The Clash of Religions

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We have a saying in Spanish: When someone says something that everyone already knew, making the commonplace sound like a great piece of wisdom, we say "*descubriste el Mediterráneo*" (you have discovered the Mediterranean). The meaning is obvious. The Mediterranean Sea has been known since the earliest days of European history and even before that, when the Egyptians and the people of the Near East called it "the Great Sea." In a way, that is precisely what Columbus did: He discovered the Mediterranean, for the lands that we now call the Americas were just as subject to discovery as was the Mediterranean. For at least 20,000 years, and most probably 50,000, they had been known and inhabited. In a way, the greatest impact of Columbus was not the so-called discovery of America but Europe's discovery of its own ignorance. If there was out there what came to be called the "New World," this also meant that there was an "Old World," and that this "Old World" was no longer, as it had always thought of itself, the entire world.

All of that is well known, and I am certain that other speakers in this series have made a similar point. What should be made equally clear, however, is that the encounters and the clashes of cultures and civilizations did not begin in the Western Hemisphere the day Columbus landed here. That, too, is part of a Eurocentric vision, one that tends to lump together all the natives of these lands and to call them "Indians."

The very name, "Indians" serves to illustrate several important points.

It illustrates, first of all, the limited world view of Columbus himself. When I was a child, I was told in school that Columbus lived in an age when people thought that the earth was flat and that his genius was that he realized it was round. That is not true. Although in fifteenth-century Europe the unschooled did believe that the earth was flat and that if one sailed too far one would fall off the edge, most scholars knew that the earth was round and even its approximate size. The reason why scholars at the University of Salamanca opposed Columbus's scheme was that it was based on a gross miscalculation of the earth's circumference. By making Asia larger and the earth much smaller than it actually is, he was able to place "Cipango" (Japan) and "Cathay" (China) much closer than they, in fact, were. They should be, so he thought, just across the Ocean Sea (the Atlantic), where the Western Hemisphere in fact was. In other words, he miscalculated the size of the earth by almost the entire width of the Americas and the Pacific.

It was for this reason that Columbus thought he was in the Indies, and therefore he called the inhabitants of these lands "Indians." This was the first great theft of the Conquest: the theft of identity. After that, it was relatively easy to steal their lands, to rob them of their freedom, and to obliterate their traditions.

Secondly, the name "Indians" illustrates the inability of Europe to accept the full humanity of those who lived in these lands. Long after Columbus's mistake was obvious, and no one thought that this was anywhere near India, its inhabitants remained "Indians." The custom soon extended to the rest of Europe, so that when the first English-speaking invaders arrived in North America, they knew full well that this was not India, and yet they insisted on calling its inhabitants "Indians." Apparently, no one felt that it was important to ask these people who they were, what they thought of themselves, or even what they called themselves! As Columbus had done before, they were made to fit into a mold conceived and determined by the Europeans.

Thirdly, and most importantly for our purposes tonight, the name "Indians" has been a convenient way to ignore the rich multiplicity of cultures that already existed in these lands before the Europeans arrived. The people inhabiting these lands had developed a variety of cultures and civilizations–a variety much greater than anything that existed in Europe at the time or ever since. Some were semi-nomadic hunters; others built empires as vast as any Europe had ever seen; still others lived as food gatherers in the forests. Some had developed complex systems for writing and had explored the mysteries of astronomy; others lived in small clans, hardly larger than an extended family. But to the European, all of these were grouped together as "Indians"—which in truth none of them were.

The reason why this is important for our purposes tonight is that it shows the lingering Eurocentrism of even our most enlightened approaches to the subject. When we speak, as we do in these lectures, of "Cultural Encounters in the Americas: A 500-year Perspective," we seem to imply that the cultural encounters began when the Europeans first arrived, when the truth is that for thousands of years before 1492 the various peoples and civilizations in this Hemisphere had been encountering and influencing each other. The "clash of religions" did not begin when the first Christian missionaries arrived on these shores. By then it had been going on for centuries upon centuries.

The great Inca Empire, which Pizarro conquered, had itself been born out of a process of conquest that was both political and religious. According to tradition, it was on Lake Titicaca that Inti, the Sun God, gave birth to Manco Capac and his sister-wife, Mama Oclo, the founders of the dynasty that was still ruling at the time of the *Conquista*. Inti taught them the arts of agriculture and civilization and set them to teach those arts to the rest of the world. Thus, the conquests that led to the mighty Inca Empire were also a series of clashes of cultures and religions. And even the Incas, when they contemplated the enormous and ancient ruins of Tiahuanaco, had no idea of the long line of encounters and clashes that had gone before them and concluded that Tiahuanaco was the place where mighty Viracocha first made humankind, but he decided that the humans were too big, destroyed them, and started all over.

In Mexico, the Aztecs whom Cortés conquered were themselves heirs and conquerors of several other civilizations, and their own religion was the result of clashes and encounters that had taken place over the centuries. They, too, saw ancient and mighty ruins, this time in Teotihuacán, and had no idea who had built such a place. It was, they concluded, the place where the gods gathered to give birth to the present age.

Also in Mexico, long before the time of the Aztecs, in the city of Tula, lived the famous prince, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, the great religious reformer who banned human sacrifices and was, in turn, exiled from his city. He promised to return, and his promise lived on long after his native city had lost its splendor, later to have tragic consequences for the Aztec empire. I shall return to that soon, but the important point here is that long before the coming of the Europeans, the inhabitants of these lands had developed a variety of cultures and civilizations, and that the encounter and clash of cultures and religions in these lands is much older than a mere 500 years.

Then came the Spanish. They, too, represented a long history of encounters and clashes. It is important to remember that the Spanish *Conquista* was preceded—not followed, as their names would seem to imply—by the *Reconquista*. The *Conquista* was the invasion and the taking of lands in the Western Hemisphere. The *Reconquista* was the long process whereby the Spanish Christians retook the land from the Muslim Moors. The latter had invaded the Peninsula in 711, destroying its Visigothic kingdom and occupying most of present-day Spain and Portugal.

In point of fact, the *Reconquista* was not as straightforward and single-minded as most Spaniards believed in 1492. During the earlier Middle Ages, when intolerance was the order of the day in the rest of Europe, Spain was noted for its religious tolerance.

Then came the spirit of the Crusades and the *Reconquista*, which claimed that Spain had a specific destiny in God's design, and that this was to bring about national unity by expelling the Moorish invaders—who had been on the land much longer than the mere 500 years that Europeans have been in the Americas!

From this perspective, it was God's purpose that Spain be unified, not only politically but also religiously. In Spanish history, 1492 marks not only the conquest of Granada—long a Moorish stronghold—and the sailing of Columbus, but also the expulsion of the Jews. In earlier generations, the Jewish population of the peninsula had made very significant cultural and economic contributions. Now they must be expelled—some two hundred thousand of them—at the cost of great suffering to them and great cultural and financial loss to the nation, just so that Spain could be religiously unified. Ten years later, in 1502, the Moors were also expelled from Castile.

The *Reconquista* provided the framework for the development of policies, structures, and perspectives that would long be applied in the "Indies." Foremost among these was the notion that the task of Spain and its subjects was the defense of the Catholic faith and that, therefore,

true patriotism and strict orthodoxy went hand in hand. This vision was further strengthened at the time of the Protestant Reformation. From the perspective of Spain, Protestantism was a northern, Germanic heresy, and every Spaniard was bound, both by faith and by patriotism, to oppose it.

In this connection, the *Conquista* soon came to be seen as part of the same glorious and providential task of defending and expanding the Catholic faith. Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta expressed the national sentiment when he claimed that Luther and Cortés were born on the same day, and that God had provided the latter as a response to Satan's work through the former. On that very day of these two momentous births, Mendieta claimed, a huge religious festivity took place in Mexico in which more than eighty-thousand people were sacrificed. These two births, timed to concur with such a nefarious pagan festival, were a sign that God was preparing in Spain the response to Satan's action in Germany. As a result, at the same time that Luther was costing the Church large number of members, who were lapsing into heresy, Cortés was adding even larger numbers, rescued from paganism.

This is an important point we must not miss. We all know that the *conquistadors* were greedy and cruel. We all know how they lusted after gold, how each sought to outdo the other in the conquest and exploitation of new lands and people, how they enslaved and decimated the original inhabitants of these lands. What we often miss, and what makes all these crimes the more horrendous, is that these *conquistadors* were also Christians, and that they thought that

it was as Christians that they did what they did. They were not outright hypocrites. They considered themselves true and faithful Christians. They even believed that what they were doing, they were doing *because* they were Christians. This is a crucial point. It is a point I have sought to make repeatedly before a number of audiences and have often been disappointed to find that some have heard me saying that the *Conquista* was not horrible. That is not at all my point. The crimes of the *conquistadors* were indeed horrible. My point is precisely that the invasion and conquest of the "New World" proves that it is possible to be a Christian, even to be a *sincere* Christian, and yet to commit such atrocities. And at this juncture I suspect that the reason why this point is so difficult to grasp and to accept is that it implies that we, too, can be Christians—even sincere, church-going Christians—and be guilty of similar crimes and a similar blindness.

How did this take place in the *Conquista*? Simply by providing religious justification for the enterprise as a whole and then claiming that any negative results were inevitable by-products of an otherwise holy undertaking—much as the military today speaks of "collateral damage."

The great justification for the enterprise was what today we would call "evangelistic." From the very beginning, part of the purpose in Columbus's first voyage was "*pro ... servitium Dei ac fidei orthodoxa augmentum*" (for the service of God and the increase of the orthodox faith). Repeatedly, in the correspondence between Columbus and the authorities in Spain, that motivation appears. Practically every Spaniard of the time believed that the eternal salvation of

the soul was the highest goal of human life, that this could not be achieved without orthodox Catholic belief, and that therefore the "Indians," no matter how much they were made to suffer, would ultimately be beneficiaries of the conquest, if only they could be led to faith.

It is important to understand how this mental process works. The fact is that the Europeans took the Western Hemisphere because they had the power to do so. But the fact is also that very few people are so deprived of every trace of human decency as to be able to admit to such a thing. Therefore, although unconsciously, it was necessary to find ways to justify what was in fact an act of naked aggression. As a result, the *conquistadors*, as well as their supporters in the old country, who also derived great benefits from the enterprise, convinced themselves that what they were doing was a great act of Christian obedience.

This, however, was not the entire picture of religious life in Spain. While the military fought the Moors, another army was engaged in a quieter but no less strenuous battle. This was the battle to reform the church, especially its monastic life. From ancient times, monasticism had flourished in Spain. At the time of the Conquest, the Spanish landscape was dominated by castles built as defenses against the Moors and by monasteries built as bulwarks against Satan and his hosts. To this day, many of Spain's most impressive architectural monuments are convents and monasteries.

Thus, while one side of Spanish Christianity was an almost messianic national pride, which boasted of the power and wealth God had given the nation, another side drew its inspiration, as St. Francis and St. Dominic two centuries earlier, from the poor and suffering Christ, who cast his lot with the humble and the downtrodden.

This resulted in an ambivalence in the attitude of the Church towards the native inhabitants of these lands. At the top of the hierarchy, bishops and other prelates responsible for the “New World” were selected by the crown and its officers, not on the basis of experience in the Western Hemisphere, but on the basis of other considerations. Most often, such considerations had to do with connections in court and with a candidate's proven loyalty to the crown and its policies. Such bishops often took years after their appointment before they set foot in their dioceses. When they finally arrived, they found conditions very different than they had expected. On points at which the Spanish settlers disagreed with directives from Spain, the bishops found themselves in the middle of a tug-of-war. They seldom got to know their Indian constituencies, and therefore most of what they heard was filtered through the negative opinions of the settlers themselves.

Likewise, those who came to the "New World" to serve in established churches had very little opportunity to see the effect of the conquest on the native inhabitants of the land. Very few of them ever learned any of the native languages. Whatever they saw of the "Indians," they saw through the eyes of the *conquistadors* and the settlers. To them, the natives were barbarous,

originally pagan, and even depraved people for whom the presence of the Europeans was a great favor, granting them the benefits of civilization and the Christian faith.

There were, however, others in the church whose perspective was very different. These were mostly friars—Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Mercedarians—who had vows of poverty, and who, on that basis, were able to share more of their lives with the natives. Some of them went to villages where scarcely another Spaniard had arrived—and many paid dearly with their lives. Many of them learned the languages of the people or at least found interpreters through whom they could communicate.

It was these friars who soon became the defenders of the Indians, the prophetic voices denouncing what was taking place. By 1511, the Dominicans on Hispaniola were disgusted by what they saw, and commissioned Friar Antonio de Montesinos to speak on their behalf. On the Sunday before Christmas, and referring to the "voice crying in the wilderness" of John the Baptist, Montesinos thundered:

> This voice says that you are in mortal sin, that you live and die in it, for the cruelty and tyranny you use in dealing with these innocent people. Tell me, by what right or justice do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people, who dwelt quietly and peaceably on their own land? . . . Why do you keep them so oppressed and weary, not giving them enough to eat nor taking care of them in their illnesses? For with the excessive work you demand of them they fall ill and die, or rather you kill them with your desire to extract and acquire gold every day. . .Be certain that in such a state as this you can no more be saved than Moors or Turks.

Soon another Dominican came to the foreground. His name was Bartolomé de Las Casas. He wrote extensively about the abuses perpetrated by the Spanish in the Americas, arguing that this was no proper way to proclaim the Gospel and that the natives could best be brought to faith in Jesus Christ by peaceful and loving means. He travelled repeatedly to Spain, in order to advocate for laws defending the native inhabitants of these lands. When such laws were passed, he would travel back to the colonies to see them enforced, only to be disappointed in that there were always loopholes or excuses that the colonizers could adduce. He lived to be almost a century old, and until his very last days he remained a staunch defender of the Indians and a prophetic voice denouncing what the Spanish *conquistadors* and settlers were doing in these lands.

Las Casas is only the most famous example of hundreds who, out of their Christian conviction, criticized the entire process of conquest and colonization. Although many in Spain still discount what Las Casas and many others of his contemporaries had to say, it is important to note, to the great honor of Spain and its church, that there was much more debate and more theological defense of the rights of the original inhabitants of these lands within the Spanish church and among Spanish missionaries and theologians than there was later within the English churches and their missionaries and theologians.

Thus, the "clash of religions" in the Western Hemisphere was not only a clash between European Catholicism and ancient American religions but also a clash between two forms of understanding Christianity on the part of Catholics themselves.

Although in theory all Spaniards (and Portuguese) held to the same orthodox Christological dogma, in practice it could be argued that this duality in perspective and in attitude towards the original American population was related to two different Christological perspectives.

On the one hand, there was the Christology of power. This lay at the root of the entire colonial enterprise, and in particular of the manner in which it was supposed that the Pope could grant lands to monarchs such as Ferdinand and Isabella. This Christology saw Christ first and foremost as King. It was closely connected with earlier medieval theories according to which Christ was the possessor of both the "temporal sword" and the "spiritual sword" and had granted one to the emperor and secular rulers and the other to Peter and his successors.

This Christology obviously played into the hands of those who wished to justify their power on theological grounds. It was expressed succinctly by Palacio Rubios, one of the most respected jurists of the Spanish court at the time of the Conquest:

> With the advent of Christ, all power and jurisdiction were made void, since they all became His. . . He thus had, not only spiritual power over things spiritual, but also temporal power over things temporal, and He received from His Father both scepters.

The task of the servants of this heavenly King is not only to announce his Gospel and his power, but also to make that power effective. This is to be done partly by preaching and persuasion but also by force. Moors, Turks, Indians, and other assorted unbelievers are in fact, even though they may not know it, rebel subjects of the heavenly King. The lands they hold should be part of Christendom, and it is the proper task of Christian princes and armies to make them such.

On the other hand, there was another Christology operating in Spain and Portugal at the time of the conquest. This Christology emphasized, not Christ the King, but Christ the servant, the one who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9); the one who "though he was in the form of God emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6-7). This was the Christ who did not have where to lay his head and was therefore poorer than the foxes, who have their caves, and the birds, who have their nests.

These two were the Christologies that clashed in the Western Hemisphere, and both of them in turn clashed with the various native religions. It is important to remember this, for only thus can one explain the dual fact that the conquest was as cruel as it was, and that it also was so highly critical of itself—critical to a degree that has no parallel in the British colonization of North America. Christianity was both the excuse for the cruelty and the source of much criticism and resistance.

Obviously, there was another source of resistance. This was the natives themselves, who saw their traditions trampled, their gods overturned, and their lands stolen. In order to understand their attitude, one must clearly understand the nature of the so-called encounter of cultures. It was an encounter indeed—very much like the encounter between a bicycle and an eighteen-wheeler. The Europeans came with power, with horses, firearms, zeal, and guile. If they interpreted their relationship to the natives in terms of their religious traditions, the natives did the same.

Not always did this lead to resistance. According to some chroniclers, the main reason why Cortés was originally welcomed by Moctezuma and his followers was that he arrived in the year One Reed according to the Aztec calendar, Ce Acatl, the same date in the fifty-two-year cycle that marked the birth of the reforming ruler Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and the date of his expected return. Cortés learned of the legend and exploited it to the hilt. By the time Moctezuma discovered his mistake, it was too late. Later, when Pizarro invaded Peru, he stole a leaf from Cortés's book. There, too, he learned of the legends of Viracocha, who had sailed off to the horizon, and whose return was also expected, and pretended that he and his followers were Viracocha and his retinue.

On the other hand, the religion of the natives did prove to be quite resistant to the onslaught of the invaders. Long after the conquest, several native leaders were condemned by the Inquisition on the basis that they still kept to their idols, even though they had been baptized.

Much later, in this century, small clay and stone figurines have been found under Catholic altars that the natives were forced to build. Apparently, those who built the churches knew that they would be forced to kneel before these altars and secretly placed representations of their ancient gods under them. No one knows for how long the memory persisted of these gods buried under Christian altars, nor for how long those who claimed to worship Christ were also worshiping their ancient gods.

In the high plateau of Bolivia, shortly after the conquest, an exceptionally enlightened priest, the pastor of the church of Sts. Peter and Paul, commissioned a native sculptor to make him images of the two saints, following native styles. The sculptor told the priest he needed time to fill this commission and returned several months later with two carts, carrying huge images of Sts. Peter and Paul. The images were of such a size that they could not be brought into the church and were placed at both sides of the entryway. Soon multitudes flocked to the church, and the veneration of Sts. Peter and Paul grew by leaps and bounds. It was only in the twentieth century that archaeologists discovered, in an ancient ruined native temple, the basis from which the supposed sculptor had removed the two statues of ancient gods.

Perhaps the best illustration of the manner in which religion became a source of resistance, and how the ancient religions were mixed with the new, is the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The legend behind the cult of Guadalupe is instructive. A poor Indian peasant, Juan Diego by name, was passing by the hill of Tepeyac, in the outskirts of Mexico City, where the goddess

Tonantzin, "the mother of the gods," had been worshipped since time immemorial. On this occasion, however, the Virgin appeared to him, ordering that a place of worship be erected there in her honor. He went to the bishop, who would not believe him. After repeated messages through Juan Diego, and an equal number of rejections from the bishop, the Virgin confirmed her message by means of a miracle that even the bishop could not deny.

This story is instructive on two counts. First of all, it is one of many instances in which the clash of religions, rather than the destruction of one of them, resulted in the assimilation of one into the other. Tonantzin, the fertility goddess who was mother of the gods, became the Virgin Mother of God. The second count, however, is even more significant. The story of Juan Diego and the Virgin is also a story of the vindication of the Indian peasant vis-à-vis the learned Spanish bishop. The bishop represented a religion that had been imposed on the natives, a religion controlled by white men, and whose ceremonies were conducted in a language, Latin, twice removed from the native Nahuatl of Juan Diego. But the Virgin came, not to the bishop, but to Juan Diego, and spoke to him in Nahuatl! The bishop preached about a God who had become incarnate in order to be one of us, but he preached that God from a distance. The Virgin came to be one of the people, not only by speaking to the native in his own tongue, and by vindicating him before the powerful bishop, but even by taking on the dark hues of the natives' skin. "*La morenita*,"—the dark-skinned one—as Mexicans have called her ever since, thus became a Catholic symbol of resistance to the very structures and imposition of Catholicism. (At this point it may be significant to remember that centuries later, when a native

Mexican priest decided to rebel both against the colonial powers and the hierarchy of the church and to proclaim Mexican independence, his flag was none other than "*La morenita*.")

The clash of religions continued long after the Conquest, in the clash between these two different faces of the Church, based on two different Christologies.

With the coming of African slaves, the story was repeated. The hierarchy saw nothing wrong with the institution of slavery. It was a means to enrich the kingdom and increase the Church, and both were certainly goals of Christ the King. But there were others who saw matters differently. Most notable among them was St. Peter Claver, who saw himself as a follower of the Christ who, being in the form of God, took the form of a slave. Being the slave of Christ the slave, Claver had no option but to serve those who, like his master, were slaves. When the time came to affirm his vows, Claver added a fourth one to the traditional three. He wrote, as was expected of him, "Peter Claver, forever obedient, forever chaste, forever poor"; but then he added, "forever a slave of blacks." We lack the time tonight to tell the stories of his life. Suffice it to say that throughout the rest of his life, an obedient servant of the Christ who was a servant, he shocked the powerful who sought to imitate and to serve Christ the King. And so the clash continued.

Eventually, the encounter between Roman Catholicism and African religions followed a path similar to the previous encounter with Native American religions. Most African slaves and their

descendants became Catholic, but they retained much of their ancient religion. This is particularly noticeable in areas where there is a very large population of African descent, where the ancient gods are worshiped under the names of Catholic saints—or, depending on your point of view, where Catholic saints are venerated by means of traditions brought from Africa. Thus, in Haitian Voodoo, in the "*bembés*" of the Spanish Caribbean, and in the Candomblé of Brazil, one can see much that is African and much that is traditionally Catholic mixed in such a way that it is practically impossible to dissociate the various elements.

Then came the Protestants. They came to found a holy commonwealth that would be a city set on a hill and a light to the nations. That is a story that most of you have known since childhood—a story connected in popular mythology with turkeys and Thanksgiving. What is usually missed in that story, however, is the markedly Eurocentric vision even of these people who left Europe in disgust. What they intended to do was to found a new, smaller, holier version of Europe, one that benefited from all the positive experiences and learnings of the Old World but left behind its shortcomings.

From that point of view, the original inhabitants of these lands were a nuisance. This was different from the attitude of the Spanish and Portuguese Catholics, for whom the natives were both souls to be saved and a potential workforce. It is for that reason that one notes a marked contrast between the Iberian Catholic narratives, in which the explorers boast of how densely populated the lands are, and the English-language narratives that boast rather of vast

expanses of land to be had for the taking. It is also for these reasons that the Spanish spoke of cities and civilizations to be conquered, even where there were none, and the British spoke of "the wilderness" and "the wild West," even when it wasn't. From the point of view of the Protestant settlers of North America, "Indians" were listed together with famine, drought, and pestilence as the major obstacles to the colonial enterprise; from the point of view of the Spanish Catholics, they were listed together with gold, pearls, and precious stones as resources to be exploited. Neither view was very respectful of the Native American as a person, but they were two different views.

These conditions determined the manner in which Protestantism and Native American religions encountered each other. Rather than living side-by-side and interpenetrating, the original American cultures and that imported from Europe lived side-by-side, one pushing the others further and further west, and even annihilating them, but never really dealing with them. Indian territories were foreign lands to which missionaries were sent, just as they were being sent at the same time to India or Africa. And, just as in India or Africa, the clash of religions took place in foreign territory, beyond the frontier, so that the imported European religion hardly had to deal with the original American religions. The clash was felt only on one side, often with devastating effects. A number of ancient dances were forbidden on the grounds that they were war dances and would lead to rebellion. Most native people were removed to distant lands, far from the sacred places that were integral to their religion. Many of the sacred places were desecrated, some by flooding them with dams and reservoirs and others by turning them into

shopping malls or golf courses. And thus, to this day, the one-sided clash continues, for what to the Native Americans are crucial religious issues, to others in society are purely economic matters.

The Protestants also brought slaves from Africa to serve them and to make them rich, and here, too, a clash of religions took place. The story of Black religion is well documented and should be known by any educated North American citizen. For that reason, I shall not dwell on it—not because it is not important, but because it is so important to this region and this setting that I could never do justice to it.

In passing, however, let me make only two comments.

The first is that the shape of the impact of African religion in this country is different from that in Latin America, in part because slaveholders followed different policies. In Latin America, it was customary to keep slaves of the same tribe and language together, with an overseer who spoke that language, on the grounds that this would make them happier and more productive. In this country, the general policy was to separate them, on the grounds that this would make them more docile and less apt to rebel. Both were policies of control and exploitation. But the result was that, whereas the names of ancestral gods, the practice of traditional rituals, and much more was remembered and continues to this day in Latin America, what remains in

North America is mostly a distillation of those elements that the various African cultures brought to these lands had in common.

The second point is that, although the Black-religious experience has been amply studied, American church historians generally have not paid sufficient attention to the degree to which African traditions have impacted white religion. There are a number of scholars working on this, and in the next few years our consciousness will probably be raised on this matter.

The clashes have continued ever since the beginning and have been many. That between Protestants and Catholics began early and was particularly violent, for it brought to the "New World" many of the enmities and prejudices of the Old. It began early in the process of conquest and lasted for centuries. In 1562, on the coast near here, a group of French Protestants started a settlement. The Spanish attacked, captured the settlement, and executed more than 200, declaring that they were being executed, not as Frenchmen, but as Lutherans. In retaliation, other French Protestants hanged a number of Spaniards and left their bodies to be found with a placard declaring that they had been killed "not as Spaniards, but as traitors, thieves, and murderers."

That was a sign of things to come, with persecution, oppression, and lynchings on both parts, and prejudices that continue to this day.

What are we to say, as a final word of reflection on such clashes that have cost so much suffering but that have also made us who we are? What am I to say as a Christian? What are we to say in this college, which also declares itself to be a Christian college?

Perhaps the answer, or part of the answer, lies in what I pointed out earlier about the two Christologies that arrived in this Hemisphere from earliest times. One was the Christology of Christ the King, who wishes to make all his servants by means of the church. Such a Christology leads to religious and political imperialism; to the insistence that I am right, and you are wrong; that your life is not worth much unless you become like me and worship as I do.

The other was the Christology of Christ the servant, who came not to be served but to serve, who humbled himself to be one of us, who asks to be given a chance, not to reign, but to serve. The Christ who inspired Montesinos's sermon; the Christ who lent power to the protest of Las Casas; the Christ who made Peter Claver respect the slave above the master; the Christ in whose name Oscar Romero gave his life. A Christ who calls us, not to conquer the world for him but to offer ourselves to the world in his name. Are we strong enough to follow this seemingly powerless Christ?