

Colonial Latin America



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the councils from becoming the closed and self-perpetuating corporations that emerged from the sale of the position of *regidor* in Spanish America. But in both Brazil and Spanish America, citizens valued council seats for their prestige as well as for the personal economic benefits available through participation in government.

Although the Portuguese Crown employed *corregedores* as royal agents in the districts in Portugal, it did not extend this middle level of administration to Brazil. Instead, it relied on governors and city councils to administer the reasonably compact zones of settlement along the coast and sent circuit magistrates into less populous regions. Not until the economic boom that began with the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais in the 1690s did the Crown devote much attention to providing administration in the vast Brazilian interior.

The single most impressive feature of bureaucrats in the Iberian empires was the extent to which they were rooted to the region in which they served. Time after time the Crowns turned to newly appointed outsiders when they wanted to effect changes. Thus they employed visitors to investigate abuses or the failure to implement specific legislation. The extent of innovation, however, was often modest. Deeply rooted local elites, of which high-ranked officials formed a part, proved resilient to challenge. When examined closely, so-called change and reform often turned out to be the old politics with a few new players. Yet it was precisely the flexibility and resilience produced by the fusion of individual bureaucrats' interests and those of other members of the elite in their district that reduced pressure within a system of bureaucratic rule.

THE COLONIAL CHURCH

The Church joined the colonial bureaucracy as a major institutional buttress of European power in the New World. Nurtured by the Crown financially and legislatively, the Church in Spanish America prospered under a degree of royal control greater than that exercised in Spain itself. Conversion of the Indians, the theoretical justification for the Iberian presence in the Indies, was the Church's initial priority.

The primary vehicle of acculturation, conversion drew the indigenous peoples into the cultural orbit of the Spanish and Portuguese settlers. The missionaries simultaneously tried to shield the Indians from the corruption and immorality of the European settlers and the labor demands of an encroaching colonial economy. In addition, they imposed Christian beliefs, social practices such as monogamy, and political organization through a mission system that undermined the Indians' potential for resistance and rebellion. These changes helped prepare the indigenous communities for integration into the emerging colonial order.

The Church in Spanish America also ministered to the Spaniards there, dominated their education, and provided social services for which the Crown was unwilling to assume direct responsibility. By the 1570s, the initial evangelical commitment was noticeably diminished. A royal policy favoring the secular clergy over the orders contributed to the malaise. In subsequent years, the Church consolidated its gains, participated in nearly every dimension of colonial life, and accumulated and displayed its wealth. Spiritual enthusiasm and utopian vision

declined, and an era of ecclesiastical routine began, although individual examples of clerical activism remained. The composition of the clergy, moreover, began to change noticeably. By the early seventeenth century, creoles far surpassed peninsulars numerically and firmly anchored the Church in the fabric of colonial society.

Royal Patronage

The Spanish kings' control over the Church rested on their *patronato real*, or royal patronage. Papal bulls in 1501 and 1508 formalized a degree of oversight implicit in the papal donation of 1493, and subsequent legislation spelled out the extent of supervision exercised by the Council of the Indies. Through their royal patronage Spanish monarchs assumed responsibility to promote the conversion of the Amerindians and to support the colonial Church. The Crown received control of tithe income, the tax levied on agricultural production and livestock, to sustain the ecclesiastical hierarchy, its physical facilities, and its activities. It also controlled the founding of churches, convents, and hospitals and the appointment of and payment to ecclesiastics. Clerics needed royal licenses to sail to the Indies, and their movement upon arrival was inhibited. The Council of the Indies examined all papal documents for statements that infringed on the Crown's patronage. Only after the council's approval could these materials be sent to the New World.

The Portuguese Crown also exercised a supervisory control over the Church. The *padroado*, patronage, derived from a series of papal bulls issued between 1456 and 1514. The king controlled the creation of colonial bishoprics, the appointment of bishops, the movement of missionaries, and the evangelical efforts among the Indians. The Portuguese Church, however, lacked the wealth and political power of the Spanish Church. The end of Muslim rule in Portugal in the thirteenth century gave the Church a history different from that of its Spanish counterpart. Still, Portugal's later expansion into North Africa and especially India gave the Portuguese Church some of the crusading zeal and material rewards gained in Spain during the long Reconquest.

The Evangelical Effort

The conquests of Mexico and Peru opened the most populous regions of the American mainlands to clerics anxious to convert the natives to Christianity. Although clerics accompanied Cortés on his march to Tenochtitlan, systematic efforts to convert the indigenous population awaited the arrival of the regulars, as members of the religious orders were known. Cortés repeatedly urged Charles I to send friars, preferring them to the more worldly secular clergy. Twelve Franciscans arrived in May 1524, the first contingent of an order that would lead conversion efforts in New Spain. In the following decade Dominicans, already active in the Caribbean colonies, and Augustinians joined in the "spiritual conquest." Although all of the orders emphasized conversion, the Franciscans approached the effort with a millenarian hope that their evangelization and the creation of a primitive apostolic church would be followed by the second coming of Christ.

The friars faced numerous obstacles to their conversion campaign. The many native languages posed a special problem, and the dispersed residential patterns of natives outside the urban centers hindered rapid evangelization. Superficial resemblances between native and Christian religious practices increased the difficulty of presenting Christianity as new and distinct. Yet the friars enjoyed some advantages as well.

The conquest transferred political power to the Spanish and gave great prestige to the Christian religion, for the gods of the Aztec and Inka had been undermined. Unlike the native conquerors in central Mexico, the Spaniards refused to respect the gods of the vanquished; the Christian God was to stand alone. The destruction of indigenous religion was systematic and persistent. Priests in particular were singled out for persecution; prudence thus dictated that the natives, whatever their private beliefs, publicly comply with their conquerors' religion.

About eight hundred friars were residing in Mexico by 1559. At first they directed much of their attention to converting the native chieftains (*caciques*) and nobles who, they anticipated correctly, would bring their peoples with them into the Church. Although the Crown wanted the natives to learn Spanish, many religious quickly began to study and preach in the languages of the peoples they were evangelizing. One prodigiously learned cleric, Andrés de Olmos, preached and wrote in more than ten Indian languages. The Aztec language, Nahuatl, received the most attention, for many native peoples were able to comprehend instruction in that tongue in addition to their own. Friars also taught Nahuatl where it had not previously been used, in order to establish a common language in New Spain, while keeping the natives separated from other Europeans who, they feared, would corrupt them. In Peru the friars promoted Quechua and Aymara over the other indigenous languages.

To segregate the natives from Europeans and to streamline their own activities, the friars founded villages to bring together Indians scattered throughout a region. The Indians' declining population further stimulated this process. The Augustinians were particularly effective at founding new villages. In Michoacán, for example, they gathered together natives who had been dispersed around Tiripitío and built, using Indian labor, a town complete with plaza, convent, hospital, water supply, and well-constructed houses. In towns such as this the friars oversaw political and economic activities as well as religious affairs.

By baptizing the natives, the friars obliged the Church to provide the sacraments of marriage, confession, communion, and confirmation that would enable the new converts to live as Christians. Christian insistence on monogamous marriage immediately ran up against the polygyny common among the Indian elite, especially in Mexico. Even after two generations of natives baptized during their youth and educated in Christian precepts, some Indians still married one wife in the Church and kept other women as concubines, although this custom faded away over time.

Many Indians responded enthusiastically to evangelization. Religion was a central feature of native life before the conquest, and the vanquished could not imagine existence without belief in the supernatural. In addition, they at once recognized the Spaniards' veneration of images of the Virgin, the Cross, and clerics.

The customary Spanish practice of building churches or at least placing crosses on preexisting religious sites reaffirmed the sacredness of the locations and promoted syncretism, the fusion of Christian and indigenous beliefs. The natives' veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most celebrated image of the Virgin Mary in New Spain, was associated with the persistence of their earlier devotion to the native goddess Tonantzin. The Indians perceived Guadalupe-Tonantzin as "God," much to the dismay of the Franciscans, who opposed the syncretic religious beliefs and practices that came to characterize "Christianity" among the natives. Crediting Our Lady of Guadalupe with miraculous healings, Indians flocked throughout the colonial era to her sanctuary on a hill just north of Mexico City.

In 1526 the Franciscans opened the College of Santiago Tlatelolco near Mexico City to train for the priesthood the sons of the native nobility. The students were taught reading, writing, music, Latin, and philosophy, among other subjects. Some mastered Latin and could translate it into Spanish and Nahuatl. Yet the college and the effort to train a native clergy ultimately failed. Antinative sentiment among many non-Franciscan clergy fueled opposition to the ordination of natives. No alumni entered the clergy, and with its principal reason for existence negated, the Tlatelolco experiment ended. From 1555 to 1591, Indians were formally prohibited from receiving ordination. Subsequent unofficial discrimination ensured perpetual inferiority for Indians in the Mexican Church.

Vasco de Quiroga entered the Franciscan order after serving as *oidor* on the second Audiencia of Mexico. In Michoacán he invested most of his own wealth in the creation of mission communities modeled on Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. All land was held communally. New skills based on European technology were taught, but labor was closely regulated so as to prevent abuse. In addition to a church, the settlements provided hospitals and a wide array of social welfare benefits. After his appointment as bishop of Michoacán in 1537, Vasco de Quiroga continued to promote the use of mission settlements, a strategy later used successfully by the Jesuits and other regulars as the Christian frontier was pushed north to Texas and California and south to the Río de la Plata region.

The Dominican Vicente de Valverde and several other clerics accompanied Pizarro to Cajamarca. Franciscans and Mercedarians had arrived before Atahualpa's execution, and Augustinians appeared in 1551. However, the intensive evangelization of New Spain's "spiritual conquest" was not duplicated in Peru. Although the disruption of civil war undoubtedly hindered efforts at conversion, it appears that the quality of the early clerics in Peru was inferior to that of the friars in Mexico. Not until the first Conciliar Council of Lima in 1551 did the Church launch a full-scale attack on surviving Inkan religious activities. Declaring all Andean people who had died before the conquest to be in Hell, the council vigorously attacked the worship of *huacas* and ancestors. Priests and government officials henceforth destroyed *huacas* and burned mummies whenever possible. The response in the central Andes was a millenarian movement in the 1560s that believed that the *huacas*, angry at being deserted for Catholicism, had brought epidemics, from which the only escape was a return



Portrait of San Ignacio Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

to traditional religious beliefs. Considering the movement heretical and thus treasonous, the state was able to eliminate the threat by the 1570s.

Religious orders spread throughout the Spanish empire, often advancing its boundary of effective settlement. Nearly twenty years after reaching Brazil, the Society of Jesus arrived in Peru in 1568 and New Spain in 1572. Quickly the Jesuits came to dominate elite education in the cities. In addition, the Society soon began to establish missions in numerous locations, from the northern frontier of Mexico to Paraguay. The first of the famous Guaraní mission villages in Paraguay was founded in 1610. By 1707 there were thirty villages with nearly 100,000 Indians.

The Society of Jesus dominated the evangelical effort in Brazil after the arrival in 1549 of Manoel da Nobrega and five other Jesuits in Salvador; the few Franciscans

who had been living in Brazil had shown little interest in converting the Indians. Defeated Indians near Salvador provided the Jesuits' first converts. As in New Spain and Peru, European military successes enhanced the prestige of the new religion and enabled superficial conversion. The Jesuits concentrated the Indians in villages (*aldeias*) in order to maximize the evangelical potential of their small numbers. After 1557, when voluntary concentration failed, the Jesuits supported Governor Mem de Sá in crushing the remaining armed resistance. By 1560 more than forty thousand Indians were in the Jesuit *aldeias* of Bahia alone, and by the end of the century the colony's 169 Jesuits controlled nearly the entire pacified Indian population.

In Brazil the missionaries promoted the use of Tupí as a common language. In the *aldeias* they taught crafts, introduced new crops, and enforced European work habits and social practices—monogamy and an abhorrence of nudity, in particular. They also fostered European culture, especially music.

After the early achievements—mass baptisms and the creation of the first *aldeias*—the Jesuits realized the shallowness of the conversion experience. Old beliefs persisted, intermingled with Christian doctrine. By the 1560s this frustration was clearly revealed in their reports and letters. As they recognized the difficulty of converting adults, the Jesuits began to emphasize more the close supervision and education of young males. When some of these young converts denounced their own elders for continuing ancient customs, the missionaries happily noted their achievement.

The development of mission settlements as a conversion tool led necessarily to a conflict between the Church and the settlers. The colonial economies of Latin America depended on Indian labor. Miners, planters, and *obraje* owners coveted control over converted Indians already accustomed to the discipline and organization of the missionaries and familiar with rudimentary European technology. Because the missionaries, especially the Dominicans and the Jesuits, tried to defend the Indians from what they saw as exploitation and abuse, they continually found themselves in political and judicial conflict with the settlers. When epidemics drastically reduced the Indian population, these pressures grew. In Brazil, for example, the Jesuit Antônio Vieira's efforts to protect the Indians led to a revolt and the temporary expulsion of the Society from Maranhão and Pará in 1661. Earlier, Jesuits working with the Guaraní in disputed borderlands that separated Brazil and Paraguay had armed their Indians against slave raiders from São Paulo. Forced to choose between the claims of the missionaries and those of the wealthy colonial elites, the monarchs of both Spain and Portugal moved to restrict the Church's control over pacified Indian communities.

Mature Church

The secular clergy made up the ecclesiastical hierarchy that extended from parish priests upward to cathedral chapters, bishops, and archbishops. Unlike the regulars—many of whom took vows of poverty and whose subsistence was provided by their orders—secular priests were primarily responsible for their own financial security, which led them into a variety of economic activities. Although they were

supposed to refrain from wholesale or retail trade, crafts, and direct employment outside the Church, not all seculars observed these restrictions.

Secular clergy were present in Brazil from the first decades but had little influence. Indeed the Jesuit Nobrega characterized the secular priests of Bahia as "irregular, apostates and excommunicates." When the first bishop of Bahia arrived in 1552, he had little interest in converting the natives. In 1676 the bishop of Bahia was elevated to archbishop, and by the late eighteenth century six bishoprics were subject to Bahia. Although the development of the episcopal structure coincided with an expansion in the secular clergy, approximately half of the bishops appointed before 1800 were regulars.

The establishment of bishoprics and then archbishoprics in Spanish America and an increase in the number of secular clergy led to conflict with the regulars. At issue was the control of the native population and its labor and income. The regulars, moreover, were justly proud of their accomplishments and loath to share the benefits with seculars whom they considered inferior in ability and commitment. Their antagonism was not limited to words. On one occasion in 1559, seculars raided the Dominican convent in Puebla, Mexico, sacked it, broke the prior's teeth, and departed with every item of value. In a similarly uncharitable spirit, on another occasion Franciscans armed six hundred Indians from the Toluca region of Mexico with bows and arrows and shields and then led them in the destruction of a church under the care of secular clergy.

In 1568 Philip II named a committee to investigate the relations between seculars and regulars. The resulting Ordenanza del Patronazgo of 1574 increased the power of the secular clergy and limited the regulars' activities. Eventually, secular priests took over many Indian parishes, or *doctrinas*. Henceforth the regulars' mission activities, when they took place, were in isolated frontier areas.

By 1600 the Church was beginning the financial ascent that would make its economic base second to none in the colonies. The growth of commercial agriculture in New Spain, Peru, Central America, and Brazil brought unprecedented revenues from the tithe in the 1590s. With the Jesuits leading the way, the regular orders—save perhaps the Franciscans—became active and successful landowners. In New Spain and Peru, the expansion of mining and commerce after the conquest era also created excess capital that its owners used, in part, to endow pious works.

Pious works included chantries, the foundation of convents and colleges, and the provision of dowries and burial funds. Frequently an individual established a chantry to celebrate in perpetuity privately administered memorial masses for his soul. The founder and his heir typically designated a family member as chaplain. This strategy had the great advantage of retaining in the family the income of the endowment, whether it had been established with cash, a gift of property, or through encumbering real property as though it were mortgaged by pledging specified annual payments.

The Church was the most important source of mortgages, normally receiving a return of about 5 or 6 percent in the sixteenth century. The conditions of the loan, however, had to be such that the recipient was buying capital rather than

simply borrowing money at interest, a transaction that canon law forbade as the sin of usury. Not only was the Church the major source of investment capital, it also became the major colonial property owner.

As time went on, tithes; fees that clerics received for marriages, burials, and other services; gifts; and pious works enabled the Church and individual clerics to become extremely wealthy. The Church acquired both urban and rural property. The Jesuits, other regular orders, and individual secular priests actively operated in the colonial marketplace, producing sugar, wine, textiles, pottery, and other products. In Mexico City and other large cities, the Church was the largest landlord, renting its property to both residential and commercial users. By employing part of its wealth and income to sustain cultural activities and welfare functions for the poor, the Church added substantially to the well-being of colonial society.

Some orders routinely opened schools in conjunction with their convents in order to educate later generations to enter the orders or assume other responsibilities in society. The Jesuits in Lima began organizing schools from the time they reached the City of Kings in 1568. The Jesuit college in Bahia had 215 students by 1589 and offered a curriculum that extended from the elementary grades to the study of theology. Together with the Dominicans, the Jesuits dominated education until expelled from Portugal, Spain, and their colonies after 1750. The Dominicans were influential in the founding of Lima's University of San Marcos, which was established in 1551 but functioned as a convent school until the 1570s. The University of Mexico, also established in 1551, held its first classes in 1553, in part as a result of efforts by Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga. Eventually universities were created in nearly every major city in Spanish America.

The immediate result of establishing universities in Spanish America was a greater number of educated creoles for vocations in the Church and the royal bureaucracy. In consequence, the composition of the clergy began to change noticeably. By the early seventeenth century, creoles had gained prominence in both the secular clergy and at least several of the regular orders. Although a few well-placed *castas* and Indians initially enjoyed limited educational opportunities, they were later excluded from the universities, colleges, and even primary schools. This restriction was imposed in Lima in the 1640s, despite the Jesuits' resistance. Brazilians also entered the Church, although the absence of a university during the colonial period retarded this development.

The presence of Europeans and American-born clerics in both the secular and regular clergy added a further rift to the already divided Church. Conflict focused on the highest positions, especially in the orders, save for the Jesuits whose provincials and supervisors were named in Europe. Europeans believed themselves superior to their American rivals by virtue of their birth in the Old World. This became a grave problem in Spanish America, for the growing creole majority threatened the peninsulars' dominance in provincial elections. The peninsulars responded by obtaining decrees that authorized the mandatory

alternation of offices between themselves and creoles. In mid-seventeenth-century Peru, only the Franciscans and Jesuits were not bound by this forced rotation in office. Beginning in the 1660s the peninsular Franciscans sought, and in 1683 received, final approval for rotation in office. Eventually the Franciscans in Brazil also instituted alternation in office.

There was less conflict among the secular clergy of Spanish America. The American-born religious repeatedly sought and at times secured high ecclesiastical offices. By 1640 five men born in the Viceroyalty of Peru had been named archbishops, and another twenty-three had been named bishops in the New World. Nonetheless, peninsulars secured most of the appointments at these levels. The five high-ranking positions that constituted the cathedral chapters, in contrast, routinely had heavy creole representation from at least the early seventeenth century. Creoles also predominated at the parish level, although by 1700 there were visible numbers of *mestizo* priests and even a few Indians. European immigrants were noticeable in some of the wealthiest parishes.

The increase in number of American-born clerics in the seventeenth century and the Church's growing economic influence bound it to American soil in a way that the early focus on missionary activity had not. Nearly every colonial family of the middle and upper sectors had relatives in one or more of the Church's branches. Leaving aside the pervasiveness of religion in colonial society, the clergy themselves were pervasive in creole society at its most fundamental level, that of the family.

The León Garavito y Illescas family illustrates this pattern. Francisco de León Garavito immigrated to Lima, where he prospered as a merchant, property owner, law professor, government attorney, and alderman. About 1574 he married Isabel de Illescas. The wealthy couple's sons included an *oidor* of the Audiencia of Panama, three Dominicans, a Jesuit, and a priest in Lima. Isabel's four sisters entered Lima's prestigious convent of La Encarnación early in the seventeenth century, and three of her daughters followed them. All became nuns of the black veil, that is, full voting members of the house, and one was elected abbess.

The seven nuns of the Illescas and León Garavito families underscore the presence of women in ecclesiastical vocations. Convents enabled women to pursue a religious life, control their own affairs, obtain and provide education, and, in many cases, live a very comfortable existence. Protected from the demands of husbands and families, many nuns cultivated the arts and literature, providing a venue for the transfer of European culture. The majority of convents date after 1570 and reached their numerical apogee in the seventeenth century. At their height, the thirteen convents in Lima housed more than 20 percent of the city's women. Far fewer were founded after 1700 than earlier, and in Peru, at least, the number of nuns fell sharply beginning in the early eighteenth century.

The first convent in Brazil was founded in Salvador in 1677. Before then, small numbers of Brazilian women seeking this contemplative life entered convents in Portugal or the Azores. By the end of the eighteenth century three more convents

were added. But Mexico City still had proportionately twice as many nuns as did the capital of colonial Brazil.

The many religious orders for women in the colonies were founded locally and maintained only loose ties to metropolitan establishments. Franciscan, Carmelite, Augustinian, and all other orders before the 1750s were devoted to contemplative routines and played no substantial educational or charitable roles. The elite within these orders were nuns of the black veil, the most educated group of women in the colonies. Almost exclusively colonial born, they brought with them sizable dowries,



San Martín de Porres was the illegitimate son of a Spanish nobleman and his black servant. He entered the Dominican order in Lima, Peru, where he became famous for his visions and an ability to heal the sick.

and they alone could vote and serve in offices in the convent and sing the canonical hours in the choir. The Convent of N. S. da Mercedes was founded in 1735 in Bahia by the wealthy heiress Ursula Luisa de Monserrat, who also became its first abbess. Rich families commonly purchased or built the quarters or cells for their daughters and made specified donations to the houses. Although convents occasionally waived the required dowry—most frequently for women of unusual musical ability—they did enforce the social prerequisites. In the convents in Lima, for example, nuns of the black veil were daughters of socially prominent families and accordingly were addressed as “Doña.”

Other women in colonial convents lacked family ties to the local social and economic elite. Nuns of the white veil served as housekeepers and in other activities considered inappropriate for the nuns of the black veil with whom they lived. Born into modest white and mixed-race families, their limited opportunities in the convents reflected their social and economic inferiority. Still lower were the poor, mixed-race women who served the nuns of the white veil and were allowed to wear nuns' habits. With servants and black slaves present as well, convents in many ways mirrored the society outside their walls.

The convents participated actively in the colonies' economic life. Not only did their residences, some occupying several city blocks, require constant attention, but the nuns and their servants, who totaled nearly a thousand persons in some of Lima's larger convents in the seventeenth century, were important consumers as well. In addition, the convents owned urban property both for their own residences and schools and as sources of income. As did other bodies within the Church, the wealthy convents earned capital by providing mortgages, mainly on urban properties. Unlike many male orders, however, the female orders normally did not engage in agricultural production.

The early presence and importance of the convents, the vigor of the male religious orders, the size of the secular clergy, and the continued support of both the colonists and the Crown combined to make the Church in Latin America a powerful, wealthy institution whose influence permeated colonial life. Although examples of individual clerics failing to observe their vows and conniving with colonists to exploit the Indians certainly can be found, their number pales in comparison with the many clergymen who sought to establish and maintain Christianity among the native peoples. A bastion of European culture and civilization, the Church in Latin America retained its strength throughout the colonial era.

The Inquisition

In 1569 the Spanish Crown replaced the earlier and unsatisfactory episcopal inquisitions in its colonies by authorizing the establishment of tribunals of the Inquisition in Mexico City and Lima. A third tribunal was approved for Cartagena in 1610. Unlike the fear of converted Jews (*conversos*) that had prompted the tribunal's creation in Spain in 1480, the tribunals in the New World were founded out of the Crown's desire to maintain the purity of the Catholic faith against the spread

of heretical Protestant beliefs brought to the Indies by foreign interlopers. Once created in the colonies, the Inquisitions of Peru and New Spain periodically persecuted “New Christians”—converted Jews and their descendants—who persisted in the faith of their ancestors. Within their districts the tribunals held jurisdiction over all non-Indians who had received Christian baptism. Protestants, by virtue of their baptism, were subject to the Inquisition.

The colonial tribunals were similar to their peninsular predecessors in organization and procedure. Normally a tribunal had two inquisitors, an expert who examined evidence for heresy, a prosecutor, a constable, and a notary. Other officials were added as necessary. In addition, tribunals had in each province of their jurisdiction investigators or commissaries, who could be lay or clerics, and lay police, or *familiares*, to arrest suspects and enforce the bodies' decrees. Although the first inquisitors were born and educated in Spain, by 1640 the tribunals in Mexico City and Lima had each received at least one creole inquisitor. A sprinkling of Americans continued to secure appointments as long as the Holy Office existed.

Because it was a powerful body independent of civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies, the Inquisition unavoidably conflicted with both. Its authority, moreover, made it an attractive ally for persons who found the other hierarchies unable or unwilling to support their ambitions. The judicial privileges enjoyed by the tribunal's agents further enhanced the advantages of cooperation and encouraged the participation of wealthy citizens. The tribunal also sought *familiares* who were well placed in local society, an approach that guaranteed prominent support.

The Inquisition initiated a case only after receiving a denunciation. Although self-denunciation was possible, usually by an individual who anticipated lighter penance as a result, generally a third party levied the charge. The accepted procedure was for the inquisitors to gather corroborating evidence before taking further action, a process that could drag on for years. When the evidence seemed conclusive, the tribunal's agents arrested and jailed the accused and sequestered his or her property for later auction as necessary to pay the costs of imprisonment.

The most important feature that distinguished the Inquisition's procedure from that of other tribunals was secrecy. The accused was totally cut off from the outside world while the case proceeded; in some cases this isolation lasted years and terminated only with death. Moreover, the victim was ordered to confess an offense so that he or she could receive absolution from and reconciliation with the Church. The victim, however, was not informed of the charge or the accuser. In a majority of cases, probably most, these omissions were not a major problem, for the accused was indeed guilty. For an innocent party, however, the problems of demonstrating innocence through such means as naming personal enemies were formidable.

The Inquisition prescribed punishment or penance at an *auto de fé*: literally, an “act of faith.” An *auto de fé* could be private or public. Here the condemned revealed remorse for their sins and professed their hatred of heresy. Public *autos* were great spectacles that public officials, clerics, nobles, and the general populace

attended. Throughout its existence in Spanish America, the Inquisition ordered death, a penalty given only to heretics who would not recant, in no more than a hundred cases, perhaps 1 percent of the total considered. Bigamy, blasphemy, and other offenses against public morality were the Inquisition's primary concerns. For such offenses, fines, flogging, confiscation of property, gagging, exile, and service on the galleys were the principal punishments. Punishments were more severe in the early years of the Holy Office than later. After the middle of the seventeenth century the largest *autos de fé* had taken place, and the importance of the tribunals had begun to dwindle.

A major part of the Inquisition's efforts to protect the colonists from heresy and unorthodox ideas involved censorship. This included both searching ships that arrived at colonial ports for prohibited literature, works listed on the Spanish *Index* of forbidden publications, and censoring manuscripts before they were published in the New World. Although these activities certainly limited the amount of protest literature that entered the colonies and slowed the publication of locally written works, the censors were most interested in ecclesiastical materials.

The Spanish population as a whole supported the Inquisition in the colonies. Most Spaniards did not feel personally threatened by the tribunal. They considered protection from heresy a worthy objective and actively participated in prosecuting those persons who strayed too far from the accepted morality. In an era in which formal political representation was absent, moreover, the Inquisition provided, during its first century of existence in particular, an alternative institution from which the colonists could seek support for their own purposes. The political dimension of the Inquisition gave added importance to the repeated conflicts, often over seemingly trivial matters, that the inquisitors had with civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

Portugal established an effective Inquisition only in 1547. Although there were several tribunals in Portugal and one in Goa, a separate tribunal for Brazil was not created. Bishops, familiars, or other agents that the Portuguese Holy Office employed in the colony investigated persons accused of heresy or other offenses. Those persons considered guilty were shipped to Portugal for trial. The procedures employed were similar to those in Spain and Spanish America except that the Portuguese Inquisition may have been even harsher in its early years.

On three occasions the Portuguese Inquisition sent special agents to Brazil. The first reached Bahia in 1591 and spent four years investigating the numerous New Christians residing in the colony. Two other inquisitorial visits took place in 1618 and 1763–69. As in the Spanish colonies, local agents rather than special investigators usually filed charges of bigamy, blasphemy, reading of prohibited literature, and other infractions. Such offenses led to investigations far more often than did allegations of heresy.

The Church provided for the spiritual life of a diverse and complex population and was one of the principal buttresses of social stability and public order in both Spanish America and Brazil. It organized much of colonial society's communal life through public celebrations associated with the religious calendar. By converting

Indians and blacks to Christianity, it extended European cultural values; and its role in education and public charity further emphasized its centrality in the lives of rich and poor alike.

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