

Christian Büschges

# Colonial Christianity. Migration, Ethnicity, and Religion in Early Modern New Spain

## 1 Christians of the New World

When Christopher Columbus set off on his second voyage of discovery across the Atlantic from the Spanish port of Cádiz on 25 September 1493, three Franciscan friars were also on board. The Franciscan monastery of Santa María La Rábida had already been assisting the Italian navigator since the beginning of 1492 in his efforts to obtain the support of Queen Isabella of Castile for his first voyage. The intertwining of private enterprise, church missionary endeavours and the claim to royal power was to have a decisive influence on Spain's colonial expansion in the New World in the decades to come. In continuation of the "reconquest" of the Iberian Peninsula, which ended with the surrender of the Muslim kingdom of Granada in January 1492, the Spanish conquerors overseas strove for dominion, wealth and social advancement, while various Spanish monastic orders set off for the spiritual conquest of the New World.

In contrast to the early modern expansionist endeavours of France, England or the Netherlands in the North of America, in Africa or Asia, the Spanish Crown started as early as the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to establish a comprehensive legal and administrative order, integrating the new American territories into the Spanish Habsburg Empire.<sup>1</sup> The status of the overseas regions and the indigenous population was by no means a matter of course in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and led to controversial discussions among Spanish legal scholars and at the royal court.<sup>2</sup> In legal terms, the overseas territories were integrated into the Spanish monarchy as new realms and provinces, and the indigenous population was given the status of free, tributary vassals of the king. In view of the centre of power remaining in Europe, the strict control of overseas trade and the subjugation and exploitation of

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1 For a typology of the forms of early modern European colonialism see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: a theoretical overview*, translated from German by Shelley L. Frisch, foreword by Robert L. Tignor (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), 23–38, 49–57.

2 James Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish world order. The justification for conquest in the seventeenth century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Alain Milhou, "Die Neue Welt als geistiges und moralisches Problem (1492–1609)," in *Handbuch der Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, vol. 1, ed. Walther L. Bernecker et al. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994): 274–296; Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish struggle for justice in the conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949).

the indigenous population, the Spanish overseas territories must be considered as colonies from a historical perspective. The notion of a colonial status of the New World spread only in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in contemporary political discourse. This was due on the one hand to the reform policies of the Spanish Bourbon dynasty aimed at strengthening the mother country and on the other hand to criticism from the American-born Spaniards, called Creoles (*criollos*), who felt disadvantaged by the reforms in many places.<sup>3</sup>

Church, clergy and religion were of crucial importance for the colonial Spanish social order that developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pope Alexander VI had granted Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, the “Catholic Kings”, the sole right to missionize the heathens in the New World in five bulls in 1493. The evangelization of the indigenous population of America thus became the core of the legitimation of Spanish colonial rule. Therefore, only three years after the fall of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan in 1521, the emblematic arrival of twelve Franciscan missionaries, the twelve Apostles, in New Spain served as the starting point of missionary activities on the American mainland. Between 1501 and 1518, the Spanish monarchy had secured for itself through several papal bulls the patronage over the church of the New World, the *Real Patronato*, which, in addition to the right of proposal for the allocation of church offices and benefices, provided extensive powers in church administration.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish crown established numerous archbishoprics and dioceses in Central and South America, while entrusting the missionary work of the indigenous population to various religious orders.

The extension of the rule of the Spanish monarchy to the conquered overseas territories led to a considerable emigration of Spanish settlers and a systematic evangelization of the local population. In contrast to most other European colonies of the early modern period, there was no emergence of a religious diaspora in Spanish America. Rather, Spanish migration to and mission in America led to an expansion of the Christian community beyond the borders of Europe, paving the way for the rise of Christianity as one of the great world religions. Spanish colonial rule in the New World is thus a decisive stage in the emergence of what

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3 Anthony Pagden, “Identity Formation in Spanish America,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, eds. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): 51–94; Christian Büschges, “De reinos, virreinos y colonias. Las relaciones centro-periferia en la monarquía hispánica y la Independencia de Hispanoamérica,” *Procesos. Revista Ecuatoriana de Historia* 27 (2008): 121–126.

4 On the development of the *Real Patronato* in Spanish America see Robert C. Padden, “The Ordenanza del Patronazgo of 1574: An Interpretative Essay,” in *The Church in Colonial Latin America*, ed. John F. Schwaller (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000): 27–47.

in recent church history is understood as *World Christianity*, whose local expressions are at the centre of current research.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter addresses the impact of migration and ethnicity on the debates about Christianity, Christians and the Christian clergy in colonial Mexico from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I will first focus on the extension of the Spanish concept of *limpieza de sangre* to the colonies and the measures taken by the Crown and local royal and ecclesiastical institutions to make the New World a place of religious purity. Secondly, I will discuss the progressive ethnicization of the originally religious concept of *limpieza de sangre*, due to the process, which the colonial authorities and the Spanish upper class perceived as biological and cultural miscegenation (*mestizaje*) between Spaniards, the indigenous population and African slaves and their descendants. Finally, I will trace the emergence of Creole patriotism and local Catholicism among American-born Spaniards during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2 The New World as a Place of Religious Purity

On the Iberian Peninsula, the coexistence of different cultural and religious groups had been an established fact since the early Middle Ages. The so-called *convivencia* of Christians, Jews and Muslims had produced different legal systems and social practices in the Christian and Islamic dominated dominions, which, depending on time and space, brought about different forms of economic, social and political inclusion and exclusion of the religious groups concerned.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the constantly shifting border between the Arab caliphates and the kingdoms that emerged from the former Visigothic empire since the 8<sup>th</sup> century had produced various forms of cultural contact between Muslims, Christians and Jews, oscillating between cooperation, toleration and oppression. The various changes of rule in turn led to rather pragmatic conversions between the different religions in the populations of many regions.

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5 Wolfgang Reinhard, *Globalisation of Christianity?* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007); Bernd Hausberger, ed., *Im Zeichen des Kreuzes. Mission, power and cultural transfer since the Middle Ages* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2004); Ulrich van der Heyden and Heike Liebau, eds., *Mission History, Church History, World History* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996).

6 Mark T. Abate, ed., *Convivencia and Medieval Spain. Essays in Honor of Thomas F. Glick* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019); Chris A. Lowney, *A Vanished World. Medieval Spain's Golden Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Free Press, 2005); Klaus Herbers, *Geschichte Spaniens im Mittelalter. Vom Westgotenreich bis zum Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006).

The continuing power struggle of the Iberian kingdoms with the Arab rulers was increasingly reinterpreted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a Christian Reconquista.<sup>7</sup> After the various Christian kingdoms had long been in mutual competition for the extension of their rule, the unification of the kingdoms of Castile and Leon in 1230 in particular led to a sustained military advance towards the south. At the same time, the Papacy tried to impose the Christian crusade against Islam on the Iberian Peninsula. Here, it was a number of prominent church representatives, above all the papal legate, Archbishop of Toledo, commander and historian Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, who propagated the idea of a unified Christian empire on the Iberian Peninsula. This was accompanied by a rise in religious intolerance, which was mainly directed against the Jewish population, especially after the pogroms of 1391. From then on, the Jewish population was subjected to increased pressure to convert. A few months after the surrender of the last Muslim kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula, the Catholic Monarchs, in their Alhambra Edict of March 1492, ordered the expulsion of all Jews who refused to convert from the territories of the Catholic Monarchs. Afterwards, the Spanish Inquisition, established in 1478, took a close look at the Jewish converts (*conversos*) remaining in Spain.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, prejudices against converts who actually or supposedly continued to practise their Jewish faith led to their increasing discrimination in the occupation of secular and church offices in favour of the so-called Old Christians (*cristianos viejos*).<sup>8</sup> Proof of a purely Christian line of descent, that is *limpieza de sangre* or *limpieza de toda mala raza*, was also essential for obtaining nobility status (*hidalguía*) or joining a noble order of knights. Muslims who converted before 1492 were initially exempt from this discrimination, but from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609, Jewish and Islamic converts were largely subject to the same exclusion criteria. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, proof of *limpieza de sangre* was still limited to two preceding generations. From the 1530s onwards, this restriction was removed in the statutes of most secular and church institutions in favour of a fundamental exclusion of any Jewish or Islamic ancestor. In practice, however, these inclusion and exclusion criteria were observed with varying degrees of stringency right up to the royal court. Furthermore, the numerous corporate rights and regional laws (*fueros*) prevented the enforcement of a legal regime applicable to all realms, social groups and institutions in Spain.

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7 For a recent overview over the history and the concept of *reconquista* see Carlos de Ayala Martínez et al., eds., *La Reconquista. Ideología y justificación de la Guerra Santa peninsular* (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2019).

8 Max Sebastián Hering de Torres, *Rassismus in der Vormoderne. Die "Reinheit des Blutes" in Spanien der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2006), 64–131.



The interweaving of faith, morality and descent underlying the concept of purity of blood was based on various medieval theories about the biological predisposition and inheritance of character and behaviour, from which the idea of a heresy passed down through the generations was derived. In contemporary writings, however, the connection remained quite diffuse, and the “blood” often served as a metaphor for education and socialisation.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, in contrast to modern racial theories, the religious and thus also the social status determined by descent was not insurmountable, making conversion conceivable and possible in the first place. Regardless of its biological connotations, the *limpieza de sangre* thus remained essentially a cultural concept which, in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, established itself as an elementary element of the social order in which converts were increasingly perceived as a social group in its own right.<sup>10</sup>

The extension of Spanish rule to the New World and the integration of the indigenous population into the colonial order led to a new, complex social order in the overseas realms. After the early conquests had led to a rapid decline and in some places – especially in the Caribbean – to an almost complete extinction of the indigenous population, the Spanish crown issued various laws during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to protect the indigenous population from exploitation by the Spanish settlers. The “Indians” were declared free vassals of the king, but were given a lesser legal status at the level of minor children.<sup>11</sup> In addition, they paid tribute to the Crown and were obliged to perform various forms of forced labour. The special legal status of the indigenous population was also reflected in the colonies’ early administrative order, which was divided into two political communities, the *república de españoles* and the *república de indios*. The majority of the indigenous population continued to live in their rural communities or in assigned neighbourhoods in the newly emerging Spanish cities. The spatial and administrative separation of the Spanish and indigenous communities served on the one hand to control the indigenous population and in particular to organise tribute payments and labour services. On the other hand, it aimed to protect the indigenous people from exploitation

<sup>9</sup> María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 46–54.

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *La clase social de los conversos en Castilla en la edad moderna* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Christian Büschges, “Die Erfindung des Indianers. Kolonialherrschaft und ethnische Identität im spanischen Amerika,” in *Barrieren und Zugänge. Die Geschichte der europäischen Expansion*, eds. Thomas Beck and Marília dos Santos Lopes Hanenberg (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004): 82–97.

by Spanish settlers, who were forbidden to live in the indigenous rural communities and urban districts.

The evangelization of the indigenous population was approached with great optimism in the early stages of missionary activity by the religious orders.<sup>12</sup> The Franciscan Order in particular saw the New World as an opportunity to realise a religious utopia. The cultural difference of the indigenous population, which was perceived from the very beginning, was initially interpreted as a sign of naturalness and innocence that was intended to facilitate evangelization. At the same time, parallels and points of contact between the Christian faith and the religious ideas of the indigenous population were sought in the course of missionary work.<sup>13</sup> In the attempt to integrate the indigenous population into the Christian history of salvation, the search was also conducted for corresponding evidence in the Bible, which led to the assumption that the Indians could be one of the lost tribes of Israel or descended from them.<sup>14</sup> The myth of the early presence of Apostle Thomas in the form of the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl even experienced a late flowering in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the context of creole patriotism.<sup>15</sup>

The central importance of evangelization for legitimizing the rule over the indigenous population was reflected in the rapid establishment of a comprehensive church administration. While the secular clergy took over the ministry for the towns and villages, the regular clergy were primarily responsible for the pastoral care of the indigenous population living outside the Spanish centres of settlement and rule. However, in the course of the colonial period, the two

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**12** Bernard Lavallé, *Au noms des Indiens. Une histoire de l'évangélisation en Amérique Espagnole* (Paris: Payot, 2014), 13–37; Antonio Rubal García, “La evangelización novohispana (1523–1750),” in *La invención del catolicismo en América. Los procesos de evangelización, siglos XVI–XVIII*, ed. Fernando Armas Asín (Lima: Fondo Editorial de Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UNMSN, 2009): 45–67. With regard to the Franciscan order see John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956); cf. the recent critical appraisal of Julia McClure, *The Franciscan Invention of the New World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

**13** See for example Eva Stoll, “La exportación de los santos al Nuevo Mundo – modelos, motivos y malentendidos,” in *Esplendores y miserias de la evangelización de América*, eds. Wulf Oesterreicher and Roland Schmidt-Riese (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010): 24–43.

**14** For a general analysis of European conceptions of native population's religious connections to Christianity and the bible in the age of expansion see Edmondo Lupieri, *In the Name of God. The Making of Global Christianity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), here particularly 25–58.

**15** David A. Brading, “Myth and Images in Mexican History: Foundations and Legitimacy,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, XXXIII:99 (2011): 18–19. On the religious aspects of late colonial creole patriotism see the final section of this paper.

church groups competed with each other for responsibility for the indigenous population as a result of the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule. In the larger cities, various religious orders, above all the Jesuits, established schools (*colegios*) for the education of the Creole upper class, from whose ranks various members entered the Jesuit and other religious orders.

Apart from the separation of the secular and ecclesiastical administration of the Spanish and overseas indigenous populations, it was in particular the control of immigration that the Spanish Crown sought to ensure the social order and the missionary endeavour in the New World. The subjugation of the indigenous population and evangelization as its central legitimizing factor made the overseas territories a “privileged place of purity” in the eyes of the Crown and the clergy.<sup>16</sup> The first central authority of the colonial administration, the *Casa de la Contratación*, set up in 1503 at the instigation of Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Archbishop of Burgos (1451–1524) and influential advisor to King Ferdinand, took control of all human and goods traffic between the motherland and the American territories via the monopoly port of Seville. It was accordingly entrusted with checking the *limpieza de sangre* of potential emigrants.

From 1522 onwards, the Crown issued several decrees prohibiting the emigration of Jews and Muslims, Jewish and Muslim converts, gypsies (*gitanos*) and heretics (mainly Protestants) to the New World. Converts were officially only allowed to travel to the New World with a royal licence. This restriction was aimed at keeping the Spanish and especially the indigenous population overseas away from converts who were considered suspicious in the stability of their faith.<sup>17</sup> In addition, slaves deported from Africa to the New World played a special social role.<sup>18</sup> According to the guidelines of the Crown, slaves were usually baptised after their arrival in the Americas, but unlike the indigenous population, they were not considered neophytes due to their African origin. On the plantations, which were largely cut off from the rest of the colonial society, the slaves were largely under the control of the Spanish owners. The servant slaves living in urban Spanish households, on the other hand, were more integrated into urban society. During the colonial period, this also applied to the increasing number of “free blacks” (*negros libres*), whose former slave status, as well as any ancestry of slaves, represented a permanent social stigma.

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16 María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 128.

17 Esteban Mira Caballos, “Los prohibidos en la emigración a América (1492–1550),” *Estudios de Historia Social y Económica de América* 12 (1995): 46–50.

18 Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico. Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

The administrative separation between Spaniards and Indians, the control of immigration from the Iberian Peninsula and the legal discrimination against African slaves and their descendants promoted a strong feeling of social distinction among the Spanish settlers, based on a “pure” Spanish, Christian descent in the tradition of *limpieza de sangre*. The continuity of genealogical criteria of social order recognisable in this led to the emergence of local, aristocratic upper classes within the Spanish population. Among the Spanish leaders of the conquests in the New World, some had been *hidalgos*, that is members of the lower Spanish nobility, while the troops had been recruited largely from the common people. To prevent the emergence of a Spanish feudal class in America, the Spanish crown refrained from rewarding the conquerors’ deeds with jurisdictional rights. Members of the Spanish titled nobility, on the other hand, remained largely absent from the companies of conquest in the New World and were also a minority among subsequent generations of Spanish settlers. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Crown began to grant privileges of nobility (*hidalguía*), memberships of the Spanish orders of knights and titles of nobility to its American subjects in return for a monetary payment. No politically or economically significant privileges were associated with this. As a symbolic capital, however, aristocratic status played a decisive role in the development of local aristocracies, whose social distinction was increasingly based less on membership of respected Spanish noble families and more on descent from the conquistadors and first settlers of the New World.<sup>19</sup> While the dream of social advancement in the New World was far from being fulfilled for all Spanish immigrants and their descendants, in many places the status of nobility became the outstanding feature of belonging to the colonial upper class.

Among the indigenous population, it was the members of the old imperial and local ruling families who sought to maintain a privileged position in colonial society.<sup>20</sup> This was entirely in the spirit of the Crown, which recognised the old indigenous ruling class as mediators between their communities and the Spanish colonial administration, exempting them from tribute payments and recognising them as indigenous nobility in equivalence to the Spanish *hidalguía*.<sup>21</sup> In addition,

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**19** Christian Büschges, *Familie, Ehre und Macht. Konzept und soziale Wirklichkeit des Adels in der Stadt Quito (Ecuador) während der späten Kolonialzeit, 1765–1822* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996); Hugo G. Nutini, *The wages of conquest. The Mexican aristocracy in the context of Western aristocracies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan press, 1995).

**20** Bradley Benton, *The lords of Tetzaco. The transformation of indigenous rule in postconquest central Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

**21** Peter B. Villella, “Indian Lords, Hispanic Gentlemen: The Salazars of Colonial Tlaxcala,” *The Americas*, 69:1 (2012): 1–36; from the same author, *Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial authorities set up various educational institutions serving the cultural instruction and evangelization of the indigenous nobility, most notably the Colegio de Tlatelolco, opened in 1536 near the city of Mexico, which also became a place of exchange between Spanish and indigenous culture. Various members of the indigenous nobility, mainly from Mexico City, Tlatelolco, and Tlaxcala gained also access to the secular and regular clergy or served as scribes or translators in the royal administration.<sup>22</sup> As late as the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Crown created other ecclesiastical institutions for the indigenous nobility, including the convent of *Corpus Christi*, founded in Mexico City in 1724 for noble indigenous women.<sup>23</sup> This monastery housed various members of the family of the last Aztec ruler Moctezuma and the nobility of the city of Tlaxcala, which had supported Hernán Cortés' conquest of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán.<sup>24</sup> Between 1768 and 1822, 89 indigenous nobles entered the University of Mexico City, all of whom had come from seminaries or former *Colegios* of the Jesuit order, which had been expelled from the Spanish dominions in 1767.<sup>25</sup>

### 3 Religious Purity, Migration, and *Mestizaje*

The idea of the New World as a “place of religious purity,” cultivated by the crown, royal officials and the clergy, was undermined by various processes in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the control of emigration in Spain could not prevent *conversos* from migrating to the New World in the long term. Apart from the granting of individual dispensations from the emigration ban, some converts passed unnoticed through the control mechanisms of the Spanish authorities or reached the Spanish overseas provinces via Portugal and Brazil and settled

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22 Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, “Informaciones y probanzas de limpieza de sangre. Teoría y realidad frente a la movilidad de la población novohispana producida por el mestizaje,” in *El peso de la sangre. Limpios, mestizos y nobles en el mundo hispanico*, ed. Nikolaus Böttcher et. al. (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2011): 230–231.

23 María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 249.

24 Ann Miriam Gallagher RSM, “The Indian Nuns of Mexico City’s *Monasterio* of Corpus Christi,” in *Latin American Women. Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978): 150–172.

25 Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, “Informaciones y probanzas de limpieza de sangre. Teoría y realidad frente a la movilidad de la población novohispana producida por el mestizaje,” in *El peso de la sangre. Limpios, mestizos y nobles en el mundo hispanico*, ed. Nikolaus Böttcher et. al. (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2011): 231; cf. Margarita Memegus and Rodolfo Aguirre, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España* (Mexico: UNAM, 2006).

in various places, including Cartagena de Indias in present-day Colombia.<sup>26</sup> With the unification of the crowns of Spain and Portugal in 1580, the number of Portuguese converts leaving for the New World also rose sharply.

The evangelization of the indigenous population also remained a challenge. The initial euphoria of the first missionaries regarding the instruction of the indigenous population in the Christian religion was soon exhausted.<sup>27</sup> Although Pope Paul III's bull *Sublimis Deus* of 1537 confirmed the indigenous population's talent for reason and their ability to accept Christianity, contact and communication with the indigenous population continued to be a difficult task for the monks, despite their learning of indigenous languages and ethnographic curiosity. The complaints about the problems of communicating the Christian faith and the indigenous population's adherence to their traditional beliefs were therefore increasingly seen as an obstacle to successful evangelization, thus legitimizing directly or indirectly the subjugation of the indigenous population to colonial rule.<sup>28</sup> In this context of growing doubts and disillusion, the gates of the *Colegio de Tlatelolco* closed at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, even though the privileges of the indigenous nobility were maintained.

In addition to the immigration of *conversos* and the problems of evangelizing the indigenous population, it was the steady growth of a "mixed population" that threatened the social order and the "religious purity" of the New World in the eyes of the ecclesiastical and royal authorities. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, some marriages had been made between Spanish conquistadors and indigenous aristocratic women. The crown had welcomed these marital unions as an element of indirect rule over and acculturation of the indigenous population.<sup>29</sup> However, these marriages remained the exception. In contrast, from the beginning of the conquest, sexual contacts between the Spanish and indigenous population – initially often forced, but increasingly consensual – took place and spurred social and cultural exchange. The first so-called "mestizos"

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26 Jonathan Schorsch, *Swimming the Christian Atlantic. Judeoconversos, Afroiberians and Amerindians in the seventeenth century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

27 Stafford Poole, C.M., "The Declining Image of the Indian among Churchmen in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," in *Indian-Religious Relations in Colonial Spanish America*, ed. Susan E. Ramírez (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989): 11–19.

28 Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, "Evangelization and Indigenous Religious Reactions to Conquest and Colonization," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America*, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 87–106.

29 Barbara Potthast, „'Women are more Indian' – Zum Verhältnis von Rasse / Ethnie / Stand / Klasse und Geschlecht in der hispanoamerikanischen Kolonialzeit," in *Interethnische Beziehungen in der Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, ed. Heinz-Joachim Domnick (Frankfurt/M.: Vervuert, 1999): 115–130.

that emerged from these sexual relationships were mostly illegitimate, but in the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, marriages across ethnic boundaries as well as between mixed offsprings increased steadily, a process, which was supported by the Catholic Church in its struggle against widespread concubinage. By the end of the colonial period in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mestizos had become the second largest social group after the indigenous population and numerically superior to the Spaniards.

While the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of the Spanish Middle Ages had accepted the coexistence of different, religiously defined social groups within the framework of the *convivencia* of Christians, Jews and Muslims, marriages between members of these religious groups were prohibited. Person of “mixed blood”, so called “híbridos”, remained a comparatively marginal social phenomenon, including the *mozárabes*, a term originally used to designate persons with both Christian and Islamic ancestors. In the Christian kingdoms, the term *mozárabes* eventually established itself as a designation for those Christians who had lived under Islamic rule and had maintained corresponding cultural traditions.<sup>30</sup>

In the New World, the ever-increasing number of mestizos and mulattoes, that is persons of Spanish and African descent, not only undermined the crown policy of the two republics, but was also seen as a threat to the Christianization of the indigenous population. In particular, the demographically strongest group of mestizos was considered a destabilizing element of the social order by the colonial administration and the local social upper classes, which increasingly became the subject of legislation and administrative measures.<sup>31</sup> Despite this, sexual relations crossing official ethnic boundaries continued to progress steadily, which is reflected also in the parish registers. In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, mestizos were not even perceived and classified as such, but were entered in the *libros de españoles* or *libros de indios*, depending on the ethnic status of the father. In the first half of the seventeenth century, however, most parishes began to keep separate books, *libros de castas*, which recorded the increasing number of children with parents of different ethnic status.<sup>32</sup>

The term *casta*, which refers to biology and lineage, was common in the Spanish Middle Ages, as was the originally largely synonymous term *raza* to designate groups of plants, animals and humans. Up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, the meaning of the two terms became more differentiated. *Casta* was now reserved

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30 María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions. Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 142.

31 Jean-Paul Zúñiga, “La voix du sang: du métis à l’idée de métissage en Amérique espagnole,” *Annales* 54:2 (1999): 425–452.

32 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 146.



for the Old Christians and was thus an expression of the *limpieza de sangre* or *limpieza de toda mala raza*.<sup>33</sup> The concept of *raza* became established primarily as a socially derogatory term for the descent of Jews and Muslims. In contrast to the Iberian Peninsula, the term *casta* referred in the Americas primarily to persons of mixed ethnic descent.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Spanish American colonial society was characterized by an official social differentiation between Spaniards, natives, African Americans (*negros*), and different groups of mixed descent (*castas*), identified as mestizos, mulattoes, etc. The Spanish notion of *limpieza de sangre* was thus extended under the colonial conditions of the New World to a principle of social difference and hierarchy based on ethnicity.

In the face of the erosion of the early colonial social order based on the control of immigration and the legal separation of Spanish and indigenous communities, the Crown and the royal and ecclesiastical institutions of the New World began to pursue forms of religious dissidence more vigorously. After the Spanish Crown had established the tribunal of the Inquisition in Mexico City in 1571, New Spain soon experienced a wave of persecution directed against the *conversos*, which continued until the end of the Union of the Crowns of Spain and Portugal in 1640.<sup>35</sup> Foreign Protestants and other groups accused of heresy, such as the *alumbrados*, were also increasingly targeted by the Inquisition.<sup>36</sup> In the provinces of New Spain, the Inquisition tribunal in the city of Mexico was supported by *familiares* recruited from the local upper classes.

Under the control of the archbishops and bishops, systematic campaigns to eradicate idolatry among the indigenous population began in the 1550s and 1560s.<sup>37</sup> Representatives of the Inquisition, in turn, repeatedly urged that idolatry be classified as heresy and that the indigenous new Christians be placed under

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33 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 161–162.

34 Laura A. Lewis, “Between ‘Casta’ and ‘Raza’. The Example of Colonial Mexico,” in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, ed. Max S. Hering Torres et. al. (Münster etc.: Lit, 2012): 99–123.

35 Stanley M. Hordes, “The Inquisition and the Crypto-Jewish Community in Colonial New Spain and New Mexico,” in *Cultural Encounters. The Impact of the inquisition in Spain and the New World*, eds. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1991): 207–217.

36 Joël Graf, *Die Inquisition und ausländische Protestanten in Spanisch-Amerika (1560–1770). Rechtspraktiken und Rechtsräume* (Köln, Wien and Weimar: Böhlau, 2017).

37 Kenneth R. Mills, *Idolatry and its Enemies. Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); id., “The Limits of Religious Coercion in Midcolonial Peru,” in *The Church in Colonial Latin America*, ed. John F. Schaller (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2000): 147–180; Richard Greenleaf, “The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain. A Study in Jurisdictional Confusion,” *The Americas* 34 (1978): 315–344.

the jurisdiction of the Inquisition.<sup>38</sup> In the debates of the time about the character of the indigenous population, there were also links to contemporary anti-Jewish representations.<sup>39</sup> Since the African slaves and their descendants as well as the increasing mulatto population were not considered neophytes, they increasingly came into the focus of the Inquisition from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Starting in the 1570s, the Crown also issued various laws concerning the legal status and often discrimination of mestizos and mulattos.<sup>40</sup>

In an increasingly complex colonial society, the “pure descent” of Spanish Old Christians served from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards as the central criterion for qualification for higher secular and ecclesiastical offices and dignities as well as for access to respected merchant and craftsmen guilds. The successive addition of ethnic criteria to the religious understanding of the original Spanish concept of *limpieza de sangre* is also evident in the development of the purity statutes of the diocesan seminaries, religious orders and the Inquisition of New Spain. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the evangelization of the indigenous population was not only viewed very optimistically; good Christians among the indigenous population should rather be able to receive church ordinations.<sup>41</sup> From the 1520s to the 1550s, the diocese of New Spain intensively pursued plans for the ordination of indigenous candidates, which were to be carried out at the *Colegio de Tlatelolco*. A New Spanish Apostolic Junta determined in 1539 that indigenous candidates could receive the lower four ecclesiastical ordinations (porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte) in support of Spanish priests, which seems to be the practice at the time. Around the middle of the century, however, this project came to a halt, and in the following decades the possibilities for the ordination of indigenous people as well as mestizos and especially mulattos became increasingly limited. As early as the 1<sup>st</sup> Provincial Council of New Spain in 1555, on which the first legal basis for the province’s church structure was worked out, revoked the junta’s decision of 1539. From then on, not only the descendants of Moors and parents and grandparents who had been condemned or pardoned by the Inquisition were excluded from ordination, but also all indigenous people, mestizos and

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38 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 149.

39 Richard H. Popkin, “The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory,” in *Menasseh ben Israel and his World*, eds. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulán, and Richard H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1989): 63–82; Henry Méchoulán, *Le sang de l’autre pour l’honneur de Dieu* (Paris: Fayard, 1977), 54–58.

40 Richard Konetzke, “El mestizaje y su importancia en el desarrollo de la población hispano-americana,” *Revista de Indias* 7:23–24 (1946): 7–44 and 215–237.

41 Stafford Poole, C.M., “Church Law on the Ordination of Indians and Castas in New Spain,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 61:4 (1981): 637–650.

mulattos. The indigenous population considered as neophytes was thus placed in the classical Spanish concept of the “maculated lineage” (*linaje maculado*).<sup>42</sup>

However, the Crown’s attitude towards the issue of the ordination of indigenous people and their descendants remained vague. In 1575, King Philip II sent an instruction to the bishops and archbishops of the New World to avoid the ordination of “unsuitable” mestizos.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, the King also rejected the implementation of the bull *Nuper ad Nos* issued by Pope Gregory XIII for the unrestricted ordination of suitable indigenous and mixed people, referring to the Royal Patronage of the Church. However, in 1588 Philip II revoked this and other relevant laws at the persistent insistence of the papacy.

The further development of canon law overseas remains somewhat in the dark. The original Spanish text of the decisions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Provincial Council of New Spain in 1585 confirmed the rules on ordination issued at the 1<sup>st</sup> Council of 1555. However, the much more open attitude of the papacy with regard to the ordination of indigenous people, as well as the widespread lack of priests in New Spain, meant that both the council decisions published in 1591 and their later editions considered the ordination of indigenous people, mestizos and mulattos possible, while maintaining “great caution.”<sup>44</sup> The decisive factor in these cases should be the impeccable conduct of the person concerned. The background to these considerations was also the contemporary debates on whether the original status of the indigenous population as neophytes would be extinguished in subsequent generations.<sup>45</sup> According to this understanding, it should be possible for the descendants of the indigenous population to be recognised as Old Christians through continuous “reproduction” with “pure” Spaniards and with an exemplary Christian way of life. This idea was closely linked to the concept of voluntary conversion of the indigenous population, which legitimised the Spanish conquest of America. The free descendants of slaves deported from Africa were largely denied this path to salvation, regardless of their legally prescribed baptism, even though criticism of the slave trade and slavery was occasionally voiced from Spanish church circles.<sup>46</sup> Since the Spanish Crown did not adopt an official position on the

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<sup>42</sup> Poole, “Church Law”: 641 and 647.

<sup>43</sup> Poole, “Church Law”: 642.

<sup>44</sup> For the persistent ambiguities of the new rules as regards the original wording, various translations from Spanish into Latin and the later printed versions of the decisions, see Poole, “Church Law”: 643–648.

<sup>45</sup> Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 154–161. Cases of the enslavement of the indigenous population were accordingly largely confined to the period of conquest and the border regions of the Spanish expansion on the continent.

<sup>46</sup> Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 163–165.

purity status of the African American population, its assessment was a matter for the colonial institutions, which tended to exclude persons of African descent in principle. Apart from the religious impurity manifested not least in (former) slave status, the African American population was also discriminated against on the basis of physical characteristics, which was also reflected in the more frequent categorisation as “race” (*raza*).

The implementation of the 1585 decisions of the Church’s Provincial Council on *limpieza de sangre* with regard to the indigenous population was subject to different cycles and regional differences. It is undisputed that from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, individual indigenous people and some mestizos were ordained as priests or accepted into religious orders, even if no systematically recorded figures are available.<sup>47</sup> In the diocese of Puebla, for example, the criterion of *limpieza de sangre* was less strictly observed in the early 1640s. This was due to various jurisdictional disputes between the then Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza (1640–1653) and the religious orders of New Spain, especially the Jesuits. In 1640 and 1641, Palafox ordered the withdrawal of various religious orders from the mission territories of the diocese and in return established various new parishes. Faced with the resulting need to ordain priests with knowledge of indigenous languages in a short time, Palafox founded two *Colegios* and a seminary. In the election process of the candidates, the social reputation was the main focus, while research into descent was less intensive, with the result that some indigenous candidates who were not from the old nobility were also ordained.<sup>48</sup> The case of the Diocese of Puebla must be considered an exception, however, as the *Colegios* set up by Palafox, and above all the seminary, returned to strict observance of the purity statutes as early as the 1650s, a practice that was to last until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The religious orders of New Spain had already enforced stricter observance of the *limpieza de sangre* in the selection of novices since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as the *Colegio de San Ignacio* of the Jesuits in the city of Puebla or the New Spanish Franciscan Province. The Franciscan Order had first established *limpieza de sangre* regulations in Spain in 1523 for the admission of novices, which provided for the rejection of persons with Jewish ancestors up to four generations.

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<sup>47</sup> With regard to the Franciscan Order see Francisco Morales, O.F.M., *Ethnic and Social Background of the Franciscan Friars in Seventeenth-Century Mexico* (Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1973).

<sup>48</sup> Norma Angélica Castillo Palma, “Informaciones y probanzas de limpieza de sangre. Teoría y realidad frente a la movilidad de la población novohispana producida por el mestizaje,” in *El peso de la sangre. Limpios, mestizos y nobles en el mundo hispanico*, ed. Nikolaus Böttcher et. al. (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2011): 223–234.

However, these regulations were not incorporated into the Order's statutes until 1583, and two years later they were also adopted by the new Spanish Franciscan province.<sup>49</sup> From that year on, candidates for novitiate in the local convents in Mexico City and Puebla had to present *informaciones de limpieza, vida y costumbres* in their applications. Accordingly, persons of illegitimate birth, children of priests, monks or nuns, married men as well as highly indebted persons and convicted murderers were excluded from admission. The *limpieza de sangre* was examined with regard to two groups of persons, on the one hand the descendants of "Moors," Jews or recently converted persons, and on the other hand persons who had been convicted by the Inquisition or other ecclesiastical courts. In addition to the self-declaration of the persons concerned, the convents conducted their own investigations, such as checking documents from church registers and questioning witnesses, procedures which were usually limited to the social status of parents and grandparents.

In 1614, the purity statute of the New Spanish Franciscan Province was finally amended to explicitly exclude "Indians" and "mestizos". Here, the extension of traditional religious criteria by ethnic categories in the definition of the *limpieza de sangre*, which can also be seen elsewhere, becomes clear. However, the selection process was still subject to a certain flexibility. Thus, candidates from the family of the last Aztec ruler Moctezuma or from the indigenous nobility of the city of Tlaxcala were accepted into the Franciscan Order. Like the New Spanish diocesan seminaries, however, the Franciscan province excluded "blacks" or "mulattos" from the novitiate on principle.<sup>50</sup> Exceptions seem to have been possible here as well, but parallel to the increase in the slave population in the course of the spread of plantation slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an increasing rigidity can be observed. The ever-growing concern with ethnic criteria in the definition of *limpieza* is reflected in the archival practices, interview processes and the genealogical formulas developed in the course of the purity tests, which increasingly excluded indigenous and African descent from the status of *limpieza* in view of their "pagan" origin.<sup>51</sup>

There is also evidence of an increasing consideration of ethnicity in the admission criteria of the Inquisition of Mexico City and in the selection of *familiares* in the provinces from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The increased immigration of Portuguese converts to New Spain from 1580 onwards had led to a rising

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49 Cf. Morales, *Ethnic and Social Background*; Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 215–220. See also David Rex Galindo, *To Sin No More. Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2017), 71–116.

50 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 221–224.

51 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 224–225.

number of inquisitors and *familiares*, given the intensification of the work of the tribunal.<sup>52</sup> Both in the review of candidacies of *familiares* and in the persecution activities, after a phase of urgent examination of *conversos*, from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, the religious devotion and lifestyle of mulattos and mestizos became the focus of the review. Once again the mulattos were particularly suspicious and persecuted by the Inquisition, with cases of simple fornication, bigamy, blasphemy and witchcraft being the main focus of persecution.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, both the mulattos and the mestizos were largely excluded from recruitment as *familiares*.<sup>54</sup>

The changes in the definition of the *limpieza de sangre* reflect the gradual emergence of what has been called caste society (*sociedad de castas*), in which specific rights and duties were assigned to the various ethnically defined social groups. These were established and reviewed by royal legislation and the specific statutes of secular and ecclesiastical institutions. Ethnic status was usually verified by public reputation and physical characteristics, above all skin colour or hairstyle.<sup>55</sup> However, during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it became apparent that the increasing “mixing” of the different population groups had not only led to an erosion of the original idea of the “two republics” of indigenous and Spanish people, but also made the ethnic identification of individual persons increasingly difficult. This development did not lead necessarily to higher social mobility, but rather to a tightening of the screws of inclusion and exclusion, and a multiplication of ethnic labels.<sup>56</sup> In view of the increasingly ambiguous physical differences, various cultural and social attributions documented by testimony were used to verify the ethnically defined social status of individuals, such as language, occupation and income, clothing or social relations.<sup>57</sup>

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52 Nikolaus Böttcher, “Inquisición y limpieza de sangre en Nueva España,” in *El peso de la sangre. Limpios, mestizos y nobles en el mundo hispanico*, eds. Nikolaus Böttcher, Bernd Hausberger, and Max S. Hering Torres (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2011): 193.

53 Böttcher, “Inquisición y limpieza de sangre:” 205; Stuart B. Schwartz, “Pecar en las colonias. Mentalidades populares, Inquisición y actitudes hacia la fornicación simple en España, Portugal y las colonias americanas,” *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 18 (1997): 51–67.

54 Böttcher, “Inquisición y limpieza de sangre:” 212–215.

55 Palma, “Informaciones y probanzas de limpieza de sangre:” 237–241.

56 Ben Vinson, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 70–90.

57 Patricia Seed, “Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 62:4 (1982): 569–606.

## 4 *Mestizaje*, Creole Patriotism, and Local Catholicism

The progressive “mixing” of the Spanish American colonial population and the establishment of social categories based on ethnic criteria led to a strengthening of genealogical thinking among the Creole population. This attitude was further nourished by the European theories emerging in the 18<sup>th</sup> century about the influence of climate and environment on man and society. The pejorative judgment of the American population in the writings of Cornelius de Pauw, Abbé Raynal and other representatives of the Enlightenment was not limited to the indigenous population, but also affected the American-born Spaniards and the *castas*.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Creole population saw itself increasingly disadvantaged by the reform policies of the Spanish crown. The reforms introduced by King Charles III (1759–1788) and José de Gálvez, the king’s Inspector General of New Spain (1764–1772) and Royal Councillor (1775–1787), were of decisive importance. Various measures to strengthen the royal administration resulted, among other things, in the ousting of Creole candidates for high secular and ecclesiastical posts overseas.<sup>59</sup> In many city councils and religious orders, this also led to conflicts between Creoles and *peninsulares* over the occupation of offices and dignities.

In a petition addressed to Charles III in May 1771, the city council of Mexico deplored the widespread prejudices against the “American Spaniards” and their increasing discrimination against the “European Spaniards.”<sup>60</sup> The members of the city council called instead for the preferential consideration of Creole candidates, whose love of their homeland and knowledge of local circumstances would qualify them better than candidates from mainland Spain, when granting secular and ecclesiastical offices and dignities. The petition places particular emphasis on the “limpieza” and “nobleza” of the Creole population, which goes back to their Spanish ancestors, and reaffirms their opposition to mixing with the indigenous and, in particular, African-American population.

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<sup>58</sup> Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 137–139.

<sup>59</sup> David A. Brading, “Bourbon Spain and its American Empire,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. I, *Colonial Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 389–439.

<sup>60</sup> “Representación que hizo la Ciudad de México al rey don Carlos III en 1771 sobre que los criollos deben ser preferidos a los europeos en la distribución de empleos y beneficios de estos reinos,” in *Colección de documentos para la historia de la guerra de independencia de México de 1808 a 1821*, vol. 1, ed. Juan Evaristo Hernández y Dávalos (México: Imprenta de José María Sandoval, 1877): 439–455.



The letter from the Mexican city council manifests the high importance of the concepts of lineage and ethnicity for the self-image of the Creoles as a colonial upper class. Various paintings created in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in New Spain also show the contemporary idea of a social order based on ethnic criteria.<sup>61</sup> In these so-called *cuadros de castas* or *escenas de mestizaje*, a variety of parents of different ethnic classifications (*español, indio, negro, mestizo, mulato*, etc.) are represented with their child and are characterised by different physical characteristics (especially skin colour) and cultural attributes (clothing, everyday objects, natural or domestic environment, etc.). The painting by the Creole painter Ignacio María Barreda y Ordóñez from 1777, commissioned by a local officer (Fig. 7), shows the hierarchical arrangement of different types and degrees of biological and cultural “mixing” of the New-Spanish population, typical of this genre. The term “morisco” for the representation of a child of a Spanish mother and a mulatto father (first couple from the left in the second row) refers to the supposed Muslim descent of African slaves. The inclusion of a “castizo” boy, a term used frequently for children of a Spanish and a mestizo parent (second couple from the left in the first row), reflects the original Spanish concept of *casta* meaning pure descent. Therefore, the term “castizo” refers to the idea, discussed in church circles since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that the original proportion of “indigenous blood” could be “erased” in subsequent generations through the continuous election of Spanish spouses and the status of *limpieza* could be regained.<sup>62</sup> For the Creole population of the colonies, this view was all the more important because various travellers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century questioned the pure Spanish descent claimed by the Creoles.<sup>63</sup> The landscape scenes at the bottom of Barreda’s painting show in the centre the original native population, depicted in their naturalness and simplicity, framed by representations of various representatives and buildings of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, which underline the “civilising” achievement of the Spanish conquest of the New World.

Creole patriotism, which is reflected in the above-mentioned petition of the City Council of Mexico in 1771, also took on a religious connotation during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This can be seen in another *casta* painting that Luis de Mena,

61 Ilona Katzew, *Casta painting. Images of race in eighteenth-century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

62 Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 197–199.

63 See for example the travel report of the Spanish naval officers Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa of the 1740s, in *Epoca, genesis y textos de las “Noticias secretas de América,” de Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa*, vol. 2, ed. Luis J. Ramos Gómez (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984): 335.

probably also a Creole, made around 1750 in Mexico City (Fig. 8).<sup>64</sup> The representation of the colonial social hierarchy is supplemented here in the upper central area of the painting by the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. According to contemporary legend, the Virgin Mary appeared to an indigenous convert in 1531 on the hill of Tepeyac, just outside the city of Mexico. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the legend became increasingly popular in New Spain, and in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it formed an integral part of local Catholicism.

## 5 Final Remarks

The evangelization of the indigenous population of the New World and the struggle against Protestantism on both sides of the Atlantic had shaped the religious policy of the Spanish king and Emperor Charles V (1516/19–1556) and his conception of a Christian universal monarchy. By adapting the Spanish religious concept of *limpieza de sangre* to a colonial multi-ethnic situation, the Crown and the royal and ecclesiastical institutions in New Spain and other areas of Spanish America introduced a hierarchically organized caste system based on an ethnic categorization of the population. Consequently, during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, religion and confession declined in favour of ethnicity as the key concept in defining social status and hierarchy. At the beginning of the century, the *limpieza de sangre* was still understood as a religious and genealogical concept that referred to the descent of Jews, Muslims or heretics, while indigenous people and sometimes even persons of African descent were considered “immaculate” in this respect. The purity statutes were then increasingly extended to exclude the indigenous population, the (enslaved and free) African-American population and people of mixed ancestry. In the colonial context, the idea of an Old Christian descent, which had been handed down from the motherland, developed into the idea of a purely Spanish descent without indigenous and African ancestors. Even though the religious dimension of the *limpieza de sangre* retained its importance in the allocation of offices and dignities, especially in ecclesiastical institutions, there too purely Spanish descent became the central element of social distinction. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even in the diocesan seminaries and religious

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<sup>64</sup> Sarah Cline, “Guadalupe and the Castas: The Power of a Singular Colonial Mexican Painting,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 31:2 (2015): 218–247. For a critical assessment of the role of the virgin of Guadalupe in Creole patriotism see Cornelius Conover, “Reassessing the Rise of Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe, 1650s–1780s,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 27:2 (2011): 251–279.

orders, the examination of an applicant's ancestry was replaced by the assessment of the social status of the persons concerned.

The migration of people and ideas from the Iberian Peninsula to the American colonies challenged traditional Spanish ideas of Christianity, Christian subjects and clergy. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, colonial notions of ethnicity not only undermined the original concept of religious purity but, as the emergence of a Creole Catholicism shows, it also led to new local expressions of Christianity. Together with enduring indigenous and African spiritual traditions in the New World, which could not be sufficiently considered in this paper, the “polycentric monarchy” of the Spanish Habsburgs of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and their Bourbon successors in the 18<sup>th</sup> century represented an important stage and space in the formation of the “polycentric structures” of World Christianity.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pedro Cardim et al., eds., *Polycentric monarchies. How did early modern Spain and Portugal achieve and maintain a global hegemony?* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014); Klaus Koschorke, “Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity (Inaugural Lecture),” in *Polycentric structures in the history of world Christianity / Polyzentrische Strukturen in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums*, eds. Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014): 15–28.



**Fig. 7:** Ignacio María Barreda y Ordóñez, “Las castas mexicanas” (1777), oil on canvas, Real Academia Espanola de la Lengua, Madrid.





Fig. 8: Luis de Mena, “Castas” (ca. 1750), oil on canvas, Museo de América, Madrid.

