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Roman Catholicism: Theology and Colonization

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colonies were typically established to secure and govern conquests.

The Catholic tradition in the Latin West grew up on the foundations laid by Rome. It accepted as fact the urban establishments that had started as colonial settlements and the need for such settlements to safeguard the imperial order. Thus in Catholic religious thought colonization and colonialism have no independent status; they are matters for legal and political reflection. Nonetheless, Catholic moral theology, particularly as it dealt with mission and conquest, had much to say about the activities that made colonization possible.

Mission

The Christian tradition has always been a missionary religion. The church has a responsibility to spread the message of salvation as a matter of charity, the love each person owes to God and neighbor. When, in the fourth century CE, the church was embraced by the rulers of the Roman Empire, it was generally assumed that the state could suppress pagan religion and heresy as threats to the spiritual and social well-being of the community. Belief itself, however, could never be coerced and faith proper was a gift of God, positions articulated most fully, in the early Latin tradition, by Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE). To say that belief could not be coerced, however, should not be confused with modern notions of toleration. Both restraint and correction were the duty of the authorities.

Crusade

Canon law and the crusading movement each, beginning in the eleventh century, helped to clarify the legal status of mission, particularly as it related to the peoples of foreign lands. Gregory VII (c. 1020–1085 CE), in the reforming conflicts of his papacy, gave impetus to the development of a general justification for the use of force to secure the goods of the church. He attempted to enlist the European nobility into the *militia Christi* and set the stage for the ecclesiastical authorization of war. In 1095, Pope Urban II (c. 1035–1099 CE), earlier a chief advisor and executor of Gregory's reforms, preached war for the recovery of the holy land and the rescue of the Eastern Church.

In legal theory this was a just war for the recovery of Christian patrimony, unjustly occupied by a hostile people. It was, in principle, no different from the war for the recovery of Christian Spain that the papacy also

Roman Catholicism: Theology and Colonization

The word “colony” and its cognates derive from the Latin term *colonia*, which can mean “land,” “estate,” or “settlement.” Colonies in the Roman sense were official settlements created by law, which specified location, size, leadership, and those citizens enrolled. “If sufficient volunteers were not forthcoming,” as one scholar notes, “compulsion could be used, for the foundation of a colony was, in a sense, a military expedition” (Jolowicz 1952, 61 n. 4). Among the Romans, such

backed. In the language of the time, the First Crusade was a pilgrimage with arms. It was not a war of conversion, though the crusaders' success, their wonder at the relics of the holy land, and the visionary experiences of several among them contributed, as Jonathan Riley-Smith puts it, "to the conviction that the crusade was God's own war" (Riley-Smith 1986, 107). Religious motives were not the only impetus to crusade, however. The crusaders famously, and brutally, sacked Constantinople in 1204 and were more than willing to turn on each other for practical and political gain.

Among Muslims and Christians both, by the end of the crusading era, the most noble figure to emerge from these conflicts was the Muslim leader Saladin (1137 or 1138–1193 CE). Dante places him, with Hector, Aeneas, Caesar, and the elder Brutus, among the noble souls in Limbo. In the next generation, Boccaccio's *Filomena* recounts a tale of Saladin and Melchizedek, whose wealth Saladin hopes to expropriate. But the wise Jew tells a story of the equality of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, at which point Saladin admits his unworthy intention, Melchizedek volunteers to help him, and they both live on in great honor. That this story captured something of the popular feeling of subsequent centuries, despite the efforts of Counter-Reformation authorities, emerges in the work of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg.

European Expansion and Canon Law

In the mid-thirteenth century Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254 CE) elaborated a theory of divine government that justified papal intervention well beyond anything allowed by the just war theory. On Innocent's account, when the Psalmist proclaims that "the earth is the Lord's," he is making a statement of legal fact. Government devolved from God to his various agents, culminating in the Christian emperor. The pope, as the heir of Peter, is ultimately responsible for both the spiritual direction of the empire and, by extension, the spiritual well-being of those rebellious subjects who fail or refuse to acknowledge imperial rule. This authority is obviously *de jure*, as opposed to *de facto*, but it is legitimate nonetheless for the pope to empower the emperor to act in the best interests of both the universal church and its wayward subjects.

This does not mean that non-Christian rulers hold power illegitimately. God bestows power on nonbelieving rulers to pursue the common good of their people. But if the proper authorities do not abide by the dictates of the natural law, which is in principle known

to all, then concern for the spiritual welfare of even alien peoples falls to the pope as Vicar of Christ. He can authorize a Christian army to invade a non-Christian land to suppress injustice, idolatry, or sexual perversion. But in general the point of Innocent's theory was to establish a basis for protecting Christians from persecution and abuse. For Innocent and his successors this was particularly important with regard to Christian communities in North Africa.

The need for papal protection could also apply to Christians faced with colonial incursions by other Christians. With the expansion of the German peoples during the agricultural take-off of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, colonization and conversion generated problems. Expansion across the Elbe brought Christians into conflict with a variety of pagan peoples along the Baltic coast. Secular authorities were happy to justify dispossessing these people, when possible, on the grounds of their paganism, but as the indigenous population responded to the preaching of Christianity, religious and secular authorities began to clash. As dynastic families accepted Christianity, the native peoples came, nominally, under the protection of the church, but as Joseph Muldoon notes, the Germans and the Poles continued to devastate and displace the Lithuanians even after the conversion of their king in the mid-thirteenth century. "The territorial aims of the Christian neighbors of the Lithuanians," he writes, "overrode the Church's goals" (Muldoon 1979, 33).

One of the most remarkable acts of Innocent IV, at least to modern readers, must be his embassy to the Mongols in 1245. The grandson of Genghis Khan (c. 1162–1227 CE), Guyuk (d. 1248), was rebuked by Innocent's ambassador for his attacks on Christians and warned of the eternal peril of his soul. His only chance, wrote Innocent, was to seek salvation in Christ and place himself under the authority of the pope. The khan reflected that his own great conquests could hardly be contrary to divine will and directed Innocent's ambassador, Friar John, to inform the pope that he should come himself to submit to the ruler of the world. The stalemate was never resolved.

Innocent's was not, however, the last word on secular authority and nonbelief. Henry of Segusio (d. 1271), a contemporary of Innocent at the law school in Bologna, known to posterity simply as Hostiensis, argued that the advent of Christ rendered the authority of all nonbelievers null and void. While, in principle, this would justify dispossessing all nonbelieving rulers, such actions would be precipitous and unwise. Though nonbelievers ought, in both fact and law, to

Dorothy Day on Pacifism

In this letter published in *The Catholic Worker* one month after Pearl Harbor, Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, emphasizes the movement's commitment to Gospel-based pacifism.

DEAR FELLOW WORKERS IN CHRIST:

Lord God, merciful God, our Father, shall we keep silent, or shall we speak? And if we speak, what shall we say?

I am sitting here in the church on Mott Street writing this in your presence. Out on the streets it is quiet, but you are there too, in the Chinese, in the Italians, these neighbors we love. We love them because they are our brothers, as Christ is our Brother and God our Father.

But we have forgotten so much. We have all forgotten. And how can we know unless you tell us. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then are they to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? But how are they to believe Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear, if no one preaches? And how are men to preach unless they be sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace." (Romans X)

Seventy-five thousand Catholic Workers go out every month. What shall we print? We can print still what the Holy Father is saying, when he speaks of total war, of mitigating the horrors of war, when he speaks of cities of refuge, of feeding Europe . . .

We will print the words of Christ who is with us always, even to the end of the world. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes His sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and unjust."

We are at war, a declared war, with Japan, Germany and Italy. But still we can repeat Christ's words, each day, holding them close in our hearts, each month printing them in the paper. In times past, Europe has been a battlefield. But let us remember St. Francis, who spoke of peace and we will remind our readers of him, too, so they will not forget.

In *The Catholic Worker* we will quote our Pope, our saints, our priests. We will go on printing the articles which remind us today that we are all "called to be saints," that we are other Christs, reminding us of the priesthood of the laity.

We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peace-makers. Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others to these efforts.

But neither will we be carping in our criticism. We love our country and we love our President. We have been the only country in the world where men of all nations have taken refuge from oppression. We recognize that while in the order of intention we have tried to stand for peace, for love of our brother, in the order of execution we have failed as Americans in living up to our principles.

We will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to the war, such an end, to quote Father Orchard, "as would manifest to all the world, that it was brought about by divine action, rather than by military might or diplomatic negotiation, which men and nations would then only attribute to their power or sagacity."

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"Despite all calls to prayer," Father Orchard concludes, "there is at present all too little indication anywhere that the tragedy of humanity and the desperate need of the world have moved the faithful, still less stirred the thoughtless masses, to turn to prayer as the only hope for mankind this dreadful hour.

"We shall never pray until we feel more deeply, and we shall never feel deeply enough until we envisage what is actually happening in the world, and understand what is possible in the will of God; and that means until sufficient numbers realize that we have brought things to a pass which is beyond human power to help or save.

"Those who do feel and see, however inadequately, should not hesitate to begin to pray, or fail to persevere, however dark the prospects remain." Let them urge others to do likewise; and then, first small groups, and then the Church as a whole, and at last the world, may turn and cry for forgiveness, mercy and deliverance for all.

"Then we may be sure God will answer, and effectually; for the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear." Let us add, that unless we combine this prayer with almsgiving, in giving to the least of God's children, and fasting in order that we may help feed the hungry, and penance in recognition of our share in the guilt, our prayer may become empty words.

Our works of mercy may take us into the midst of war. As editor of *The Catholic Worker*, I would urge our friends and associates to care for the sick and the wounded, to the growing of food for the hungry, to the continuance of all our works of mercy in our houses and on our farms. We understand, of course, that there is and that there will be great differences of opinion even among our own groups as to how much collaboration we can have with the government in times like these. There are differences more profound and there will be many continuing to work with us from necessity, or from choice, who do not agree with us as to our position on war, conscientious objection, etc. But we beg that there will be mutual charity and forbearance among us all.

This letter, sent to all our Houses of Hospitality and to all our farms, and being printed in the January issue of the paper, is to state our position in this most difficult time.

Because of our refusal to assist in the prosecution of war and our insistence that our collaboration be one for peace, we may find ourselves in difficulties. But we trust in the generosity and understanding of our government and our friends, to permit us to continue, to use our paper to "preach Christ crucified."

May the Blessed Mary, Mother of love, of faith, of knowledge and of hope, pray for us.

Source: Day, Dorothy. (1942, January). "Our Country Passes from Undeclared War to Declared War; We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand." *The Catholic Worker*, 1(1). Retrieved April 6, 2003, from <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/>

be subject to Christians, Hostiensis agreed with Innocent that the best approach was through the preaching of the gospel. In theory, however, nonbelievers could not legitimately hold dominion of their own.

The Spanish Critique of Papal and Imperial Authority

In the centuries that followed, the claims of Innocent and Hostiensis did not go unchallenged. Nor did the

more extravagant claims of the advocates of empire. Beginning in 1493, Pope Alexander VI (1431–1503 CE) issued a series of pronouncements dividing the arena of exploration and exploitation between Spain and Portugal. In the previous century Portugal had taken the lead in developing trade with Africa. Spain, of course, had just laid claim to the lands discovered by Columbus. To forestall the sorts of conflict that had erupted over the Canaries and other islands off the west African coast, the pope proposed dividing the spheres of inter-

est along an imaginary line that eventually gave Brazil to the Portuguese and the rest of the Western Hemisphere to Spain.

In the explorations and conquests of the sixteenth century one of the professed purposes was to spread the gospel. Soon after Columbus's first voyages Queen Isabella was exhorting the colonists to do their duty by the New World natives. Particularly in the Americas, missionary priests found themselves at odds with the explorers and conquistadors when they spoke out against the abuse of native populations. Shortly before Christmas of 1511, the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos (d. 1545), preaching in Santo Domingo, in what is now the Dominican Republic, "launched 'with pugnacious and terrible words' into an attack on the conscience of the Spaniards, which he likened to a 'sterile desert'" (Pagden 2001, 66). Montesinos's denunciation was not, in general, favorably received. But among those who did respond was Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566 CE), who took up the cause of the natives and pushed it with vigor until his death in 1566.

Las Casas, however, was only the most visible, and vocal, of the Spanish critics of imperial conquest. Francisco de Vitoria (c. 1492–1546 CE) and Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), the leading moral theologians at Salamanca in the first half of the sixteenth century, rejected the claims of emperor and pope. The Spaniards viewed themselves as following their Dominican precursor, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE), who himself recognized that the missionary impulse, when backed by the power of the state, could overstep the bounds of "natural justice" (Aquinas 1989, 341–42). Vitoria wrote that neither natural nor human law could confer universal dominion on the emperor, since human beings are free under natural law and there is no human law that can claim legitimacy throughout creation. In theory, God could give dominion to a single authority, as he gave stewardship to Adam in Eden, but in fact, Vitoria argued, it is not the case that any such authority was ever issued or claimed by God.

Not only, for this tradition, did the pope and emperor overstep their authority in claiming dominion, but the conquests carried out on their behalf were manifestly unjust. The background to this judgment rested in the Thomist account of the just war. The indigenous peoples, while more primitive in their technology than the Spanish, had standing institutions of government, marriage, and the like that attested to their human maturity. They could not maintain those institutions if they were not, as Soto would point out, as sound of mind as the average Spaniard. And given the bellicose

appearance of the Spaniards, it was not unreasonable for the natives to repel the newcomers. In the end their fears were well founded. Vitoria and Soto concluded not only that the conquest and occupation were unjust, but that in all honesty the king of Spain was liable for the return of goods.

The natural law argument of the Spanish Dominicans set the standard for the analysis of conquest and thus when colonization could be just. At least as important as Las Casas for establishing Thomas's teaching in the New World was Vitoria's student, the Augustinian friar Alonzo de la Vera Cruz (c. 1507–1584), who left Salamanca for Mexico in 1536 and spent the next forty-eight years writing and lobbying for the rights of the indigenous peoples. Franciscans and Jesuits as well maintained, at least in principle, the basic Thomist position. The Royal Orders for New Discoveries, issued in 1573, themselves reflected the Spanish position that "missions contend for the souls of Indians through friendly persuasion rather than . . . minister to alienated peoples conquered by force" (Weber 1992, 95). This spirit continued to animate the mission to Upper California at the end of the eighteenth century.

It was, however, a standard that the European powers studiously managed to avoid. The Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius (1583–1645 CE) led the way in subverting the Aristotelian and Thomist argument against conquest. Grotius was followed, in English-speaking lands, by John Locke (1632–1704 CE), whose justification for the British usurpation of North America lay in the absence of widespread native agriculture. Locke's indifference to the claims of indigenous peoples was expanded by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873 CE), for whom it was axiomatic that "despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end" (Mill 1989, 14). It is unclear whether Mill knew that the argument for paternalism had been critically dissected by Vitoria and Soto four hundred years earlier.

Toward Independence

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the independence movements that culminated in the 1960s, colonialism followed in the wake of trade. Missions during this period were perhaps even more conflicted than earlier, often seeing themselves as advocates for native peoples while at the same time dependent on the colonial government. On the one hand, as Roger Aubert puts it, "the work of colonisation and the work

of mission, although not totally unrelated, was kept clearly distinct." On the other, missions "allowed themselves to become actively or passively linked with the colonial system, often in compromising fashion" (Aubert 1978, 410).

By the last great period of European conquest, the "scramble for Africa" of the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Catholic and Protestant missions had been at work in the interior of Africa for fifty years. It was only after the middle of the nineteenth century that bringing the gospel to the Africans began to energize the popular imagination. Central to this new interest were the reports, notably by David Livingstone (1813–1873 CE), of the brutality of the slave trade. Livingstone's call for "commerce, Christianity, and civilization" as an antidote to the trade in east and central Africa did much to spur missionary zeal in the English-speaking world. By the end of the nineteenth century the churches were often identified with colonial power, while at the same time they served as advocates for indigenous rights, a complex dynamic captured, in "the tranquil twilight of the colonial period," on the edge of independence, by Roland Oliver (Oliver 1965, viii). Mission remains central to the identity of the church; conquest, and the colonialism it made possible, have generally received the condemnation Vitoria and Soto thought they richly deserved.

G. Scott Davis

See also Latin America: Historical Overview; Latin America: Modern

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