

6. SPANISH MISSIONIZATION OF THE AMERICAS (2/24/04)

One of distinguishing features of Spanish conquest was emphasis on Christianizing Indians. Not true of many empires: didn't care or tolerated other religions.

Primarily job of mendicant (begging) orders, took vow of poverty

2 great early missionizing orders, Franciscans and Dominicans

Swept up in movements to reform church of 15th and 16th centuries

Later came Jesuits, formed 1540

Franciscan characteristics: messianic; early-on emphasized mass baptism; utopian; extreme emphasis on mortification of the flesh; strong desire for martyrdom.

Dominicans less messianic, strong emphasis on doctrine of chosen elect; but in many ways similar

Essence of plan: concentrate Indians, keep in separate communities, protect from secular Spanish, keep priestly control, make Christians of them.

Missions were agents of Spanish imperial power. Encouraged in many areas partly because could pacify Indians, sometimes with little or no military force. especially useful in frontier areas.

But at same time, missionaries had differing viewpoint, interests than settlers and secular rulers. Protected from secular abuses, though not encouraging freedom.

What were methods and difficulties?

Communication and Translation:

Had to get message across barriers of language and culture.

Sometimes saw job as teaching Spanish and religion together.

But often impatient to convert, learned indigenous languages, esp. widespread national languages, Nahuatl in Mexico, Quechua in Andes

Translation is always a difficult task.

Missionary translator Eugene Nida pointed out that there are lots of problems because source language and target language don't specify the same things.

Languages also tied to environment: How do you communicate "Lamb of God" to people who have never seen sheep? Also tied to conceptions of body: what if they don't associate same qualities with the heart?

Translation involves whole systems of meaning.

Book by Louise Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth* (see supplementary reading list) offers examples from early Franciscan missionization of Nahuatl-speakers:

1. Word translated as sin in some ways closer to "damage". Sin is sin regardless of results, but to Nahua results mattered. In sin, intention crucial, not so for Nahua word. Nahua word also used for damage where no moral questions.
2. Nahua morality strong emphasis on balance, whereas at least concerning sex, Franciscans way over at one end.
3. How to translate "God" for polytheists? What word to use for devil if have no concept? Franciscan choice very misleading. How describe saints? What about hell, if none in native cosmology?

Other methods and problems

Our required reading, article by Sweet, especially for frontier missions, but also some parts apply to early missions in more central areas. Sweet critiques earlier work by famous historian Bolton.

Struggle over interpretation. tendency to idealize, see from point of view of missionaries, even by secular historians. Sweet on other hand over-generalizes, many variations.

Key methods:

Cast down idols, suppress native priests, rituals, any obvious sign of paganism.

Remake space. Superposition, i.e. put Christian church on site of pagan temple. Impose Christian institutions on landscape.

Remake time, impose annual cycle, with liturgical years, life of Christ, days of saints.

Baptize, though often only after long delay, very cautiously to avoid back-sliding.

Catechize. Example from 19th and 20th century missions. Rote learning. Essences of doctrine. Question and answer sessions. Oral method.

Dramatizations: communal plays, story of conquest of moors, conversion of Indians. Get Indians to participate in story of own subjugation, though often subverted.

Work on leaders: old pattern from Christianization of Europe. Get king or chief first, others will follow.

But often despaired of present generation of adults, would work on children. Try to get at least some separate from parents, break influence. Model of St. Francis, who repudiated parents and earthly kin for heavenly family

Continuing problems of discipline, resistance. Isolate from corruption.

Sweet discusses discipline: corporal punishments; sometimes round-ups. Clock, bell.

Work discipline crucial.

Often try to infantilize.

Key issue of sexuality, polygynous marriage. Struggles over issue.

Extirpate native culture, though not as consistently and thoroughly in all cases as Sweet suggests. Also few priests, never as thorough information or control as desired.

Concentration meant very prone to epidemic diseases, often kill majority.

Later Stages.

Regardless of success, 16th century missions did not last. Zeal waned, entropy, battles with local secular authorities. By end of century, Franciscans had withdrawn in many places.

Lots of Indians were turned over to "secular" priests not in orders. Often much less learned or zealous than Franciscans, and very few of them.

Meant that in many places, religion in effective control of Indians, re-indigenized.

Considered selves Christians, but thoroughly syncretic.

Often veneration of local saints, local pattern in Europe too, but here saints often mixture of native gods and European saints.

Brotherhoods (*cofradías*) another European pattern, local organizations for veneration of saints, festivals.

Priests who periodically investigated often appalled at lack of correct doctrine or practice.

Degree of syncretism varied. In Andes seems that native religion more tenacious, less adulterated. Periodic attempts to wipe out idolatry, fierce in Peru.

But in many places Indians mostly on own, as long as stayed within outward forms and paid tribute.

Jesuits arrived later, follow much of Franciscan pattern. Resettled, concentrate Indians, establish theocracies in 17th and 18th centuries, especially on frontier areas.

In Orinoco, Amazon, California, and most famously Paraguay.

Settlements had to be economically viable, pay for selves.

In Paraguay, protected Indians from slavers, relatively stable and economically successful, but lots of conflict with Brazilian slavers, Paraguayan authorities. organized Indian militias, even hired out to secular powers.

Jesuits scared local colonists: too independent-minded, many non-Hispanic foreigners, Pope's shock troops. Very tough, arrogant. Eventually frightened monarchs.

1767 banished altogether from Spanish colonies. Paraguayan missions went into decline.

Famous event, source of movie "The Mission."