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Religious conversion: Mexican Catholic to Mexican Baptist

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION: MEXICAN CATHOLIC
TO MEXICAN BAPTIST

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A Thesis
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of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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Religious conversion:
Mexican Catholic to Mexican

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is to make an analytical study of the religious conversion of Mexican Catholics to Mexican American Protestants. The approach has been made from the perspective of social anthropology. In a general way this study seeks to formulate an explanation that underlies the apparent exchanging of one set of religious beliefs for another. The emphasis is normative to the extent that beliefs are necessary explanations for social behavior. An attempt has been made to demonstrate how religion, as a cultural system, formulates a congruence with a new social milieu. The particular method has been to analyze and describe the distinctive function of religious conversion in the maintenance of cultural values of the Mexican immigrant as he settled in southern California.

The term "Protestant" will be used to describe those members of the Baptist Church in the United States, including people belonging to the Mexican Baptist Church in southern California. The term "Catholic" will refer to those members of the Roman Catholic Church both in Mexico and the United States. Distinctions will be made when appropriate.

"Religion" will be described as a system of symbols

which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and creating an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem realistic.¹

"Culture" will refer to an abstraction based on an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which individuals communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.² Culture is learned and transmitted to provide for the individual or group a vehicle for adaptation in the larger society.³ Culture is based on a close-knit group of interrelated and interdependent traits that characterize human behavior and is the product of social interaction.⁴

"Chicano" and "Mexican American" refer to those people of Mexican ancestry who were taken into the United States as a result of the Mexican War of 1848 and who

¹Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, ed. Michael Barton, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph Series, No. 3 (London: Tavistock, 1965), p. 3.

²Geertz, pp. 2-3.

³Delbert Gibson, "Protestantism in Latin-American Acculturation" (PhD dissertation, University of Texas, 1959), p. v.

⁴Gibson, p. viii.

continued to immigrate up to the present time.

"Social order," "environment," and "social milieu" describe various terms that represent the existing social and cultural influences that constitute a particular reality.

"Cultural accommodation" or "adaptation" will refer to a process whereby a numerically small, culturally distinct minority adapts to a new or different cultural environment. The interaction between the minority group's culture and the new one results in a selective adaptation of new cultural elements and a retention of the old ones. The accommodation to a different cultural system does not necessarily result in the abandonment of the old cultural values but rather a syncretical grafting of the new on the old culture.

The extent to which the process of conversion plays an important function in the cultural accommodation of the Mexican immigrant to the new social milieu of the United States is shown by the establishment of the Mexican Baptist Church and by the church's function as an agent of accommodation which created a basic congruence between a particular life-style and a specific reality.⁵

⁵Geertz, p. 4.

Geertz's belief is that a group's ethos or their world-view is represented as reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world-view describes, while the world-view is represented as emotionally convincing by being presented as

The analysis of religious conversion necessitates an examination of certain preconditions: (1) the relationship between the Mexican Catholic Church and the Mexican who left Mexico; (2) the relationship between the American Catholic Church and the Mexican immigrant; and (3) the evangelizing efforts by the Baptist Church in California. At this point, one can generate explanations for the religious conversion of Mexican Catholics to Chicano Protestants.

Most of the literature about the Mexican in the United States comes from writers and researchers in the social sciences. Basically, this body of knowledge describes various factors concerning the minority status of Chicanos and the conflict resulting from immigration. Other than perfunctory remarks, Chicano Protestantism remains largely uninvestigated.

Because of the very limited amount of data discussing the process of religious conversion, theories from related disciplines have been used. The theoretical framework has been drawn from a collection of hypotheses and bodies of literature dealing with the Mexican as a social group, the function of religion as a cultural system, and the sociology of knowledge.

Chapter 2 of this study deals with the theoretical

an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well arranged to accommodate such a way of life.

background and methods used to substantiate the hypothesis. Chapter 3 deals with a content analysis of the relationship of the Mexican Catholic Church with the Mexican who immigrated and, also, the American Catholic Church with the Mexican immigrant. Chapter 4 will describe the development of the American Baptist Church, its evangelizing efforts, and the establishment of the Mexican Baptist Church. Chapter 5 will describe the religious conversion of Mexican Catholics to Chicano Protestants in southern California.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Mexican American or Chicano has been identified by many researchers as being religiously affiliated with Roman Catholicism. The phenomena of Chicano Protestantism remains largely uninvestigated. The reasons causing the Mexican Catholic to change his religious affiliation to Protestantism are the central theme of this study. The specific analysis will focus on the first generation Mexican Catholic who immigrated and settled permanently in the southern California area between 1910-1930 and who became a member of the Mexican Baptist Church. The emergence of the Mexican Baptist Church in southern California coincides with the period of large-scale immigration of Mexicans to the United States (1910-1930), and the first converts were almost exclusively from the ranks of this immigrant group.¹

The occurrence of religious conversion suggests that changes took place in the Mexican Catholic's religious beliefs, which will be referred to as his religious cultural system, that enabled him to convert to Protestantism. The first consideration is to provide an analytical framework

¹Mrs. L. C. Troyer, Mexican Missions in the Southwest (Los Angeles: Students Benefit Publishing, 1934), p. 5.

for the explication of the problem by describing the theoretical approaches.

Social change is recognized by many social scientists as a fundamental process of human life. Social change refers to the process by which customary patterns of behavior alter in relation to particular environmental conditions.² Specifically, the phenomenon of religious conversion indicates that this change may have occurred because of the adaptation to a changing environment and because of contact with different religious cultural systems. This writer believes that the emergence of the Mexican Baptist Church was a mechanism of social change.

The significance of change and its role as an instrument of religious conversion can be further explained by the process of cultural accommodation. First, one must assume that the Mexican immigrant underwent some degree of change as he settled permanently in the United States. The amount of change is not the issue, but one can assume that the immigrant moved into a different environment than he had been accustomed to and made contacts, however small, with individuals and institutions of the Anglo-American society. The results of these contacts might have led to short- or long-term adaptations to the existing situation because

²Fred Plog and Daniel Bates, Cultural Anthropology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 287.

individuals within a group may react differently to a given circumstance.³ Change is not a uniform process; a tendency exists for human groups to maintain the status quo in their customary patterns of behavior. But the process of change might be the attempt to develop different ways of coping with the changing circumstances these groups encounter because people everywhere try to maintain some ties with the past--ties that will help to integrate the old with the new.⁴ As substantial numbers of Mexicans immigrated to this country, they encountered attitudes of racial prejudice and actions of social discrimination. These conditions were manifested in strains and inconsistencies in the various cultural systems of the immigrants. Although many of these tension-producing factors may have been reduced by the cultural and physical isolation of the immigrant from the direct contact with American society, his life-style did not remain wholly unchanged. Change was an adaptive mechanism to the existing conditions that impinged on the cultural systems of the Mexican from external sources. Cultural accommodation occurred as the Mexican immigrant modified parts of his cultural system which aided in the persistence of that system while incorporating some new traits of the host society.⁵ The Mexican immigrant selectively adopted

³Plog and Bates, p. 286.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Plog and Bates, p. 299.

certain traits from the Anglo-American society, and what he borrowed seemed to blend with his own beliefs and practices. The conversion to Protestantism was one form of cultural accommodation.

If religious beliefs are subject to modification by a change in the social order, the relationship between culture and religion must be described. Geertz defines religion as any system of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that makes life meaningful and intelligible. He believes that religion is essentially an ideology, or system of symbols, that has a powerful emotional appeal and can provide a rationale for human existence. Most importantly, religious symbols serve both as models of reality by expressing cultural concepts about the way the world is organized and as models for reality by representing how the world should be organized ideally and how people should act to bring about this ideal.⁶ Symbols not only express deep-seated beliefs about the world but also promote understanding by translating the unknown or the unfamiliar into the known and familiar. Symbols are fundamental features of any religion, and these symbols constitute the bases for specific beliefs and actions which one can describe as a religious cultural system.

⁶Plog and Bates, p. 228.

Geertz describes this cultural dimension of religion by stating that religious symbols:

. . . function to synthesize a people's ethos--the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood--and their world view--the picture they have of the way things are in sheer actuality, their most comprehensive ideas of order.⁷

Religious beliefs and practices reveal a group's ethos:

. . . as representing a way of life ideally suited to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well arranged to accommodate such a way of life.⁸

Clearly, Geertz believes that culture and religion are part and parcel of each other in that they define each other's qualities. He maintains that the functions of this intrinsic relationship between culture and religion are that it:

. . . objectifies moral and aesthetic preferences by depicting them as imposed conditions of life implicit in a world with a particular structure, as mere common sense given the unalterable shape of reality and supports these beliefs about the universe by invoking deeply felt moral sentiments as evidence for their truths.⁹

Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular life-style and a specific reality sustaining each with the borrowed authority of each other. A religious cultural system harmonizes human action to a perceived cultural milieu and projects representations of a social

⁷Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, ed. Michael Barton, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph Series, No. 3 (London: Tavistock, 1965), p. 3.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Geertz, p. 4.

order on a human experiential level.¹⁰

The nexus of how a religious cultural system formulates conceptions of a general order of existence is the system of symbols which create these conceptions with an aura of factuality that seems uniquely realistic.¹¹ The term "symbol" has various meanings attached to it; this term will be used to denote ". . . an object, act, event, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception--the conception is the symbol's meaning."¹² The Lord's Supper, a prayer, and the cross are symbolic elements of meaning as are a painting, an automobile, and a hand gesture. All of these symbols represent tangible formulations of objects, notions, abstractions, attitudes, ideas, or beliefs.¹³ Religious cultural activity is not solely restricted to a supraempirical, mentalistic world of cognitions, affections, or abstruse meanings. The construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms are bases for religious and social behavior. The manner in which a group of people order a part of their social relationships is reflected in their concept of religion and in the symbols that constitute their religious cultural system. Religious beliefs provide a legitimizing ideology which identifies the religious realm

¹⁰Geertz, p. 4.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

with the social realm (and vice versa) validating social organization and regulating social behavior.¹⁴ But the translation of religious symbolism to socially observable behavior needs further explanation.

Cultural patterns (systems of symbols, either social or religious) are external sources of information--external in that they lie outside the boundaries of the individual who internalizes these patterns through socialization. These patterns become sources of information that provide a blueprint for processes, external to the individual, which take on a definite form.¹⁵ Cultural patterns, then, provide a coded program of social and psychological processes which shape human behavior.¹⁶ In one sense, these cultural patterns become models for behavior because human beings need concepts from symbolic sources in order to attain a relationship among social processes by paralleling or simulating them.¹⁷ Geertz states:

. . . culturally programmed ones [cultural patterns or a system of symbols that become models for behavior] are so important, only because human behavior is so loosely determined by intrinsic sources of information that extrinsic sources are so vital. To build a dam . . . man . . . needs a concept of what it is to build a dam, a conception he can get only from a

¹⁴Frank R. Vivelo, Cultural Anthropology Handbook (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), p. 193.

¹⁵Geertz, p. 6.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

symbolic source--a blueprint, a textbook, or a string of speech by someone who already knows how dams are built, or, . . . from manipulating graphic or linguistic elements in such a way as to attain for himself a conception of what dams are and how they are built.¹⁸

A religious cultural system, consisting of systems of symbols, becomes a way of conceptualizing the social reality and a manner of behaving in that same reality.

Thus far, the discussion of religion has been limited to a social (functional) context, but religion also embodies an ideational dimension that is part and parcel of the social order. Ideational symbolic systems have a double aspect to them in that they give meaning to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to reality and by having reality shape itself to them.¹⁹ These symbolic patterns become models of reality by:

. . . the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring into parallel with the pre-established non-symbolic system . . . as to render them apprehensible: it is a model of reality . . . as when one grasps how dams work by developing a theory of hydraulics. Models of reality such as linguistic, religious, or cultural processes represent those patterned processes as to express their structure in a coherent form.²⁰

The perception of the structural congruence between one set of processes, activities, relations, or entities and another for which it acts as a program represents a conception or symbol of that program.²¹ The ideational and functional

¹⁸Geertz, p. 6.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

interact to express the social milieu and to shape it by imparting a particular character to an individual's beliefs. Religious symbols and symbolic systems establish certain beliefs and values for the individual which, in turn, the individual attempts to live by while achieving a sense of relevation and direction for his life.²² It is the modification or alteration of these religious symbols and symbolic systems that constitutes the key construct of this analysis.

Statement of the Hypotheses

The major hypothesis of this study is that the Mexican Baptist Church served as an agency of cultural accommodation that attracted some first-generation Mexican Catholics to convert to Protestantism. The theoretical approach to this problem is the phenomenon of social change, and the key construct is the alteration of the religious-cultural system. The major premise is that Chicano Protestantism emerged as a result of cultural accommodation, and the Mexican Baptist Church functioned as an agent of this adaptation. The secondary hypothesis is that the cultural systems of the Mexican Baptist Church manifested similarities with those cultural systems of the Mexican Catholic Church, thereby facilitating the conversion process. The second

²²Geertz, pp. 6-9.

premise is that the first generation Catholic immigrant found the Catholic Church in the United States as functionally and culturally different than his own religious cultural system. This resulted in a tension-producing situation that could have caused him to feel alienated vis-à-vis his Catholic faith. A peripheral occurrence was the efforts by Baptist missionaries to evangelize the Mexican immigrant. The combination of Protestant evangelizing and the influences of a new social environment resulted in a modification of the Mexican immigrant's religious beliefs. The convergence of the Mexican's religious beliefs and the symbolic systems of the Mexican Baptist Church were manifested in conversion. This phenomenon was facilitated by the congruence that was perceived by the Mexican between his own religious cultural symbols and those of the Mexican Baptist Church.

The basic disciplinary framework is social anthropology. The holistic approach of anthropology encompasses the study of human behavior in an attempt to formulate general concepts that underlie the phenomena of culture. Since this study will describe various aspects of the Mexican immigrant's experiences, a multifocal approach is necessary. If the Mexican immigrant's conversion to Protestantism resulted from a modification of his religious-cultural system, a description of the salient religious-cultural

patterns of the Catholic Church in Mexico and the United States that relate to the Mexican immigrant must be presented (Chapter 3). Additionally, an examination of the cultural patterns of the Baptist Church in the United States, of the evangelizing efforts by Baptist missionaries, and the emergence of the Mexican Baptist Church must be described (Chapter 4). Finally, if social change caused an attendant alteration in the Mexican's religious-cultural system, an analysis of how precisely this occurred must be given; furthermore, if the Mexican Catholic's religious-cultural system converged with that of the Mexican Baptist Church's, a description of how these similarities were perceived by the individuals involved and how those elements facilitated the conversion process also must be presented (Chapter 5).

The fundamental assumptions of this thesis are:

(1) that religion is eminently social--an individual's apprehension of religion and society is inextricably bound together; (2) that a change in the social order may result in a tension-producing situation which can be reduced by an accommodation to the existing social milieu; (3) and that the accommodation phenomenon occurs as the individual selectively adopts certain traits from the existing social order to minimize the inconsistencies he perceives between his own cultural patterns and the ones of the new social environment.

Chapter 3

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

As the Mexican immigrated to the United States between 1900 and 1930, he came into contact with various institutions of American society. These new experiences may have had a disorienting effect on him. Some type of adaptation to the existing social milieu conceivably could have taken place. Ostensibly, the American Catholic Church represented a familiar entity because the overwhelming number of Mexicans were Catholics. Did the immigrant perceive the religious-cultural system of the American church as consistent with his own or as different; did he accept it too, or did he care? In this chapter, a selective historical overview of Catholicism both in Mexico and the United States will be presented. Special emphasis will be placed on the functional role of each church in its respective social setting.

The Colonial Church in Mexico

The most remarkable feat of the colonial period in Mexico (1521-1821) was the Christianization of the native or mestizo population. This accomplishment is significant in terms of the problems that the first missionaries encountered and the conflicts that emerged. It is evident, though, that the native Mexican did not necessarily internalize all of

the dogmas of Catholic orthodoxy and that the Indians assumed the role of peripheral participants of the colonial church.

The initial obstacles centered on how to purge paganism while instilling Christian principles, whether to Hispanicize the native or to allow him to keep his culture, and how to disseminate religious doctrine without compromising church orthodoxy.¹ It would become evident that the first missionaries would have to adopt an eclectic approach in evangelizing the natives--eclectic in that only selective aspects of church doctrine would be taught.² This reflected the early approaches taken by the brothers of the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian Orders, who were the first friars in Mexico, and the secular clergy, who dominated the missionary enterprise by the mid-seventeenth century.³ During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the prevailing attitude taken by the missionaries was that some native institutions were essentially corrupt and must be eliminated.⁴ Conversion meant a break with the past so that

¹Robert Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico, trans. Lesley B. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 35.

²Ricard, p. 285.

³Charles Gibson, The Aztecs under Spanish Rule (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 112.

⁴Ricard, p. 284.

a new Christian society could be built. However, another attitude, which would dominate after the mid-nineteenth century, co-existed which maintained that the indigenous people, regardless of their beliefs and institutions, were not totally decadent because they had a dimension of truth and desire for enlightenment.⁵ These views were manifested in the eclecticism of the missionaries' efforts in hopes of facilitating the conversion process. As Ricard states:

The Franciscans . . . seem . . . to be especially interested in ethnography and linguistic studies and more concerned with training a native clergy; the Dominicans, more scrupulously attached to orthodoxy and less optimistic about the Indian's spiritual capacities; the Augustinians, more competent in organizing the natives' communities, more given to building large monasteries, and more interested in giving the neophytes a higher and more advanced spiritual training.⁶

But, regardless of approach, the problems were manifold. The friars realized that any semblance of paganism must be eradicated before conversion could take place. The preconquest religions contained many superficial similarities with Catholicism, and the friars believed that these pagan practices had nothing in common with the church's sacraments; therefore, a complete break with the past was necessary. One general fear was the possibility of a pagan-Christian synthesis, and this matter was complicated by the lack of trained missionaries who were knowledgeable of

⁵Ricard, p. 284.

⁶Ricard, p. 285.

Indian dialects and customs.⁷ To avoid confusion with native terms (analogous, yet different in meaning), the friars used Latin or Spanish words to represent some Christian concepts. In the early period, the learning of Catholic principles was conveyed by pictures, drawings, and the edifying plays. It was the intent of the friars to simplify the doctrine of the church because this less complicated method would insure a basic understanding of Christian beliefs.⁸ Also, this approach eliminated the possibility of heterodoxy because of its simplicity. This method reflected the low opinion many friars had of the spiritual qualities of the Indians. Many missionaries were unwilling to dispense all the sacraments because the Indians placed more importance on the act itself than on its significance. Generally, baptism and marriage were the most common sacraments administered because without them no semblance of a Christian community would have existed.⁹

One area that served to alienate the Indian from the church, especially in the late sixteenth century, was the internal conflict of the religious body. As the missionary enterprise in New Spain grew, cleavages emerged as divergent opinions appeared and factional rivalries developed.

⁷Ricard, p. 286.

⁸Ricard, p. 287.

⁹Ricard, p. 288.

Intraorder disputed were manifested in opposing viewpoints over the neophytes, personal conflicts, incompatibilities of character, doctrinal interpretations, and generational rivalries.¹⁰ After the mid-sixteenth century, a continuing conflict emerged between the regular orders themselves and between these groups and the secular priests and the bishops.

Gibson states:

Within the church, the regular Mendicant friars and the secular clergy comprised two powerful opposing groups. The former were the Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian orders to whom parochial and sacramental powers had been entrusted for the realization of missionary goals. The latter were the clerics of the episcopal hierarchy, the traditional possessors of these powers who saw parochial control by the regular clergy as an unwanted intrusion.¹¹

Initially, the point of conflict was that the Mendicant friars enjoyed distinct advantages of privilege, power, and prestige because they had the right to administer the sacraments without the authorization of the bishops. With the establishment of the bishoprics and the introduction of the secular clergy, it was evident that strife would result.¹² As early as 1537, the episcopal hierarchy voiced strong opposition to the autonomy of the friars.¹³ One archbishop reported that the regular clergy usurped episcopal authority, incited rebellions against the bishops, and

¹⁰Ricard, pp. 240-43.

¹¹Charles Gibson, p. 98.

¹²Ricard, pp. 240-43.

¹³Ricard, pp. 244-54.

performed unauthorized ceremonies. However, the friars also took issue with the episcopacy because the prelates ignored their responsibilities and allowed the secular clergy to infringe on their missions.¹⁴ In an attempt to neutralize the religious and financial autonomy of the regular orders, the episcopacy permitted the secular orders to encroach in areas already settled by the friars and instituted a system of tithing.¹⁵ This gradual secularization of missions, which began in 1559, was not accomplished until the mid-seventeenth century, and the secular priest became the episcopacy's assurance of its authority in religious matters as the regular clergy was displaced.¹⁶ The secular clergy subsisted on special taxes, tithes, and fees, and a part of these revenues was extracted from the Indians.¹⁷ The church also received monies from the land-owning class, and in time it became a financial and lending institution, especially after secular control was established.¹⁸

The economic development of the church seemed to be an attendant manifestation of secularization. The church was influenced by the society it served. One factor was the substantial numbers of Creoles that entered the clergy

¹⁴Ricard, pp. 244-54.

¹⁵Ricard, pp. 244-49.

¹⁶Leslie B. Simpson, Many Mexicos, 4th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 88, 173.

¹⁷Simpson, p. 173.

¹⁸Ibid.

because it offered an opportunity for social status and financial security. Mayo states:

Because of the principle of "Primogeniture in perpetuity," that is, "the first son inherits everything for ever and ever," there was always a need for brothers and sisters to find prestigious positions that would offer economic security. . . . By the seventeenth century the Church became an extension of the dominant social groups in New Spain.¹⁹

The Creoles entered both regular and secular orders, but it was the latter group that would succeed in establishing itself as the dominant group of the colonial church in the southern and central areas of Mexico. Since the secular priests did not take vows of poverty, they were able to finance themselves and their dioceses through commercial enterprises. Even though the regular friars engaged in business, they did not do so for personal aggrandizement.

Commercial activities of the clergy included the purchase and rental of urban properties, the ownership of grain mills, and the proprietorship of textile mills. Both the regular and secular clergy owned and rented farm and grazing land, but a considerable source of wealth for both of them was the capellania. The capellania was a tax-free donation given in favor of the church diocese. If a member of that family who deposited the capellania entered the priesthood, he could utilize the interest drawn on the amount

¹⁹Samuel Mayo, A History of Mexico from Pre-Columbia to Present (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 131.

to support himself. The priest's family could also use the capital for further investments. Both the church and the donors benefited because the interest accrued to the church and the investment capital remained tax-free to the donor. The capellania was adopted by the orders of the church as a means of accruing interest from the loans of capital. By means of the capellania, the religious orders and individual priests became the primary lenders and lending institutions in colonial Mexico.²⁰

The church's expanding financial role was no better exemplified than its control over property. Loans made to individuals were used primarily to purchase land. The loans acted as a mortgage; if the mortgagee defaulted on the loan, the church would assume control of the property upon the death of the mortgagee. Also, the church inherited land from wealthy parishioners, and the clergy was able to diversify its holding by investing its capital into different enterprises. The Catholic Church of New Spain had assumed an important economic role in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²¹

Some of the secular clergy who were sons of the landed gentry acted in their own behalf by appointing

²⁰Mayo, p. 132.

²¹Ibid.

themselves as priests on their fathers' encomienda.²² There, they shared two roles: one as the teacher/priest and the other as a labor boss. The priest was able to recruit labor for the encomienda. When the encomienda system declined and the latfundia system, which was characterized by a large estate with a private owner, replaced it, the priest became a labor recruiter for the large land owner or latifundista. The priest occupied a very advantageous position in that he received a fee for his services from the latifundista and from the Indians as well. It was possible for many individuals to enter the colonial clergy and make a fair and reasonable living, and it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the colonial church became a formidable economic institution in New Spain.

One of the most successful clerical groups in colonial Mexico, especially in the northern frontier, was the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits. They arrived in New Spain in 1572 and were noted as an educational elite. The Jesuits tended to settle in the outlying areas and invested most of their capital in rural estates which they managed themselves. The financial successes of their investments enabled the Jesuits to fund their educational institutions

²²The encomienda was the labor system whereby Spanish land grantees could receive tribute and use Indian labor on their land grants. The term became identified with the actual grant of land itself.

and their missions. The Jesuits had gained control of the majority of secondary schools and colleges by the eighteenth century. But, their success ultimately resulted in their dissolution. Their superb organizational structure, their absolute control over their estates, and the efficient marketing of their products established them as a powerful economic force in northern New Spain. Jesuit enterprises competed directly with the commercial interests of wealthy Creole landowners and Indian villages, resulting in strained relationships with the clergy. In some instances, the Jesuits were accused of profiteering at the expense of the native population. These situations did not endear the Jesuits to the local populace, and in rare occurrences, the Indians actually revolted against the Jesuit clergy.²³

Ironically, the Jesuits' successes eventually caused their banishment from the colony. Their domination in education and economics generated many antagonisms with the colonial bureaucracy and private landowners. The elimination of the Jesuits would allow for their holdings to be confiscated and redistributed. Colonial bureaucrats, Creole latifundistas, and even some Indian groups would all benefit if the removal of the Jesuits could be effected. The Jesuit

²³See accounts of the conflict that took place between the Indians and Jesuits over the Colegio Maximo in Mayo, pp. 138-39.

areas were comprised mainly of the territories of northern New Spain extending into what is now the United States Southwest. Friars Juan Maria de Salvatierra and Eusebio Francisco Kino were two very prominent missionaries who extended Jesuit hegemony in the northern frontier. Because the Jesuits were virtually autonomous in some of these areas, a great deal of jealousy and suspicion developed around them. But the deciding factor occurred in Spain, where Charles III, a Spanish Bourbon King of French ancestry, had been imbued with the reformist philosophies of the Enlightenment. One such ideal was the curbing of the economic and political power of the Catholic Church. In 1767, in keeping with the anticlerical fervor that was popular in Europe, Charles III ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in the New World.

In some cases, the clergy, both regular and secular, presented problems. Some priests had moral and intellectual deficiencies that limited their missionary abilities.²⁴ These individuals abandoned their parishes and labored for their own personal aggrandizement.²⁵ Some of them were incompetent because they did not know Latin or were unable to instruct the natives in the sacraments.²⁶ Also, some

²⁴Ricard, p. 239.

²⁵Ricard, p. 240.

²⁶Ricard, p. 244.

friars were accused of brutality toward the Indians who were punished by the clergy for practicing pagan rituals and "sinful" acts.²⁷ Other acts, such as forced labor, which developed in the 1530s, coerced the native into working for the construction of ecclesiastical buildings.²⁸ During the early secularization period, the friars were extremely critical of the secular clergy because they lacked competency, linguistic training, and self-control.

The mistreatment of the Indians also interfered with the evangelization of New Spain. The regular clergy received many complaints about the abuses by the Spanish colonists.²⁹

It was a most discouraging thing for the friars to see that what they accomplished on one hand, the Spaniards destroyed on the other, and that it was the Spaniard who prevented the conversion of the Indians, and that if the friars reproached them for committing forbidden acts, they complained to the Audencia which found in their favor, so that the ecclesiastical authority could not count on the secular arm for the punishment of the guilty.³⁰

This ill treatment was partially responsible for the massive decline of the native population during the first seventy years of colonial rule.³¹ The effects of the exploitive labor system and epidemics reduced the indigenous population

²⁷Charles Gibson, pp. 117-18.

²⁸Charles Gibson, pp. 118-21.

²⁹Ricard, pp. 244-54.

³⁰Ricard, p. 254.

³¹Woodrow Borah, New Spain's Century of Depression (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 1-2.

from eleven million in 1519 to approximately 2.5 million in 1597.³² The labor system had been a rallying point for the clergy to protect the Indian. However, after the 1550s, churchmen had difficulty voicing opposition to the system because ecclesiastical strictures against forced labor appeared inconsistent with the church's own dependence on Indian labor and tribute.³³ It seemed evident that the Indian became a pawn between the civilian and the religious authorities concerning his welfare. The end result was a progressive disruption of the Indian's social order and an estrangement from the church's leadership.³⁴

But the fundamental deficiency of the colonial church was that it remained a Spanish-dominated institution.³⁵ This circumstance was not so remarkable considering the colonial social structure and the eclecticism of the missionary effort. In becoming converted, a native did not necessarily become Hispanicized.³⁶ Many missionaries respected the natives and their culture and sought to preserve it.³⁷ Also, the friars had no real intention of turning the Mexican into a Spaniard because the main purpose of conversion was to create what Eric Wolf calls a "new

³²Borah, p. 3.

³³Charles Gibson, p. 112.

³⁴Borah, pp. 2-5.

³⁵Ricard, p. 288.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ricard, pp. 288-89.

utopia" where a new Christian spirit was to unfold.³⁸ Additionally, the upper classes of New Spain maintained negative attitudes toward the Indians because they considered them racially inferior and exploited the Indians by utilizing them as a source of cheap labor. The native's role in the church was that of an obedient servant. The Indian was never an integral part of the church because he was not allowed to enter into the clergy; therefore, the colonial church remained a Spanish institution that never attained a national character.³⁹ Alongside the Indian was the mestizo, whose life was also regulated by social attitudes. It was evident that, even though the Mendicant friars attempted their utmost to tend to the needs of the neophytes, their efforts were hampered by the class attitudes of colonial society.⁴⁰ Even when the Indian and mestizo were allowed to enter the clergy, they were relegated to subordinate posts and small country parishes.⁴¹ In effect, this situation created two elements in the church--one consisting of the Spaniard and his offspring, the other made up of the Indian and mestizo.⁴² What is evident is that the evangelization

³⁸Eric Wolf, "Conquest of Utopia," Introduction to Chicano Studies, eds. Livie I. Duran and H. Russell Barnard (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 101-14.

³⁹Ricard, p. 292.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ricard, p. 294.

⁴²Ibid.

of Mexico did not result in a monolithic religious structure being transplanted from Spain. While it did achieve a radical transition from paganism to Christianity, it did not necessarily remold the attitudes and lives of the people of Mexico.⁴³

What did occur in Mexico was a cultural synthesis of Catholicism with elements of the pre-conquest religions. This phenomenon, called syncretism, began in the early part of the colonial period, and eventually, it resulted in a Mexicanized Catholicism that manifested many outward expressions of the indigenous cultures. Roman Catholicism embodied a rich pagentry and a complex ceremonial cycle. It offered roles to men and women, young and old. Its priests, believing in the devil and spirits, could deal with the native religions in ways the Mesoamerican people could understand. Additionally, Catholicism provided multiple manifestations of the Virgin and the Trinity as approximations of multiple dieties and physical objects for veneration. It was in the early sixteenth century that Catholicism supplanted the Indian religions as the central faith of Mexico, and many ritual elements of Catholicism, such as religious processions, music, dances, and plays, assumed a distinctive Mexican flavor.

⁴³Charles Gibson, p. 134.

Churches became symbols of the power of Christianity, and many churches using Indian labor had Indian motifs in their appearances. Each community had its own patron saint, and this is where Catholicism and Indian spiritual needs really merged. It was common that the religious sanctuaries that existed prior to the conquest reemerged as Catholic religious centers of great importance, with patron saints whose miracles were often associated with that area. For example, the Church of Los Remedios in Mexico, built atop the Cerro de Tollepec where once stood a pre-conquest pyramid, was one. It was believed that on the night Cortez retreated from Tenochtitlan--that night La Noche Triste--the Virgin Mary appeared atop this hill and shone a bright light with her hand which allowed the Spaniards to escape while the other hand shone a brighter light that blinded the Indian pursuers. The Virgin was considered the patron saint of the Spaniards and was called La Gachupina by the Indians.⁴⁴

Another source of convergence was the religious festival. The festivals always celebrated some patron saint or miracle of the church. They were complete with Indian interpretations of images, costumes, music, dancing, and plays based on biblical and moral events.

⁴⁴Mayo, p. 136.

An area that proved to be an important source of collective security and spiritual identity for the Indian was the cofradia. This was a parishioners' association which offered financial and spiritual security and emotional solidarity. These Indian brotherhoods were introduced by the Catholic clergy and were a rather late development of the colonial era, but the Indian populace responded positively to them. The Indians could identify with families within a given parish, and they could gain security and satisfaction and recognition as additional benefits. The cofradias acted as subordinate religious and economic structures both within and outside of the Catholic Church. They sponsored religious festivals, paid for Masses, said prayers for deceased members, and guaranteed the proper burial of its members. In some instances, the cofradia, as a group, bought and sold land and invested the profits as a means of supporting the organization. Mayo states:

There is no doubt that the cofradias were the singularly most important organizations that bound the Indians to Catholicism. And finally, the cofradias acted as a vehicle for the preservation of certain Indian traditions within the Catholic Church . . . were the catalysts for aspects of present day Catholic heterodoxy.⁴⁵

Even though the church's hierarchy was dominated by the Spaniard and the Creole, and the church's dogma remained essentially intact, the most significant aspect of the

⁴⁵Mayo, p. 137.

Christianization of Mexico was the syncreticism of Roman Catholicism with some elements of the pre-Columbian religions, which resulted in a Mexican Catholicism.

The Nineteenth Century Church

Mexico's independence from Spain did not result in widespread social change because one ruling class replaced another, and Mexican society remained stratified. The religious institution sought to maintain the privileged position it had in the colonial era. In order to accomplish this end, the episcopacy endeavored to support those political ideologists who would allow the Catholic Church virtual autonomy in their spheres of operation. The actions of the prelates would play an important part in the political development of nineteenth-century Mexico.⁴⁶

With the exception of the peasant class, one's religious disposition probably correlated with one's politics and social status. By the end of the colonial era, the Catholic Church had emerged as a powerful institution. The Catholic Church had accumulated large estates, collected tithes, operated its own judicial system, controlled

⁴⁶Robert Quirk, Mexico (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 48-50.

education, and lent monies to commercial enterprises.⁴⁷ The church's hierarchy would support that political faction which would insure that these conditions remain unchanged. The episcopate was identified as part and parcel of the conservative elements in Mexico that did not push for reform. It was obvious that those individuals who opposed the status quo also criticized the prelates. The political evolution of nineteenth-century Mexico was a partial struggle over the issue of what role the Catholic Church should have in Mexican politics and of what programs should be implemented to bring about social reform. The episcopal hierarchy was a handmaiden to the needs of Mexican conservatism. With the conservatives in power, the Catholic Church was assured of its dominant societal position.⁴⁸ Mexican liberals were secularly minded in that they believed that human advancement was a function of reason, not superstition or religious dogma.⁴⁹ Liberals believed that the power of the clergy should be limited so that the Mexican could achieve "perfectibility" on earth, not in heaven.⁵⁰ The radicals were the

⁴⁷Robert Quirk, The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church 1910-1929 (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1973), p. 7.

⁴⁸Quirk, Mexican Revolution, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹Quirk, Mexican Revolution, p. 8.

⁵⁰Quirk, Mexico, p. 50.

catechismal teaching, focusing his religious attention on the local saint. One problem was the lack of trained priests. Many villages would not have church services on a regular basis. The priest was often a transient on horseback. Unfortunately, many parish priests were poorly trained or chosen, and sometimes they set bad examples by their avarice or immorality. Fees were commonly charged for marriages, funerals, and communions. These conditions did not evoke an unequivocal commitment by the peasant to the church's doctrines.⁵²

The Catholic Church also mirrored Mexico's social cleavages. Great disparities existed between the prelates of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the village priests. Prelates were from the upper classes of Mexican society. The majority of them did not consider the native clergy as their equal. The native priests were relegated to village parishes, and they were never given important positions within the church. The village priest was not well educated and had second-class status in the church hierarchy. He was sometimes given to excesses and lacked the formal training of the prelates. This was one reason why the Catholicism of the Mexican peasant was different from the Catholicism of the upper classes of Mexican society and why Mexican

⁵²Frank Tannenbaum, Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), pp. 124-25.

Catholicism developed from a synthesis of pre-Columbian beliefs and Christian beliefs. Because of the poor quality of native clergy and their lack of numbers, many foreign clergymen came from Europe. They were better educated and tended to be appointed to the important posts in the larger cities and towns. It was evident that the Mexican peasant and the village priest remained estranged from much of the religious conflict in Mexico. The main attacks on the church came from the educated sectors of the society, such as middle-class liberals or radicals, the latter being vehemently anticlerical. But if the parish clergy, who were mainly mestizo or Indian, had a commitment, it would have to be with their parishioners to whom they were close and with whom they identified. The village priest was aware of his inferior status in the church, and he did not necessarily see himself as part of the universal church to which the prelates belonged. The Mexican Catholic Church was weakest where it should have been strongest.⁵³

The Catholic Church suffered its severest restrictions during the liberal administrations of Juarez and de Tejada, but conditions for the poor did not improve. The ascension of the dictator, Porfiro Diaz, allowed the church to regain a part of its privileges, but this pragmatic

⁵³Tannenbaum, p. 127.

alliance between the repressive government of Diaz and the ecclesiastical hierarchy served only to reestablish the institution of the Catholic Church as a foreign entity against the revolutionary movement of social reform. If one were to attempt to examine the religious attitudes of the Mexican peasantry at the beginning of the twentieth century, one would observe that, while the Indian or mestizo professed membership in the Catholic Church, his understanding of the church's doctrine and theology was minimal.⁵⁴

The Catholicism of Mexico's rural poor became basically oriented toward the conservation of the social order. The peasant was imbued with a simplified Christian doctrine.⁵⁵ What was important to him was his local saint and the village priest toward whom the peasant had ambivalent feelings.⁵⁶ In time, it was evident that a number of superstitious practices became constituent parts of an incipient Mexican Catholicism.⁵⁷ The evangelization of New Spain did not result in a pure Catholicism; it brought about a fusion of pre-Hispanic practices and Christian beliefs.

⁵⁴Quirk, Mexican Revolution, pp. 14-16.

⁵⁵Patrick H. McNamara, Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles County: A Study in Acculturation (San Francisco: R. & E. Associates, 1975), p. 5.

⁵⁶Quirk, Mexican Revolution, p. 6.

⁵⁷Ricard, p. 278.

The essence of religious conversion was the substitution of Christian meaning for a pagan one.⁵⁸ The indigenous people underwent a transmutation of their pre-conquest religious belief patterns because they were no longer consistent with the teachings of the missionaries and conditions of colonial society. It would have been impossible to break completely with the pre-conquest religious practices. Even though the friars had attempted to do so, their efforts were not complete. The natives utilized those practices that were meaningful to them in order to reorganize their religious beliefs. This did not result in a total rupture with pre-conquest beliefs, because early Catholic and native ideologies became so interwoven that the Indians became unaware that any such historical process occurred.⁵⁹ At the village level, Mexican Catholicism did not promote social reform. Instead, it reinforced the traditional folk culture. These communities had religious and political structures which fulfilled the emotional and practical needs of the members.⁶⁰

Catholicism's fundamental role for the Mexican

⁵⁸Ricard, p. 280.

⁵⁹Charles Wisdom, "The Supernatural World and Curing," Heritage of Conquest, ed. Sol Tax (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), p. 120.

⁶⁰Fernando Camara, "Religious and Political Organization," Heritage of Conquest, ed. Sol Tax (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), p. 143.

peasant was to impart a peaceful adjustment or adaptation to the immediate environment. The rural Mexican needed to learn the appropriate behavior so that he could bring himself into conformity with the social order.⁶¹ The native's faith was self-sufficient, not wholly dependent on the Catholic hierarchy.⁶² This perspective reinforced the general dimension of a folk rural environment. John Gillin describes it as:

The basic assumptions of Indian cultures . . . holds that man is in a world which operates according to certain laws or rules ultimately controlled by that part of the universe which we would call the supernatural or unseen, that this general plan of things is ongoing and immutable, that man must learn certain patterns of action and attitude to bring himself into conformity with the scheme of things, and that if he does so he will . . . survive as a member of the group.⁶³

Adjustment was an understandable goal in rural Mexico. The village priest represented what Catholicism was, and it was evident that folk Catholicism existed separately from the Catholicism of the episcopal hierarchy. The Indian and mestizo priests were different than the Creole priests in terms of power, prestige, and authority. Peasant life was permeated with many religious symbols because the

⁶¹John Gillin, "Ethos and Cultural Aspects of Personality," Heritage of Conquest, ed. Sol Tax (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), pp. 196-205.

⁶²Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Altars (4th ed.; New York: Payson and Clark, 1929), p. 131.

⁶³Gillin, pp. 196-205.

individual's immediate environment was viewed as essentially an integrated whole.⁶⁴

The rural peasantry was imbued with a simple Catholicism dominated by a folk concept. The Mexican village was a small aggregate, relatively isolated from outside influences.⁶⁵ This folk society was characterized by informalized oral communication, homogeneity, and gradual social change. This arrangement is similar to what Toennies called gemeinschaft--emphasizing the community rather than the society in general. These relationships are what Durkheim called mechanical. Parsons interprets this by stating:

It was Durkheim's view that religious ritual was of primary significance as a mechanism for expressing and reinforcing the sentiments most essential to the institutional integration of society. He applied it to society as a whole in abstraction from a particular situation of strain and tension for the individual.⁶⁶

It becomes clear that religion functioned as a major force by unifying and integrating the total life of the community and by influencing institutional activity. Individual differences are minimized, and members of a village culture are alike in their devotion to a common goal.⁶⁷ To what degree the peasant was a deeply devout or fanatical Catholic

⁶⁴Gillin, pp. 202-04.

⁶⁵Charles Gibson, p. 9.

⁶⁶Talcott Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory (rev. ed.; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), p. 206.

⁶⁷Lewis Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought (New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1971), p. 131.

would be difficult to discern. His faith was the vehicle for acceptance of the church's dogmas, but that faith was modified by many factors. During the conflict between the prelates and the anticlerical factions, the rural peasantry did not get directly involved in the struggle. It was evident that the peasants were too distant from the center of clerical power to become a part of the strife. The Indian's devoutness could be found in his beliefs concerning his way of life, not in the doctrines of the church.⁶⁸ This became a crucial factor, as it was this type of individual who began to immigrate to the United States in substantial numbers during the period between 1910 and 1930.⁶⁹

The Catholic Church in the American Colonies

The first Catholics in the American Colonies did not necessarily find religious tolerance. Initially, the American Catholic was subjected to abuse and persecution. Anti-Catholic biases originated from the bitter religious turmoil in England. Religious strife between Protestants and Catholics had a long history dating back to the reign of King Henry VIII, when he replaced Catholicism with Episcopalianism.

⁶⁸Tannenbaum, pp. 124-25.

⁶⁹Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), pp. 57-67.

These prejudices were transplanted to the New World as the colonialization of North America took place. Ironically, the same individual who left England and Holland because of religious persecution began to discriminate against the Catholic.⁷⁰

The first Catholics in the colonies were mostly Irish and English, and they settled in Maryland and Pennsylvania. At first, Catholics practiced their faith privately so that they would not be persecuted. Catholic immigrants entered the colonies for religious freedom and financial gain. The first clerics were the Jesuits who limited their efforts to the instruction of the Indians. A full-scale development of the American Catholic Church did not begin earlier because it might have jeopardized the status of the Catholics in the colonies. A further impediment occurred with the execution of Charles I by Cromwell. In the colonies, Catholicism was momentarily attacked, and priests were removed from Maryland. Cromwell's reign unleashed a new onslaught against Catholics on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷¹

Anti-Catholic sentiment resulted in political constraint as well. The advent of Cromwell culminated in

⁷⁰John T. Ellis, American Catholicism (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 21.

⁷¹Thomas T. McAvoy, A History of the Catholic Church in the United States (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 10-11.

anti-Catholic laws in the colonies. Maryland, known for its acceptance of Catholics, repealed its Toleration Act in 1654. Roman Catholics were sometimes excluded from holding political office, and anti-Catholic bias continued into the eighteenth century. The American Catholic Church confronted many difficulties in establishing itself as part of the religious institution in the colonies. Very few colonies had any semblance of religious freedom.⁷²

When John Carroll was appointed superior to the Catholic clergy in 1784, the establishment of the institutional church began.⁷³ Because of the influence of the Bill of Rights and Jeffersonian Democracy, anti-Catholic bias lessened, and many restrictions placed on Catholics were lifted. The creation of the American bishopric laid the foundation for the further development of the American Catholic Church.⁷⁴

Bishop Carroll called for the diocesan synod in 1791 to formulate the course of action for the church to take. Between 1791 and 1849, Bishop Carroll called for seven provincial councils to discuss the status of the church. These councils endeavored to establish the infrastructure of Catholicism in America. The most pertinent discussions that

⁷²McAvoy, p. 27.

⁷³McAvoy, p. 216.

⁷⁴Ibid.

took place dealt with the church's minority status. The most important decision that was made was to establish Catholicism as a fundamental institution of American religious life. This position reflected that the church would be a spiritual and social force to its laity. The episcopal hierarchy stated that the Catholic Church and the United States Constitution had parallel beliefs.⁷⁵ One statement from the prelates maintained:

We think we can claim to be acquainted with the laws, institutions, and spirit of the Catholic Church, and with the laws, institutions, and spirit of our country; and we emphatically declare that there is no antagonism between them. . . . We believe that our country's heroes were instruments of the God of all Nations in establishing this home of freedom; to both the Almighty and to his instruments in the work we look with grateful reverence; and to maintain the inheritance of freedom which they have left us, should it ever--which God forbid--be imperiled, our Catholic citizens will be found to stand forward, as one man, ready to pledge anew their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.⁷⁶

The American Catholic Church did not undergo a drastic change as it provided for the layman the rituals, sacraments, and theology of Catholic doctrine.⁷⁷ The church recognized that the principles of separation of church and state would allow the church to realize its goal.⁷⁸

American Catholicism was exemplified by Bishop Carroll who desired to combine Roman Catholicism with

⁷⁵McAvoy, pp. 218-19.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷McAvoy, p. 318.

⁷⁸Ibid.

American democratic ideals. He advocated that no animosity be directed toward the Protestants, that causes of religious and civil liberties be utmost in the minds of Catholics, and that American Catholics nominate their own bishops. He wanted American Catholics to understand that no contradiction existed in being loyal to one's church as well as one's country. This particular orientation became known as "modernism," but this ideal was neither universally accepted by all American Catholics nor by the Vatican.⁷⁹

Some members of the clerical hierarchy disagreed on the views of the American Catholic Church as espoused by Bishop Carroll. Many Catholic leaders fought to maintain the church in strict accordance with the Catholic Church in Rome. The Vatican became alarmed at the growing autonomy of the American Church. The Holy See denounced American Catholicism as not entirely in keeping with the ideals of the Roman Church. Primarily, the Vatican was concerned with the notion that the individual could follow his own reasonings by keeping with the modern ideas of civil liberties. Pope Leo XIII condemned the American Church and its clergy in an apostolic letter entitled Testem Benevolentiae. This encyclical, with its condemnation of modernism, slowed down the development of the church. Nonetheless, the deromanization

⁷⁹McAvoy, p. 319.

of the church had begun, and ideals of modernism had caused many Catholics to be more amenable to the moderate proclivities of the state than to the dogmatic principles of the Pope.⁸⁰

The Catholic Church had its greatest development through the immigration of thousands of foreign Catholics who came to the United States in the nineteenth century. The church's orientation of spiritual and social concern provided a vehicle for the acculturation of the foreign-born Catholic immigrant. The Catholic Church devoted much of its organizing impetus to providing social services to its immigrant communities. The church became the intermediary between the immigrant and the new society. The two-fold purpose of American Catholicism was to indoctrinate the foreigners to the precepts of the American Church and to assist them in adjusting to the new social environment. However, the church dealt with so many types of Catholicisms that the development of a unified doctrine, devoid of ethnic influences, was retarded.⁸¹

The church attempted to meet the needs of its immigrant population by developing the parochial school system and charitable organizations. The parochial school became the medium to convert and acculturate the immigrant to the

⁸⁰McAvoy, pp. 315-20.

⁸¹McAvoy, p. 318.

American social milieu. The curriculum of the early Catholic school was the same as the public school except for the inclusion of subjects related to religion. The Catholic school taught both adult and child and was an immeasurable help to the illiterate or non-English speaking immigrant. Also, the church established many charitable institutions to assist the socioeconomically disadvantaged Catholics. Orphanages, hospitals, and homes for the aged were created to meet the physical needs of the poor. The American Catholic Church was able to eliminate some of the deprivation of poverty-stricken Catholics, while administering to their social and psychic needs. The church underwent unprecedented growth, but its character was changing because the nineteenth-century Catholic Church was not the wholly Anglo-American institution it had been in the eighteenth century. The Irish Catholics were emerging as the dominant figures in the episcopacy, priesthood, and laity. By the late 1800s, the Irish influence had firmly established itself as the primary group in the church.⁸²

Between 1820 and 1860, over two million Irish immigrants came to the United States. Almost all were Catholics and sought to continue their faith in America. When the Irish came, they brought their clergy with them. Basically,

⁸²Winifred E. Garrison, Catholicism and the American Mind (New York: Willet, Clark, & Colby, 1928), p. 73.

the immigrants were poor (especially those who came after the potato famine in the 1840s), and they congregated in the urban rather than the rural areas. Their English speaking ability meant they were free from a linguistic barrier, but prejudice against the "shanty Irish" kept them isolated as a group. The sheer number of Irish Catholics quickly established them as the dominant group in the church. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish clerics held positions in most major dioceses.⁸³

The Irish influence reinforced the ideals of modernism because the ideals of the Irish clergy seemed to complement the concepts of democracy and separation of church and state. Ireland had been waging a constant battle with England over basic religious and civil liberties. The Irish were well aware of the benefits of religious freedom. Moreover, the Irish immigrant and clergyman realized that they were at a disadvantage because of the ethnic and religious prejudice against them. The American Catholic Church was an ideal agency because it embodied their religious orientation and provided a means for their acculturation. What resulted was the gradual accommodation of both the Irish Catholic and the American Catholic Church as a

⁸³Ellis, pp. 54-56.

constituent part of American society.⁸⁴

American Catholicism developed by fulfilling the spiritual needs of a diverse laity and by assisting them to acculturate themselves to American society. Historically, three factors influenced the church's development: (1) the orientation of the church (modernism); (2) the heterogeneity of the Catholic immigrants; and (3) the dominant role played by the Irish clergy. The German, Italian, French, and Polish immigrants represented the other major Catholic groups that were in America. None of these groups ever became a dominant force in the national church after the Irish assumed control. At best, each group developed regional dioceses. These groups remained relatively isolated and separated into local power bases which never equaled the Irish influence.⁸⁵

The hegemony of the Irish resulted partly from their sheer numbers and from the dissident factions of English, German, Italian, Polish, and French Catholic immigrant groups. Conflict was rooted in the ethnic and cultural differences of each group, and strife arose over the issue of lay autonomy for the American Church. In the early 1800s,

⁸⁴Robert Cross, The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 1-20.

⁸⁵Will Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, and Jew (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1955), p. 125.

the independence movement was led by an incipient Irish faction against the established French clergy. As the Irish began to displace numerically the French in both the clergy and the laity, Irish American Catholicism began to take form.⁸⁶

Catholic solidarity was assisted by anti-Papist and anti-Irish sentiments which had always existed and which rapidly intensified as thousands of Irish immigrants arrived in the United States from 1820 to 1865. Anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudices became one and the same, resulting in sporadic violence against both Irish and Catholic. Ironically, all this rancor manifested itself in the Irish organizing themselves as an ethno-religious group whose loyalty was to the church and to their newly adopted country. The church became an eminently social institutional force which enabled many foreign Catholics to acculturate themselves into American society.⁸⁷

The Irish Catholic was well qualified to assume a dominant role in the Catholic Church. He spoke English, adapted well to urban life, and became active in local and public affairs. The Irish clergy attempted to integrate the

⁸⁶Herberg, pp. 130-40.

⁸⁷Theodore Maynard, The Catholic Church and the American Ideal (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), pp. 3-20.

semi-independent, immigrant churches and encouraged the foreigners to adopt the cultural characteristics of the host country. The acculturation of the entire church laity did not occur overnight, and several conflicts emerged. However, by the end of the 1800s, American Catholicism acquired a special character that reflected the Irish influence.

Herberg states that Irish American Catholicism:

. . . was English-speaking, puritanical, democratic, popular, and activist, with little of the traditional Catholic inwardness . . . or . . . of the aristocratic conservatism or baroque excesses that characterized so much of the nineteenth century Continental Catholicism.⁸⁸

The most significant adjustment by the church was the resolution of the principle of church and state separation. American Catholicism did not adopt the precept of the union of church and state. Bishop Carroll realized that the American principles of religious freedom and the separation of religion and government necessitated a moderate approach to church-state relations. The problems posed to the Irish were to synthesize the separation of church and state principle and the doctrine of church supremacy and to weld together the substantial numbers of unacculturated foreigners as members of one religious body. The realistic solution was to amalgamate certain normative societal values with the church's teachings. One theologian, John Courtney Murray,

⁸⁸Maynard, pp. 111-20.

S. J., developed the perspective that Catholic doctrine and American democracy were compatible. The end result was that Irish American Catholicism became a component of the religious institution of American society, while many members of Catholic ethnic groups were able to acculturate themselves and become a part of the mainstream of American society.⁸⁹ The process took the greater part of the nineteenth century, but it was accomplished, as evidenced by the following statement:

Sixteen millions of Catholics . . . prefer the American form of government before any other. They admire its institutions and its laws. They accept the Constitution without reserve, with no desire as Catholics to see it changed in any feature. The separation of Church and State in this country seems to them the natural, inevitable, and best conceivable plan, the one that would work best among us, both for the good of religion and of the state. Any change in their relations they would contemplate with dread. They are well aware, indeed, that the church here enjoys a larger liberty, and a more secure position, than in any country today where Church and State are united. No establishment of religion is being dreamed of here, of course, by anyone; but were it to be attempted, it would meet with united opposition from the Catholic people, priests, and prelates.⁹⁰

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the American Catholic Church was characterized by its orientation to democratic principles and by its role as an agent of

⁸⁹Edward Wakin and Joseph F. Scheuer, The Deromanization of the American Catholic Church (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 17-35.

⁹⁰Cross, p. 25.

acculturation for immigrant Catholics. The church did not renege on its spiritual responsibilities, but its acculturation function seemed to be just as important as its spiritual one. The interaction between the church and the society resulted in a Catholicism which emphasized integration into the American society.

The church's orientation toward acculturation was understandable. Many overzealous Protestants and xenophobic individuals took issue over the growth of the church and the seemingly unending stream of predominantly Catholic immigrants coming into the United States. Protestant zealots perceived the Catholics as opposed to the principle of the separation of church and state because Catholics believed that church doctrine superceded civil authority. In the late 1800s, there was mounting concern over the unrestricted immigration of southern Europeans, as evidenced by the anti-Catholic and pro-nativist attitudes exhibited by the American Protestant Association and the Know Nothing Political Party. Anti-Catholic bias was further inflamed by the pronouncements of racial extremists who maintained that the southern European was racially inferior and could not acculturate himself into American society. Nineteenth-century America witnessed anti-Catholic bigotry in the form of anti-Papist demonstrations, outbreaks of violence against convents, and slanderous

publications about clerical immorality.⁹¹

The institutional function of American Catholicism identified the church with the American society. The church's position of modernism was a partial response to the influences of American society. Even in nineteenth-century America, the society could be described as industrial or associational, characterized by impersonal, formal, functional, and specialized relationships. The Catholic Church in the United States functioned to acculturate culturally distinct individuals into the host society. As the immigrant Catholic began to enter fully into the societal network of groups, institutions, and social structure, the church achieved regular status as part of the religious hegemony in the United States.⁹²

The Mexican Immigrant and the Catholic Church

In the early twentieth century, people of Mexican descent were victims of racial prejudice and social discrimination. Prevailing attitudes judged them as being racially and culturally inferior. As thousands of Mexicans began to immigrate to this country, between 1900 and 1930, the situation deteriorated. The development of large-scale

⁹¹Wakin and Scheuer, pp. 25-35.

⁹²Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 70-74.

agriculture, technological innovations, and the impending political strife in Mexico caused some 2.5 million Mexican nationals to emigrate to the United States. As immigration continued, people of Mexican descent came under closer scrutiny by governmental agencies which began to initiate studies concerning the dysfunctional characteristics of this rather large, unacculturated group. The end result was that the immigrant Mexican population was classified as possessing undesirable traits which deemed them unassimilable. Since the people of Mexican descent existed as a distinct racial and cultural entity, it seems evident that they would have been seen as most likely targets of the American Catholic Church's acculturation efforts, but the Mexican immigrant was a neglected religious minority in the southwestern United States.

Before 1900, the Mexican laity was serviced by a Spanish and then a French clergy. From 1850 to 1890, the Catholic Church's first priority was to acculturate the European immigrants, and the southwestern dioceses suffered from a lack of priests and money. At the turn of the century, the church had no structure to mediate differences between the American society and the Mexican immigrant. The hierarchy would not undertake the programs needed to educate

the Mexican.⁹³ The southwestern church concerned itself with the pastoral concerns of offering Masses and performing the sacramental rites. Even in urban areas such as Los Angeles, the church emphasized pastoral care. The urban dioceses were limited by the lack of Spanish-speaking priests. A Catholic historian wrote:

. . . the shortage of priests and the lack of funds for parochial schools left Spanish-speaking Catholics in the Southwest open to secularizing and also to Protestant influence. The limitation and emphasis on pastoral goals of saying Mass, preaching the sacraments, and assisting those who were ill, or near death became the fundamental characteristic of the Southwestern Catholic Church until the late 1940's.⁹⁴

In southern California the church's activities within the Spanish-speaking population represented the position taken by the Catholic Church in the Southwest at this time. Generally speaking, the Los Angeles diocese showed an attitude of "benign neglect" toward the people of Mexican descent. The first reaction was the fear of Anglo-Protestant proselytizing. The Los Angeles diocese did establish two settlement houses in 1905 to mitigate some of the problems of the Mexican people and to neutralize the effect of Protestant evangelizing. The diocese only indirectly participated in the church's interest in helping the immigrant

⁹³Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman, The Mexican-American People (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 449-60.

⁹⁴Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, p. 452.

acculturate himself. The church never really took an aggressive stance on Mexican acculturation because it did not establish a well-founded program to deal with the Spanish-speaking immigrant. Although the church did try to provide limited services to the immigrant, the emphasis remained on the pastoral needs of the "flock." The church would not be, or was unable to be, the acculturating agency that it had been in the East and Midwest. Since the church was beleaguered by financial problems and a very small Spanish-speaking clergy, it operated at a minimal level to provide doctrinal guidance for the Mexican Catholic. The relationship between the American Catholic Church and the Mexican immigrant was never strong. American Catholicism was not the vehicle of Americanization for the Mexican as it had been for the European Catholics. It was evident that the role and status ascribed to the Mexican could not be ameliorated by the church at this time. The Mexican Catholic remained somewhat distant from the church because it did not necessarily reflect the Mexican's needs. In the final analysis, the American Catholic Church did not develop a lasting relationship with many of the Spanish-speaking people, and this situation manifested itself in religious estrangement and disorientation that some of the Mexican Catholic immigrants in the Los Angeles area experienced

during the first part of the twentieth century.⁹⁵

⁹⁵Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, pp. 450-80.

Chapter 4

THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

The examination of the Catholic Church in Mexico and the United States has demonstrated that similar religious systems may develop differently because of societal influences. Since religious conversion would indicate a change from one set of beliefs to another, the description of that other system is necessary to comprehend what factors encouraged the conversion of Mexican Catholics to Mexican Baptists. This chapter will examine the tenets of the Baptist Church and its development in the United States. Special emphasis will be placed on the evangelical orientation that the church took in the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the Mexican Baptist Church in southern California.

Baptist thought resembled that of earlier Protestant groups who sought to preserve the simplicity of the gospel and the autonomy from ecclesiastical authority.¹ Baptists maintained that their beliefs were embodied in the teachings of the New Testament and considered the Bible as the source for the interpretation of God's will. The aftermath of the Protestant Reformation resulted in many conceptions of what

¹Robert Torbet, A History of Baptists (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1963), p. 15.

the true gospel was; various Protestant sects set out to establish their own doctrine. Protestant reformists saw themselves as independent of any authority other than God Himself.

The major tenet of the Baptists was their belief in the Holy Scriptures as the only means of salvation. The Holy Bible was inspired by God, and His word constituted the supreme authority for all laymen to comprehend and obey. The words of prophecy were not from private or human origin but from the Holy Spirit. The early Baptist theologians bore witness to the importance of the Bible for all lay people and clergy alike. The Bible became the ultimate source of knowledge and authority instead of the church and the clergy. Two pre-Reformation scholars, John Wyclif and John Huss, were the spiritual precursors of Baptist thought. Wyclif made a vernacular translation of the Bible into English so that the laity could comprehend what it read. When Wyclif died, Huss spread Wyclif's beliefs throughout Europe until he was condemned to die as a heretic.² The Bible represented the word of God and the manner in which the individual was to relate to the Holy Spirit. Also, the Holy Scriptures were the ultimate source for truth.

The establishment of the New Testament was the basis

²Torbet, p. 19.

of the Baptist Church's doctrine. The church's concept of faith and loyalty was the spiritual relationship between the individual and Jesus Christ. The symbol of this fealty was baptism. The ritual of baptism became the symbol of the acceptance of Christ as one's own personal savior. The baptism represented the beginning of a new Christian life which was dedicated to God's will. For the individual the baptism meant a resurrection into a new life; it symbolized a spiritual catharsis that expunged sin and guilt from the individual. Additionally, the baptism was associated with the faith in the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection for one's personal salvation. As Christianity evolved, the ideal of immersion centered on the question of infant versus adult baptism. The early Baptist sects tended to believe that baptism should be accorded only to those who had instruction in the faith. Baptists believed that a true Christian should not be ignorant of the principles of his church. One could only consecrate his life to Christ and accept him as his savior as long as he understood what he was doing, and why.³

Another Baptist principle was the concept of the "priesthood of believers." This meant that a believer was eternally saved by grace through faith and that he had free

³Torbet, p. 20.

access to God through Jesus Christ for spiritual comfort and forgiveness of sins. The Baptists opposed any distinction between the clergy and the laity that favored the priesthood. The Baptists were anticlerical, and they refrained from excessive ritualism and sacramentalism. The Baptists also maintained the autonomy of the local church and emphasized cooperation among all churches. Early Baptist sects preferred their members to rely on their own competency to interpret the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As one Baptist theologian stated:

. . . a gospel Church is an organized body of Baptized believers equal in rank and privileges, administering its affairs under the headship of Christ, united in the belief of what he has taught, covenanting to do what he has commanded, and cooperated with other like bodies in Kingdom movements.⁴

The Baptist position on the principles of the "priesthood of believers" and local church autonomy meant that every Baptist is his own priest, with equal access to divine grace. The church, rather than being the established institution through which one must go to attain salvation, is for the Baptist an agency through which men may serve as evidence of their salvation. The Baptist's conviction does not include an acceptance of church authority, but is regarded as an inward personal matter. Interpretations are not made for

⁴Torbet, p. 24.

him, but by him.⁵ The development of sacerdotalism and sacramentalism had elevated the authority of the church's hierarchy. But the Baptist sects were able to preserve the religious democracy through a congregational church government and equality before God. Consequently, the "priesthood of believers" negated the traditional subordination of the laity, and each individual Baptist could establish his faith on a personalized level.

The final Baptist precept involved the belief of religious freedom and the separation of church and state. These ideals were responses to the union of church and state in societies where religion was a function of the overall state organism. Religious liberty and the separation of church and state were the inevitable corollaries of the other principles of the "priesthood of believers" and of the right to interpret the Bible. What prompted this ideal was the concentration of power and authority in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. This dissenting view matured during the Protestant Reformation and blossomed into many formalized sects which sought to praise and worship God according to their personal interpretation of religion. Essentially, the Baptists created their own religious reality concerning their personal perspective of God as

⁵George W. McDaniel, The Churches of the New Testament (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), p. 23.

found in the Bible. The Baptist doctrine represented an intense desire for the independence and freedom of an individual to find his own meaning of God, the maintenance of the Holy Scriptures as the sacred word and law of God, and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's personal savior.⁶

The American Baptist Church derived the majority of its early members from chiefly English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants. The impetus to immigrate to the New World was the need to escape the restrictions placed on them in the Old World. Unfortunately, the Baptist immigrants did not always find religious freedom in the colonies because of their insistence on keeping the church and state apart and their desire to maintain local autonomy. The Baptists were victims of intolerant attitudes because they did not acknowledge the supremacy of a state church. Because the Baptist principles mandated local authority, no central Baptist organization existed.⁷

During the seventeenth century, the Baptist Church was beleaguered by two sources: the persecution by other religious groups, and the internal doctrinal dissensions emanating from the individual interpretations of the Bible. The Baptists were criticized because of their practice of

⁶Burnett H. Streeter, The Primitive Church (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 5-7.

⁷Ibid.

believer rather than infant baptism, their belief in the right to worship as they chose, and their acceptance of the principle regarding the separation of church and state. Their chief antagonist was the Anglican Church. Many Baptist clergymen were harassed and even imprisoned for not obeying the edicts of the Anglican clergy. The first Baptists encountered an ambivalent environment in the colonies. In some areas they were tolerated, while in others they were persecuted. The early Baptist sects did not form an organized denominational structure. The early church was splintered into factions as evidenced by the differing opinions on communion, baptism, membership, ordination, women's status in the church, and the propriety of musical instruments in the service. The necessity for a central organization was obvious.⁸ In 1707, five Baptist churches organized the Philadelphia Baptist Association which acted as an advisory council and did not dictate policy to its member churches.⁹

In the eighteenth century, the Baptists sought to organize themselves because a unified church would represent some semblance of continuity and coherence in doctrine and belief. This period was not a stable one because the church needed some direction to curtail internal dissensions.

⁸Torbet, pp. 219-20.

⁹Torbet, p. 23.

Gradually, the Philadelphia Association grew during the 1700s until it had a membership of twenty-nine churches. The association identified itself with the Calvinistic doctrine of maintaining the Holy Scriptures as supreme. The association became an important factor in the church's development because it did provide direction at a critical time. The eighteenth-century Baptist Church established its organizational foundations in the Philadelphia Baptist Association which endeavored to unite the theological tenets of the church into a centralized doctrine. Additionally, the association established a precedent that brought Baptists together without necessarily violating the principle of local autonomy.¹⁰

The church experienced its greatest activity from 1740 to 1840. The changes certainly reflected the historical developments that affected the emerging American state. By the 1750s, the church was sufficiently stable to begin evangelical and revival crusades. As early as 1720, efforts to encourage church expansion had crystallized in a movement called the "Great Awakening." Many Protestant sects had suffered a decline in membership because of the formality and rigidity of the worship services. What resulted was an

¹⁰Samuel Jones, A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory (Philadelphia: S. C. Ustick, 1898), pp. 37-38.

attempt to rekindle the spiritual feeling by having revival services which elevated the severity of religion to an emotional plane. The "Great Awakening" was epitomized by the "fire and brimstone" sermons which would ignite the spiritual flame within the masses to evoke a more personal relationship with God. The Baptists greatly benefited from this movement because they had continually preached a religious doctrine of total emotional involvement. Previously, the established churches had considered the Baptists as crude, uneducated, and fanatical because they appealed to the common man with their emotional approach. The similarity of the "Great Awakening's" spiritual revival and the Baptist's teachings had manifested itself in the unprecedented growth of the church. The successful implementation of revivalism resulted from the affective approach to God and salvation.¹¹

The dominant colonial churches were the Anglican and Congregationalist. In their attempts to break from Catholic ritualism, these churches substituted austereness for ostentation. Furthermore, these denominations practiced their teachings in a perfunctory manner. Many people became

¹¹Torbet, pp. 231-38.

In 1762, Baptist churches numbered approximately 29 with 4,018 members. By 1745, Baptist congregations reached 1,152 in 16 states. By 1844, Baptist churches totaled 9,385 with a membership of 720,046 people ministered by 6,364 pastors.

indifferent to church membership. The Baptists fully realized their minority position, and they continually sought to bring converts into their fold by rigorous proselytizing. The "Great Awakening" simply amplified their efforts. The Baptists practiced a highly emotive evangelicism. They believed that religion should be an emotional and spiritual experience. One could not come to know God's power and grandeur unless he felt the Lord's presence within him. The Baptists emphasized that a spiritual metamorphosis occurred between God's will and man's soul. The Baptist Church concentrated on evangelizing by the intuitive, affective approach. This greatly contrasted with the ascetic doctrines of the dominant churches which did not differentiate man's spiritual and worldly behavior. The Baptists felt that, as long as one experienced the true gospel of God, his actual behavior would reflect the teachings of the church and the Holy Scriptures. One did not need to prove his religiousity by asceticism. All that was necessary was a spiritual, affective covenant with God which would automatically induce Christian demeanor. This was the difference between Calvinist theology and Baptist thought.¹²

Salvation was achieved by the acceptance of God and

¹²Oliver W. Elsbee, The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America, 1790-1815 (Williamsport, Pa.: Williamsport Printing Company, 1928), p. 301.

His teachings. Religion was elevated to an experiential level; one's devotion was dependent on one's emotional relationship to God. This communion was defined by the individual. The transition from the sterile asceticism of the conservative churches to the emotional spiritualism of the evangelical sects established the Baptist Church as a stable institution in American religion. By the end of the eighteenth century, the church was well on its way to achieving denominational status equal with the dominant Anglican and Congregational Churches. Concomitantly, the Baptist Church emerged out of the eighteenth century with a firm conviction to propagate the new frontiers with God's true gospel.¹³

The Baptists were in a very propitious position because of the conditions affecting the United States after the Revolutionary War. The greatest impact was the disestablishment of the state religions. The Baptist Church, being an advocate of religious autonomy and liberty, saw its principles acknowledged by the emerging American republic. It gained great respect and popularity during this period, as evidenced by the tremendous expansion of its congregations. The culmination of the "Great Awakening" and the Revolutionary War sustained an unrelenting desire to establish the Baptists as the premier Protestant denomination in

¹³Elsbee, p. 305.

the republic and the new territories as well.¹⁴

The Baptist Church was a minority denomination in the colonial period. Its first priority was to spread their gospel while enlarging their membership. Baptist revivals were characterized by widespread efforts to evangelize the people through spiritual enlightenment. What motivated the Baptists was their literal interpretation of the Bible's edict to go forth and proclaim the word of God to the world so that the people could receive salvation. They regarded their mission to proselytize as a mandate from God. The combination of being a minority church and having an evangelizing theology made the Baptists one of the most active groups in America. Furthermore, Baptist principles highly complemented the church's relationship with the emerging nation. But the success of the Baptists was rooted in their appeal to the common man.¹⁵

The Baptists believed that the common man would not relate to the sanctimonious piety of the established churches. They endeavored to make religion suitable for anyone to understand and believe. Consequently, they brought God to man by the most basic of characteristics--his emotions. The

¹⁴Fredrick L. Weiss, The Colonial Churches, and the Colonial Clergy of the Middle and Southern Colonies, 1607-1776 (Lancaster, Mass.: Society of the Descendants of the Colonial Clergy, 1938), p. 18.

¹⁵Elsbee, pp. 76-77.

Baptist clergy concerned themselves with spreading the gospel by exhorting that salvation could only be obtained through a personal experience with God. The Baptists seemed to demand that the individual self-actualize his association with the Lord. This was a dramatic change from the Calvinistic precepts of predestination and theological determinism where God was seen as absolute and unalterable. Under Calvinism God was all-powerful, and he influenced every event. Moreover, man was constrained to accept God's will as his own fate. The Baptists countered by stating that salvation was available for anyone as long as that person would accept Christ as his savior and redeemer. The Baptists brought salvation to those individuals who were neglected by Calvinist doctrine. In its formative stages, the Baptist Church was known as the commoner's congregation because its composition was that of the poorer classes. In some cases, the Baptists relied on a lay clergy who were farmers or laborers. These men formed intimate relationships with their congregations because they shared similar beliefs, values, and hardships with them. Lay preachers exemplified the church's belief that all members were equal in rank and privileges. The minimization of class consciousness in the Baptist Church promoted the cohesiveness of the congregations. Likewise, the neophyte did not encounter the orthodoxy of a regimented church doctrine or the aloofness

of the clergy. All of these factors culminated in an aggressively evangelical church that endeavored to convert the nation.¹⁶

The nineteenth century began a most favorable period for religious expansion. Religion took on new forms with the emphasis on individualism and toleration and the trend toward the organization of independent churches which supported the doctrine of the separation of church and state. A decline in interdenominational friction among Protestants and a concern over the growth of Catholicism stimulated a widespread missionary enterprise by many Protestant groups.¹⁷

Missionary Societies

The expansion of the United States and the influx of European immigrants set into motion further proselytizing by the Baptist Church. The missionary society became the vehicle for the religious conversion of the West. The nineteenth-century Baptist Church was organized under regional associations that allowed individual congregations to function independently without the onus of a national church structure. Several Baptist associations carried out their own unallied missionary programs in the new territories and among the native American tribes. Individual

¹⁶Torbet, p. 260.

¹⁷Torbet, pp. 62-63.

churches also undertook missionary activities. The eventual result was the formation of missionary societies that were semi-independent of association control. The Baptists adopted this approach because they wanted to avert the possibility of a national church authority. These societies maintained an open door policy in that they were non-denominational with no rigid doctrinal standards for their members. The guiding light of the missionary society was to spread the word of God and not create a national church. The missionary society became the predominant force to carry out the evangelizing activities of the Baptist Church.¹⁸

By 1844, the Baptist Church had grown to 720,046 members in 9,385 congregations. Baptist missionaries were in most states and territories administering to blacks, whites, and native Americans. Their progress was characterized by their zeal, autonomy from a national church, common appeal, interest in education, and vision of evangelizing the West for Protestantism. These initial successes laid the foundation for further conversion.¹⁹

The success of the missionary societies created supportive activities to insure that evangelizing would continue. Biblical publication societies, Sunday schools,

¹⁸Elsbee, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹Henry Cook, What Baptists Stand For (London: Kingsgate Press, 1947), p. 13.

and missionary seminaries were all part of the missionary effort. In an attempt to coordinate all of these activities, Baptist missionary societies decided to establish a national missionary organization that would afford the Baptists a national association without endangering the principle of local church autonomy. In 1832, the American Baptist Home Mission Society was created to deal specifically with domestic evangelical efforts. Unfortunately, this move resulted in a schism along regional lines that was exacerbated by the slave controversy. Many fundamental congregations, especially in the South, vehemently objected to the proselytizing of blacks and native Americans. Eventually, a split occurred between northern and southern missionary associations.²⁰

By 1849, the Baptists were the second largest Protestant denomination in the United States. Their extensive missionary efforts, which included Sunday schools, educational institutions, and publishing houses, had resulted in unprecedented growth. Their success represented the efficacy of the emotional, evangelical approach. Seminary-trained pastors fulfilled the person's spiritual needs and instructed him in the teachings of the church through the Sunday school and religious periodicals. The educational emphasis

²⁰Torbet, pp. 262-66.

reflected the establishment of Baptist academies and colleges to train young men for the ministry and to provide the laity with an educational system. The foundation had been laid for the westward push. However, the social, economic, and religious upheavals of the late 1800s provided a formidable challenge to the evangelizing efforts of the Baptist Church. The influx of non-Protestant immigrants and the industrialization of America caused a myriad of problems that the Baptists had to contend with as they attempted to Christianize America.²¹

The Baptist proselytizing zeal was best exemplified by the efforts to convert the predominantly Catholic immigrants who entered the United States from 1840 to 1890. Most Protestant denominations held antagonistic attitudes toward the Catholic Church. As immigration of foreign Catholics increased, anti-Papist sentiment intensified and crystallized in a virulent bigotry as exemplified by the Know Nothing Party and the American Protestant Association. These groups feared that Catholics would compromise the separation of church and state principle, declare their loyalty to the Pontiff in Rome, and thereby, subvert the basic institutions of a free society. The Baptists began a zealous attempt to evangelize the immigrant. Not only would the Baptists

²¹Henry May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1949), p. 195.

fulfill their obligations to God; they would insure that Protestantism and democracy would prevail as dominant institutional forces in America. But the Baptists' missionary enterprise became involved in the racial controversy over the immigrants.²² Social Darwinism, Manifest Destiny, and the "white man's burden" produced "scientific explanations" concerning the inherent superiority of white Protestant Americans. Those assumptions began to influence public opinion about unrestricted proselytizing. The first immigrants consisted primarily of northern and western Europeans who supposedly had the qualities deemed necessary for gradual acculturation into the society because they originated from a superior racial stock. The latest arrivals were from southern and eastern Europe, and these people were believed to have undesirable characteristics that would impede their successful integration into American society.

Compounding the racial issue was the economic and social ferment of the 1880s and 1890s. The late 1880s marked the beginning of industrialization which resulted in social upheaval. Industrial strikes, urban blight, and rural economic difficulties resulted in a widening gulf between social classes. From 1875 to 1895, the United States experienced labor unrest, militant unionism, and economic

²²William R. McNutt, Polity and Practice in Baptist Churches (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 25-40.

depression. The disparity between the rich and the poor increased as wealth was concentrated in fewer hands. Many foreign groups identified with radical labor movements, and these immigrants were depicted as representing an undesirable foreign element. The culmination of racial theories, anti-Catholic sentiments, labor syndicalism, and social unrest was a reevaluation of the Baptist's missionary efforts.²³ However, many Baptist missionary societies still maintained their evangelical enthusiasm. They believed that Protestantism had sufficient vitality to overcome the alleged inferiorities of the immigrants. This attitude reflected the initial successes that the Baptists had with the northern European immigrants. This point of view was stated in the Home Missionary Society's assertion that:

. . . as the Barbarians that swept down from the German forests into the Roman Empire infused fresh blood into the decaying Latin race, so these immigrants are bringing to us the brawn that will save the native American stock from physical deterioration. When the immigrants cast off the shackles of the old European aristocracy, of a despotic state religion, . . . they will distinguish themselves in all areas under the influence of America's liberal institutions . . . an encounter with a religion of simplicity and spirituality, lacking in hateful features would hasten their acceptance of the American way of life and lessen mutual prejudice. . . . providence, in sum, had directed immigrants to the United States not only for their own good but ultimately for the welfare of the nation.²⁴

The Baptists were not deterred in their efforts to create

²³McNutt, p. 57.

²⁴McNutt, p. 60.

the ultimate in Protestant societies. They visualized religious conversion as the spiritual panacea to the immigrant problem. This rather naive outlook sustained the initial Baptist's efforts. However, the Protestant conversion of America did not take place as the evangelical attempts were not the solutions to create a homogeneous society. Gradually, the Baptists' optimism declined as the immigrant issue became a national concern.²⁵

By the 1890s, it was evident that the attempts to convert the immigrants by a purely religious experience was inadequate. The social ferment had a discordant effect on the basically pro-immigrant position of the Baptist Church. The immigrant was stereotyped as the cause of societal problems because he was ignorant, riotous, and dangerous to social stability. Many Baptist congregations opposed conversion, while others still felt that the immigrant could be saved. The ambivalency of the church reflected the general dispositions of autonomous churches and regional associational differences which allowed for many churches to react differently to the immigrant controversy. Various churches denounced the nativist beliefs of the American Protestant Association. Moreover, some congregations developed new perspectives concerning the status of immigrant groups.

²⁵McNutt, p. 40.

Some Baptist leaders, such as Walter Raushenbusch, exemplified this perspective by stating that "even dynamiters and anarchists were useful because they set men to thinking about social questions."²⁶ This socioreligious faction held that social conditions produced inequities of a social nature. These Baptists believed that oppressive socioeconomic conditions negated the evangelizing efforts of the missionary societies. A modified approach was necessary in order to seriously convert the immigrant to Protestantism.²⁷

The social gospel was the response to the social conditions of the late nineteenth century. Industrial combines with their monopolistic tendencies emerged as the dominant commercial model. Large banking institutions controlled large amounts of the nation's wealth. Corporate power was challenged by the incipient labor movement, precipitating conflict and violence. The development of the industrial state was borne by the masses of immigrants who toiled in the factories and the mines. The inhuman conditions at work and in the slums prompted some attempts to rectify these social injustices. A progressive movement began in various institutional areas to improve conditions for the working classes. Humanitarians sought to bring help to the disadvantaged people by stating that their alleged inferiorities were sociologically not biologically bound. Ignorance

²⁶May, p. 195.

²⁷May, pp. 190-210.

and suspicion could be usurped by decent individuals who sought to correct the society's evils. If society would change, so would the individual. This perspective was the final impetus to sustain the evangelizing efforts of the immigrant by Protestant groups. The social gospel revitalized the idea that the United States could become the perfect model of a Protestant democratic nation. The immigrants were not ignored, and the Baptists took an active part in the social gospel. Many Baptists felt that an infusion of Protestant values would correct any deficiencies that the immigrant might have. The Baptists engaged in a fervent evangelization effort throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the Baptists' endeavors to help evangelize America were never completely successful. Even though the Baptist missionary societies organized nineteen different foreign-speaking Baptist organizations, they failed to convert the majority of non-Protestant immigrants. Notwithstanding, the American Baptist Church became one of the established Protestant denominations in the United States. Their missionary efforts were just as successful as other Protestant evangelizing attempts. The Baptist devotion to the principles of religious freedom and local autonomy and their incorporation of the social gospel enabled them to resist anti-immigrant sentiments and vigorously carry out a far-flung missionary

enterprise to many ethnic groups. Their deemphasis of a strictly spiritual conversion and a concentration on social issues provided the Baptists with a wider base for evangelizing. The twentieth-century church was an established denominational force in American Protestantism. Its missionary societies disseminated the gospel to a variety of racial and ethnic groups in hopes of converting them to the cultural models of the United States. The Mexican made up one of these groups.²⁸

The Mexican Baptist Church

The Baptist Church had been active in Mexico as early as 1827 when Scottish missionary James Thompson worked for the British Foreign Bible Society. The first Baptist church in Mexico was established by James Hickey, a Baptist minister from Texas, in 1866. Hickey was associated with the American Bible Society. His successor, Thomas Westrup, was appointed in 1870; Westrup was an agent for the American Baptist Home Missionary Society of the American Baptist Convention. By the 1900s, Baptist missionaries had set up centers in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Saltillo, and other smaller cities. The limited success of the Baptist's missionary work in Mexico resulted in only a small number of

²⁸May, pp. 190-200.

converts. Nonetheless, Baptist thought existed in Mexico prior to the mass immigration that occurred in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. However, one could surmise that the number of Mexican Baptists who may have immigrated and settled in Los Angeles was small.²⁹

Baptist activity in the Mexican population of the southwestern United States began in south Texas as early as 1840. The Civil War had disrupted much of the evangelizing work of the Baptists, and efforts to revive the programs did not occur until the 1880s under the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. But intradenominational conflict occurred over the issues of Christianizing blacks and other ethnic groups. The end result was an inconsistent policy of evangelization in the Southwest and California.³⁰

The first Mexican Baptist mission in any recorded chronicle was begun by the First Baptist Church of Santa Barbara, California, in 1901. This mission was directed by Pastor C. A. Valdivia, who also started a mission in Oxnard, California, in that same year. Unfortunately, these two mission efforts were discontinued, until they were revived

²⁹David Luna, "Development and Growth of the Hispanic Baptists Congregations of the American Baptist Churches in the Pacific Southwest" (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Division of Church Development, American Baptist Convention, 1973), pp. 4-5. (Unpublished manuscript.)

³⁰Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman, The Mexican-American People (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 491-93.

in the second decade. In Los Angeles, Miss Nina Morford initiated a campaign to establish a Mexican mission in 1902. Between 1905 and 1907, the First Baptist Church began a mission on Rio Street which eventually became the first Mexican Baptist church in Los Angeles.³¹

The most significant event in the development of the Mexican Baptist Church was the appointment of Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Troyer, in 1911, as superintendents of the newly organized Mexican Ministry Program that was sponsored by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in southern California. By 1917, the Troyers were successful in starting or reestablishing new Mexican Baptist missions in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Bandirri, Bakersfield, Corona, San Diego, Garnet, Loreno Heights, Santa Barbara, and Oxnard. Mr. Troyer died in 1917, but his work was continued by Dr. Edwin "Mexican" Brown who expanded the evangelizing of the Mexican people in southern California.³²

Under the direction of Dr. Brown, missionaries, both Anglo and Mexican, were recruited. In 1923, the establishment of the Convención Bautista Mexicana (Mexican Baptist Convention) created a separate Baptist organization strictly

³¹Ivan Ellis, "Origin and Development of Baptist Churches and Institutions in Southern California" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1938), pp. 130-32.

³²Luna, p. 7.

for the evangelizing of the people of Mexican descent. The Convención Bautista Mexicana enlisted the aid of two Mexican evangelists, Pablo J. Villanueva and M. P. Enriquez, who worked in "chapel cars" which enabled these individuals to distribute literature and to expand evangelistic work in the more remote areas of Los Angeles. These two individuals were responsible for starting new missions in La Habra, La Jolla, Placentia, Camarillo, Carpinteria, and Shafter. The "chapel cars" enabled many other Baptist missionaries to spread their gospel to railroad, labor, and agricultural camps and to urban barrios which did not have local Mexican Baptist missions or churches.³³

Another important development was the establishment of the Spanish American Baptist Seminary of Los Angeles in 1921. It was a joint effort by the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the State Convention, and the Los Angeles Baptist City Society. At first, the seminary was affiliated with the International Baptist Seminary of East Orange, New Jersey.³⁴ The seminary's objectives were to:

. . . prepare men and women to be pastors and missionaries for the Mexican in the United States. . . . to educate leaders of the United States and elsewhere to a larger knowledge of the Bible and better methods of Christian work through correspondence departments. . . . to prepare the local Mexican Bible School workers for

³³Luna, p. 7.

³⁴Luna, p. 8.

the better service by holding night classes and institutes.³⁵

The importance of the seminary was that it was dedicated primarily to the expansion and training of predominantly Spanish-speaking individuals who would facilitate the conversion of the Spanish-speaking population of southern California. This reflected a very precise and calculated attempt to convert the non-English speaker by providing him with someone who spoke his language and was acquainted with his culture. The seminary taught most of its courses in Spanish. The academic program included two years of preparatory work for those individuals who did not possess a high school diploma. Therefore, it provided many students with an opportunity to be educated for the continuous evangelizing of people of Latin American descent, especially the Mexican.³⁶

The preliminary attempts to evangelize the people of Mexican descent in southern California was the establishment of the Mexican Baptist mission and the creation of a seminary to train future ministers to attend to the Mexican community. The Convención Bautista Mexicana believed that conversion would be facilitated by the method of using

³⁵Samuel M. Ortegon, "The Religious Status of the Mexican Population of Los Angeles" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1932), p. 28.

³⁶Ortegon, pp. 29-50.

Spanish as the primary language of communication. These attempts were aided by the fact that the Baptist Church organized a separate agency that was dedicated to the evangelizing of the Mexican population in southern California. The Mexican Baptist churches and missions, missionaries, and lay people did a great deal to promote the faith among the Spanish-speaking in Los Angeles.

Chapter 5

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

The phenomenon of religious conversion suggests that certain changes occurred to the Mexican immigrants that attracted some of them to convert to Protestantism. This chapter will attempt to describe the theoretical conditions that might have resulted in religious conversion and to explain why only a small number of immigrants actually converted to Chicano Protestantism. The nexus of these two points is how certain societal conditions affected only a few of the immigrant population to the extent that they altered their religious-cultural system and became Mexican Baptists. The basic premises are these:

1. Immigration to the United States resulted in religious disorientation which created the theoretical conditions for conversion to occur.
2. Only a certain type of immigrant was sufficiently affected by these conditions that he converted to the Baptist faith.

In order to describe the theoretical conditions of conversion, it is necessary to analyze certain concepts of the social construction of reality and the social characteristics of religion. Additionally, a discussion of these conditions vis-à-vis the Mexican immigrant will be made.

Finally, an analysis of why only a small number of immigrants converted to Chicano Protestantism will provide an explanation concerning the phenomenon of religious conversion of Mexican Catholics to Mexican Baptists.

The Construction of Reality

Reality can be defined as a quality pertaining to phenomena that individuals recognize as having a being independent of their own volition. Closely related to the term reality is knowledge, in that this term is defined as the certainty that phenomena are real and possess specific characteristics. In any given society, reality and knowledge appear in many forms. It would seem that what passes for knowledge and reality pertains to specific social contexts because all human knowledge is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations. An analysis of reality must concern itself with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises.¹

Every society or collectivity of individuals has a particular perspective of what reality and knowledge are. The interaction between an individual and society is a dialectical phenomenon because society is a human product that continually acts back upon its producer. No social

¹Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 2.

reality can exist apart from human activity and consciousness. Society is a product of man, yet man is a product of society. The individual becomes a person within society, and as a result of social processes, he attains an identity and carries out various roles that constitute his life.²

Berger makes this point clear in the following statement:

. . . that society is the product of man and that man is a product of society, are not contradictory. They rather reflect the inherently dialectic character of the societal phenomenon.³

The end result of the dialectical phenomenon is the social construction of reality, knowledge, and society.

The dialectical process of society consists of externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human beings into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality. It is through internalization that man is a product of society.⁴

Externalization means that man cannot be conceived of apart from his continuing interaction with the world in which he

²Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 3.

³Ibid.

⁴Berger, p. 4.

finds himself. An individual does not have a given relationship to the world; he must establish one. Man's instinctual structure at birth is both underspecialized and undirected so that he must undergo a process to develop his personality and internalize knowledge. This is done by externalizing himself in his world and making a reality for himself. The world-building process of man is best exemplified by culture. Culture provides firm structures for human life to develop, and it is a product of man's activity. But culture must be continually produced and reproduced because humanly produced structures can never have the stability of the instinctual animal world in that man's structures are subject to alteration or change. Culture becomes the totality of man's products and knowledge. Society becomes an aspect of culture because a society is constituted and maintained by acting human beings and structures man's ongoing relations with other individuals. The uniqueness of society is that it becomes the expression of a shared reality. Men, together, shape tools, invent languages, adhere to values, and devise institutions. The construction of reality is inevitably a collective effort. An individual's participation in a culture is contingent on a social process, and the continuing cultural existence depends upon the maintenance of specific social arrangements. Society is not only an outcome of culture, but also a necessary condition of the

latter. Society structures, distributes, and coordinates the activities of men, and only in society can the products of those activities persist over time. Society is a product of man and that is rooted in the phenomenon of externalization.⁵

Objectivation is the transformation of man's products into a world that not only is derived from man but also comes to confront him as a reality outside of himself. The humanly produced world becomes something tangible, consisting of objects that are capable of resisting the desires of its producers. Even though all culture originates and is rooted in the subjective consciousness of human beings, once it is formed it cannot be reabsorbed completely into the consciousness at will. It will stand outside the subjectivity of the individual as a world that attains the character of objective reality. For example, man may produce values yet discover that he feels guilt because he contravenes them. Also, man develops institutions which might confront him as powerful mechanisms of control or force. Consequently, man's cultural products acquire a quality of objectivity as they cannot be controlled completely by man himself. But culture assumes a dual meaning in that it confronts man as an assemblage of objects in reality existing outside his own consciousness, and it is

⁵Berger, pp. 4-8.

also objective because it can be experienced and apprehended by anyone. To be affected by culture means to share in a particular reality of objectivities with others.⁶

Since society is an element of culture, it, too, becomes an objectivated human activity because it has attained the status of an objective reality. Social structures are experienced by man as elements of an objective world, and society confronts man as an externally and, sometimes, coercive reality. The most obvious examples of these are mechanisms of social control. It is evident that no humanly constructed object can be referred to as social phenomenon unless it has achieved that quality of objectivity that compels the individual to recognize it as real.⁷ Berger states, ". . . the fundamental cohesiveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control, but in its power to constitute and impose itself as a reality."⁸

The process of internalization is the reabsorption into the consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of that world become subjective structures of the consciousness itself. Society functions as a basis for the individual's consciousness to apprehend various elements of the objectivated world as phenomena

⁶Berger, pp. 7-10.

⁷Berger, pp. 11-12.

⁸Berger, p. 12.

internal to his consciousness while apprehending them too as phenomena of an external reality. This is the socialization process that enables succeeding generations to learn how to live in accordance with institutional structures of a society. The individual learns objectivated meanings, identifies with them, and is shaped by them. The success of this process depends upon the establishment of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual. Successful socialization establishes a high degree of objective/subjective congruence. If it is not successful, the establishment of society would be difficult to maintain as a viable structure.⁹

It is clear that socialization must occur in a collectivity. The processes that provide for the internalization of the socially objectivated world are the same processes that assign social identities to the individual. Ideally, an individual is socialized to be a designated person and to inhabit a designated world. A subjective identity and reality are created in the same manner as the dialectic between the individual and those significant others who are in charge of his socialization. What is important is that an individual's internalization of his world and identity remains valid only as long as he

⁹Berger, pp. 13-16.

perceives his reality as consistent with the society. The implication is that socialization must continue as an ongoing process throughout the lifetime of the individual. Usually, one takes this process for granted because the person's world is reinforced by other individuals who share the same reality. If that world is disrupted, the subjective reality is vulnerable to change as it loses its plausibility.¹⁰

Therefore, internalization implies that the objective reality of the social world becomes a subjective reality as well. The individual encounters the institutions as information of the objective world outside of himself, and these structures become the data of his own consciousness. According to Berger:

The institutional programs set up by society are subjectively real as attitudes, motives, and life projects. The reality of the institutions is appropriated by the individual along with his roles and identity. Ipso facto, he takes on the roles assigned in terms of these roles.¹¹

Although it seems that the process of internalization becomes a rather deterministic mechanism in which an individual is produced by society as cause produces effect, internalization must be understood in a larger context. Berger continues:

Not only is internalization part of the dialectic of externalization and objectivation, but the socialization of the individual also occurs in a dialectical manner.

¹⁰Berger, pp. 16-17.

¹¹Berger, p. 17.

The individual is not molded as a passive, inert thing. Rather, he is formed in the course of a protracted dialectic in which he is a participant. That is, the social world (with its appropriate institutions, roles, and identities) is not passively absorbed by the individual, but actively appropriated by him. Furthermore, the individual is formed as a person, with an objectively and subjectively recognizable identity, he must continue to participate in the social world that sustains him as a person. . . . The individual continues to be a co-producer of the social world, and thus of himself. No matter how small his power to change the social definition of reality may be, he must at least continue to assent to those that form him as a person.¹²

The phenomena of externalization, objectivation, and internalization result in an ordering of experiences manifesting themselves in a socially constructed world. A meaningful order is imposed upon discrete experiences and meanings of individuals. People are compelled to order their experiences because this process is endemic to any type of social collectivity. But the individual ordering of social phenomena does not encompass all the experiences and meanings of the participants. Every social world consists of multiple realities. Many meanings and experiences will only be important to certain individuals. People tend to create their own realities that are, in turn, consistent with their social world. The objective order is internalized through socialization, and the individual appropriates certain elements of this order, and it becomes his own subjective reality. Society is the social base of order and meaning by

¹²Berger, p. 19.

its institutional structures and by its structuring of the human consciousness.¹³

It is conceivable that a separation or migration from the social world one has internalized could result in a powerful threat to the individual. A person could lose emotionally satisfying ties and his sense of identity and reality. The basis of a person's socially ordered world is lost, and he is subject to disorientation vis-à-vis the degree of his separation. The circumstances of this disruption may vary in that they may affect large collectivities or individuals. This phenomenon of disruption from one's social reality can be described as anomie. The fundamental order in which the individual can relate to and identify with begins to disintegrate. Berger posits:

Not only will the individual then begin to lose his moral bearings, with disastrous psychological consequences, but he will become uncertain about his cognitive bearings as well. The world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining reality begins to falter.¹⁴

He continues:

The ultimate danger of separation from society is the danger of meaninglessness. This danger is the nightmare par excellence, in which an individual is submerged in a world of disorder, senselessness, and madness.¹⁵

Berger believes that anomic situations may lead individuals

¹³Berger, pp. 20-22.

¹⁴Berger, p. 22.

¹⁵Berger, p. 23.

to reorder their social reality at all costs. In other words, their social realities may be subject to modification or change if there is a rupture in the social world that is familiar to them. Depending on the degree of circumstances, the individual may only seek to change certain parts of his reality.

Religion and Society

Because marginal situations of human existence reveal the vulnerability of all social worlds, every society develops procedures that will assist its members to remain reality-oriented and will maintain the reality that is already defined when there has been a separation. Society provides its members with structures which allow them to remain within the social reality of the established order. These structures are internalized by the socialization process, and the individual usually perceives these structures as being part and parcel of the nature of society. Individuals who do not internalize the attitudes, values, or the legitimacy of such structures adequately are sometimes considered abnormal or deviant. The establishment of institutional structures are crucial for the continuance of the social order because:

. . . institutional programs are endowed with an ontological status to the point where to deny them is to deny being itself--the being of the universal order of things and consequently, one's own being in this order.

Whenever the socially established order attains the quality of being taken for granted, there occurs a merging of its meaning with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe.¹⁶

The social order of a society becomes the "nature of things" in that it is endowed with a stability deriving from more powerful sources that persist over time. One of these sources has been the manifestation of religion and its attendant characteristics.

Berger defines religion as a human enterprise that establishes a sacred cosmos:

Religion is cosmization in a sacred mode. By sacred is meant a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is to reside in objects of experience. This quality may be attributed to natural or artificial objects, to animals, or to the objectivations of human culture. . . . The quality may finally be embodied in sacred beings from highly localized spirits to the great cosmic divinities that, in turn, may be transformed into ultimate forces or principles ruling the cosmos. . . . The cosmos posited by religion thus both transcends and includes man. The sacred cosmos is confronted by man as an ultimately powerful reality other than himself and locates his life in an ultimately meaningful order.¹⁷

Religion becomes a symbolic system which makes life meaningful and intelligible, which has powerful emotional appeal, and which provides a rationale for human existence. The religious symbolic system serves as a model of and for reality by expressing cultural concepts about the way the world is organized and by representing how the world should

¹⁶Berger, p. 25.

¹⁷Berger, p. 26.

be ideally organized. Religious symbolic systems not only express deep-seated beliefs about the world, but also promote understanding by translating the unknown into the familiar.¹⁸ It is clear that religion has played a significant role in the enterprise of creating a social reality and maintaining it. Berger summarizes:

Religion implies the farthest reach of man's self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being, and it is an audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.¹⁹

But any socially constructed reality is subject to modification or, worse, disruption. Processes of socialization and social control attempt to mitigate these threats. Socialization endeavors to ensure a continuous consensus concerning the most important elements of a particular social order. Social control attempts to contain individual or group resistances within tolerable limits. Inherent within any social order are mechanisms whose purpose is to maintain the stability of that society, and they are referred to as legitimations.

Legitimations are objectivated knowledge that serve

¹⁸Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, ed. Michael Barton, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph Series, No. 3 (London: Tavistock, 1965), p. 3.

¹⁹Berger, p. 28.

to explain and justify the socially constructed world. Legitimations become what passes for knowledge in any society because they have a status of objectivity within a social order. Practically all socially objectivated knowledge is legitimating because the social order legitimates itself by being there. Human activity is structured by legitimations, and the meanings become social realities through institutional complexes that present these legitimations as self-evident to individual societal members. The socially constructed world is legitimated by its objective reality, but its legitimating formulas are many because specific sectors of the social order are explained and justified by specialized bodies of knowledge. Legitimations effectively manifest themselves when a symmetry is established between the objective and subjective definitions of reality. The reality of the world, as socially defined, must be maintained externally in day-to-day interactions with others who share the same reality and internally by the way the individual perceives that world within his own consciousness. In the final analysis, legitimations maintain all socially defined realities.²⁰

Historically, one of the most common legitimating mechanisms of any social order has been religion because it

²⁰Berger, pp. 30-33.

relates the reality constructions of empirical societies with an ultimate reality that transcends both man and history. Berger believes that "religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference."²¹ The social order becomes a reflection of the sacred cosmos in that its relationship takes on a unique capacity of locating human action within a cosmic reference. Some social scientists believe that institutions, such as the family or politics, were conceived of as extensions of the cosmological order.²²

. . . the historically crucial part of religion in the process of legitimation is explicable in terms of the unique capacity of religion to "locate" human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference. Religious legitimation purports to relate the humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal, and sacred reality. The inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity are given a semblance of ultimate security and permanence.²³

Religious legitimations become objectivated knowledge, and they assume a reality supporting the social order in a society. In turn, individuals are socialized into their society, and they are also imbued with the cosmic status of that institutional legitimation. It follows that religious legitimations are instrumental in establishing some of the

²¹Berger, p. 33.

²²Berger, pp. 34-35.

²³Berger, p. 36.

socially defined realities of institutional structures in an ultimate reality by giving them a sense of inevitability, firmness, and durability.²⁴ Berger concludes that the "cosmization of the institutions permits the individual to have an ultimate sense of rightness, both cognitively and normatively, in the roles he is expected to play in society."²⁵

The phenomenon of legitimation is crucial to any social order. As societies develop, these legitimations emerge as institutional structures that proscribe what is normative in that society. Legitimations become the procedures that maintain stability and reality-orientation. Legitimations are society's maintenance mechanisms for the marginal situations of human experience.

The maintenance of any social order is embodied in its institutional structures. As religion developed into one of these structures, the maintenance activity of religion has been the ritual. Ritual has been an important source of legitimation in the continuation of traditional meanings. Ritual functions to remind individuals of what is expected of them in society by sustaining basic reality-definitions and their legitimations.²⁶ Ritual involves the

²⁴Berger, p. 36.

²⁵Berger, p. 37.

²⁶Berger, p. 41.

carrying out of activities and actions reflecting beliefs. Berger believes that religious rituals are the embodiments of religious ideation which, in turn, is based on religious legitimations. Rituals provide for the continuity between present and past societal traditions by placing the experiences of the individual and various groups of the society in the context of history (fictitious or not) that transcends them all.²⁷ The result is that religious activities, based on religious ideations, are routinized into many aspects of human behavior in everyday life, and many of these activities function to maintain a semblance of order and continuity in any socially constructed reality. Religion, as a social entity, is rooted in the dialectic of religious activities and ideation that becomes a part of everyday life by the course of human activity. Religion, as a component of society, arises in the same manner as the society itself.²⁸ When religious legitimations are crystallized into complex meanings, they become part of a religious tradition that can attain a measure of autonomy by establishing what is religiously appropriate for the society. It is apparent that religion plays an important role in maintaining part of any societal reality.²⁹ Furthermore, it is clear that religion

²⁷Berger, p. 41.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Berger, pp. 41-42.

is eminently social because of its role in the social order. However, just as religion and its legitimations act as important societal stabilizers, religion also relates the anomic or marginal situations that can disrupt the order of any society.

Marginal situations occur in any society. Any threat to the stability of the individual or the social order can be construed as a condition of marginality or even anomie. Occurrences such as death or crisis certainly induce marginality in many individuals. In such circumstances, religion has been instrumental in providing an explanation as to why these events happen. Religion allows people who experience marginality to continue in the existing society by placing these situations in a perspective that retains a meaningful relationship with the social order. Even catastrophic occurrences, whether natural or man-made, are referred to by many as "the will of God" or "an act of God." Historically, religion has served to integrate anomic situations into the nomos of the social order. Even in contemporary societies, religion has continued to play an important role as an interpreter of existence. Berger posits that one of religion's most important societal roles is its reality-maintenance function.³⁰

³⁰Berger, p. 41.

Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, with objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective elements (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon specific social processes, namely those worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these social processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social base for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This base is referred to as a plausibility structure.³¹

The plausibility structure is the requirement for any legitimations to continue. Events that threaten the reality of entire societies or social groups such as war or social upheaval confront the permanence of these structures. Religious legitimations come to the forefront during these times because of their ontological and transcendental status. The religious-cultural system becomes one of the firmest institutional structures in any socially constructed world. But religion cannot stand alone and resist all anomic circumstances. The religious-cultural system is dependent on other institutional structures to maintain that society's reality. For example:

. . . the religious world of pre-Columbian Peru was objectively and subjectively real as long as its plausibility structure, namely pre-Columbian Incan society, remained intact. Objectively, the religious legitimations were ongoingly confined in the collective activity taking place within the framework of this world. Subjectively, they were real to the individual whose life was embedded in the same activity. Conversely, when the conquering Spaniards destroyed this plausibility

³¹Berger, p. 45.

structure, the reality of the world based on it began to disintegrate with terrifying rapidity.³²

What is apparent is that the same human activity that produces society also produces religion. The relationship between religion and society is a dialectical one.

Berger states this point clearly:

The implication of the rootage of religion in human activity is not that religion is always a dependent variable in the history of society, but rather that it derives its objective and subjective reality from human beings, who produce and reproduce it in their ongoing lives. . . . for anyone to maintain the reality of a particular religious system, . . . to maintain his religion he must maintain (or, if necessary, fabricate) an appropriate plausibility structure.³³

The existence of any religious system necessitates an appropriate social context where a specific social base and social processes exist to maintain that system. Consequently, an individual can only maintain one's identity as a personage of importance when the milieu confirms that identity, and one can maintain one's particular religious beliefs only if one retains his relationships with those elements of that faith that reflect the person's objective and subjective interpretation of that religious system.³⁴ The disruption of the social order and its plausibility structure could threaten the objective and subjective realities of the

³²Berger, p. 48.

³³Berger and Luckmann, p. 142.

³⁴Berger, p. 48.

individuals in that society. If the plausibility structure is altered, an attendant change could occur in the institutional structures of those people involved.³⁵ As the Mexican immigrated to the United States during the first thirty years of this century, he experienced a disruption of his social world, and the realities of his social world were subject to change. The manner in which some Mexican immigrants responded to these changes is the incipient stage of religious conversion.

Immigration and Social Disruption

For an individual to convert from one set of religious beliefs to another or to participate actively in another church even though previous interest was not apparent indicates that certain modifications might have occurred to the religious-cultural system of the person. When the Mexican immigrated to the United States and settled in the Los Angeles area, he found himself in a social milieu that was different in many ways from his native Mexico. The Mexican immigrant came from a predominantly rural folk culture while Los Angeles, in the early 1900s, was relatively urbanized. This transition, from a folk to an urban culture,

³⁵Berger and Luckmann, p. 142.

has been analyzed by many anthropologists.³⁶ Urban migration from isolated, culturally simple communities tends to induce important changes in the folk culture as individuals come into contact with an urban environment.³⁷ These changes are described by McNamara in terms of cultural disorganization, secularization, and individualization of behavior.³⁸ For the Mexican, the folk-urban migration terminated not only in an urban environment, but in a foreign one as well. Doubtlessly, migration created some instances where the objective and subjective realities of the Mexican immigrant were subject to disruption as a result of the contact with the new social milieu.

One disruptive effect of migration was evidenced by the ascribed social and economic statuses held by people of Mexican descent in the American Southwest. In the 1900s, these individuals were perceived as being racially and culturally inferior by the American society. The Mexicans occupied low-status economic positions and were victims of social discrimination. Little opportunity existed for upward mobility, and limited interaction with the Anglo

³⁶See Robert Redfield's The Folk Culture of Yucatan.

³⁷Patrick H. McNamara, Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles County: A Study in Acculturation (San Francisco: R. & E. Associates, 1975), p. 1.

³⁸Ibid.

society took place. In most instances, the Mexicans lived in segregated neighborhoods. As a source of cheap labor, the Mexican immigrant worked primarily as a farm laborer. In California the Mexicans generally worked as farm workers following the crops, moving gradually northward through the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys and over to the coastal areas adjacent to San Francisco. Returning southward as the harvests ended, many of them made their homes in southern California, moving their families to urban centers such as Los Angeles, San Diego, or smaller surrounding communities.³⁹

The newly arrived immigrants, settling in the traditionally Mexican areas, encountered many problems. As immigration continued, these neighborhoods expanded into what were termed barrios or colonías. In Los Angeles areas such as Boyle Heights, Belvedere Gardens, Elysian Park, and the Plaza District became predominantly Mexican residential centers which were isolated, physically and culturally, from the Anglo community. The continual influx of immigrants reinforced the racial attitudes held by the Anglo majority. Stereotypes of cultural and intellectual inferiority persisted because of the discernible differences in language, skin color, and customs. These circumstances did not permit a smooth transition from the folk to the urban environment.

³⁹McNamara, p. 5.

The immigrant who settled in Los Angeles was beset with meager economic opportunities, racial prejudice, and poverty.⁴⁰ It was evident that immigration had created many disruptive situations for the Mexican.

The problems affecting the people of Mexican descent were manifold. Occupationally, the majority of them held low-paying jobs as unskilled farm laborers. Their inability to speak English made it difficult for them to move out of the low-status occupations. Even though education was compulsory, many schoolaged children had to work to supplement family incomes. Culturally, Mexicans were a distinct group in terms of customs and traditions. Conflict manifested itself in terms of cultural differences between Mexican and Anglo-American value systems vis-à-vis child rearing and courtship practices of young women. Kinship patterns were affected as the extended family structure was curtailed because the network of godparents could not be brought to southern California completely intact.⁴¹

The phenomenon of immigration had many ramifications. The movement from the rural areas of Mexico to urban Los Angeles disrupted the plausibility structure of folk Mexican culture. The immigrant no longer resided in a rural folk environment. He was thrust into a new social order with

⁴⁰McNamara, p. 6.

⁴¹McNamara, pp. 6-9.

different institutions, legitimations, and realities. As McNamara states:

. . . the uncertainties of employment, the language barrier, the estrangement of children from parents, . . . the uprooting of traditional kinship relationships, and all these woven into a background of racial prejudice and discrimination experienced for the first time--militated against the comparative simplicity and stability of family life as it was lived in Mexico.⁴²

The folk-urban transition constituted a powerful threat to the social order of the Mexican. But these anomic conditions affected individuals differently. Some of them sought to reorder these new experiences by modifying some of their own realities vis-à-vis the new plausibility structure, because these individuals could not maintain the social reality of a folk-rural culture in urban Los Angeles. The folk-urban transition resulted in the disruption of his socially constructed world. But these circumstances did not manifest themselves in a complete separation from Mexican culture because the immigrant attempted to reorder his social reality by modifying it to neutralize the disruptive effects of immigration. The limited interaction between the immigrant and the new urban environment resulted in a selective adaptation of new cultural elements and a retention of traditional ones.⁴³ The Mexican immigrant underwent social change in the form of cultural adaptation or accommodation.

⁴²McNamara, p. 10.

⁴³McNamara, p. 1.

Religious Disorientation

Social change is one of the constructs used to describe the phenomena of religious conversion. If parts of the Mexican's social order were subject to modification, it would seem conceivable that religious beliefs could have been affected equally by the process of social change. Social change would affect certain elements of the immigrant's folk culture because accommodation is not a uniform process. These changes reflected both the historical and circumstantial aspects of the immigrant's contact with the new social order. Herskovits stated:

. . . while all peoples are exposed to elements of cultures other than their own, what they will reject is determined by their pre-existing culture and the circumstances of their contact.⁴⁴

In the immigrant's situation, certain favorable conditions existed for religious conversion to take place. One was the disruption of the Mexican's religious system.

As the Mexican immigrant settled permanently in the Los Angeles area, he discovered that American Catholicism differed from folk Catholicism. The most obvious difference was the dearth of a Mexican clergy in the American Catholic Church. The immigrant was accustomed to the village priest as his religious disseminator who spoke his language and was

⁴⁴Melville J. Herskovits, Man and His Works (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 539.

cognizant of his culture. Moreover, many immigrants were nominal Catholics who revered their local village saints and who had minimal knowledge of the church's doctrine. Folk Catholicism acted as a cohesive force to complement the individual's social reality. The village priest fulfilled many roles other than that of a religious intermediary. This folk-type Catholicism went hand in hand with the social environment of rural Mexico. However, the Catholic Church in Los Angeles could not maintain that folk perspective. The Los Angeles diocese was unable to provide the immigrant with a folk Catholicism because the church had established an acculturation orientation for its foreign laity. The church's experiences with foreigners were mostly with white ethnic groups of the East. The church became a vehicle of acculturation into American society. Complicating this situation was the fact that church officials considered the Mexican immigrant to be part of a racial and cultural minority. They believed the Mexican's differences would greatly impede his ability to acculturate himself into society. Additionally, the Mexican was ministered to by a predominantly Irish clergy whose knowledge of Mexican culture was minimal.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Antonio Soto, The Chicano and the Church: Study of a Minority within a Religious Institution, Marfel Monograph Series, No. 8 (San Jose, Ca.: Marfel Associates, 1975), p. 14.

Generally, the Los Angeles diocese took a pastoral approach in ministering to the needs of the immigrant. In some cases, Spanish priests were used, but this was rare. The prevailing view of the immigrant by the church was that he was foreign and uneducated in the doctrines of the church.

The role of the Catholic Church in the lives of the Mexican Americans has been importantly conditioned by . . . the clergy's prevailing view of these people as uninstructed in the faith and deficient in their adherence to the general norms of Church practice . . . [and by] the inadequacy of resources available to the Church in the Southwest. Mexican immigration placed the resources, scarce to begin with, under special strain, for the clergy was faced with immigrants from a country that had gone through a protracted struggle between church and state.⁴⁶

The church took a paternalistic as well as authoritarian position toward the Mexican, for it refused to take into account the informal and folk nature of Mexican Catholicism.⁴⁷ The church believed that the Mexican immigrant was not ready for full church participation in terms of his own clergy and his own ethnic parishes because he had to be instructed in the faith and he had to acculturate himself to the norms of Anglo society.⁴⁸ Soto states, "The seminaries, for instance, made no provision for anyone who was culturally different from the typical 'American boy.'"⁴⁹ It was

⁴⁶Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman, The Mexican-American People (New York: Free Press, 1970), p. 449.

⁴⁷Soto, p. 23.

⁴⁸Soto, p. 24.

⁴⁹Ibid.

probable that many immigrants found the American Catholic Church different, socially and culturally, from folk Catholicism. These immigrants could have experienced a sense of disorientation and estrangement not only from their own religious system, but also from American Catholicism. The Catholic Church in Los Angeles represented a religious-cultural system that was based on a plausibility structure which was different than that of the Mexican immigrant's.

The legitimations of folk Catholicism were threatened because the plausibility structure of that reality was no longer symmetrical with those of the new social order. The religious-cultural system of the Mexican immigrant was based on the institutions and symbolic universes found in the concrete social locations and interests of a rural Mexican social order which no longer existed, in toto, even in the ethnic enclaves of the barrios of urban Los Angeles. The dialectical relationship between the individual and society compelled the immigrant to make some changes in his life-style.⁵⁰ Urban Los Angeles confronted the immigrant with different social structures, social bases, and social processes.⁵¹ The rural to urban transition resulted in a disorientation of the immigrant's folk culture, creating a

⁵⁰Berger and Luckmann, pp. 117-18.

⁵¹Berger and Luckmann, pp. 142-43.

situation whereby the customary patterns of behavior became subject to change because of the influences of the new environment.⁵²

Any marginal situation will force the individual to make certain responses to his circumstances. Berger has mentioned that socially disruptive situations may lead people to reorder their social reality by modifying parts of their social order.⁵³ The degree of change is related to the particular set of conditions that prevail. An individual may only seek to change certain aspects of his reality. In this context, change becomes an adaptive mechanism. This process of change with respect to existing societal conditions will be referred to as cultural accommodation. Within these circumstances, the Mexican immigrant modified parts of his cultural system which resulted in the continuance of many aspects of Mexican culture and the adoption of some new traits of the host society. The conversion to Protestantism was one form of this adaptation.

Accommodation, Convergence, and Conversion

The religious conversion of some Mexican Catholics to Mexican Baptists can be explained from two sources:

⁵²Berger and Luckmann, pp. 142-43.

⁵³Berger, pp. 23-24.

(1) the function of the Mexican Baptist Church as an accommodation agency, and (2) the convergence of religious values that facilitated the transition from folk Catholicism to Chicano Protestantism. The first explanation deals with the functional aspect of the role of religion in society and the latter with how similarities in the practices of the Mexican Baptist Church converged with those of folk Catholicism. It is not this writer's intent to reduce religion to a purely functional role, but to establish that religious conversion was due in part to the Mexican Baptist Church maintaining a more familiar cultural milieu than the American Catholic Church was able to provide.

Most indicative of the Mexican Baptist Church's role as an accommodation agent was its maintenance of many Mexican cultural values. The church's method in evangelizing the Mexican was to meet him at his own cultural level. The far-flung foreign missionary programs of the Baptist missionary societies had enabled many missionaries to become knowledgeable of many cultures and to acquire fluency in many languages. Such was the case with Reverend and Mrs. L. C. Troyer, who began a missionary program in Puerto Rico before starting one in the Los Angeles area among the Spanish-speaking people. The Baptist Church also began to recruit recent Mexican and/or other Spanish-speaking converts into the missionary program to assist and expand

the evangelizing efforts. Leaders of the program believed that the conversion would be greatly facilitated if the immigrant's language would be utilized. Also, the development of ethnic congregations such as the Mexican Baptist churches and missions and a Spanish language seminary reflected the flexibility of the church's efforts to relate to the linguistic needs of the Spanish-speaking people. The importance of this approach was that it allowed the immigrant to maintain his language. Since language constitutes a major foundation of cultural expression, the usage of Spanish represented an important linguistic accommodation by the Baptists. Church services and related activities were conducted in Spanish so that the Spanish-speaking individual felt a sense of familiarity in the new surroundings. Since the inception of the Hispanic evangelizing program, the Baptists had used Spanish as the only language.⁵⁴

Another corollary to the use of Spanish was the utilization of a Spanish-speaking, and sometimes, native clergy. The Troyers were two of many evangelists who spoke fluent Spanish and who encouraged the church to use persons of Mexican or Latin descent as lay evangelists or assistants. Many of these individuals had intimate knowledge of the

⁵⁴Mrs. L. C. Troyer, Mexican Missions in the Southwest (Los Angeles: Students Benefit Publishing, 1934), pp. 25-40.

Mexican communities and their inhabitants.⁵⁵

Another factor was the establishment of a separate institutional structure within the American Baptist Church. The Convención Bautista Mexicana (Mexican Baptist Convention) was the intermediary between the Mexican churches and the larger American congregations. Ostensibly, this was created to meet the specific needs of Spanish-speaking people. This move was consistent with the Baptist policy of local church autonomy, but it also could be construed as a means to separate the Mexican churches from the Anglo congregations, thus avoiding any conflict of integrating the Mexican people into the Anglo churches. Whether this action was racially motivated is difficult to ascertain, but it was clear that the Baptist missionary leaders did not perceive its activities with the Mexicans as a vehicle for acculturation. The organization of a separate ethnic church and overall organization functioned to maintain many cultural practices of the Mexican immigrant who converted. The evangelical program had a latent function of limiting the interaction of Mexican and Anglo Baptists. The Mexican Baptist Convention became responsible for the missionaries' activities among the Spanish-speaking of Los Angeles. It would establish churches and missions and insure that an active evangelical

⁵⁵Troyer, pp. 25-40.

program would persist. Also, it was responsible for recruiting potential ministers and evangelists from the ranks of the laity; this was facilitated by the program of the Spanish American Baptist Seminary of Los Angeles. By the late 1920s, the Mexican Baptist Convention had established a number of churches and missions staffed with Mexican and Mexican American ministers.⁵⁶

Generally, the Baptist's missionary objective was to imbue the immigrant with the spiritual values of Baptist theology. The Baptists, per se, never became the religious social welfare agency that the Presbyterians or Methodists did; however, they were compelled to modify their approach by developing some type of aid programs because the Mexican immigrant was so impoverished.⁵⁷ But any aid the church provided was secondary to the spiritual evangelizing of potential converts. From 1910 to 1930, the initial activities centered on a rigorous proselytizing interspersed with limited social action programs, but the very nature of the Baptist doctrine required the church to participate more and more in a social welfare role. The primary emphasis of the Baptist religion was the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The missionaries began classes in reading and interpreting

⁵⁶Troyer, pp. 30-45.

⁵⁷Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, p. 492.

the Bible. This was one of the few attempts to raise the literacy rate of the immigrant. Also, the missionary and the church attempted to ameliorate the poverty of its converts by securing jobs and by helping destitute individuals receive some sort of public assistance whenever possible. In some instances, the church provided certain services that the Catholic Church in Mexico did not, such as the marrying of couples who were not legally wed because they could not afford the fees charged by the village priest. These efforts reflected the Baptist's interpretation of the biblical mandate to evangelize non-Protestants for the greater glory of God.⁵⁸ The social welfare role of the American Missionary Home Society and the Mexican Baptist Convention became part and parcel of the overall evangelical program to convert the Mexican to Protestantism.

A significant factor of the church's role as an accommodation agent was the internal functioning of the church. The Mexican Church evolved around an all-encompassing ministry that included activities for all members of the family. Within its structure, the church was able to incorporate many lay people into positions such as deacons and deaconesses. This had a degree of influence in keeping the church an ethnic congregation, very homogeneous and

⁵⁸Troyer, pp. 40-50.

culturally Mexican. The church's ability to integrate the immigrant and his family imparted a sense of religious community. The policy of using lay people in positions of authority evoked a feeling of belonging and respect. The Baptist principles of local church autonomy and the "priesthood of believers" provided an aura of egalitarianism within the church's congregation. The relative undifferentiation between the clergy and the laity served to foster feelings of community and kinship within the extended family of the congregation. The common appellations of "hermano" (brother) and "hermana" (sister) for members of the congregation and "El Señor" (the man) for God enhanced the solidarity of Chicano Protestantism. Members were both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans or Chicanos who belonged to the same socioeconomic class. To many immigrants, the Baptist Church represented some of the familiar characteristics of the folk culture in Mexico.

The Mexican Baptist Church service encompassed many elements that paralleled the structure of the extended family. Each congregation had a program of worship services that provided activities for the entire family. Generally, a weekly program would consist of: a Sunday school program for all ages in addition to the regular worship services in the morning and at night, a Sociedad Femenil meeting (women's society), a Sociedad de Varones meeting (men's

society), a Baptist Youth Fellowship meeting, and Servicios de Oracion and Negocios (prayer and business meetings). The church became an extension of the family. The immigrant household was able to function as a unit within the church. The church not only was a place of worship, but also a source of primary relationships for friends, social activities, and entertainment. Since the church served one particular ethnic group, most of the culture was maintained and transmitted through the relationships within the church. The Mexican Baptist Church fulfilled the same function as the mutual benefit societies did in the Southwest by sustaining many elements of Mexican culture. What was significant about the Mexican Church was that it maintained a cultural orientation toward Mexico, while allowing the immigrant to convert to Protestantism. The church allowed the immigrant to adapt to the existing social milieu by exhibiting common cultural features that minimized the transition from the rural to the urban environment. Whether manifest or latent, one function of the Mexican Church was the continuation of a familiar cultural milieu. This orientation was abetted by the creation of a separate intradenominational organization, a Spanish-speaking ministry, and church programs that accommodated the convert to Protestantism.

The role of the Mexican Church had excluded

acculturation and emphasized accommodation. It provided this primarily by creating an ethnic congregation and utilizing a native clergy to facilitate conversion. The Baptist hierarchy believed that its church was founded on an evangelical base whose development had benefitted by the attendant growth of the American republic. It perceived its function as a religious intermediary to non-Protestant immigrants so that democracy and Protestantism would prevail as major institutional forces. The development of the missionary society allowed the Baptists sufficient autonomy to implement flexible policies of evangelizing immigrant populations. The evangelizing of Mexican immigrants embodied the approach of using his culture as the vehicle for religious conversion. The Baptists believed that, once the Mexican converted, he would gradually internalize the values of American society; therefore, the first priority was to provide for the transition from Catholicism to Chicano Protestantism. The Mexican Baptist Church served to help the Mexican immigrant accommodate his life to not only Protestantism but also to the urban environment of Los Angeles.

The second source of religious conversion was the convergence of religious-cultural systems that facilitated the transition from folk Catholicism to Chicano Protestantism. The Mexican Baptist Church represented a religious-cultural system that replicated some of the characteristics

of folk Catholicism that abetted the conversion process. Since the Catholic Church in Los Angeles could not sustain the folk orientation of the immigrants, the possibility of some of them experiencing religious marginality was apparent. The American Catholic Church lacked the specific social processes and the social base required for the maintenance of folk Catholicism.⁵⁹ The immigrant would only be able to sustain his orientation to folk Catholicism in a social milieu that confirmed that reality.⁶⁰ Berger and Luckmann believed that "one can maintain one's Catholic faith only if one retains one's significant relation with a Catholic community."⁶¹ The Mexican found that it was difficult to continue this folk relationship with the American Catholic Church. The disruption of the immigrant's religious-cultural system threatened his subjective interpretation of his religious reality because the religious community he was accustomed to no longer existed in urban Los Angeles.

Folk Catholicism was characterized by a rudimentary knowledge of theology, familism, primary relationships, and localized saints. Since the American Church did not sustain these characteristics, it was probable that many immigrants experienced feelings of religious alienation and sought to

⁵⁹Berger and Luckmann, p. 142.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

reorder their religious reality. Their responses were varied because the phenomenon of reordering one's social reality is a selective process based on the available structures in the existing social reality. The majority of the immigrants maintained their self-identification as Catholics in the American Church, but this relationship was characterized by the subordinate status the Mexican occupied in the church.⁶² Some others were evangelized and eventually converted to Chicano Protestantism.

Conversion necessitated two interrelated factors that represent the social rootedness of religion and showed the dialectical relationship between an individual and society in the construction of a social reality. The two elements were the social and conceptual conditions, the social being the matrix of the conceptual, embodied in the religious cultural system of Chicano Protestantism. The social or objective reality of Chicano Protestantism was the structure and organization of the Mexican Baptist Church, the Mexican Baptist Convention, and the evangelical programs. These constituent parts provided the social base for religious conversion to occur. The existence of an empirical reality of the Mexican Baptist Church was the vehicle for the accommodation of the subjective reality to take place

⁶²See Antonio Soto's The Chicano and the Church: Study of a Minority within a Religious Institution, Chapter V.

that facilitated the conversion process. The phenomenon that occurred was the continuation of some of the immigrant's religious values in a Chicano Protestant cultural system which, in turn, was aided by certain similarities that existed between both systems.

The transition of religious values from folk Catholicism to Chicano Protestantism did not entail a complete dismantling of the immigrant's belief system or subjective reality. The evangelizing programs of the Baptists served as a maintenance mechanism for some of the Mexican's cultural values. The similarities between the value systems of the Mexican Baptist Church and the immigrant enabled the church to attract potential converts. The characteristics of the Mexican Baptist Church replicated many of the social processes of a folk religious culture. The Mexican Baptist Church employed primary contacts, especially those centering on the family, and personalized communication.⁶³ The Baptist Church was the social base that provided for the appropriate conceptual conditions for the subjective internalization of a Chicano Protestant cultural system by the potential convert.

This subjective internalization can best be explained by the necessity of existing in a religious community.

⁶³Soto, pp. 56-57.

Berger believes that all religious-cultural systems require specific communities for their existence. The reality of any religion depends upon the presence of social structures within which that religious system is taken for granted and persists so that successive generations of individuals internalize that reality.⁶⁴ Essentially, potential converts perceived the Mexican Baptist Church as an institutional structure of urban Los Angeles that also represented many similar cultural characteristics of the immigrant's religious folk culture. The immigrant found many familiar features of his own religious system within the structure and activities of the Baptist Church. This person may not have formally converted immediately in terms of being baptized, but his continual presence at meetings fostered a sense of belonging. The potential convert was aided by other converts with whom he established a new relationship and assumed a new identity consistent with the new religious reality.⁶⁵ The potential convert was resocialized into the Chicano Protestant religious system. At some point, the convert identified and perceived himself as part of the new religious community as he internalized the subjective reality of Chicano Protestantism.

⁶⁴Berger, p. 47.

⁶⁵Berger and Luckmann, p. 145.

The Mexican Baptist Church exhibited many characteristics of a community. There was a sense of collective participation conveyed by the egalitarianism of the congregation, by the Baptist belief of a "priesthood of believers," and by a sense of belonging. Members participated in many church activities allowing them to feel that they had a part to perform and a function to fulfill. Members experienced feelings of dependence on the religious community. The church represented solidarity, cohesion, and action around common interests.⁶⁶

Thus far, a description of the sociological and historical conditions that might have resulted in religious conversion has been made. What must follow is an attempt to explain why only a small number of immigrants were attracted to Chicano Protestantism and actually converted. The question centers on what distinguished the potential convert from the non-convert. The possibility exists that the potential convert might have suffered a disruptive experience with the pre-existing religious-cultural system that might have been a preliminary condition for his conversion to the Baptist faith. If religion is a symbolic system which makes life meaningful, which has powerful emotional appeal, and

⁶⁶Renato Poblete, "Anomie and the Quest for Community: The Formation of Sects among the Puerto Ricans of New York," Sociology and the Study of Religion, ed. Thomas F. O'Dea (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 190.

which provides a rationale for human existence, individual anomie experiences might serve to alienate the person from his religious system. If these experiences are severe enough, an individual might suffer from a psychological disorientation from that religious reality because the symbols of that reality and for that reality would lose their validity. The issue is not whether the individual's concept of religion was undermined, but rather, his perception of that particular religious system. It is this writer's belief that the Mexican immigrant who was attracted to Chicano Protestantism had undergone a stressful experience that weakened his traditional religious beliefs.

The basic premise is that religion is a symbolic system which makes social life possible by expressing and maintaining the sentiments or values of the society. The phenomena that are fundamental to an individual's perception are beliefs and rites. Durkheim stated that religious beliefs presuppose a classification of all things into two classes which he called the sacred and the profane. Religious beliefs are representations which express the nature of sacred things.⁶⁷ These representations also function to render an individual's view of the world as reasonable by

⁶⁷Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life," Reader in Comparative Religion, eds. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 68.

portraying a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world-view describes. The important consideration is that religious beliefs objectivize moral preferences by depicting them as imposed conditions of life in a particular reality.⁶⁸ Religious rites or rituals are modes of action which prescribe rules of conduct as to how an individual should comport himself vis-à-vis sacred objects. Rites reinforce the validity of religious beliefs and maintain the legitimacy of that religious system. Also, rites become processes so that individuals can express their religious beliefs in an empirical reality. The end result is that an individual's life has meaning, and he is provided with a rationale for existence. When a religious system fails to provide these functions for a person, then his perception of that religious-cultural system is weakened to the extent that he may be predisposed to alter it to regain that relationship with another set of beliefs and rites.

As previously discussed, Mexican Catholicism emerged as a synthesis of formal Roman Catholicism and native beliefs and rituals. The Mexican laity represented many diverse elements of this syncretical Catholicism. The majority of Mexican immigrants had been imbued with a folk-type Catholicism that reflected their world-view of society.

⁶⁸Geertz, p. 4.

In many cases, these immigrants were not fully instructed in the formal doctrines of the church. The Catholic faith proscribed certain sacraments to be administered to individuals before they could be completely received in the church. Because of the lack of rural priests, many immigrants did not receive the proper instruction in the faith, nor had they been given all the necessary sacraments. But these conditions did not necessarily create the situation that resulted in religious alienation. What became problematic would be the relationship between certain segments of the clergy and a portion of the laity.

In describing some of the characteristics of individuals who converted to Protestantism, Gamio stated that a frequent remark was that the convert was uninstructed in the doctrine of the church. Also, some immigrants expressed their opinion that the Catholic Church was not the "true" religion because of past experiences they had with corrupt priests and formal Catholicism.⁶⁹ A clear pattern emerged that many converts made anticlerical and anti-Catholic statements; moreover, these comments formulate an ideal type of immigrant who might have been a potential convert.

Evidence does exist describing the immoral practices of priests in Mexico. These excesses included concubinage,

⁶⁹Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), pp. 57-67.

gambling, drunkenness, and profiteering. Some village priests participated in these activities. The village cleric would charge fees for performing certain sacraments or ceremonies such as weddings, burials, baptisms, and special Masses. Sometimes the parishioner was unable to pay for these services. Some priests fathered children and had wives, while others participated in economic enterprises for their own personal aggrandizement. The immoral behavior by some priests might have served to alienate some people from the church. Unfortunately, the village priest was a victim of circumstance. He had little opportunity to advance in the church hierarchy because of his low social status. His formal religious training was minimal, and in some cases, he could not even perform all the sacraments.⁷⁰ Also, the village priest was a scarce entity, and many rural parishioners did not see their priests for weeks or even months. All of these conditions did not strengthen the relationship between the individual and the church.

It is this writer's contention that the potential convert experienced a disorientation from Catholicism before

⁷⁰Samuel Mayo, A History of Mexico from Pre-Columbia to Present (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 124.

Mayo states that the confirmation and holy order sacraments could only be administered by a bishop or other prelates of higher rank and that the confirmation sacrament was very important because it was the final rite of acceptance into the church.

he immigrated. If religious rites reinforce the validity of a religious-cultural system, if those rites are not available to the individual, or if those rites are administered infrequently to those individuals, then it is quite possible that a person's perception of his religious system could weaken. If this condition is intensified by feelings that the moral behavior of its priests is reprehensible, then the individual's faith in that system may not be able to be sustained. The potential convert might have felt that Catholicism no longer provided an adequate explanation of his social reality. The inability for that person to reinforce his religious beliefs by partaking in the rites of the church delegitimized that religious system.

It is evident that anticlerical and anti-Catholic responses given by converts represented a point of view whereby certain individuals had become disenchanted with the Catholic Church in Mexico. These individuals identified priestly immorality and corrupt practices as elements that were inherent in the church. Therefore, the Catholic religion could not embody the tenets of the "true" religion because it allowed "sinful" practices to take place. The end result was that this individual who perceived inconsistencies became the potential convert who was attracted to another set of beliefs and practices, and it was this individual who eventually converted to Chicano Protestantism.

In an attempt to substantiate the hypothesis, a small number of informal conversations were conducted with members of Los Angeles Mexican Baptist churches. Interviews were limited to those members who immigrated to the United States from 1910 to 1930, and subsequently converted. Eighteen individuals were talked to concerning their descriptions of how their conversion took place. These sessions were sometimes problematic because the informants relived these experiences very emotionally and dramatically without any direction as suggested by the interviewer. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the following material was condensed from those conversations.

All eighteen persons stated that they had been Catholics, yet they implied that their knowledge of the Catholic Church was minimal. They all came from rural areas in Mexico. The people interviewed considered their accounts as testimony to the will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. What was reiterated frequently was the fact that the Bible was the "word of God" and a norm for one's life. Their knowledge of Baptist theology was rudimentary, and there was a great deal of emphasis on a total way of life involving brotherly love and a rejection of sin. Interviewees stated that initial contact with the Mexican Baptist Church was through friends, acquaintances, or evangelists. What was important in these first contacts was the

familiarity of language. When an individual would attend a service, he was impressed by the friendliness that he discovered there. Many individuals stated that people made them feel welcome and encouraged them to return. About half of the respondents stated that they were favorably impressed with the practices of the clergy of visiting people when they were sick and providing assistance for the members in need. A common response was that participation in the church services had provided a sense of community. Many individuals expressed the hardship that they encountered when they arrived in this country and how the church eased this burden.

Actual membership in the church occurred as these individuals were baptized. All persons spoke of being saved when they joined the church. Many people felt that by being saved they left a life of ignorance about God. They said that learning about God in the Bible had given them a new perspective about who God was. One general characteristic of the interviewees was that they had a fundamentalist view of interpreting the Bible, as they neither smoked, danced, nor imbibed alcoholic beverages. Many stated that the world was fraught with sin and temptation, and only God's grace could save them. Language was referred to as an important feature in learning about God. Once converted, many individuals spoke positively about being able to participate

in church services and being in a community of God's people. Going to church for these people enhanced their communal feelings about God and imparted a sense of belonging. The predominant theme expressed was that the converts truly experienced a sense of group solidarity. Anyone outside this community was considered as lost or ignorant of the true meaning of God's commandments. Some individuals expressed anti-Catholic sentiments. One explanation was that the converts felt very righteous in their convictions, and anyone not sharing their reality was still apart from God's will. Also, their experiences with the formal aspects of Catholicism in Mexico and the United States did not endear the formal structure of Catholicism to them. Finally, some of the individuals stated that the Catholics they knew did not conform to the Baptist's interpretation of God's will; therefore, Catholicism must not be a strong religion.

In conclusion, the Mexican Baptist Church provided a religious community as confirmed by the content of the interviews. The church and its members emphasized familism, and the church services and its activities were a common enterprise. The usage of terms such as "hermano" and "hermana" enhanced the "we-feeling" of the individual's relationship to the church. Role feeling was evident by the participation of the members in the church's services and by the positions held by the laity in the church. Individuals sometimes

neighborhoods and interacted minimally with the host society, his cultural systems were subjected to marginality which threatened the maintenance of his social order. One response to these conditions was the attempt by them to reorder their social reality by means of change and accommodation. This was not difficult because a variant of Mexican culture did exist in the social reality of the ethnic enclaves where the immigrant lived. The immigrant did not undergo a severe disorientation, but he was coming from a folk-rural environment to an urban one where the host society considered him culturally different. This, in itself, was a sufficient cause for any initial disorientation. It follows that the immigrant sought to reestablish familiar relationships with the existing society in an attempt to reorder his social reality.

In times of crisis, all social groups maintain processes to sustain a reality already defined. The reality-orienting processes manifest themselves in the institutional structures of a society. The existence of a Mexican American urban culture in Los Angeles minimized some of the disruptive effects of immigration for the folk-oriented Mexican. Traditionally, religion has always been an integral part of any society's cultural systems, and one of its characteristics has been to maintain the social realities of any society by its rituals and activities.

The religious-cultural system of the immigrant was based on a folk Catholicism of rural Mexico. The Mexican perceived his religion as complementing the existing social reality. Folk Catholicism was one of the social bases for rural Mexican culture to be maintained. When the immigrant arrived in the Los Angeles area, he discovered that the American Catholic Church differed culturally and symbolically from his folk-type Catholicism. He experienced a sense of disorientation in the new social milieu and sought to reorder his religious reality.

The Mexican Baptist Church provided the social base and the social processes for that reordering to take place for some of the immigrants. The church acted as an accommodation agency by maintaining some of the cultural characteristics of folk Catholicism, by embodying these characteristics within its structure and activities. The end result was the conversion of some of the Mexican Catholics to Chicano Protestants.

While both hypotheses are not unequivocally confirmed because of the limited empirical data, this writer feels justified because of the firm body of social scientific theory that the hypotheses are based on provides an explanation for understanding the phenomena of religious conversion. Following the tentative confirmation of the hypotheses, more research would serve to substantiate and amplify the body of

knowledge on Chicano Protestants.

With regard to further research on religious conversion and Chicano Protestantism, several questions arise in addition to the need for more empirical data on the hypotheses presented in this thesis:

1. If religious disorientation resulted from migration, how does one explain the success of the Baptist groups in Mexico and other parts of Latin America?

2. Does affiliation with the Baptist Church persist from one generation to another, and do Mexican Baptists eventually join an English-speaking congregation?

3. To what extent did the phenomena described in this thesis apply to the conversion of Mexican Catholics to other Protestant denominations or sects, such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, or Pentecostals?

4. How did religious conversion occur in the rural areas of the American Southwest where, ostensibly, the disruptive impact of immigration was minimized?

It was the intent of this thesis to expand the body of knowledge on the Chicano Protestant and to present one explanation of the phenomena of religious conversion vis-à-vis the Mexican immigrant. Hopefully, some direction toward those ends has been accomplished.

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