”Jesus är för spanjorerna”

Studier av den katolska missionens misslyckande i det tidigkoloniala Peru

With an English summary

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Abstract

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The general aim of this study is to investigate the development of the Catholic mission in Peru between 1540 and 1622. Its point of departure is the fact that the efforts of the Catholic Church to Christianize the Indians failed. Its specific aims are twofold. First, to examine the veracity of the traditional images of the mission's main protagonists, i.e., the priest who allegedly neglected his duties and abused his flock and the reputedly primitive but good-hearted Indian. Second, to examine whether there are only two parties, the priest and the Indian, responsible for the failure of the missionary endeavour. For my study I use "conciliar" sources such as minutes from church meetings (concilia and synods), and "non-conciliar" sources such as reports that were written outside the direct control of the Church, in order to provide different perspectives. In my view, historians like Rubén Vargas Ugarte and Pierre Duviols, both among the most accomplished specialists in the history of the Peruvian Church, have criticised the missionaries without adequately considering the frequently extreme circumstances that conditioned their work. Neither has the role of the Church as an institution been subject to sufficient critical scrutiny in previous research, while I argue that its leadership was indeed the third protagonist in the mission.

There are reasons why the priest's reputation is tarnished. When considered, the physical and mental circumstances of his situation might not excuse him but they do make his behaviour understandable. As far as the passive but benevolently inclined Indian is concerned, he has emerged as more actively opposing and resisting the conversion efforts by, for example, manipulating Spanish legal authorities to the detriment of the priest's work. Examining the reputation of the priest and the Indian has also helped us see the role that the leadership of the Church played in the mission. The Church was in overall control of the mission, and no doubt its leaders were of great importance to it. However, when the problems and the final failure of the mission became increasingly apparent to all it was obvious that the Church had no interest in being held accountable, instead blaming the lower clergy, the missionaries on the ground.

The conclusion of this study is that any discussion about the responsibility for the mission's problems and final fiasco must include the Church. Its description of the main protagonists of the mission, where it excludes itself and its leaders, has essentially been adopted by Vargas Ugarte and Duviols. In my view they have accepted the portrayal of the priest and the Indian, as presented by the Church in the conciliar material, without applying adequate critical methods and without doing so in the context of the failed mission. Hence, their interpretation of the mission and its main protagonists will have to give way to the one presented in this investigation.

Keywords: Catholic mission, early colonial Peru, conciliar sources, new non-conciliar sources, traditional images, Rubén Vargas Ugarte, Pierre Duviols, Bartolomé Álvarez, accountability of Church leaders.