

South American coastline in search of a passage to Asia. In the end, Vespucci decided that South America was so large and so densely populated that it must be a *new* continent. In 1507, a German mapmaker paid tribute to Vespucci's navigational skills by labeling the New World using the feminine Latin variant of the explorer's first name: America.

PROFESSIONAL EXPLORERS News of the remarkable voyages of Columbus and Vespucci stimulated other expeditions. The first explorer to sight the North American continent was John Cabot, an Italian sponsored by King Henry VII of England. Cabot's landfall in 1497 at what the king called "the new founde lande," in present-day Canada, gave England the basis for a later claim to *all* of North America. On a return voyage, however, Cabot and his four ships disappeared. Their grim fate as well as the English monarchy's preoccupation with religious strife, suppressing a massive rebellion by Irish Catholics, and conducting a war with France prevented it from following up on Cabot's discoveries for one hundred years.

The English were unaware that Norsemen ("Vikings") from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) had in fact been the first Europeans to "discover" and colonize areas of North America. As early as the tenth century, Norsemen had landed on the rocky, fogbound shore of Greenland, a huge island off the northeast coast of North America. They established farming settlements that were active for hundreds of years until prolonged cold weather forced them back to Scandinavia.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN EUROPE

While explorers were crossing the Atlantic, powerful religious conflicts were tearing Europe apart in ways that would shape developments in the Western Hemisphere. When Columbus sailed west in 1492, all of Europe acknowledged the thousand-year-old supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church and its pope in Rome. The pope led a sprawling religious empire governed by a hierarchy of cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns. Catholics were evangelists eager to spread their faith around the world.

The often brutal efforts of the Spanish to convert native peoples in the Western Hemisphere to **Roman Catholicism** illustrated the murderous intensity with which European Christians embraced religious life in the sixteenth century. Spiritual concerns inspired, comforted, and united them. People fervently believed in heaven and hell, devils and witches, demons and angels, magic and miracles. And they were willing to kill and die for their religious

beliefs. Between 1095 and 1291 C.E., European armies, sanctioned by the Pope in Rome, traveled to the Near East to do battle with Islamic “infidels” who had occupied the Christian Holy Land.

MARTIN LUTHER

The enforced unity of Catholic Europe began to crack on October 31, 1517, when an obscure thirty-three-year-old German monk who taught at the University of Wittenberg in the German state of Saxony, sent ninety-five “theses” lambasting the “corrupt” Catholic Church to church officials. Little did Martin Luther (1483–1546) know that his defiant stance and explosive charges would ignite history’s fiercest spiritual drama, the **Protestant Reformation**, or that his controversial ideas would forever change the Christian world and plunge Europe into decades of religious strife.

Luther was a profound and combative thinker, a man of intense conviction and personal magnetism, a true spiritual revolutionary who fractured Christianity by undermining the authority of the all-powerful Catholic Church. Any believer, he maintained, could challenge the authority of the church as long as their arguments were rooted in biblical teaching. He called the pope “the greatest thief and robber that has appeared or can appear on earth.” Luther especially criticized the widespread sale of *indulgences*, whereby priests would forgive sins in exchange for money. The Catholic Church had made a profitable business



not purchase it. As Luther exclaimed, "By faith alone are you saved!" To him, the Bible was the sole source of Christian truth; believers had no need for the "den of murderers"—Catholic priests, bishops, and popes.

Through this simple but revolutionary doctrine of "Protestantism," Luther sought to revitalize Christianity's original faith and spirituality. The common people, he declared, represented a "priesthood of all believers." Individuals, in other words, could seek their own salvation. "All Christians are priests," he said. They "have the power to test and judge what is correct or incorrect in matters of faith" by themselves. To enable Christians to be their own "priests," Luther went on to produce the first Bible in a German translation so that everyone—male or female, rich or poor—could read it.

Luther's rebellion spread quickly across Europe thanks to the circulation of thousands of inexpensive pamphlets, which served as the social media of the time. Without the new printing presses, there may not have been a Protestant Reformation.

Lutheranism began as an intense religious movement, but it soon developed profound social and political implications. By proclaiming that "all" are equal before God, Protestants disrupted traditional notions of wealth, class, and monarchical supremacy. Their desire to practice a faith independent of papal or governmental interference contributed to the ideal of limited government. By the end of the sixteenth century, King James VI of Scotland grew nervous that his Protestant subjects were plotting to install a "democratic form of government."

THE CATHOLIC REACTION What came to be called Lutheranism quickly found enthusiastic followers, especially in the German-speaking states. In Rome, however, Pope Leo X lashed out at Luther's "dangerous doctrines," calling him "a leper with a brain of brass and a nose of iron."

Luther, aware that his life was at stake, fought back with equal fury, declaring that he was "born to war." He refused to abide by any papal decrees. "I will recant nothing!" The "die is cast, and I will have no reconciliation with the Pope for all eternity." During the 1520s, the brilliant, tempestuous Martin Luther became a cultural phenomenon: a spiritual revolutionary, a folk hero, and a political prophet, encouraging German nobles to separate themselves from the Italian papacy.

When the pope expelled Luther from the Catholic Church in 1521 and the Holy Roman emperor sentenced him to death, civil war erupted throughout the German principalities. A powerful prince protected Luther from the church's wrath by hiding him in his castle.

Luther's conflict with the pope set off decades of religious warfare during which both sides sought to eliminate dissent by torturing and burning at the

stake those they deemed “heretics.” A settlement between Lutherans and Catholics did not come until 1555, when the Treaty of Augsburg allowed each German prince to determine the official religion of his subjects. For a while, they got away with such dictatorial policies, for most people still deferred to ruling princes. Southern Europe—France, Spain, and the Italian states—remained mostly Catholic while most of the northern German states, along with Scandinavia, became Lutheran.

Once unleashed, the flood of Protestant rebellion flowed in directions that Luther, a theological radical but a political conservative, neither expected nor wanted. His initial desire to reform the Catholic Church mushroomed into a religious, social, and political revolution that grew increasingly diverse and divided.

Although all early Protestants distrusted the Catholic Church, they often violently disagreed among themselves over theological issues. Disputes over doctrinal matters (among them baptism, communion, and church organization) spawned various Protestant sects, such as the Anabaptists, who favored only adult baptism and insisted on the separation of church and state. Other Protestant offshoots appeared, including the Mennonites, Moravians, and Amish, but the more numerous like-minded groups would be the Baptists and the Quakers, whose origins were English.

For his part, Luther condemned Protestantism’s radical sectarians. His goal was to reform religious life, not restructure social and political life. When German peasants revolted against princely rule in 1525, Luther sided with the princes. The rebels claimed that they were applying Luther’s ideas to the social realm, but he urged the rulers to crush the “devilish” revolt, saying “Let whoever can, stab, strike, [and] kill” the insurgents. “Obedience is the supreme duty of the citizen,” he exclaimed, and “nothing could be more poisonous, hurtful, and devilish than a rebel.”

JOHN CALVIN

If Martin Luther was the lightning that sparked the Reformation, John Calvin provided the thunder. Soon after Luther began his revolt against Catholicism, Swiss Protestants also challenged papal authority. In Geneva, a city of 16,000 people determined to become the Protestant “Rome,” the movement looked to John Calvin (1509–1564), a brilliant French theologian and preacher who had fled from Catholic France to Geneva and quickly brought it under the sway of his powerful beliefs.

Calvin deepened and broadened the Reformation that Luther had started by developing a strict way of life for Protestants to follow. His chief contribution

was his emphasis upon humanity's inherent sinfulness and utter helplessness before an all-powerful God who had predetermined who would be saved and who would be left to eternal damnation, regardless of their behavior.

Calvin and Luther were the twin pillars of early Protestantism, but they were very different revolutionaries. Where Luther was a volatile personality who loved controversy and debate, Calvin was a cool, calculating, analytical theorist who sought to create a Protestant absolutism rigidly devoid of all remnants of Catholicism. Under his leadership, Geneva became a theocracy in which believers sought to convince themselves and others that God had chosen them for salvation.

Calvin came to rule Geneva with uncompromising conviction. He summoned the citizenry to swear allegiance to a twenty-one-article confession of faith. No citizen could be outside the authority of the church, and Calvin viewed himself as God's appointed judge and jury. No aspect of life in Geneva escaped his strict control. Dancing, card-playing, and theatergoing were outlawed. Censorship was enforced, and informers were recruited to report wrongdoing. Visitors staying at inns had to say a prayer before dining. Everyone was required to attend church and to be in bed by nine o'clock. Even joking was outlawed.

Calvin urged that some thirty "witches" in Geneva be burned, drowned, or hanged for supposedly causing an epidemic. Overall, he had fifty-eight people put to death. Calvin could not abide any opposition. For example, he encouraged the civil authorities to arrest and put on trial his most prominent opponent, Michael Servetus, a Spanish theologian who went to Geneva to preach and to debate Calvin. Servetus's "heretical" views, such as denying the divinity of Christ and insisting that children could not be sinners, convinced the Geneva court to order him burned alive, using his blasphemous books as fuel for the fire. Calvin had wanted a "more humane" punishment for Servetus: beheading.

Calvin also banished scores of people from Geneva who fell short of his demanding standards, including members of his extended family. He exiled his sister-in-law for adultery and ordered his stepdaughter jailed for fornication. "I have found it to be true," observed a witty Genevan, "that men who know what is best for society are unable to cope with their families."

CALVINISM For all of its harshness, Calvinism, as embodied in Geneva, spread like wildfire across France, Scotland, and the Netherlands. It even penetrated Lutheran Germany. Calvinism formed the basis for the German Reformed Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Presbyterians in Scotland, and the Huguenots in France, and it prepared the way for many forms of American Protestantism. Like Luther, Calvin argued that Christians did not

need popes or kings, archbishops and bishops, to dictate their search for salvation; each congregation should elect its own elders and ministers to guide their worship and nurture their faith.

Over time, Calvin exerted a greater effect upon religious belief and practice in the English colonies than did any other leader of the Reformation. His emphasis on humankind's essential depravity, his concept of predestination, his support for the primacy and autonomy of each congregation, and his belief in the necessity of theocratic government formed the ideological foundation for Puritan New England.

Many of the radical Calvinists who left England to establish colonies in North America claimed that they were reenacting the Hebrew exodus from bondage in ancient Egypt. They boarded their ships confident that the Lord would guide and protect them on their "errand into the wilderness." Many New England Puritans were certain that God had chosen them to "create a new heaven, and a new earth, new churches, and a new commonwealth together."

In 1564, at age 54, John Calvin died after a long illness. On his deathbed, he refused to believe that the reformation he had led had succeeded. The Genevans, he muttered, remained a "perverse and unhappy nation." Perhaps this is why the stern man of God who had sought to impose his will on a wicked world had a surprising deathbed request: an unmarked grave. It was granted.

THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The Catholic Church furiously resisted the emergence of new "protestant" faiths by launching a "Counter-Reformation" that reaffirmed basic Catholic beliefs while addressing some of the concerns about priestly abuses raised by Luther, Calvin, and others. In Spain, the monarchy established an "Inquisition" to root out Protestants and heretics. In 1534, a Spanish soldier, Ignatius de Loyola, organized the Society of Jesus, a militant monastic order created to revitalize Catholicism. Its members, the black-robed Jesuits, fanned out across Europe and the Americas as courageous missionaries and teachers.

Despite such efforts to blunt the appeal of Protestantism, the Reformation permanently fragmented Christianity. What began as a theological dispute evolved into a political movement, as well, and ultimately became a *catalyst* for social change, civil strife, and imperial warfare.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholics and Protestants persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and killed each other in large numbers. In 1572, militant Catholics in Paris rampaged through the streets shouting, "kill, kill, kill," as they murdered French Protestants (Huguenots). The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre saw 3,000 men, women, and children killed and

their bodies dumped into the Seine River. Every major international conflict in early modern Europe became, to some extent, a religious holy war between Catholic and Protestant nations.

THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

In England, the Reformation followed a unique course. The Church of England (the Anglican Church), emerged through a gradual process of integrating Calvinism with English Catholicism. In early modern England, the Catholic Church and the national government were united and mutually supportive. The monarchy required people to attend religious services and to pay taxes to support the church. The English rulers also supervised the church officials: two archbishops, twenty-six bishops, and thousands of parish clergy, who were often instructed to preach sermons in support of government policies. As one English king explained, "People are governed by the pulpit more than the sword in time of peace."

KING HENRY VIII The English Reformation originated because of purely political reasons. King Henry VIII, who ruled between 1509 and 1547, had won from the pope the title Defender of the Faith for initially refuting Martin Luther's rebellious ideas. But Henry turned against the Catholic Church over the issue of divorce. His marriage to Catherine of Aragon, his elder brother's widow and the youngest daughter of the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, had produced a girl, Mary, but no boy. Henry's obsession for a male heir convinced him that he needed a new wife, and he had grown smitten with another woman, sharp-witted Anne Boleyn. But first he had to convince the pope to annul, or cancel, his twenty-four-year marriage to Catherine, who rebelled against her husband's plan. She found a powerful ally in her nephew, Charles V, king of Spain and ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, whose armies were in control of the church in Rome.

The pope refused to grant an annulment—in part because Charles V had placed him under arrest to encourage him to make the right decision. In 1533, Henry VIII responded by severing England's nearly 900-year connection with the Catholic Church. The archbishop of Canterbury then granted the annulment, thus freeing Henry to marry his mistress, the pregnant Anne Boleyn. The pope then excommunicated Henry from the Catholic Church, whereupon Parliament passed an Act of Supremacy declaring that the king, not the pope, was head of the Church of England. Henry quickly banned all Catholic "idols," required Bibles to be published in English rather than Latin, and confiscated the vast land holdings of the Catholic Church in England.

In one of history's greatest ironies, Anne Boleyn gave birth not to a male heir but to a daughter named Elizabeth. The disappointed king refused to attend the baby's christening ceremony. Instead, he accused Anne of adultery and had her beheaded, and he declared the infant Elizabeth a bastard. (He would marry four more times.) Elizabeth, however, would grow up to be quick-witted and nimble, a cunning and courageous queen.

THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH In 1547, Henry VIII died and was succeeded by nine-year-old Edward VI, his son by his third wife, Jane Seymour. Edward approved efforts to further "reform" the Church of England. Priests were allowed to marry; church services were conducted in English rather than Latin, and new articles of faith were drafted and published.

When Edward grew gravely ill in 1553, he declared that his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, should succeed him. But nine days after his death, his Catholic half sister, Mary, led an army that deposed Lady Jane and later ordered her beheaded. The following year, Queen Mary shocked many by marrying Philip, the Holy Roman emperor and king of Spain. With his blessing, she restored Catholic supremacy in England, ordering hundreds of Protestants burned at the stake and others exiled.

"Bloody Mary" died in 1558, and her Protestant half sister, Henry VIII's daughter Elizabeth, ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five. Over the next forty-five years, despite political turmoil, religious strife, economic crises, and foreign wars, Elizabeth proved to be one of the greatest rulers in history. During her long reign, the Church of England again became Protestant while retaining much of the tone and texture of Catholicism.

THE SPANISH EMPIRE

Throughout the sixteenth century, Spain struggled to manage its colonial empire while trying to repress the Protestant Reformation. Between 1500 and 1650, some 450,000 Spaniards, 75 percent of them poor, single, unskilled men, made their way to the Western Hemisphere. During that time, Spain's colonies in the Western Hemisphere shipped some 200 tons of gold, 16,000 tons of silver, and untold numbers of pearls to Spain. By plundering, conquering, and colonizing the Americas and converting and enslaving its inhabitants, the Spanish planted Christianity in the Western Hemisphere and gained the financial resources to rule the world.

SPAIN IN THE CARIBBEAN The Caribbean Sea served as the gateway through which Spain entered the Americas. After establishing a trading post

on Hispaniola, the Spanish proceeded to colonize Puerto Rico (1508), Jamaica (1509), and Cuba (1511–1514). Their motives, as one soldier explained, were simple: “To serve God and the king, and also to get rich.” As their New World colonies grew more numerous, the monarchy created an administrative structure to govern them and a name to encompass them: New Spain.

A CLASH OF CULTURES

The often-violent encounters between Spaniards and Native Americans involved more than a clash of cultures. They also involved contrasting forms of technological development. The Indians of Mexico used wooden canoes for water transportation, while the Europeans traveled in much larger, heavily armed sailing vessels. The Spanish ships also carried warhorses and fighting dogs (the Aztecs called them monsters); weapons included long steel swords, crossbows, firearms, gunpowder, and armor. “The most essential thing in new lands is horses,” reported one Spanish soldier. “They instill the greatest fear in the enemy and make the Indians respect the leaders of the army.”

CORTÉS’S CONQUEST The most dramatic European conquest of a major Indian civilization occurred in Mexico. On February 18, 1519, Hernán Cortés, a Spanish soldier of fortune who went to the New World “to get rich, not to till the soil like a peasant,” sold his Cuban lands to buy ships and supplies, then set sail for Mexico and its fabled riches.

Cortés’s fleet of eleven ships carried nearly 600 soldiers and sailors. Also on board were 200 indigenous Cuban laborers, sixteen warhorses, greyhound fighting dogs, and cannons. The Spanish first stopped on the Yucatan Peninsula, where they defeated a group of Mayans. The vanquished chieftain gave Cortés twenty enslaved young women. Cortés distributed them to his captains but kept one of the girls (“La Malinche”) for himself, giving her the Spanish name of Doña Marina. Malinche, it turned out, spoke Mayan as well as Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, with whom she had previously lived. She became Cortés’s interpreter—and his mistress; she would later bear the married Cortés a son.

After leaving Yucatan, Cortés and his ships sailed west and landed at a place he named Veracruz (“True Cross”), where they convinced the local Totomacs to join the assault against their hated rivals, the Mexica (Aztecs). To prevent his soldiers, called *conquistadores* (conquerors), from deserting, Cortés had the ships scuttled, sparing only one vessel to carry the expected gold back to Spain.

Conquistadores were then widely recognized as the best soldiers in the world. They received no pay; they were pitiless professional warriors willing to



Cortés in Mexico Page from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, a historical narrative from the sixteenth century. The scene, in which Cortés is shown seated on a throne, depicts the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico.

risk their lives for a share in the expected plunder. One conquistador explained that he went to America “to serve God and His Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness, and to grow rich, as men desire to do.”

With his small army and Indian allies, Cortés bravely set out to conquer the extensive Mexica Empire, which extended from central Mexico to what is today Guatemala. The army’s nearly 200-mile march through the mountains to the Mexica capital of Tenochtitlán took almost three months.

SPANISH INVADERS As Cortés and his soldiers marched across Mexico, they heard fabulous stories about the Mexica capital: Tenochtitlán. With some 200,000 inhabitants scattered among twenty neighborhoods, it was one of the largest cities in the world. Laid out in a grid pattern on an island in a shallow lake, divided by long cobblestone avenues, crisscrossed by canals, connected to the mainland by wide causeways, and graced by formidable stone pyramids, the city and its massive buildings seemed impregnable.

Cortés wrote that the “floating city” was “so big and so remarkable” that it “was unbelievable.” A conquistador reported that their first glimpse of the city left them speechless: “We did not know what to say or whether what appeared before us was real. . . . In front of us stood the great City of Mexico, and we—we did not number even four hundred soldiers!” Yet the outnumbered Spanish made the most of their assets—superior steel swords, armor, warhorses, can-



- What were the Spanish conquistadores' goals for exploring the Americas?
- How did Cortés conquer the Mexica?
- Why did the Spanish first explore North America, and why did they establish St. Augustine, the first European settlement in what would become the United States?

In the spring of 1520, disgruntled Mexica priests orchestrated a rebellion after deciding that Montezuma was a traitor and the Spaniards were not to be trusted. According to Spanish accounts, the Mexica stoned the emperor to death; more recently, scholars argue that the Spanish did the deed. One account says that they poured molten gold down Montezuma's throat. Whatever the cause of the emperor's death, the Spaniards were forced to retreat from the capital city. Some 450 conquistadores were killed, but more than 4,000 Aztecs died as well.

Cortés, however, was undaunted. His many Indian allies remained loyal, and the Spaniards gained reinforcements from Cuba. They then laid siege to Tenochtitlán for eighty-five days, cutting off its access to water and food, and allowing a smallpox epidemic to devastate the inhabitants. One of the Mexica reported that the smallpox "struck everywhere in the city." Tens of thousands "were covered with agonizing sores from head to foot. There was great havoc. Very many died of it."

After three months, the siege came to a bloody end in August 1521. The ravages of smallpox and the support of thousands of anti-Mexica Indians help explain how such a small force of Spaniards vanquished a proud nation ruling millions of people. A conquistador remembered that as he entered the capital city after its surrender, the streets "were so filled with sick and dead people that our men walked over nothing but bodies." Cortés ordered the Mexica leaders hanged and the priests devoured by dogs. "We have pounded our hands in despair against the adobe walls," a survivor wrote, "for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead. We have torn out our hair in our grief; the houses are roofless now, and their walls are red with blood."

Cortés became the first governor general of "New Spain" and quickly began replacing the Mexica leaders with Spanish bureaucrats and church officials. He ordered that a grand Catholic cathedral be built from the stones of Montezuma's destroyed palace.

The Spanish conquest of Mexico established the model for waves of plundering conquistadores to follow. From Mexico, Peru, and the Caribbean islands, conquistadores fanned out to conquer the rest of Central and South America. Within twenty years, Spain had established a huge empire in the New World. By then, however, Cortés had left New Spain to find China. He eventually returned to Europe and died in Spain in 1547.

In 1531, Francisco Pizarro mimicked the conquest of Mexico when he led a band of 168 conquistadores and sixty-seven horses down the Pacific coast of South America from Panama toward Peru, where they brutally subdued the Inca Empire and its 5 million people. The Spanish killed thousands of Inca warriors, seized imperial palaces, took royal women as mistresses and wives,

and looted the empire of its gold and silver. From Peru, Spain extended its control southward through Chile and north to present-day Colombia.

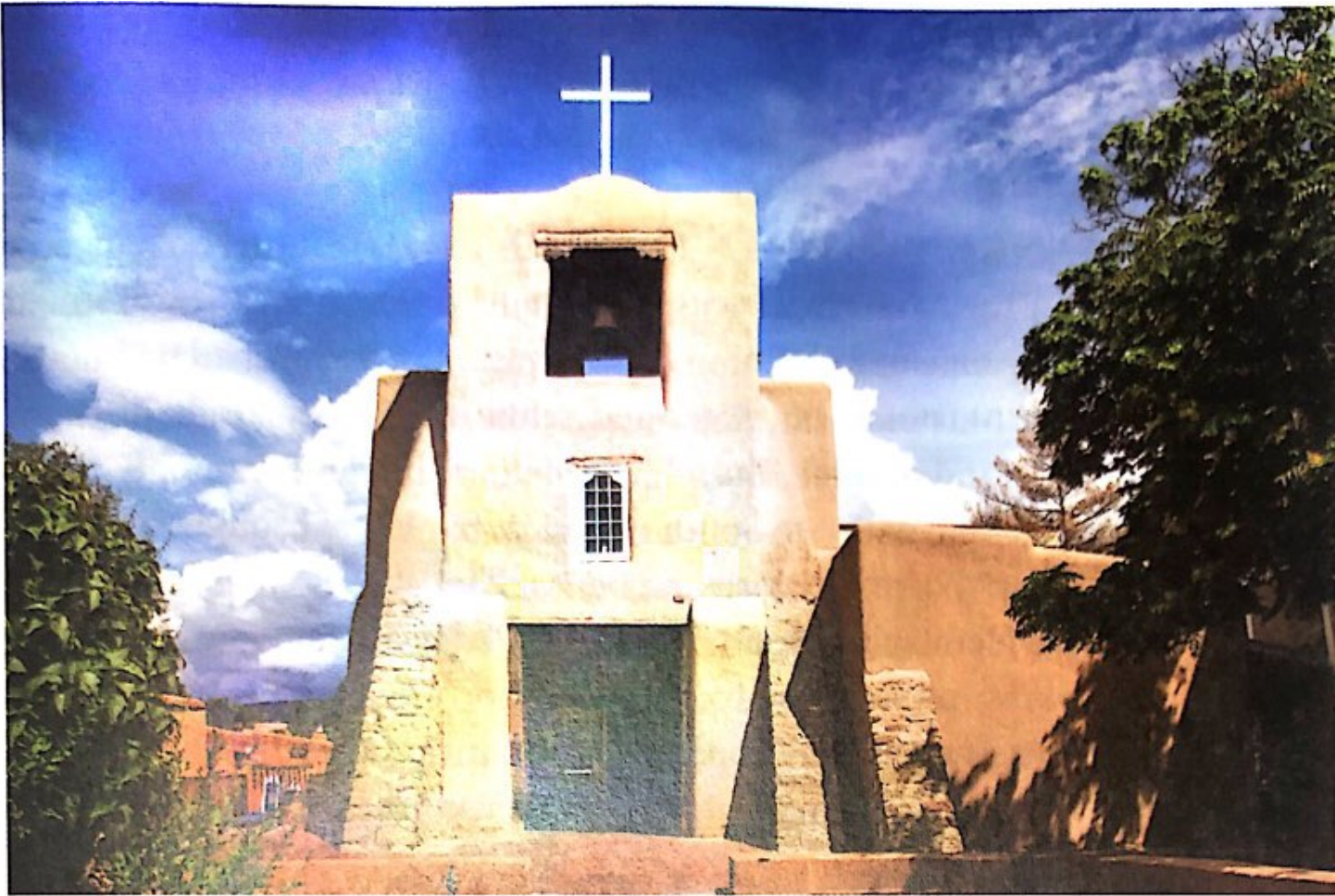
NEW SPAIN The Spanish established provinces in North America not so much as commercial enterprises but as protective buffers to defend their empire in Mexico and South America. They later would grow concerned about French traders infiltrating from present-day Louisiana, English settlers crossing into Florida from Georgia and Carolina, and Russian seal hunters wandering down the California coast.

As the sixteenth century unfolded, the Spanish shifted from looting the native peoples to enslaving them. To reward the conquistadores, Spain transferred to America a medieval socioeconomic system known as the *encomienda*, whereby favored soldiers or officials received huge parcels of land—and control over the people who lived there. The Spanish were to Christianize the Indians and provide them with protection in exchange for “tribute”—a share of their goods and labor.

New Spain became a society of extremes: wealthy *encomenderos* and powerful priests at one end of the spectrum, and Indians held in poverty at the other. The Spaniards used brute force to ensure that the Indians accepted their role as serfs. Nuño de Guzman, a governor of a Mexican province, loved to watch his massive fighting dog tear apart rebellious Indians. But he was equally brutal with Spanish colonists. After a Spaniard talked back to him, he had the man nailed to a post by his tongue.

A CATHOLIC EMPIRE The Spanish launched a massive effort to convert the Indians into Catholic servants. During the sixteenth century, hundreds of priests fanned out across New Spain. Most of the missionaries decided that the Indians could be converted only by force. “Though they seem to be a simple people,” a priest declared in 1562, “they are up to all sorts of mischief, and without compulsion, they will never speak the [religious] truth.” By the end of the sixteenth century, there were more than 300 monasteries or missions in New Spain, and Catholicism had become a major instrument of Spanish imperialism and the most important institution in the Americas.

Some officials criticized the forced conversion of Indians and the *encomienda* system. A Catholic priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas, observed with horror the treatment of Indians by Spanish settlers in Hispaniola and Cuba. To ensure obedience, they tortured, burned, and cut off the hands and noses of the native peoples. Las Casas resolved in 1514 to spend the rest of his life aiding the Indians. He gave away his land in Hispaniola and began urging the Spanish to change their approach: “Everything done to the Indians thus far,” he claimed, “was unjust and tyrannical.”



Missionaries in the New World A Spanish mission in New Mexico, established to spread the Catholic faith among the indigenous peoples.