

—☉ TIBESAR LECTURE ☉—

THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

This essay is in large part inspired by Fr. Antonine Tibesar OFM, whom I had the privilege to meet in 1982 just after I returned from my doctoral research sojourn in Bolivia. Fr. Antonine was for many years the director of the Academy of Franciscan History when that institution had its beautiful campus in Potomac, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. I had corresponded with Fr. Antonine earlier and during my visit enjoyed discussing with him the many facets of Franciscan missions in Latin America. He proudly showed me the large collection of books in the academy library. What impressed me about both Fr. Antonine and the friars I had met in Bolivia during my research was their selflessness and willingness to help a budding scholar—one who at that point had little of scholarship to show. These characteristics got me thinking about the Franciscans and their worldviews and how those must have affected the missions. Although I was determined to write mainly about the indigenous population on the missions (after all, they constituted the vast majority of the mission population and were the ones most profoundly affected by the mission experience), I realized that it was important not to ignore the missionaries. Though few in number—most missions had just one or perhaps two friars—it was their desires for the native population and the overall goals and local organization of the missions they founded that profoundly shaped the human settlements they supervised.

My research concentrates on the missions among the Chiriguano (now called Ava-Guaraní) and to a lesser extent the Tobas and the Maticos (now called Weenhayek) in southeastern Bolivia from the 1830s to 1949. It was likely the most important mission system in the hemisphere during the post-independ-

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ence period, encompassing more than 10,000 natives in the last decade of the nineteenth century. It was the central demographic, political, and economic institution of the Bolivian frontier, and its actions, organization, and authority had effects all the way to northern Argentina, where many neophytes went to labor in the sugarcane fields. The thoughts in the paragraphs that follow are based largely on my research on this mission system, but I will also bring in Argentina and Peru, where the Franciscans also labored among indigenous groups on the frontier and for which there are a number of excellent mission studies. Based on the information from these resources, I hope to be able to tell something about the Franciscan missionary enterprise in general.

The missionaries' perspective has been taken sufficiently into account in many mission histories and in historical research, a logical outcome of the fact that virtually all the material that historians have at their disposal was produced by the missionaries themselves. Indeed, many of the best histories of the Franciscan missions were written by those missionaries or by other Franciscans.¹ Their perspectives have been important in elucidating many issues and in demonstrating the profound effect of the missionaries and missions on their charges. But what is missing from these histories is a critical examination of the missionaries themselves and the assumptions they brought to their work. The Franciscan missionary enterprise was profoundly affected by conceptual frameworks that were well established but largely unexamined by those who wrote the mission histories.

To understand these frameworks, it is necessary to look at five factors that shaped the Franciscan missionary enterprise in the nineteenth century. First, the missionaries approached their world and their work through cultural assumptions that made them attempt to organize the missions in certain ways, assumptions that often had little to do with spiritual matters but much to do with the perceptions they had grown up with. For this reason, it is important to conduct the same kind of ethnographic analysis of the missionaries as the missionaries and others did of the indigenous population. There is rich documentation for doing so, not only in the "self histories" that the friars kept, but also in much other documentation that they carefully preserved.² It also seems only fair and proper to conduct this turn-about analysis, since the "new mission history" has

1. The vast majority of mission histories for southeastern Bolivia have come from Franciscans. See for example Bernardino de Nino, *Etnografía chiriguana* (La Paz: Ismael Argote, 1912); Alejandro María Corrado, *El colegio franciscano de Tarija y sus misiones*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Tarija: Editorial Offset Franciscana, 1990); Angélico Martarelli, *El Colegio Franciscano de Potosí y sus misiones*, 2nd ed. (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos Marinoni, n.d.); and Doroteo Gianecchini, *Historia natural, etnografía, geografía, lingüística del Chaco boliviano* (Tarija: Fondo de Inversión Social/Centro Eclesial de Documentación, 1996).

2. The term "self history" is one I borrow from Robert H. Jackson. See his introductory essay in *The New Latin American Mission History*, Erick D. Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. ix.

made its central focus the experience of the indigenous as discoverable through ethnohistorical methods. In the case that I examine, the Franciscans were overwhelmingly from Italy, mostly Tuscany, with some smattering of Austrians, French, and Spaniards. From each of these countries, friars brought their own culture and cultural suppositions to the New World. Given the brevity of this essay, I have chosen to focus on the Italians.

The assumption underlying my research is that nobody can escape his or her own place and time. These must be taken into account in any discussion of people who try to create new communities, including the Franciscans; much of what they did came out of their own understanding of how the world works. This means that the historical context of the missionaries' lives prior to arriving in mission territory is important. People who emigrate from anywhere are profoundly affected by their personal histories in their home countries, and they carry this history with them for the rest of their lives. Nowhere was this fact more determining than among the Italian friars, who suffered through a particularly turbulent time in Italian history during the nineteenth century.

Likewise, the Franciscan order had its own culture, which had changed over time. We have very little information on the Franciscans of the nineteenth century, but it is clear that the intense preparation that the friars went through to become members of the Order of Friars Minor marked them and the way that they organized themselves and their world around them. Of course, this world was distinctly different from that of the sixteenth-century missionaries, which John L. Phelan describes so vividly and effectively in his seminal *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*,³ but the Franciscans of both periods had distinctive characteristics that arose from a combination of rules and principles existing since the founding of the order and the permutations that inevitably occurred as the organization maintained its relevance in a changing world and with new members who were children of their own times.

The enterprise was also much affected by the world the Franciscans entered when they went into the mission field, in particular the state to which they journeyed and how it reacted to the coming of the friars and the establishment of their missions. Local circumstances were crucial—it was the independent states and their rulers that permitted the establishment and operation of the missions. Treatment of the Franciscans and the missions across the various states was not equal. For example, in Argentina's federalist system, the friars had much less support on the national level and the provincial governments had a much

3. John L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

greater say than in other locations; this had to do with the structure of the state itself. Further, Argentina's provincial governments, dominated by local landlords during the nineteenth century, were as a rule much less favorably inclined toward the missions than the national administrators in Buenos Aires. Where national governments were stronger, as in Bolivia and Peru, the friars could ally with Sucre or Lima and thus withstand the pressures of local elites. However, when the national administrations turned anticlerical, as eventually happened in Argentina, the missionaries rapidly lost power along the frontier and many missions in that region were secularized.⁴

Last, but just as important, the reaction of the indigenous peoples the Franciscans wanted to convert influenced the missionary enterprise as well. Each indigenous group had its own culture, history, and ethnic politics that shaped its interactions with the missions and their eventual success. In this sense, indigenous peoples had an important voice, not least because they were the vast majority of human beings in the mission settlements where the missionaries usually lived singly or in pairs. This was much more the case in the nineteenth century, when the government did not station soldiers or construct forts close to the missions to support the missionaries.

Let us now examine these factors in greater detail and combine the elements we have thus far identified. I will discuss the Franciscans and their context with the aim of constructing a historically sensitive ethnography that takes into account the culture and history of both individual friars and the Franciscan order in Italy, the interactions between the Franciscans and the various Latin American states, and, albeit briefly, the interactions between indigenous peoples and the friars.

THE FRANCISCAN ORDER IN ITALY

The nineteenth century was a turbulent time in Europe, where most of the Franciscans were born and educated. For the majority, Italians, the struggle between the papacy and secular nationalist forces were bringing about revolutionary changes in what has been called the *Risorgimento*. The friars who left for missionary endeavors had grown up during the turmoil of this period and were marked by it. The struggle pitted a Roman papacy that had over the centuries

4. For Argentina, see Ana A. Teruel, *Misiones, economía y sociedad. La frontera chaqueña del noroeste argentino en el siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005) and Langer, "Liberal Policy and Frontier Missions: Bolivia and Argentina Compared," *Andes: Antropología e Historia* 9 (1998), pp. 197–213. For Peru and Bolivia, see Pilar García Jordán, *Cruz y arado, fusiles y discursos. La construcción de los Orientales en el Perú y Bolivia, 1820–1940* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2001); García Jordán, *Yo soy libre y no indio, soy Guarayo. Para una historia de Guarayos, 1790–1948* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2006); and Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830–1949* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).

gained temporal control over about half of Italian territory—essentially bisecting the peninsula—with modernizing forces that wanted to unify Italy into a secular state in control of the other. To simplify, the monarchy of the Piedmont in northern Italy and allied republican groups constituted an anticlerical force that was intent on ending the papacy's rule over Italian lands. The Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century had brought the papacy to its knees, although the Congress of Vienna (1815) did re-establish the Papal States. This return to the *status quo ante* was not to last long. The election of Pope Pius XI (also known as Pio Nono) in 1846 seemed to augur a new era of reform for the Church. However, the 1848 revolutions that swept Europe also brought about revolution in Rome, and the pope had to flee the city disguised as a common priest. The troops of Napoleon III re-established papal authority, but meanwhile the reformist Pio Nono had become an arch-conservative.⁵

In the end, secular and anticlerical forces won the day despite the pope's rear-guard actions. In 1866 the Franciscan order was briefly suppressed in Italy, and in 1870 Rome fell to the forces of King Victor Emmanuel II of the Piedmont monarchy, leading to the unification of Italy and the marginalization of the pope in temporal affairs. The pope declared himself a "prisoner of the Vatican" and continued with his recalcitrant condemnations of liberalism, nationalism, and rationalism.⁶

The Franciscans who joined the order during the nineteenth century were largely committed to supporting the papal stance against secular forces and believed firmly in the centrality of the Church. The continual losses that the Church suffered during the century weighed heavily upon them. The missionary impulse came in part from such reactions; the friars saw the mission territory as a place to recreate perfect Christian communities away from a corrupt and increasingly anticlerical Europe. The missionaries were also undoubtedly aware that the question of nationalism that so vexed Italy had been largely resolved in the Americas—and not necessarily at the expense of the Church.

The Franciscans also thought that the missionary enterprise would engage indigenous peoples who had never heard the Word of Christ, *tabulae rasae* who could be taught the true faith without the interference of modernity and all its ills. The Franciscans focused their plan for conversion and education on children, who could be made into faithful Christians without the ideological bag-

5. There are many histories of Italy for this period, but few in English that deal with the conflict with the Papal States. For the best treatment in English, see David I. Kertzer, "Religion and Society, 1789–1892," in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1786–1900*, John A. Davis, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 181–205.

6. See David I. Kertzer, *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes' Secret Plot to Capture Rome from the New Italian State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

gage and superstitions of adults. The Franciscan order of this period emphasized education in ways it had not done in previous centuries. Its educational mission was to teach the masses and the poor, unlike the Jesuits who after their reestablishment in 1814 focused on the elites. Indeed, the Franciscan missions boasted of the largest educational establishments on the Latin American frontiers and were often the only ones who taught children within hundreds of miles.

A primary purpose of the Latin American governments in permitting the establishment of the missions was to make the indigenous peoples of the frontier into citizens of the polis, but such was not the aim of the Franciscans. It is understandable that the missionaries did not promote the political aspects of their missionary endeavor, given their unpleasant experiences with Italian nationalism. Instead, the missionaries stressed, in addition to religious conversion, the social aspects of change for their indigenous charges. This was congruent with a new push in Europe by some Catholics, who were trying to counter the influence of socialists and communists by creating Catholic organizations among the working class. This kind of “working-class Christianity” focused on educating workers and artisans in religion and useful skills. The Franciscan missionaries adapted this focus to the missions, making the most talented boys proficient in practical arts, such as carpentry, distilling, tile-making, cobbling, and the like, while teaching the rest to be good agricultural workers. In turn, the friars, with the help of women of the local elite, taught the girls what they considered feminine skills, such as sewing, cooking, embroidery, and other such tasks. In essence, of course, the friars imposed upon native children their own views of gender roles, as expressed in southern European culture. This view was distinct from that of most indigenous peoples. In many indigenous societies in the Chaco region, for example, women were the prime horticulturalists and men did not engage in much agricultural labor.⁷

The Franciscans also tried to transform their charges’ bodies by dressing them in “civilized” clothes. Oddly, the “dress” that the missionaries promoted was that of the *cholos*, the working class people of the cities and small towns of Bolivia and Peru, or that of mestizo workers of Argentina. The clothing choices indicated well what the missionaries were trying to achieve: create a working class who would live in the urban mission settlements and provide the artisanal and agricultural labor for the frontier region. Indeed, the missionaries usually provided the children who went to school with free clothing, pants and shirts

7. This was the case with the Toba and Mataco Indians, ethnic groups that the Franciscans missionized in Bolivia and Argentina. See for example Marcelo Lagos, *La cuestión indígena en el estado y en la sociedad nacional. Gran Chaco, 1870–1920* (San Salvador de Jujuy: Universidad Nacional de Jujuy, 2000). Also see Erland Nordenskiöld, *Indianerleben: El Gran Chaco (Su’damerika)*, (Leipzig: G. Merseburger, 1913).

for the boys and skirts and blouses for the girls, to accustom them to dressing in a “civilized” style.

The Franciscans were also very concerned with enforcing southern European mores regarding sexuality on their charges. They insisted on new housing for the converted Indians, providing separate sleeping quarters for the parents and their children. Houses were laid out along straight streets along which a front door and a window allowed a passerby to see inside the home, a form of control by friars and indigenous authorities. Boys who went to school returned home at the end of the school day, whereas the girls, whenever possible, remained on school property in dormitories at night to preserve their virginity. In addition to a church, all missions boasted a large central plaza where the friars could call together the Indians. Unlike such plazas in Italy where people typically gathered, these tended to be huge and treeless, so that little social interaction took place other than when the whole community was called together.

The Franciscans were trying to create disciplined Christians who were doctrinally pure and would live a Christian and moral life. The missionaries did not realize that they were trying to reproduce the kind of society that they themselves had come from, with many of the same cultural assumptions but stripped of the secularism that had invaded their home countries.

THE FRANCISCANS AND THE LATIN AMERICAN STATE

The nineteenth-century missions lasted for some decades, and the Franciscans were relatively successful in creating the social and economic structures already described. They were able to do so in large part because their presence provided a form of control to the national government along the frontier, in areas where the state itself was very weak. In turn, the state exerted only sporadic control over the internal workings of the missions. This was even more the case than in the colonial period, when missions had forts associated with them. In the nineteenth century, there was no secular authority that could deal with the missionaries from a position of strength. In fact, with the possible exception of Argentina, the state wanted the missionaries on the frontier in good part because it was too weak to control the territory itself.

As a rule, the frontier settlers also supported the establishment of the missions. The local settlers welcomed the missions because they could provide a refuge in case of Indian raids or rebellions. The mission population also provided a ready, localized source of indigenous labor for landowners, who otherwise had to visit remote villages and cajole the natives to work through force or costly alliances. Also, the mission residents, under the supervision of the missionaries, posed no

military threat. Indeed the missions' main positive effect for the settlers was that they made permanent allies of the Indians who lived there, so that the settlers could rely on them in their struggles with other indigenous groups and expand their landholdings beyond the missions. The missions thus divided indigenous society even more sharply than it had been before, by interrupting the earlier patterns of shifting alliances in which settlers and indigenous villages often changed sides in ways that most settlers did not fully understand.

However, the presence of the state created many problems for the missions. The post-independence states were not the natural allies of the missions, as had been the case in the colonial period.⁸ Although conservative governments at the national level usually supported them, the missions' relations with local officials were often much more difficult. Local officials were often members of settler families or sided with them, thus pitting officials against the missions in disputes with the settlers.

Tensions with frontier colonists were built into the mission system almost by definition. After all, the missionaries' main purpose was to catechize the Indians; to accomplish this, they had to see that their charges remained on the missions. The missionaries realized that if the mission inhabitants spent too much time away from their homes, they could not be appropriately indoctrinated: they would lose the religious ways they had acquired through the mission routines. The result was that even as the settlers valued the missions for the labor force they put at their disposition, the Franciscans became loathe to give up their charges to work outside the mission villages.

Another problem was that national governments, even those sympathetic to the missionaries, saw the missions as instruments they could use to promote the growth of creole settlement and to extend state control over territories and native peoples. Although it is perhaps true that the most devout presidents concerned themselves with the missions' religious goals of conversion, national governments in general thought of the missions as frontier institutions that should move farther and farther into unconquered lands as soon as the indigenous peoples of a given area had been pacified. However, the state's agenda did not take into

8. This is of course an oversimplification. In Brazil and elsewhere there were often conflicts between missionaries and government officials. Moreover, the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Iberian possessions brought about the decline of their mission systems. For colonial Brazil, see for example Alexander Marchant, *From Barter to Slavery: The Economic Relations of Portuguese and Indians in the Settlement of Brazil, 1500–1580* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942) and Mathias Kiemen, *The Indian Policy of Portugal in the Amazon Region, 1614–1693* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954). For the effect of the Jesuit expulsions on the Paraguayan missions, see Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poderes en las misiones de Guaraníes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial SB, 2009) and Ignacio Telesca, *Tras los expulsos: Cambios demográficos y territoriales en el Paraguay después de la expulsión de los Jesuitas* (Asunción: Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, 2009).

TABLE 1
*Comparison of Nineteenth-Century Franciscan Missions
 in the Bolivian Chaco and Argentina*

Bolivia (Tarija Convent)		Argentina (Salta Convent)	
Mission	Years	Mission	Years
Itau	1845–1905	Esquina Grande	1856–1860
Chimeo	1849–1905	Purísima Concepción	
Aguairenda	1851–1911	del Bermejo	1859–1875
Tarairí	1854–1911	San Francisco de las	
San Francisco del		Conchas	1862–1864
Pilcomayo	1860–1905	San Miguel de Miraflores	1880–1890
San Antonio del		San Antonio	1868–1875
Pilcomayo	1863–1905		
Macharetí	1869–1949		
Tiguipa	1872–1949		

Source: Erick D. Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830–1949* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 52–53 and Ana A. Teruel, *Misiones, economía y sociedad. La frontera chaqueña del noroeste argentino en el siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2005), pp. 86–93.

account the friars' concern for their primary job—the conversion of the natives into stout Catholics. The Franciscans usually argued for a longer-term presence, realizing that the conversion process would often take various generations.

In fact, the relatively weak states in nineteenth-century Latin America were incapable of asserting control over their frontiers for an extended period, and this meant that the Franciscan missions generally remained in place much longer than government officials had planned. The only exception was Argentina, where vigorous local governments under the federalist system in the second half of the nineteenth century quickly asserted control over frontier regions. As a result, most missions in the Gran Chaco region lasted considerably less than ten years, whereas in Bolivia and Peru most missions lasted many decades.⁹ Table 1 presents a comparison between the longevity of the Chaco missions of the main convents, Tarija in Bolivia and Salta in Argentina.

Despite the relative weakness of the nation-states, the alliance between the Franciscans and national governments was essential for the survival of the frontier missions. National officials backed up the missionaries against local settlers, especially in preventing the exploitation of native labor by local landlords. This approach was successful in Bolivia until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the

9. See García Jordán, *Cruz y arado*, and Langer, “Liberal Policy and Frontier Missions,” pp. 197–213.

virulently anticlerical Liberal Party began to dismantle the Franciscan mission system. In Argentina, provincial governments were more beholden to local settlers, and the Argentine national government in the second half of the nineteenth century swung back and forth between anticlericalism and support for the Catholic Church. In the case of Argentina, the animosity against the missionaries was at times so strong that some Franciscans took up arms to defend themselves against the colonists. Some friars were jailed, and at the San Francisco de Conchas mission one friar was beaten and a lay brother killed by a gang of local creole toughs who wanted to appropriate for themselves the Indian workers.¹⁰

INDIGENOUS REACTION TO THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

The indigenous reaction to the Franciscans was not always positive, although many natives saw both advantages and disadvantages to the missions. By the nineteenth century, the friars had missionized only a few non-migratory agriculturalists—most of the others had already been appropriated by the creoles as farm labor. In this, the corn-growing Chiriguano were the exception. Much more common was the situation of the jungle tribes in the Peruvian Amazon, who subsisted on horticulture and hunting, or the semi-sedentary Chaco peoples such as the Tobas and Maticos, who were hunters and fishermen, though they had also by this time acquired some livestock.¹¹ In the Chaco in particular, most of these peoples were unable to remain long in fixed settlements because of their reliance on ever-changing seasonal resources. Although the Franciscans tried to get them to settle in one area, they were unable to do so for generations. Instead, the Indians thought of the missions as convenient places to leave people who were not mobile, such as the very young, the old, and the infirm. These they left in the missions while they hunted and harvested in the interior. The healthy adults returned only to visit their relatives or during the off-season, when fruits were scarce in the outback.

While the Tobas were the most extreme in this sense, the seasonality of the missions frustrated the missionaries to no end and led in large part to the tenuousness of the Chaco missions. Even the Bolivian missions that were better staffed and lasted longer were troublesome. The San Francisco del Pilcomayo mission, founded in 1860 for the Tobas, shut down in 1873 when all the Tobas left. The friars brought in Chiriguano from a nearby mission to populate the settlement

10. Fray Joaquín Remedi, "Memorial presentado al Presidente de la República Argentina Domingo Faustino Sarmiento por el prefecto de misiones (1870)," *Misioneros del Chaco Occidental: Escritos de franciscanos del Chaco salteño (1861–1914)*, (San Salvador de Jujuy: Editorial CEIC, 1995), p. 71.

11. For example, Marcela Mendoza in "The Western Toba: Family Life and Subsistence in a Former Hunter-Gatherer Society," in *Peoples of the Gran Chaco*, Elmer S. Miller, ed. (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), pp. 81–108 describes well the migrations of the Tobas.

and the Tobas drifted back, only to leave again in 1883 and in 1893. After that, the mission remained settled mainly by Chiriguano.¹² The other missions among the Tobas, all in Argentina, did not last very long. Only where the sugarcane estates in Salta and Jujuy claimed the Tobas as seasonal workers did the missions remain, but by now they were in the hands of Anglican missionaries.¹³ The Franciscans in particular had a fixed notion of what it meant to civilize the natives, and it did not include the flexibility characteristic of other missionary groups, such as the Anglicans and Lutherans. For the Franciscans, with their Mediterranean understanding of civilization as tied to urban centers and a settled life, dealing with peoples who refused to remain in the mission settlements proved to be difficult. For the missionaries, being Catholic meant staying in one place and going to mass on Sundays (and as many other days as possible) and interacting with the priest for other liturgical necessities, something that the non-sedentary peoples refused to do. During the colonial period, the missions were associated with forts and soldiers who could force the Indians to remain, but the republic-era missionaries did not have this option. For this reason, the Franciscan missionary enterprise was remarkably unsuccessful among these groups.

Even the vaunted success story of the agriculturalist Chiriguano was equivocal. As the century wore on, more and more adult males went to work in the sugarcane fields of northern Argentina, leaving the missions full of women, children, and old men. In any case, very few of the Indians in the nineteenth century wanted to convert to Catholicism—most had accepted the establishment of a mission mainly to preserve the community from the predation of land- and labor-hungry landlords. For this reason, the Franciscan goal of creating ideal Christian communities among the Indians did not work out—or at best took generations longer than they had expected. They did have success with the children, but only those who did not escape with their fathers at adolescence to the towns of Argentina.

CONCLUSION

The friars wanted to set up ideal communities in another, less-contaminated world, far from the anticlerical troubles that most had experienced in Europe. This was especially true of the Italian Franciscans, who arguably had suffered the most. They wanted to translate their vision into reality in mission territory, but the mission reality was quite different from the dreams that the idealistic

12. See Doroteo Giannecchini, *Historia natural, etnografía, geografía, lingüística del Chaco boliviano 1898* (Tarija: Fondo de Inversión Social, Centro Eclesial de Documentación, 1996), p. 195.

13. See Gaston Gordillo, *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

friars might have had when they boarded ships for the New World. This was the central conundrum of the Franciscan enterprise in the nineteenth century.

The friars faced recalcitrant officials, locally if not nationally. Eventually, all Latin American governments were caught up in a liberal, anticlerical wave, just as had happened in Europe. The settlers whose lands surrounded the missions were at first eager to welcome the missionaries because they could provide security and appeared able to bring together a concentration of natives who could then be exploited for their labor. However, the conscientious friars refused to have their charges work under the terrible conditions typical of hacienda labor, so many local landlords came in time to see the missionaries as impediments to frontier development. The settlers often tried to destroy the missions' Christian enterprise, which did not promise them any economic benefits.

Moreover, the Indians were not beings who could be converted easily. Most adults never converted and also refused the missionaries access to their children. Mission Indians often left for places where opportunities appeared to be better and where they did not have to live under the friars' relatively strict and very foreign regimen. Most (if not all) Indian caciques accepted the establishment of the missions not because they wanted to be converted but because the missions represented a means of refuge from the implacable demands and usurpations of land and human beings by the frontier creoles. At best, the children were converted, but again, many who finished school left for other opportunities and a lifestyle not regimented by religious rituals and expectations.

Despite these difficulties, the missions left important legacies, especially where they lasted for several decades, as in Bolivia. Over the longer term, the former mission communities created a new religious category, that of *neófitos* (neophytes), made up of persons who had grown up in the missions. Those who had remained in the missions often were much better educated than the vast majority of the creoles along the frontier. These former mission communities, although they were often overrun by non-Indians after secularization in the twentieth century, embraced many indigenous persons who had remained free from hacienda serfdom and often became part of an urbanized middle sector—teachers, carpenters, truck drivers, and the like. They also remained profoundly religious and proud of their heritage as *neófitos*, seeing themselves as superior to the impoverished agricultural workers on the haciendas. In many ex-mission communities, you can hear even today beautiful music emanating from the old churches, sung by the descendants of the mission Indians at Sunday mass.

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