):

During its 500 years of history, Latin America has had a close and mutual relationship with the Franciscans. Christopher Columbus first discussed his plans for a voyage of discovery to India with the Franciscans. They introduced him, in January 1492, to Queen Isabella of Spain, who in the end gave him royal permission and supported the project. Franciscan missionaries accompanied the Spanish and the Portuguese

to America during their 'Conquista'. There exists, therefore, a special responsibility and relationship of the Franciscans with regard to the event of the 500th re-occurrence of that historical day, the 12th October, 1492, when Columbus set foot ashore on the Caribbean island Quanaiani.

[...] On whose side are we? That is the central question, when we draw conclusions from the 500 years of Latin American history. First of all, as Franciscans, we must admit, that the project of conquest and mission of the American continent has not taken place in the spirit which Francis had recommended so strongly to his brothers. He had urged them to go spiritually



'among' believers of other faiths and unbelievers; different from the Crusaders who went forth to fight 'against' the Saracens, the Friars Minor should go out to live 'among' them, 'to be subject to every human creature for the sake of God', and confess that they are Christians (see ER 16:6). Different from this Franciscan understanding of mission, the conquest of America took place in an evident attitude of 'Conquista'.

All the more, as Franciscans, today we must take the side of those who became victims of this horrible colonial history. First of all that means: We definitely oppose any jubilee celebrations, and we want to help the colonial powers to see the historical facts from the viewpoint of the victims. They really have nothing to celebrate. Neither have the original inhabitants of whom until now, about 60 million Indians have become victims of a genocide. The descendants of the African slaves, who form an essential part of the 500 years' tale of woe, have nothing to celebrate either. The same is true of the majority of the actual inhabitants of Latin America, who – at the moment – suffer from the 'open wounds' of an unequalled impoverishment.

In Latin America it is a real miracle that this continent, in spite of its cruel colonial history, has accepted and preserved the Gospel, and that local churches emerged from it. In Medellin and Puebla these local churches have resolutely chosen the side of the poor, and with that constitute a source of strong hope today, not only for these peoples but also for the universal Church. If, therefore, there is something to celebrate, then it is the fact that in the course of 500 years, a new People of God has come into existence which has maintained its identity, even though with much pain, and which, today, increasingly wants to speak its own mind.

Reflecting and wanting to make amends, in view of the 500 years of Franciscan presence in Latin America, implies admitting that the Franciscan mission, too, has entered into unholy bonds with the rich and the powerful. It implies also that we regret having failed to prevent the murder of millions of Indians. Further, it demands from us that we ask pardon from the descendants of those who were once our slaves, and

who, in the spirit of our founder, should really have been our nearest sisters and brothers.

Making amends in a positive sense and with reference to the future, means that we make an unreserved and preferential option for the poor. It also means that we opt for a different cultural model of the Church, in which the people can maintain their own identity. These options should become the core of the New Evangelization of the continent. Making amends also means that, as Franciscans, we show a close solidarity with those brothers and sisters, who, because of their commitment to the poor and to a Church of the Poor, often enough get into trouble.



As Franciscans we should feel encouraged and even obliged:

- to take a new look at the history again and try to understand it from the viewpoint of the victims and their resistance;
- to be evangelised by them, which means learning to listen to the Word of God from their perspective, in order to discover the living God of the poor, and to turn to him as Francis did, converting to Christ, through the leper;
- to commit ourselves to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation because only then, will the poor have a future worthy of their human dignity.

Questions

1. What does it mean to see and understand history from the viewpoint of the victims and their resistance?
2. What are the fundamental decisions that have to determine our contribution to the 'New Evangelization'?
3. What can and must be our gestures of reconciliation and reparation towards the 'victims of history'?



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Picture Credits

Cover St. Francis. Anonymous, polychrome plaster sculpture, about 1750, S. Francisco, Cuzco, Peru.

P. 3 Calendar of the Aztec.

P. 5 From: Adveniat-Documents/Projects 33, Photo: K. Herzog, foto-present.

P. 6 Woodcut, Leipzig 1505.

P. 8 Drawing by Cerezo Barredo, Detail.

P. 9 Copper engraving by Dietrich de Bry (1528-1598) in "Brasilienreise" by Jean de Lery.

P.10/13/15 Woodcuts by Miguel León-Portilla, Los Franciscanos vistos por el hombre Náhuatl. Codex

of Diego Muñoz Camargo (Mexico 1985).

P.12/16 From: Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, Nueva Cronica y buen gobierno, 3 Vols (Madrid 1987).

P. 17 Detail from the Fresco by Diego Rivera, 1951, National Palace (Mexico-City).

P. 19 Drawing by Ursula Hess. From: O. Waegeman: *Maiskörner der Liebe.* Himmerod 1978.

P. 22 From: Museo Taller Hilario Mendivil, Cuzco, Peru.

P. 31 From: *Unterwegs mit Franziskus 5/88.* Photo: Hanny Kramer.

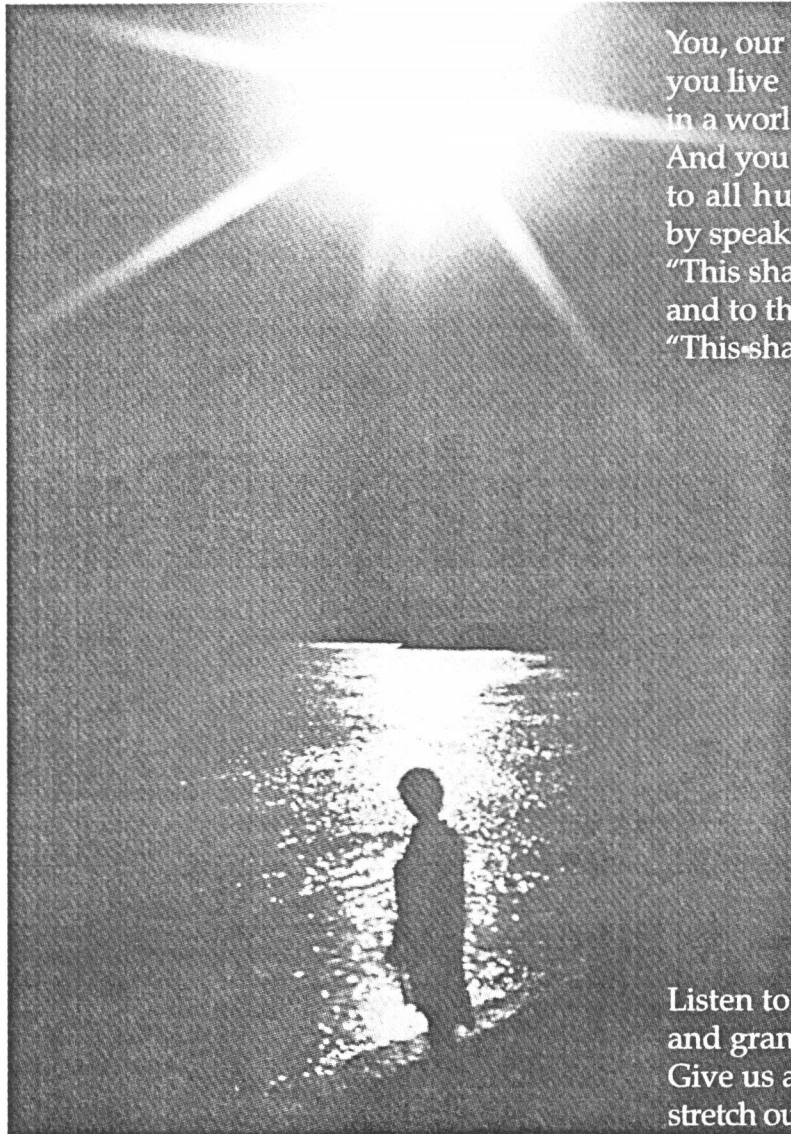


For Reflection



Payer

to the Creator of the Inca Pachacútec



You, our Creator
you live
in a world unparalleled
And you gave life and dignity
to all human beings,
by speaking:
"This shall be a man!"
and to the women:
"This shall be a woman!"

You made them, you have formed them
and gave them their being.
Keep them safe therefore,
and protect those
whom you created and whom you
gave their being,
so that they may be healthy and safe
and live in peace and without danger.

Where are you?
Do you live
in the height of the heavens
or below the earth
or in the clouds and storms?

Listen to me, answer me
and grant me what I am asking for:
Give us a secure life,
stretch out your hand
and receive this sacrifice,
wherever you may be,
You, our Creator.

