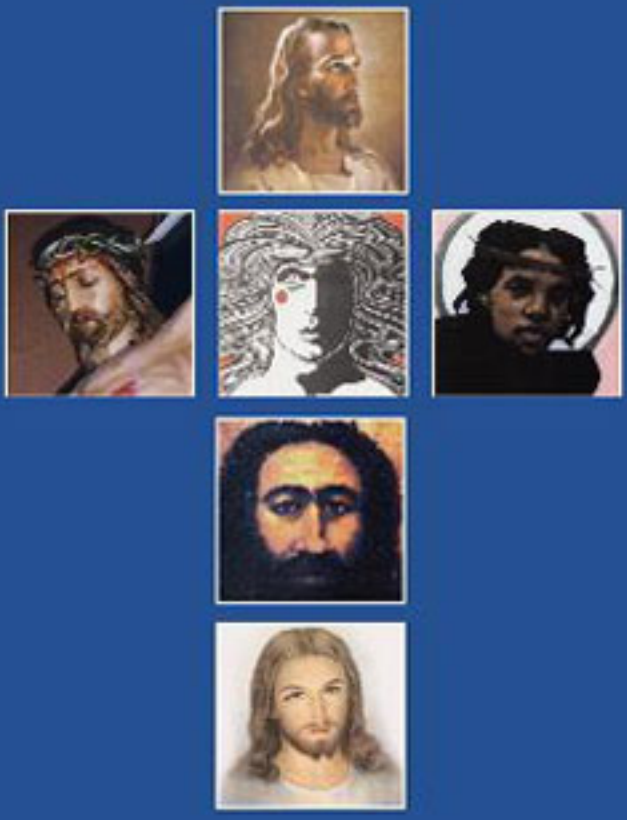
JESUS IN AMERICA

A History



PERSONAL SAVIOR, CULTURAL HERO, NATIONAL OBSESSION

RICHARD WIGHTMAN FOX

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In memory of my father
Matthew Bernard Fox
(1916–1998)

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THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB

I

My experience of Jesus begins with my father. An Irish-American Catholic television producer who moved my family from the East Coast to Los Angeles in 1953, Ben Fox was a man of prayer. And he wanted me to pray. Some of my earliest memories place me on the front seat of our woody station wagon, my legs bent under me, palm trees passing on either side as we rolled along, my father beaming over at me as I correctly put together a string of mysterious phrases. The rhythm of the syllables and the sound of the words made a comforting music. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." I had little idea what it meant, but I figured it made sense to the parents and the priests and the nuns. What mattered was that once the phrases were linked together right, the prayer felt beautiful and held the Father and the Son close together inside of it. Like my father and me in the car when his big smile traveled across the front seat from him to me and then back to him.

God was the father of Jesus, but there was that other human father, Joseph. He was a strangely uninvolved sort of father. I

wondered if he was away at work all the time, the way my father was. And then there was the miraculous mother of Jesus. More moments in the car with my father as his deep voice intoned the Hail Mary, and I repeated it word for word. The mysteries of this prayer were physical and feminine. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Was Mary's womb named "Jesus"? What was a womb, anyway? I understood that Jesus was the plum or apricot of his mother's body. He was a delicious baby, bathed in his mother's nectar. I imagined Mary as quiet and warm like my mother, with a beautiful smile like hers. There in the car, my father's voice carried the Hail Mary and the Glory Be as sweet opportunities to know and feel. Not everything could be understood. The two prayers seemed right just as they were, not comprehensible but not confusing either. They tied Jesus together with his Father and his Blessed Mother, and they tied all three of them together with everyone else who ever prayed the same prayers. We were all humming along on the road of prayer.

Sunday Mass was all about prayer too. At St. Martin of Tours in Brentwood I saw my blustery man-of-the-world father brought to his knees, bowing his head during the holiest part of the Mass, the Canon. The priest intoned the Agnus Dei, repeating three times in Latin the words "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us." Then he reached the phrase "Domine, non sum dignus, ut intres sub tectum meum; sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea" ("Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul will be healed"). I sat on the wooden pew and watched my father beating his breast three times. I watched as he worshiped Jesus and accepted what Jesus was offering: a chance to admit weakness and to hope for strength. My mother stayed home, since she was brought up Episcopalian, not Catholic. She always took my brother and me to our Catholic church when my father was away. She would sit in the pew watching and listening, not kneeling and beat-

ing her breast like the Catholics. Whenever the organ played during communion she would close her eyes to hear better. She always wished for more music. She could never get why Catholics did not want to sing as much as Episcopalians did.

When the time came to celebrate my First Communion, my father gave me a child's prayer book called *Pray Always*. Measuring four inches by two and a half inches, the little black leatherette book fit my hands perfectly. I was happy my father had given me this book full of holy pictures and words, just as I was glad later when he gave me an illustrated missal on my confirmation. He inscribed them both with fond words etched in his jagged handwriting. A pearl-colored crucifix was nestling in the inside cover of *Pray Always* with a one-inch-high gold-metal Jesus languishing on it. On the opposite page was printed a "Prayer before a Crucifix" whose words felt important and a little scary: "With deep affection and grief of soul I ponder within myself and mentally contemplate Thy five most precious wounds; having before my eyes that which David spake in prophecy: 'They pierced My hands and My feet; they have numbered all My bones.'" I knew that the five precious wounds were the ones Jesus had received during his Passion, when he was pierced in his feet, his hands, his side.

To be a child in the Catholic Church was to be aware of the suffering body. Father Murray, the pastor at St. Martin's, talked about martyred saints in his sermons, how they were beaten and bloodied for Christ's sake. They stood all the pain because they could talk straight to God in the middle of it. They would get a resurrected body in heaven, said Father Murray, but as I listened in the pew I was still thinking about their physical pain. If you followed Jesus, your body was going to be affected. I was not given Bible verses to memorize like Protestant children, I was not given hymns to sing, but the responses that I committed to memory from my blue paperback Baltimore Catechism, first published in 1891 and revised in 1941, taught me that agony accompanied glory: "Why did God make us? To show forth His goodness and to share with us

His everlasting happiness in heaven." "What were the chief sufferings of Christ? His bitter agony of soul, His bloody sweat, His cruel scourging, His crowning with thorns, His crucifixion, and His death on the cross."

I could see him suffering, in huge relief, on the life-size wooden crucifix attached to the wall behind the altar. During the hours for confession on late Saturday afternoons, the California sunshine would stream through a certain stained-glass window, casting a rich red light exactly on the wound in Christ's side. His head drooped; in death he looked more sorrowful than extinguished. When I looked at his face in that afternoon light, I would think of the part of the Salve Regina that goes, "To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." I felt sad looking at him, but the sadness had admiration and hope mixed into it.

The fourteen Stations of the Cross illustrated the story of Christ's suffering in even greater detail. Painted on the sides and back walls of St. Martin's, the Stations depicted his last hours. "Jesus is Condemned to Die" was the first Station, and "Jesus is laid in the tomb" was the last. They told the story of his suffering as the Roman soldiers pushed and prodded him up the path to Calvary. Simon of Cyrene helped him carry the cross, Veronica wiped his face, he said goodbye to his mother, and he met the women of Jerusalem. The ninth Station was the one that drew me in: "Jesus Falls the Third Time." Those five words mesmerized me. They rang with a stark finality that made me queasy. Did Jesus actually know it was the last time he would fall? Or was he too dizzy and disoriented to know what was happening? What a terrible kind of suffering! Maybe Jesus suffered less on the cross because at least by then he knew he had reached the end of his human road (see fig. 9).

The Stations and the crucifix instructed us that the human road was challenging for everyone. The sacraments and the prayers gave us support. So did the teachings of the church. I was let out of public elementary school early every Wednesday for catechism

class at church. I was probably about ten when Father Murray came to the class and announced that anyone who received communion every first Friday over nine consecutive months would get to see Jesus before dying. My father's son, I was the only kid in the class who decided this was too rich a prize to pass up. True, getting up in time to make seven o'clock Mass on the proper Friday nine months in a row was an ordeal. But I had my mother, willing to drive me to church early. I succeeded in making eight straight first Fridays, but then forgot all about the ninth. What a shock when I realized, too late for Mass, what day it was. I felt horrible. The next day I went to the sacristy to ask Father Murray what I should do. "Just take communion next month," he answered, "and it'll be fine." For a moment I was elated, but even before reaching home I knew Father Murray had to be wrong. He should have taken the hard line: nine more months of trudging to early-morning communion. His casual answer led me to question the whole scheme. If I was going to be granted the sight of Jesus before I died, I knew it was going to be Christ's doing, not mine.

One Saturday afternoon a few years later, I was sitting alone at the back of the church after going to confession. Having done my penance of Hail Marys and Our Fathers, I was looking straight ahead at the crucifix, then looking sideways to the ninth Station of the Cross: Jesus Falls the Third Time. I suppose I was trying to pray, but mostly I was just looking at Jesus. Without warning two insights entered my mind, one on top of the other. I felt them rushing into my head and took them as real experiences of illumination. The first was direct: religion might be a completely human creation, God could be an invention of our minds, and Jesus could be a wonderful wise man, nothing more. All the practices and structures of faith, the prayers, the statues, the breast-beating, the windows, seemed human. The second insight amounted to a judgment on the first: the initial insight was too neat and too stark. It presumed knowledge about something we could not know. It arbitrarily limited the real to the visible or provable. And it took the mystery out

of life. Human beings did invent religions, I told myself, but they did not invent God. They set up religions as a way of experiencing and re-experiencing their feeling that a God who lay beyond all human reckoning was somehow present in their midst. Jesus was a unique person with a double identity: a man whose teachings could be studied, and the mysterious emissary of an incomprehensibly grand divine power. Jesus was irresistibly elusive: available to be known yet always beyond knowing.

My father had given me a double gift. He wanted me to pray and he wanted me to think. Questions were welcome, a sign of God's benevolence in creating the human mind. My early experience ensured that there would be questions aplenty. My mother sat home while I prayed at Mass, or else she sat quietly in the pew because my father was away. She loved Jesus too, and met him in the lines of her favorite hymns from childhood—hymns like Charles Wesley's rousing Easter creation "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today." She sang it as a child in the choir at her Episcopal church. It is a cascade of "Alleluias" along with fine poetry such as "Lives again our glorious King / Where, O death, is now thy sting? / Once He died our souls to save / Where thy victory, O grave?" My mother never tried to teach me anything about religion, but she taught me anyway. She devoted herself to others. The paths to Jesus are many.

So are the paths to God. My best friend growing up in Los Angeles was Jewish. I met Ken Adashek when I was ten. We played Little League baseball together, went to the movies, sat in the same classrooms. In late December we would compare Hanukkah presents and Christmas presents. I thought he was lucky to have eight nights of gifts, and he thought I was lucky to get a huge bonanza on a single morning. He was not envious of my Christmas tree, though he did wonder why his next-door neighbors, also Jewish, got to have a tree when his family did not. It never occurred to me for a moment that Ken would be better off being a Christian, any more than that my mother should be a Catholic. I loved watching Ken's family light their menorah candles and hearing them recite

some Hebrew prayers together. It brought to mind all the centuries when Ken's European ancestors lit candles and spoke those same words. His Reform synagogue was directly across Sunset Boulevard from St. Martin of Tours Church. When he had his confirmation I sat in the congregation and listened in proud amazement as he spoke to the assembly in Hebrew. If only Catholics could have a confirmation ritual like that, I said to myself. Ken would come to my church and I would recite a Latin prayer in front of the congregation, and afterward we would celebrate by getting our gloves and playing catch while I told him what the Latin meant.

I look back in wonder and appreciation at my father's linkage of Catholic conviction with urgent inquiry. One day in his old age he was riding in a Santa Monica city bus when he overheard the driver talking about Jesus. The driver was engaged in discussion with an ebullient woman sitting over to his right. Her hand was resting on the shopping bags piled up beside her. My father got up to join in. The woman put the bags on the floor so he could sit down. Before long they were the last three people on the bus. The driver pulled the bus over to the side of the street and they remained there for half an hour exchanging views on whether the resurrection was a fact or only a story. My father kept digging for the argument that would persuade the other two it was a fact. One part of him wanted to seal the victory; the other part wanted to listen to what they had to say. He reveled in the conversation as much as the conclusion. He called me up to tell me what had happened.

II

It is April 21, 2000, Good Friday. Christians around the world are commemorating the crucifixion of their Son of God, a Jewish healer and teacher from Nazareth who ran afoul of the Roman authorities in Palestine about 1,970 years ago. The crucifixion of Jesus, all scholars are agreed, is a demonstrable historical fact. Christians

claim to know, by faith, much more about Jesus, starting with his resurrection on Easter. But we can all know, by studying history, that Jesus was crucified. The historical evidence is much clearer about that than it is about such matters as his birthplace (many biblical scholars doubt the historicity of the Bethlehem story and believe he was born in Nazareth) or his trial before Pilate (many scholars believe that scene to be fictional in whole or in part).

I am walking along in the Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) procession in the Colonia neighborhood in Oxnard, California. For thirty years the Chicano Catholics of Colonia, whose settlement there precedes U.S. statehood (1850), have performed this Good Friday reenactment. A bearded, barefoot Jesus in a long white robe and a crown of thorns drags his cross slowly down Juanita Avenue. Roman soldiers right on his heels are whipping his red-stained back. His eyes are cast down. Hundreds of the faithful, including a throng of children, press tightly behind the soldiers. Residents stand on balconies, and shoppers clog sidewalks in front of Lupita's Panadería and García's Discoteca y Video (see fig. 4).

Three times Jesus falls under the weight of the cross. When the procession reaches the plateau on the grassy field behind Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Church, the Roman soldiers lay Jesus and the two thieves on their crosses, then hoist them upright (see fig. 5). Small children sitting behind a rope one hundred feet away scoot under it for a better view. Many minutes pass before the soldiers lift a sponge on a stick to Christ's lips (the gospels say the sponge was filled with vinegar). Many more minutes pass before they put a microphone on the end of the same stick so we can all hear Jesus say, "Dios mío, Dios mío, ¿porqué me has desamparado?" ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?") and "Padre, en tus manos encomiendo mi espíritu" ("Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"). Four- and five-year-old children sit transfixed as Jesus expires. The soldiers take down the body, and Mary, with a microphone concealed in her bright blue robe, sobs into it. Her wailing unsettles the crowd for another quarter of an hour.

Finally a soldier slings Jesus over his shoulder and takes him away as the crowd disperses. This soldier and his comrades are now out of character, chatting with friends and family as they depart the scene. No one is paying any attention to Jesus, the only one left in character. He is a limp rag of flesh bouncing on the soldier's shoulder as he is carried to the sacristy. In the church hundreds of people have already assembled for a communion service. Padre Eusebio Elizondo reminds everyone that in the original, first-century Via Crucis, death was not the end for Jesus. He rose again on the third day, and his body is present in ours when we eat the bread of life and believe in him.

The next day I am in the audience at the modern glistening Crystal Cathedral, where the Garden Grove Community Church is putting on a pageant called "The Glory of Easter." This professional production features equity actors in the main roles. Tickets cost fifteen to thirty dollars, a fair price given the elaborate special effects, live camels and horses, and scores of period costumes for the extras drawn from the congregation. The Reverend Robert Schuller founded this church in a parking lot in the 1940s, and even today there is an "in-car worship center" adjoining the massive glass-walled cathedral—a Philip Johnson creation of 1980 that resembles an especially sleek New York City skyscraper. The little vehicles patrolling the parking area have "Traffic Ministry" painted on their sides. Schuller has mastered the upbeat message of self-development and mental peace through Christian belief, the liberal doctrine made famous in the twentieth century by Norman Vincent Peale.

Schuller has also mastered television preaching. His weekly "Hour of Power" contested the airwave dominance of conservative televangelism in the 1980s and 1990s. In a 2001 telecast Schuller said that Philippians 4:13 expressed the main idea of his ministry: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He called that verse a "scientifically provable" statement. "You are a creature designed by God to have positive expectations for your future."

People who succeed, he told his sun-drenched audience, have a sense of direction, a passion, and a drive. Jesus will gladly grant you those things. Some televangelists mocked Schuller's straightforward empowerment message, but no one could doubt either his success or the impact of can-do thinking on many twentieth-century evangelists, including some of the most conservative.[1]

The Crystal Cathedral seats almost three thousand, and at the start of "The Glory of Easter" the Reverend Schuller's recorded voice tells the full house that what we are about to see is the staging of "an historical truth, the way it really happened." What we actually see is a play composed by an author who had to choose among four gospel accounts that tell the story of the Passion of Jesus with different, and sometimes contradictory, details. "The Glory of Easter" contains a brief crucifixion scene—ten seconds at most, as a curtain is lifted to reveal an actor playing Christ on the cross—but the resurrection scene goes on for many minutes. White-robed women wearing angel wings shoot forth from the rafters, suspended by wires, and perform a synchronized, midair ballet. Triumphant music and a laser-light show announce that Jesus has risen.

The Oxnard and Garden Grove Passion pageants try to represent the fundamental truth about Jesus. The Catholic one centers on the crucified body of Christ; the Protestant one, on the miracle-working savior and resurrected Lord. Christian viewers will disagree about how successfully the pageants communicate gospel truths. Many will find the Via Crucis performance interminable, maudlin, and so fixated on Christ's flesh that it forgets his eternal spirit. Many will find "The Glory of Easter" glib, passionless, and dominated by state-of-the-art effects that eclipse Christ's simple humanity. But everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, will agree that the performances are cultural events as well as religious ones. They are cultural in being artistic, but in a deeper sense they are cultural in displaying some basic rituals of American life. They give us a glimpse of what many Americans believe and how they act out their beliefs. They show how certain sacred traditions brought

to the Americas from Europe centuries ago have been adapted to contemporary life. Whether Jesus is the eternal Son of God or only a great first-century Palestinian Jewish wise man, there is no doubt about his prominence as an American cultural figure over the last four centuries. For most American Christians today, Jesus is still "true God and true man," as the church decreed at Chalcedon in the year 451 of the Common Era. The actual Jesus was such a true man that he was embodied culturally as well as biologically in first-century Galilee. He was always Jesus of *Nazareth* in his own lifetime, always a practicing Jew from Galilee. Only after death did his Jewish and Gentile followers come to know him as Jesus, the "Christ" (meaning "messiah," or "anointed one"). Only much later did he completely lose his character as a Palestinian Jew and become firmly established in cultural terms as a trans-historical, divine member of the Trinity.[2]

Neither Jesus of Nazareth nor Paul of Tarsus, the great builder of early Christianity, could have guessed it, but as the centuries crept along, each successive evangelized society would embody Jesus differently. Christians of later epochs would have to swallow the hard truth that even if Jesus Christ remained always "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever," as Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (13:8) put it, he had entered history as a cultural figure whose shape and meaning shifted. He would be perpetually reborn in one culture after another. Whether he was in fact God (as most Christians believe), a lesser but still divine being (as some Christians believe), or a wise human being inspired by God (as some Christians and many non-Christians believe), he was indisputably a man walking the earth in the first century. His incarnation guaranteed that each later culture would grasp him anew, for each would have a different view of what it meant to be human. Jesus had to be reborn if he was going to inspire or even make sense to people in every era.

Of course the broad features of Christ's identity were passed along from one culture to another. At different times greater or

lesser weight was assigned to his roles as divine king, sacrificial redeemer, holy child, apocalyptic prophet, miracle worker and healer, wisdom teacher, social critic and reformer, luminous personality. Jesus assumed regional and national shapes as those perennial features of his identity were adapted to local conditions. In nineteenth-century America, for example, urban and rural working-class Catholics, Baptists, and Methodists all appealed to Jesus for support as they sought leverage against mostly Anglo American cultural, political, and economic establishments. They made Jesus a democrat, a man of the people, a crucified carpenter. They did not stop regarding him as "Lord" and "King." Those patriarchal labels were vital supports for Baptist and Methodist men as they eased women out of the few positions of authority they had managed to obtain during the hectic early-nineteenth-century years of evangelical expansion. Hierarchical labels for Jesus were also important supports for the episcopal hierarchies (i.e., bishops) of the Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists. Jesus was reborn again and again in nineteenth-century America, as one group after another construed his divinity or his humanity in novel ways.[3]

In retrospect we might imagine that Jesus helped unite nineteenth-century Catholic and Protestant Americans. When they jointly encountered Native Americans or Asian immigrants, he probably did. But as they confronted each other in the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, Catholics and Protestants used Christ mainly to emphasize their differences. Each group tried to protect him from contamination by the other. Occasionally ethnic and religious animosity turned violent—the burning of Catholic convents or churches, assaults on Protestant neighborhoods—but in the main the war was ideological. Pitched cultural battles were fought over many issues, including the right way to represent and worship Christ. Catholics took heart from the image of Jesus as the physically abused, suffering servant, a depiction the Irish had already nurtured under English oppression. It was a portrayal guaranteed to alienate, if not disgust, most Protestants, who regarded it as me-

dieval and idolatrous. Each group got to savor the conviction that it was being faithful to the original Jesus of the gospels.[4]

Protestants, especially northern, educated, liberal ones, held Jesus up as the ultimate individualist, the model of the self-made man. Catholics and many other Protestants praised him as the consummate family man. Catholics, naturally, kept him tied to his Holy Family of origin, an only son and a celibate adult. Protestants gave him siblings and imagined he might have been married. Jesus could be pushed in either direction, autonomous individual or family pillar. The solitary divine-human person promoted the relentless northern Protestant assault upon any customary practice that got in the way of personal development or social progress. Modernizing Americans liberalized Jesus into a God of pure "love" who had nothing but scorn for inherited "law," a radical critic of all "Pharisees" who preferred old-fashioned constraints to boundless freedom. Meanwhile, the Catholics' Holy Family member and the Protestants' personal savior could stand for the importance of tradition. With Jesus as their hero Americans could have their cake of old-time values and devour it too. They could get divine sanction for making all things new while believing that they honored their most precious inheritance of all, Christ himself. They could see themselves as a chosen people—the ancient Hebrew notion adopted in the seventeenth century by the Puritans—but a people chosen now for free-spirited development as individuals. Jesus, the chosen Son, provided vital underpinning for this *novus ordo seclorum* (new order of the ages): a nation of individuals embarked on an open-ended journey of territorial expansion, economic innovation, and social experimentation. As a symbolic figure, Jesus could offer moral support for that journey while also raising moral objections. Protestant and Catholic Americans could never have remade their nation in the nineteenth century without trusting Jesus to propel them forward while steering them away from sin.

The overall national infatuation with Jesus has been deepened by an array of subcultural traditions of allegiance to him. African

Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Anglo Americans, Native Americans, and many others have developed their identities in relation to Christ. Within each group he helps to link the past and present. Individual immigrants can choose to worship him in ways familiar to them from the Old World or select new ones that stand for and help speed their adaptation to America. Today many Latino Catholics are combining old and new by relying on Catholic rituals when marking important life events and attending evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant services when seeking emotionally potent encounters with Christ. Hispanic Protestantism takes over from the Catholic tradition a far more corporeal Jesus than most American Protestants recognize. This physical Jesus fits naturally with the hands-on healing practices of much Protestant revivalism and Pentecostalism.[5]

The African American tie to Jesus is the most historically complex of all the ethnically differentiated faiths in him. While it stemmed originally from a forced adjustment to the white world, it ended up exerting a major impact on the southern white Protestant culture to which blacks had been forced to adapt. Early on Jesus emerged for some African American slaves as the figure who bridged the African past and the American present. By the early nineteenth century, slaves had become Christians in large numbers. African convictions about the living presence of the dead and the reality of the unseen world made Jesus a powerful presence in dreams as well as wakeful states. Thanks to his paradoxical place as Lord and servant of both highborn and low, Jesus came to stand in African American religion for the mysterious agency through which, against all appearances, the last would ultimately—and even now, in faith—be made first. The last had a forceful cultural impact on the first. White Protestantism immediately understood the religious power of the black spiritual. African American creations such as "Steal Away to Jesus" or "Balm in Gilead" spoke of distinctively black yearnings for temporal as well as spiritual free-

dom and consolation. But whites could appropriate those spirituals as pleas for Jesus to free them from bondage to sin. "If you can't preach like Peter," declares the final verse of "Balm in Gilead," "if you can't pray like Paul, just tell the love of Jesus, and say He died for all."[6]

III

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the United States became a modern, industrial society while remaining vigorously religious. At the start of the twenty-first century the United States was by far the most religious of advanced industrial societies. In 2003 eight in ten adult Americans said they were Christians (about half saying they were Protestant, about one-fourth saying they were Catholic). Four in ten Americans said they were "born again" or evangelical Christians. Four in ten also said they attended religious services every week—a figure roughly double that of most of the industrialized West. Surveys in the 1970s and 1980s showed that a colossal 70 percent of adult Americans said they believed Jesus was God or the Son of God, not just the founder of a great religion like Muhammad or the Buddha. Roughly the same proportion was certain Christ was resurrected from the dead. Half of all Americans—60 percent of the Protestants and 40 percent of the Catholics—reported that they had "tried to encourage someone to believe in Jesus Christ or to accept Him as his or her Savior."[7]

One study in 2001 suggested that the Christian percentage of the adult American population fell in the 1990s, from 86 percent in 1990 to 77 percent in 2001. The Christian percentage was down not because other religions were attracting former Christians, but because the unchurched segment of the adult population was up. (Because of overall population growth, the *number* of American Christians rose over the decade of the 1990s—by eight million—even as their *proportion* declined.) Those adult Americans claiming

no religion at all have almost doubled as a proportion of the population. Most of these new secularists are former (at least nominal) Christians, and like their forebears in earlier centuries, they may continue to feel an ethical or cultural attachment to Jesus. Sociologists Michael Hout and Claude Fisher note that many people who have stopped calling themselves Christians have not surrendered their Christian beliefs. They simply hold those beliefs less passionately or dogmatically than many practicing Christians do.[8]

The non-Christian part of the population has grown too, but not significantly enough to affect overall American attachment to Jesus. Jews have actually dropped in absolute numbers since 1990 (from 3.1 million adults to 2.8 million) and are now 1.3 percent of the adult population. Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus have all at least doubled their numbers since 1990. There are now well over a million Muslim Americans, a million Buddhist Americans, and almost a million Hindus. But Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu citizens still total less than 2 percent of the population.[9]

Even if Jesus is losing a small percentage of his religious disciples in America at the start of the twenty-first century, he is certainly an omnipresent symbol of religious, ethical, and philosophical seeking. He is so pervasive culturally that some representations of him have no apparent religious reference at all. Over the last generation, for example, his crucifix has taken on a secular life of its own as a hip fashion statement. But the commercialization of the cross—and of Jesus himself in secular as well as Christian music—may still carry with it a moral or spiritual yearning that marks it as religious. It is hard to separate religious from secular piety where Jesus is concerned. Amy Grant's 1991 album "Heart in Motion," which features the blockbuster romantic hit "That's What Love Is For," ends with "Hope Set High": try as you might "to see the light" on your own, you find out that "anything good" in life comes "from Jesus." Amy Grant identifies herself as a "religious" artist, one who happens also to sing secular songs. A more complete intermingling of the secular and the religious is revealed in

the free-floating cultural status of "Amazing Grace." Is it a secular song or a religious hymn? Written in the late eighteenth century by the English pastor Joseph Newton, a former captain of a slave ship, it is frequently sung today at public events that are not explicitly Christian but are explicitly reflective, meditative, or celebratory. It has evolved into an "American" anthem affirming the whole local or national community's relation to God, or to a broadly spiritual if not religious "Judeo-Christian" tradition. Perhaps the hymn works in that secularized context because it never mentions Jesus but does feature some recognizably Jesus language (the blind see, the lost are found).[10]

Over two-thirds of the adults in one of the most modernized and industrialized countries in the world believe that a first-century Palestinian Jewish teacher and healer was and is the incarnation of God. Even if many of these people merely endorse the divinity of Christ when a pollster prods them to think about it, this percentage is about twice as large as the figure in most of the industrial West. This is a striking instance of American uniqueness. Why do so many Americans remain persuaded that Jesus is divine? Part of the explanation is that Christian churches have long since entered the deep fabric of American social life. They are community centers and charitable organizations as well as places of worship. People still believe in Jesus because they wish to belong to the assemblies that preach and celebrate him. Belief follows, without being wholly determined by, social placement and aspiration. In Europe, where the churches have tended to stick to charity work and to religious rites narrowly defined, leaving community-building and social fellowship aside, rates of churchgoing and membership—and of belief in Christ—are substantially lower.[11]

Churchgoers may like the social benefits of religion yet still practice their faith primarily because they believe in God. Their piety is not only a function of inherited habit, lifestyle choice, or social calculation. In the face of the mysteries and joys and reversals of their lives, many people seek the answers, comforts, and provocations

that religion can provide. Where else can they go to express a spectrum of deep feelings about love, peace, sin, loss, and justice? Where else are they to look for help confronting the ultimate dilemmas of existence, or for maintaining emotional bonds with their ancestors? Where else can they assemble regularly to marvel at the wonders and bemoan the betrayals of everyday life? Jesus, for most Americans, is the God-man who offers forgiveness, succor, and hope. In the classic dialectic of Christian religious experience, he makes them feel better by loving them and he makes them feel worse by reminding them of their failure to love him and their neighbors.

Yet even when faith is deeply spiritual it is also cultural, the product of a group's history. Most Americans have their religious experiences with Jesus because for historical reasons it is he, not Buddha or Muhammad, who is recognized as the appointed messenger of divine wisdom—and in the classic Christian vision, as the mediator who reopened the channels of supernatural grace. Most American Christians believe Christ to be a transcendent and unchanging divine person. But human beings seeking to know such a resplendent person are forced to rely on culturally available forms of knowing. Naturally, those sanctioned means of knowing change with time. Recognizing that knowledge of Jesus is culturally shaped does not compromise his divinity. Suppose there is a God who wishes to make contact with individuals through their religious experiences. That God would have no choice but to work with the cultural forms that people can recognize as religious experiences. And those forms evolve historically. Today God does not communicate with Americans through omens or dreams or thunderbolts or bodily possession or the visions of saintly children as often as he did in earlier centuries. God communicates in modes that are culturally prominent in our day, such as silent prayer, or speaking in tongues, or physical and mental healing, or contemplating nature beside a mountain brook. These cultural forms change very slowly, and forms that have fallen into disuse are sometimes revived in later eras. In the United States today many

people become or remain believing Christians because they wish to keep having the kinds of Bible-based religious experiences they imagine their ancestors had. They join churches to have a social life, but not just any social life. They choose a community either because it has preserved religious customs they cherish from the past or because it proclaims values they have embraced as adults. One reason why the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) is expanding so dramatically is that many former Catholics and Protestants see it as the most fully committed to "family values" of any American religion.[12]

IV

The name of Jesus, Emerson said in 1838, "is not so much written as ploughed into the history of this world." For almost two millennia Jesus has been ploughed and reploughed into Western thought, worship, and consciousness. Every generation has inherited all earlier conceptions and practices about Jesus and then added more of its own. That puts me in a challenging position as the author of this book. No single volume can offer full coverage of what millions of believers and nonbelievers, even in a single geographical area, have said, written, and felt about Jesus. Far more will have to be left out than included. The writer of John's Gospel said it well at the end of his labors: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." Amen indeed. The only way to begin to do justice to American experiences of Jesus is to acknowledge at the outset that the topic can only be pointed at, not covered. In fact, the more you look at it, the bigger it gets. "Jesus in America" includes all the theology, preaching, worship, literature, art, music, plays, films, architecture, letters, and diaries devoted to him, along with countless cultural practices from Christmas pageants and municipal crèches

to public prayers at the start of high school football games. The Library of Congress owns 17,239 books about Jesus and 7,719 more about God. A good number of them were published overseas, but many of those circulated widely in the American colonies and the United States.[13]

But all that is only the beginning. My subject is not just the history of images of Jesus, ideas about Jesus, and customs concerning Jesus. It is the history of American experiences of Jesus. Think of the American yearning for Jesus over the last four centuries as a din of sung and spoken language, thought, and feeling. Christians have expressed their craving to be close to Christ in a chorus of praise and petition that has peaked on the Sabbath but been audible too outside the boundaries of formal worship. Then consider the hundreds and thousands of people in America who have been praying silently to Jesus at every instant of the last four hundred years, in a chorus of pleading and thanksgiving that has never dimmed. If believers are right that their Lord and savior is hearing every word of this, imagine Christ's powers of attention. For Jesus there can be no respite. A God who hears everything, patiently and sympathetically, must take listening as a form of sustenance. I think it was Thomas Aquinas who mused that heaven would be a paradise of constant conversation with multiple partners at once. Easy for a contemplative Dominican monk to say, a man with all the silence he could desire. But that state of constant conversation may be what it is like for a divine Jesus, especially if those believers are right who claim that Christ speaks to them as well as listens.

What I can hope to do in my book is to keep my ear open to that collective cry for Christ while throwing some light on the basic historical patterns and particularities of Americans' devotion to Jesus. I want to document the diversity of American experiences of Christ across time—not every one of them, but a fair sample. I want to examine the intersection between Christ's multiple identities and certain historical events and trends—not all of them, but some of the most important ones. I want to analyze how Jesus crossed and

helped reconstitute the very blurry line between the "religious" and the "secular" in American history. Most of all, I want to think about the relation between faith and culture without presuming that faith is simply the product of culture. I do not know whether believers are right about Jesus' being a divine Comforter who sends them his spirit. I do think that their belief in him makes perfect sense, and I know that their belief has profoundly shaped American and world history.

I restrict myself to American experiences of Jesus despite the distortion imposed by that choice. The seventeenth-century North American encounter between Indians and the European Christ took place in the larger context of Caribbean and South American meetings with European cultures. The Puritans and other colonial residents of the future United States were of course literally English, since there was not yet a United States. But Puritanism, fundamental to the formation of American national mythologies and to Protestant American piety in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was an English as well as American religious movement. The evangelical revival of the eighteenth century was trans-Atlantic, not American. Nineteenth-century American Christians read John Keats and Ernst Renan and Mrs. Humphrey Ward on Jesus alongside Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Sheldon. The logic behind my choice of "America"—the United States and its colonial antecedents, with a nod to seventeenth-century New France, of which Protestant New Englanders were acutely conscious—is that in America the cultural incarnation of Jesus eventually took on some discrete meanings and forms. Again and again Jesus has helped Americans understand themselves as distinctively American—sometimes, ironically, by lending support to those who thought the truest "American" perspective was a cosmopolitan, trans-national one. The great Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner wrote in 1925 that Jesus of Nazareth was such a radical critic of national loyalties that he questioned even the Jewish nation, without which the Jewish religion that Jesus loved was bound to languish. Christ's

allegiance was to God, and to the purification of each individual's engagement with God, whatever the cost might be to a stable social peace or a secure national identity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most Americans tried to combine Christ's concern for personal purity with a decidedly un-Christlike embrace of the nation. Some Christians, aware of the contradiction, tried to adapt their Americanism to their Christianity by redefining patriotism as a trans-national faith in liberty, democracy, or modernization.[14]

I was tempted to limit this book to the post-revolutionary United States, permitting a more detailed treatment of the last two centuries. I decided that some coverage of the colonial period was indispensable for grasping what happened to Jesus in America in the nineteenth century. Essential contours of American devotion to Christ were "ploughed" into American culture well before the Revolution. Later developments cannot be understood apart from what preachers and thinkers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin said and did about Jesus in the eighteenth century. What they did and said, in turn, can be understood only in relation to what Catholics as well as Protestants were doing and saying in early-seventeenth-century New France, New Spain, and New England. It is crucial to start with the Catholic and Protestant Christs of the seventeenth century to show that Catholicism was a major force in America from the beginning, despite the small percentage of Catholics in the population before the 1840s. Protestants saw their own settlement in America from the seventeenth century forward as a brake upon Catholic influence in the New World. Indeed, they hoped eventually to liberate Indians from the "popish" errors to which they had already been exposed.

Yet in the end I have given more attention to Protestants than to Catholics. If this book were a history of American religions, I would say more about Catholicism and other non-Protestant religions. But in my view a book on Jesus in America has to lean to the Protestants. Over the course of American history Protestants did much more innovating in their conceptions and experiences of Jesus.

Protestants have recurrently voiced a double aspiration: to restore Jesus to his original purity—corrupted as much by their fellow Protestants as by Catholics—and to remake society in the image of his "Kingdom." On the whole Catholics have been satisfied that they already have complete access to the real Jesus. True, like Protestants they have experienced revivals of piety. But they have felt little desire to purify their cultural incarnations of him—save in the Vatican II period of the late twentieth century. Compared to Calvinistic Protestants, they have also been generally skeptical about remaking society, despite often seeing Jesus as a broadly "pro-life" advocate of social justice for the poor and mistreated. The Protestant drive to get closer to Jesus fuels a perennial quest to reimagine him so that he can be fully himself and fully usable in the struggle to transform society. I certainly am not implying that Protestant versions of Jesus are more significant religiously than Catholic ones. In America there have simply been more Protestant versions, just as there have always (in English-speaking America) been more Protestants than Catholics. Today Roman Catholics are the single largest American denomination, but Protestants still outnumber them by more than two to one. In earlier times Protestants were even more dominant.[15]

V

This book is for believers and nonbelievers alike. It is not a book about whether one should believe in Jesus, but about how Americans have believed in and portrayed him. Those who know a living Christ by faith share some important ground with those who do not. Both groups must agree that Jesus has had a historical trajectory within culture, even if (as most believers hold) he is also a divine being who transcends culture. "There is nothing in history," Emerson said in the 1840s, "to parallel the influence of Jesus Christ." Emerson was astonished at the staying power of a divine

Jesus in "these learned and practical nations of modern Europe and America." He predicted that a thousand years hence people would have a hard time believing that nineteenth-century "physicians, metaphysicians, mathematicians, critics, and merchants" had taken seriously the idea that a "poor Jewish boy" had been the incarnation of "the Triune God." Whatever our descendents may think a thousand years hence, we can be sure that a vast majority of Americans in 2004 give Jesus their credence and their love. For most believers he is a personal savior, for most nonbelievers he is a philosophical and ethical sage, and for all Americans he is an immediately recognizable cultural symbol. Jesus continues to help a vast population of Americans make sense of their deepest hopes, fears, cravings, and transgressions.[16]

In all likelihood Jesus is permanently layered into the American cultural soil. Yet given how much he has changed in the last four hundred years of his American incarnations, he will surely evolve substantially in response to social and religious developments we cannot foresee. Old depictions of Jesus will resurface, and new ones will emerge. His identity is elastic. There is no single Jesus, in America or anywhere else. He can lead crusades like a warrior and he can turn the other cheek. He can thrash about in the temple and cup a blind person's face in his hands. He can withdraw into the desert like John the Baptist and he can gather the little children. He can call for fulfilling the law, then for destroying it. He can linger with his mother and tell his disciples to leave their families behind. He can warn that the end-time is near and sketch the outlines of a new society. Americans will try their best to make him a predictable source of comfort, but he will remain unpredictable. New prophets will rise up to remind their countrymen that Jesus delivers condemnation along with solace, and many Americans will try to follow his injunction to lose their lives so as to find them.

As long as Americans take Jesus as their personal savior or cultural hero, some of them will carry their devotion to the point of obsession. Some will take him to be the sole answer to life's conun-

drums or the single valid path to salvation, and a segment of those believers will view alternative faiths with alarm. Some non-Christians will respond obsessively themselves, fearing the fanaticism that they detect either on or just below the surface of Christian conviction. They are right that Christianity, like all religions (including atheism), attracts some people who are adamant about the sins of others and impressed with their own purity. But even those Christians who worry more about the beam in their own eye rather than the splinter in their neighbor's eye will strike some nonbelievers as overwrought, if not compulsive. Jesus preached permanent revolution in the self. For a follower of Christ there can be no end to the self-scrutiny, and no end to the discovery of self-love masquerading as holiness. If Jesus keeps his lofty station as a prime American cultural hero in centuries to come, it will be for two reasons: because so many Christians find him useful as a means of congratulating themselves, and because so many find him indispensable as a critic of their self-congratulation.

For any foreseeable future, a large majority of Americans will continue praising Christ. They will find ingenious new ways to do as "Balm in Gilead" suggests: "just tell the love of Jesus." At the Iowa State Fair in 1999, champion butter sculptor Norma "Duffy" Lyon took a ton of butter and produced a rendition of the Last Supper. She had been sculpting butter for forty years, and was famous across the Midwest for her "butter cow." She chose the Last Supper to mark her seventieth birthday as well as her forty years of sculpting. It took her two weeks of work. The newspaper reported that "twelve disciples, with their robes, long hair and beards, appear in deep thought as their eyes look toward Jesus Christ." Mrs. Lyon, a mother of nine and grandmother of twenty-three, showed she was a biblical interpreter as well as a sculptor. According to the newspaper she "created the disciples in more relaxed positions than people might expect. Lyon, a lay minister at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Toledo, notes that in at least three references in the Bible, the disciples were 'reclining' during the Last Supper. She also said

some people might disagree with the youthful look of the butter disciples, but she said most of the real ones were younger than Jesus." Lines of appreciative fairgoers stretched around the Agriculture Building to relish what Duffy Lyon had wrought "with the most common of breakfast spreads."[17]

The history of Jesus in America begins in childhood, as almost all Americans, Christian and non-Christian, encounter the figure of Christ in one fashion or another. Christian children encounter him in family rituals, church lessons, and public performances, such as the Via Crucis procession on Good Friday. Non-Christians meet him in public exhibits—municipal crèches, Christmas carols at malls, Christmas advertising in stores—and in family or schoolyard conversations. Christians take these observances as part of the natural American order of things, so much so that they have trouble noticing the pain and confusion Jesus has caused for many Jewish American children over the last two centuries. How could Jesus be a problem for anyone, Christians may ask, since he stands only for love, sacrifice, and peace? In practice, in America as in Europe, Christ has also stood for brutal intolerance and callous discrimination. It is difficult enough for children to cope with the milder forms of social exclusion that adults in a cultural minority group have learned to take for granted. Jewish children must still sometimes hear Jews denigrated or threatened as "Christ-killers." No wonder Jewish groups have mobilized opposition to such twentieth-century American films as D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927), and Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973).[18]

In view of the sad track record of anti-Semitic depictions in Hollywood Jesus movies, it is no wonder that concerns were raised in 2003 about Mel Gibson's just-released film *The Passion.* Judging by the movie's trailer, few children are going to see the film. It is far too violent and bloody. Yet parents can use the occasion of publicity around the film to teach their children some basic truths. First, we cannot be sure what role the Jewish leadership played in

the execution of Christ. The gospels are not histories, but stories and compilations of sayings put together many decades after the events. Second, even if the Jewish leadership did play a major role in the death of Jesus, their twenty-first century Jewish descendants bear no responsibility at all. Third, whatever part the Jewish leaders played, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate figured at least as prominently, if not more prominently, in the killing of Christ. Fourth, any retelling of the Jesus story that employs centuries-old visual or verbal stereotypes of Jewish duplicity, avarice, or hypocrisy should be condemned by everyone. Fifth, the dispassionate study of history is everyone's ally. Children need to be protected from the graphic violence in Gibson's *Passion,* but not from knowing whatever the dispassionate study of the past can tell us.

American children of all backgrounds position themselves in the world by finding out who they are in relation to Christ, the single most important American cultural hero and religious figure. There has been no single history of Jesus in America because there have been so many different ways to experience him, secular as well as religious. My two kids heard a good deal about Jesus when they were little, since three of their grandparents were avid churchgoers and two were active proselytizers. Their mother and I were then holiday worshipers who regarded Jesus with awe and affection. When my kids were in first and second grade in Hamden, Connecticut, they would take the schoolbus home every day. Hamden was a very Catholic town. On Tuesday afternoons, the bus driver would drop off most of the children at the Catholic church for catechism before taking my kids and a handful of others home. One Tuesday my six-year-old and seven-year-old ran off the bus and up the front steps. "Dad," said the six-year-old, "are we Jewish?" "No," I said, "but Jesus was." The question was enchanting, and we all laughed as I tried to explain my answer. I realized I was doing with them, a quarter-century later, what my Catholic father had done with me in the front seat of the station wagon: passing along some knowledge of Jesus. I called my father up to tell him what had happened.

ONE

THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN SPOKEN

I

Jesus of Nazareth came into the world around the year 4 BCE, and word of him reached what Europeans called the "New World" fifteen hundred years later. But how did Jesus enter that world, and what kind of Jesus was he? He arrived in the minds, prayer books, and Bibles, on the crosses, holy cards, and rosaries, of European traders, explorers, and adventurers at the end of the fifteenth century. Spanish Catholic missionaries and settlers took him into Florida, New Mexico, and other parts of the Americas in the sixteenth century. In the early seventeenth century, French Catholics and English Protestants brought him to their settlements along the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic seaboard. If we limit our attention to these Europeans, we immediately note the gap between Catholic and Protestant Christs. The Catholic Jesus was visible, material, and portable. Packed wooden ships carried sculptures, paintings, and crucifixes in their holds, along with other necessities. Jesus was represented in those religious objects and embodied

physically in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Images showed him embedded in his Holy Family—Mary and Joseph—and surrounded by the saints (see figs. 1–3). He was the fleshy, wounded, bleeding, suffering Son of God whose sacrificial life was the model for each Christian's pilgrimage through the human vale of tears.

The early New England Protestants, like the Calvinists on the Continent, were in full rebellion against this Catholic love of "externals"—all the trinkets and visible symbols of faith. For them Jesus was present mainly in the Word read and preached, not in the sacrament shared. They banished images of Jesus not to downplay his importance but to respect his divinity. They kept him under his transcendent Father's wing, safe from idolatrous manipulation by human admirers. Like the Catholics, these Protestants centered their theology upon his redemptive sacrifice and his union with the Father and Holy Ghost in the Trinity. They felt his invisible spirit blow through their inmost hearts but were dismayed at the Catholic contemplation of his body and horrified at the Catholic consumption of his flesh. They thought Catholics were too complacent about their natural, unaided ability to imitate Christ's virtue, too liable to reduce faith to the pursuit of good works. Catholics, meanwhile, thought the Protestants had lost direct historic touch with Jesus by breaking the line of apostolic succession in the church he founded. By elevating the Bible over church tradition and the individual conscience over ecclesiastical authority, they had severed contact with the incarnate Christ. For all the Protestants' talk about finding Jesus in their hearts, they diminished his humanity by neglecting his pierced body. Spiritualizing him to safeguard his purity, they gave up the daily bread of his succor.[1]

The Catholic-Protestant split in theology and piety has remained the central fault line in American incarnations of Jesus ever since the seventeenth century. Yet the basic divergence between seventeenth-century Catholics and New England Puritans did not prevent them from finding common ground on some of Christ's cultural meanings. If we focus on the two groups' interactions with

Native Americans, some intriguing convergences come into view. Spanish and French Catholics and English Protestants all saw Christ as a gift they could bestow upon the Indians. All of the Europeans thought Jesus stood for and effected salvation from sin. The Catholics took him, in addition, as an agent of deliverance from a primitive social outlook. In their view he was both the incarnate God who transcended culture—who lifted faithful human beings into a placeless eternity of souls—and an agent of cultural progress. Jesus helped Catholics and Protestants alike to justify their American overtures. Both groups could see their American adventures as part of God's plan to liberate native souls from the devil's chains. Catholics went further and identified Jesus explicitly with the campaign to alter Indian social behavior. Yet it is an error to view the early American Jesus as primarily a servant of European imperial expansion. Surely many statesmen, explorers, and even clergymen would happily have confined him to that role. But Jesus was not so easily contained. As a symbol of everlasting love he occasionally offered resistance to the barbarities committed by Europeans in their practice of civilization. Christians in America as in Europe sometimes rose up to challenge worldliness, exploitation, and cruelty.

In their meetings with the Indians, the Europeans all settled on two basic identities for Jesus. He was the healer and the martyr. The Catholics in New Spain and New France added a third identity: the civilizer who combated dissolute habits. He taught the Indians to see those habits as offenses against God. Puritans resisted this civilizing use of Jesus. It made Jesus too cultural, too instrumental, too easy and undemanding a gift. Catholics gave Jesus away in their Eucharist with too few strings attached. He had to be held in reserve until Indians could actually read and experience his Word. But the Puritans joined the Catholics in preaching Christ's healing powers and his selfless martyrdom. Christ allowed Europeans and Indians alike to greet their own earthly end with equanimity. For the Catholics a select cohort of gifted souls could move

beyond the usual achievement of Christian virtue to a direct imitation of Jesus, in which they could anticipate a suffering, perhaps even a martyrdom, like his.

Newly arrived Europeans wanted things from Native Americans, and the Indians they met wanted things from them. Europeans wanted to know where the furs, gold, and silver were. They wanted land and food. They wanted knowledge of topography and waterways. Indians wanted iron goods and weapons, clothes and tobacco, barrels of peas and beans, and novel objects of all kinds, including brass crosses and porcelain rosary beads. Sometimes both parties wanted the same things, like land, although Europeans and Indians had very different conceptions of what it meant to "own" land. The biggest difference between the two sides may have been that only the Europeans had something they urgently wished the Indians to want: their religion. The Europeans wanted Jesus ultimately to be everyone's exclusive savior. For some of them Jesus was the inspiration and justification for their entire enterprise, the symbolic junction of their worldly and otherworldly commitments. These pious newcomers wanted Indians to know him and love him because they could not imagine living or dying without him. They believed that his ultimate sacrifice on the cross had changed human history, reopened the gates of heaven, and allowed men and women to transcend sinful passion and consecrate themselves to God's service.

II

As soon as they got to their new world, Europeans made public displays of their loyalty to Jesus for their own as well as the Indians' benefit. Juan Ponce de León picked Easter Sunday, the day commemorating Christ's resurrection, as the proper moment for the first official Spanish landing on the well-populated "island" of Florida in 1513. Spanish reconnaissance and conquest from Colum-

bus on was announced as Christian outreach. Europeans were always frank about material goals as well as spiritual ones. They did not speak of God to hide their commercial and strategic purposes, but to put them in the right perspective. Eternal gains were paramount, and earthly gains were desirable and perfectly proper. Explorers and colonizers departed from Europe with ringing proclamations about bringing true religion to the heathen, "to see how," as Columbus put it in 1492, "their conversion to the Holy Faith might be undertaken." Yet religious goals were so tied up with worldly ones that Jesus could be depicted as Lord of earthly domains as well as eternal souls. When the Jesuits first disembarked in Canada in 1611, "a solemn Thanksgiving was enjoined," according to one of their early historians. "The figure of Christ, covered with a canopy, was carried about with the greatest possible ceremony, and he came auspiciously into the possession, so to speak, of the happy land."[2]

But thoughts of Jesus and his kingdom accompanied European voyagers in a personal way too. They often bore the trials of their journeys and labors by contrasting them to the far greater agony of Christ's sacrifice. The shipwrecked Spanish adventurer Cabeza de Vaca trudged for eight years (1528–1536) from Florida to Mexico, and reported on his return to Spain that his only consolation during the ordeal was "to think about the Passion of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, and the blood he shed for me, and to consider how much greater had been the torment that he suffered from the thorns." After her death in Quebec in 1651, Ursuline Marie de St. Joseph was hailed by her Mother Superior, Marie de l'Incarnation, for spending her final five years in New France living "only by faith and crosses." Sometimes Marie de St. Joseph had such "vivid impressions of the sufferings of Jesus Christ," her Mother Superior recalled, that she suffered "almost continual pains and weaknesses" in body and soul. She embraced the words of St. Paul, "I am crucified with Jesus Christ," and clung to her life of frigid deprivation in Canada because "it made her like her Bridegroom [Jesus]," a "victim

of suffering love." The sacrificial Jesus she modeled to her Algonquin and Huron pupils at the female seminary (she spoke the languages of both peoples), and to the adult Indians (male and female) whom she counseled, had little in common with the triumphal Christ proclaimed by Jesuit Pierre Biard after his arrival in Canada in 1611: "We have taken possession of these regions in the name of the Church of God, establishing here the royal throne of our Savior and Monarch, Jesus Christ."[3]

Native Americans added their own understandings of Jesus to the cultural mix from the moment they first learned of him from the explorers or missionaries. It was a time of social emergency for them because "the first Spanish sneeze," as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, had propelled "millions of invisible bullets." The initial intersection between European and American peoples was a demographic disaster for the Indians. They had no protection against the measles, smallpox, or influenza to which Europeans had often developed resistance. The religious paradox is stark: the Europeans supplied both the diseases and the divine healer and redeemer who helped some unknown number of Indians make sense of their calamity. According to European observers, some Native Americans believed that their own shamans or gods could not account for or reverse the tide of affliction. Naturally the Indians were interested in knowing more about the Europeans' Christ, a "savior" who appeared to have the power to protect the Europeans from falling ill. Inhabiting a world full of invisible spirits, they had no reason to doubt his existence or his power. What they debated was whether he could save them from disease as he had saved the Europeans, and whether the Europeans would allow him to if he could.[4]

Europeans believed that Indians were seeking out Christian stories and rituals to tap whatever power they might contain. If they were right—if the Native Americans were not just being polite but were on the lookout for any and all spiritual agencies that meshed with their beliefs—then the Indians may have exerted a

substantial impact on the kind of Jesus the missionaries ended up preaching. Spanish Franciscans in New Mexico and Florida, French Jesuits along the St. Lawrence, and English Puritans in New England all had to simplify Christian truths if they were to make contact with Indians, or for that matter with ordinary Christians of their own faiths (the most undisciplined of whom consistently struck them as *less* spiritually promising than the Indians they met). The Jesus many Indians seem to have been most interested in was the Jesus who cured people of sickness and saved people from death, not the one who stressed obedience to the Father's commandments, love of enemies, repentance for sin, or the imminence of the coming Kingdom. Missionaries here as elsewhere adjusted their teachings to the interests of their audiences. Even the Jesuits in Canada and the Puritans in New England, who scoffed at the Spanish Franciscans' mass baptisms, tailored the gospel to the urgent Indian desire for cures.[5]

When the Jesuits began evangelizing the Hurons in the seventeenth century, the Indians engaged in a lively disagreement about the benignity or malignity of Jesus. But as the deaths from illness mounted, the Hurons became increasingly Christian (and pro-French). The Iroquois then attacked them more systematically, causing them to appeal all the more to Jesus for deliverance. In his report of 1650, Father Paul Ragueneau was forthright about the sad dynamics of this cultural crossing. Upon his arrival in the 1630s, he wrote, the Hurons lacked Christ but were rich in fisheries, hunting grounds, and trade with allied peoples. But "since the faith has entered their hearts and they have adored the Cross of Jesus Christ, he has given them, as their lot, a very heavy section of that Cross, leaving them prey to miseries, torments, and cruel deaths." They were now "a people wiped off the face of the earth," consoled only by the knowledge that "having died Christian, they have entered into the heritage of true children of God. Flagellat Deus omnem filium quem recipit." ("The Lord scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"—from Paul's letter to the Hebrews 12:6.)[6]

The unlucky Cabeza de Vaca and his three fellow wanderers trekking through the Southeast in the 1520s introduced thousands of Indians to Christ long before they had seen a clergyman. This was a century before Father Ragueneau canoed up the St. Lawrence to preach to the Hurons, and many decades before Spanish Franciscan missions appeared in Florida or New Mexico. None of Cabeza de Vaca's ragtag party was either a priest or a doctor, but, according to his account, one set of Indians after another begged the Spaniards to treat their sick. He claimed to have healed them repeatedly by making the sign of the cross over them (saying "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" while outlining the shape of a cross with the motion of his hand). Word of the cures, he said, moved faster than he did. Encountering the Avavares Indians for the first time, he learned that "they already had news of us and about how we were curing and about the wonders that our Lord was working through us." The Avavares did not wait for one-on-one healing. They approached *en masse,* "placing their hands on our faces and bodies, and afterward they passed their hands over their own faces and bodies." The next day "they brought us the sick people they had, begging us to make the sign of the cross over them." In another place the welcoming stampede was so chaotic that some, "trying to arrive more quickly than others to touch us . . . crowded us so much that they nearly could have killed us."[7]

Cabeza de Vaca's party also met plenty of wariness and hostility along the way. Some Indians, he reported, were cautious because they feared Spanish slave roundups (kidnappings having begun in the Caribbean with Columbus's first trip, and on the mainland with Ponce de León's landing). Others were angry because of the epidemics the Europeans had caused. Cabeza de Vaca noted that one group of Indians contracted "a stomach ailment . . . from which half of them died. And they thought that we were the ones who had killed them." Another group, which lost eight men during Cabeza de Vaca's stay, "held it for certain that we were

killing them by simply desiring it." Knowing their own prior state of health, they had correctly inferred European responsibility without having any more inkling of the disease process than the Spaniards had.[8]

Some of the Indians apparently wished to eliminate the visitors before they "desired" any more Indians into the grave, while others sought access to whatever healing power the Europeans were able or willing to bestow. A nonviolent reaction to the Europeans, no less than a violent one, reaffirmed the integrity of Native American beliefs. If Cabeza de Vaca understood the Indians correctly in believing they had elevated him to high station as a miracle-worker, the Indians were incorporating the Christian symbols and rites that fit into their own prior outlook. They encouraged Cabeza de Vaca to present them with those Christian meanings that they could most easily understand and that best met their needs and preconceptions. They made him a shaman who had a mysterious access to the world of spirits and a power to ward off illness or evil. Healing was the mutually agreed upon point of spiritual contact long before missionaries arrived with their Bibles and breviaries. It fit the bill because it relied the least on verbal communication (impossible given the linguistic gap) and because it was the area of greatest urgency. If Cabeza de Vaca was right about Indians' responses to him, Christ and his cross made an immediate entrance into Indian cultures because Jesus offered his aid at a time of social and medical disaster.

Cabeza de Vaca may have imagined his new vocation as a shaman, or invented it out of his store of memories after returning to Spain. It stands to reason that he would want to depict himself, upon his return to Europe, as a heroic agent of the faith, not a lucky survivor of an inept expedition. But it makes equal sense to suppose that he would have built up that image as a survival mechanism while on his torturous American journey and tried to impose it on the Indians he met. Playing the part of the divine healer may have protected him while also confirming in his own eyes the sense

of cultural superiority he had brought with him from Spain. Becoming a renowned Christlike healer (he even raised one Indian from apparent death) allowed him to believe all the more in the power of the Christian God to vanquish the "devils" he thought the Indians cherished. At the very least, Cabeza de Vaca's story, along with later references to it, reveals how desperately some Europeans wished to see themselves as disciples of a healing Jesus and a sacrificial Jesus, not just a warrior Jesus who civilized by compulsion or violence. Their expansionist venture into their New World made more sense to them if it was a story not of dispossession but of selfless Good Samaritans offering assistance and thereby extending the sway of God's peaceful Kingdom.[9]

In the 1540s Hernando de Soto's expeditionary force traversed some of the same terrain crossed by Cabeza de Vaca a decade earlier. His men were startled to come upon Indian villages *not* on Cabeza de Vaca's path in which the dwellings were topped by crosses. Garcilaso de la Vega, one of the chroniclers of the expedition, wrote that "there was scarcely a house that did not have one. It was supposed that these Indians had heard of the good works and miracles" of Cabeza de Vaca; "the fame of those wonders" passed "from person to person and from country to country." The Indians "had heard it said that all the benefits those Christians had conferred in curing the sick was by making the sign of the cross over them," and "it gave rise to their observance of placing it over their houses, in the belief that it would also save them from all evil and danger, as it had cured the sick."[10]

Assuming the accuracy of Garcilaso de la Vega's report about the crosses on rooftops (his narrative has been accused of fictionalization in other respects), neither he nor any of De Soto's soldiers or friars had any way of knowing why the Indians used them, or whether there was any connection between the crosses and Cabeza de Vaca's earlier trip. Crosses had been employed decoratively and spiritually by a variety of peoples, including Mesoamericans, beginning with the Egyptians. And it was plainly in the self-interest

of Indians confronted by an armed Spanish convoy to confirm any explanation the visitors might have preferred about the provenance of the crosses. Yet for all we know word of the cross and its powers had indeed spread beyond Cabeza de Vaca's route and the Indians were taking advantage of whatever magical properties it possessed. What Garcilaso de la Vega's account establishes beyond any doubt is how passionately the Spanish and other Europeans wanted to see their mission in the Americas as beneficent, not predatory. If the resident Americans had adopted the cross in response to Cabeza de Vaca's wonder-working, then the spirit of the Christian God was surely blowing across the continent.

While Cabeza de Vaca was effecting or affecting his cures near the Gulf of Mexico, French explorer Jacques Cartier reported having a similar experience along the St. Lawrence River. He became a virtual lay priest on his second trip up the St. Lawrence, in 1535. On his arrival at Hochelaga (today's Montreal), he gave the Iroquois headman "a cross and a crucifix," which he had him kiss before putting it around his neck. Then "the girls and women of the village, some of whom had children in their arms, crowded about us, rubbing our faces, arms, and other parts of the upper portions of our bodies which they could touch, weeping for joy at the sight of us." Cartier was made to sit on a special mat in the center of the village, whereupon a stream of "sick persons, some blind, others with but one eye, others lame or impotent" were brought forward "in order that he might lay his hands upon them, so that one would have thought Christ had come down to earth to heal them." Cartier proceeded to read the opening of John's Gospel (in French, a language the Indians could not fathom), and presented gifts of hatchets and knives to the men, beads to the women, and tin Lamb of God images to the children. (He refused to accept the Indians' reciprocal gifts of "fish, soups, beans, bread, and other dishes" because, lacking salt, they "were not to our taste.") Cartier's penultimate act before departing for France was to build a thirty-five-foot cross (five feet higher than the one he had left on his first

voyage in 1534). His final act was to kidnap five adult Iroquois to take back to France, along with the five children he had already received as a gift.[11]

Europeans in North America had been erecting large crosses and passing out small ones ever since Columbus first hit the Bahamas. For Europeans and Indians alike, the crosses were symbols of political as well as religious import. Cartier's thirty-footer, planted at the Gaspé harbor in 1534, featured, just below the crossbar, "a shield with three fleurs-de-lys in relief" and a sign proclaiming LONG LIVE THE KING OF FRANCE. Indians fishing in the harbor assembled to watch the dedication of the cross. Cartier and his men put on an instructional performance to model the proper reverence. They knelt down with hands clasped, "worshipping it before them; and made signs to them, looking up and pointing towards heaven, that by means of this we had our redemption, at which they showed many marks of admiration, at the same time turning and looking at the cross." Moments later, the apparent admiration turned into ambivalence at best when the Native American "captain" pulled his canoe alongside Cartier's ship, "making the sign of the cross with two of his fingers" and pointing "to the land all around about, as if he wished to say that all this region belonged to him, and that we ought not to have set up this cross without his permission." Cartier dismissed that reaction because the French were claiming possession on the basis of an authority far loftier than the king of France. The triumphant Jesus beloved of explorers and heads of state supplied a legitimacy that trumped mere earthly distinction.[12]

In the seventeenth-century America of the Spanish, French, English, and Indians, the cross of Jesus conveyed a range of overlapping meanings. Placed around a neck or atop a roof, it healed or protected. Planted on a prominent spot of land, it staked a national claim. When a boatload of English Virginians (hence non-Puritans) sacked a French fortification at St. Sauveur in 1613, Father Biard reported that they "tore down our crosses, raising another to show they had taken possession of the country, and were the masters

thereof. This cross had carved upon it the name of the King of Great Britain." A publicly erected cross had expressed ownership since Columbus's first voyage a century earlier. "In all the places, islands, and lands that he entered," according to his logbook, Columbus left a cross behind. He put them up (with the help of impressed Indian labor) as a sign "that Your Highnesses [Ferdinand and Isabella] claim the land as your own, and chiefly as a sign of Jesus Christ Our Lord and in honor of Christianity."[13]

Calling Jesus the "chief" signification of the cross—implying some secondary meaning too—exhibited the ideological instability at the heart of the Spanish imperial venture and of the broader European colonial juggernaut. Explorers such as Columbus said that the cross was primarily religious while acting as if it were primarily political. This discrepancy left a large opening for missionaries who had plans of their own for the peoples of the New World. Historians often take the early clergy as the obedient handmaidens of the conquering men in armor—either bad cops themselves, whipping the Indians (literally) into submission, or good cops who put sanctimonious camouflage over a seedy and perhaps genocidal history of expropriation. Such an assumption buys its very legitimate condemnation of European atrocities at too high a historical cost. By focusing on the undeniable contribution that religion made to Western arrogance and brutality, this viewpoint misses the complexity of the religious impulse and the special place of the clergy in their own cultures. They had a distinctive role in the European invasion and the Indian responses to it. Priests and ministers were not satisfied to let explorers, statesmen, or Native Americans shape Christianity in any way they pleased. The Franciscans and Jesuits were strong-willed advocates of what they considered *true* Christianity. The drama of the missionaries' spiritual vocation in the Americas is that however purely they might apprehend the sufferings of their crucified Lord and the glories of the heavenly paradise opened up by his sacrifice, they were still the faithful servants of European political powers (and of particular Indian peoples allied

to those powers). They could never escape their national identities or their nation's political interests. Nor could they overcome their own sense of cultural superiority over the Indians. But we have to take note of the sacrificial as well as the self-righteous character of their quest to bring saving knowledge of Christ to the thousands of heathen who they feared would die without it. We have to confront the spiritual depth as well as the cultural condescension contained in the missionaries' faith that, as one Jesuit put it, "Jésus est le Dieu des sauvages, aussi bien que le nostre" ("Jesus is the savages' God as well as our own").[14]

III

Mention the 1620s to modern-day Americans and they are apt to recall grade-school pageants with Pilgrim hats and shiny black shoes with oversized buckles. They might be surprised to learn that while a few hundred Pilgrims were worshiping Christ in Plymouth, thousands of Native Americans were attending Mass and receiving communion in New Mexico and Florida. It is easy to forget the substantial Florida mission system put in place by Spanish Franciscans in the seventeenth century. Although the missions stretched from St. Augustine in Florida to present-day South Carolina, and from Gainesville west to Apalachee (Tallahassee), they eroded after 1675 and, unlike the eighteenth-century California missions, left no architectural trace. The Christian Indian and mestizo presence in New Mexico has been more or less continuous since the start of the seventeenth century. The Spanish moved north into what we now call New Mexico in 1598, establishing Santa Fe ("Holy Faith") a decade later. Franciscans packed crosses, oil-painted images, and statuary into their wagons, along with food staples and medicine, farming and building tools, and extra sackcloth for new robes. By the 1620s they had erected scores of churches with the aid of Indian labor. (Women built the walls; men

did the rest.) At their peak in the seventeenth century, about fifty Franciscans (there were about seventy in Florida) were engaged in "the conversion and pacification," as the missionary Fray Alonso de Benavides put it in 1630, of dozens of Indian communities. The friars and other Spaniards were expelled during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 (twenty-one of the thirty-three Franciscans and almost four hundred of the twenty-nine hundred Spanish colonists having been killed in the uprising), but they returned to their evangelical and civilizing labors in the mid-1690s.[15]

Alonso de Benavides made the grueling fifteen-hundred-mile journey from Mexico City to Santa Fe in 1625, and reported in his 1630 *Memorial* to King Philip IV that one "nation" (group) of Pueblo Indians after another had accepted the faith. Baptisms took place *en masse*, but not without active consent. These were not coerced conversions of the sort earlier practiced in New Spain upon the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of the former Aztec empire—conversions condemned by Dominican priest Bartolomé de las Casas in his famous tract *In Defense of the Indians* (1552). Las Casas did not mind mass baptism itself. He objected only to "violent" imposition of the faith. Christ's teaching was the norm to follow, said Las Casas: "Men must not be forced to listen to the gospel." He pointed out that Jesus rebuked his disciples James and John (in Luke 9:54) for proposing "fire from heaven" as proper punishment for a Samaritan town that refused to receive Christ. Missionaries should let the image of Jesus "shine forth in our conduct. . . . We must not have more diligent concern for the salvation of men than Christ himself, who shed his precious blood for them." Yet Las Casas was no relativist. If the Indians chose to reject the faith after hearing it preached, "it is not our fault." They would bear full responsibility for their exclusion from "the sheepfold of Christ, . . . the place outside of which there is no salvation."[16]

Alonso de Benavides detailed a long string of successes in New Mexico for the Las Casas pacification strategy, including the baptisms of all six thousand souls in the fourteen pueblos of the Piro

people, the baptisms of most of the ten thousand people in the fourteen pueblos of the Tompiros, and the "conversion" (the step prior to baptism) of all ten thousand Zunis in their eleven pueblos. These rounded figures are plainly estimates, but they establish that the Franciscans were persuading some Indian leaders to endorse some Christian rituals on behalf of their peoples. When a group of friars arrived in the Humana Nation for a prearranged group baptism, there were ten thousand people waiting for them in a field. "Do you ask for baptism with all your hearts?" Father Salas yelled. "With a great shout, they all raised their arms, got up on their feet, and asked for holy baptism. . . . Mothers who had their babies at their breast . . . took their babies' arms and stretched them upward, asking at the same time in loud voices for holy baptism for these children."[17]

According to Alonso de Benavides, the priests remained a few days to preach and teach the Indians the Pater Noster (Our Father), the Ave Maria (Hail Mary), and Salve Regina (Hail Holy Queen). As they prepared to leave, the Indian "captain" protested, saying, "We cannot yet do anything with God. . . . We have a lot of sick people: heal us before you go." The friars agreed and set up a curative ritual that ran from three in the afternoon until ten the next morning. The sick formed a continuous line that passed between two priests, who recited Latin prayers without interruption. "Blind people, lame people, people afflicted with dropsy—everyone [was] cured of his afflictions." The healing atmosphere was so thick that "even the soldiers accompanying the priests were able to work wonders." Like Cabeza de Vaca, the Franciscan friars gladly put on the mantle that Alonso de Benavides claimed was urged upon them by the Indians—that of Christ the healer—and joined the Indians in acting out a communal passage from affliction to restoration.[18]

Amerindians could band together in certain rituals with priests such as Alonso de Benavides and adventurers such as Cabeza de Vaca because they all took the world as an enchanted place, filled with mysterious portents and fabulous happenings. The seventeenth-century New Mexico Franciscans may have shared more cultural

ground in this respect with the Pueblo Indians than they did with the contemporaneous Jesuits of New France or Puritans of New England. The Franciscans were surely closer to the Jesuits than to the Puritans. The Jesuits perpetually mocked Native American "superstitions" while retaining a good many of their own. The New England Calvinists were the most inclined to restrict miracles to happenings engineered directly by God, although many of them also gave credence to some extra-biblical powers and omens. While the Puritans often made room for the occult, they generally tried to shield the supernatural from contamination by the merely magical. The Franciscans, by contrast, shared with the Pueblo Indians a worldview steeped in magic.

In his *Memorial* of 1630, Alonso de Benavides supplied many examples of wonder-working. When certain members of the Picuris Nation tried to kill a priest, they failed because "he became invisible." On another occasion, "an old Indian sorceress" in the Taos Nation was gathering firewood with some Christian Indian women and tried to talk them out of their new devotion to monogamy. "The sky was clear and serene, but a bolt from the blue struck that infernal instrument of the devil right in the middle of those good Christian women." Her demise naturally convinced "everyone who had been secretly living in sin" to get married right away. Historian Ramón Gutiérrez, relying on Elsie Parsons's twentieth-century anthropological study of *Pueblo Indian Religion* (1939), doubts Alonso de Benavides's account. He speculates that "the Indians interpreted the event differently. For them, persons struck by the germinative force of lightning immediately became cloud spirits, thus confirming that what the [sorceress] woman said was morally true."[19]

The most famous miracles reported by Alonso de Benavides were the appearances of a Spanish mystic, Mother María de Agreda, in Pueblo country between 1620 and 1623. The Indians who had seen and spoken to her in their own language said that although "the lady in blue" resembled the Spanish nun pictured in one of the Franciscans' paintings, she was much younger, "a slip of

a girl and beautiful." Upon his return to Spain, Alonso de Benavides visited Mother María and satisfied himself that she had indeed traveled repeatedly by spiritual means to New Mexico. The friars' fabulous stories had meaning for Spaniards and Indians alike, because they pointed beyond themselves to an invisible world of wonders. Historians writing about missionaries often claim that Europeans played on the natives' credulity to get conversions. David Weber writes, for instance, that "Franciscans often sought to dazzle natives with showy vestments, music, paintings, statuary of sacred images, and ceremonies." But the friars were dazzled themselves by what the Nicene Creed called "visibilium omnium et invisibilium," "all things visible and invisible."[20]

The seventeenth-century Spanish preference for voluntary rather than forced conversions—a pacification strategy operating, of course, in the larger coercive context of Spanish rule—put a premium on the friars' diplomatic skill and graphic preaching. In his *Memorial* to the king, Alonso de Benavides gave a striking example of both. As an initial overture to the nomadic "Apaches" (Navajos) in 1629, Fray Alonso sent twelve Christian Tewas to a Navajo encampment. For good luck, they departed on September 17, the eve of the celebration of the Stigmata of St. Francis, and they carried as offerings a rosary, a feather-tipped arrow (signifying peace), a pipeful of tobacco "ready to smoke," and a feather indicating that the pipe had already been smoked in Pueblo country. Duly impressed by the display, the Navajo captain, with the rosary around his neck, journeyed to the Tewa pueblo, where Alonso had mobilized "1,500" Tewas as a welcoming committee. At a candlelit meeting in the church, Alonso de Benavides explained to the captain that "the Creator, and Lord of all creation, had died on a cross to free us from eternal suffering." A painting on the altar helped illuminate the terror awaiting lost souls. "I told him that anyone who did not worship God, and who was not baptized, must be damned. And anyone so condemned would burn in hell in eternal suffering." The captain immediately declared his faith in the Christian God, and Alonso de

Benavides marked his conversion by hanging arrows from the altar. The Navajo leader wanted to be baptized forthwith, but the Spaniard told him that would have to wait. The Franciscan goal was not individual conquests, but the baptism of all "200,000" Navajos, and that could happen only when Franciscans had been invited to live among them. Spiritual growth depended upon carefully monitored religious practice. Progress toward heaven required advance toward civilization. A year later Alonso de Benavides was glad to report that "a priest of very great spirit" was "pursuing the conversion and pacification of these people."[21]

For the Franciscans of New Mexico, Christ healed people of disease and saved sinners from the hell to which Adam's misbehavior had consigned them. Christian preaching from the apostolic period onward had linked sin to bodily disease, both causally and metaphorically. Sin caused sickness, while bodily affliction supplied images for conveying the meaning of spiritual disarray. Louise Burkhart's study of Franciscan vernacular preaching in sixteenth-century Mexico shows how sin was systematically tied to illness for the Nahuatl speakers who were in steady decline from diseases introduced by the Spanish. "When Fray Francisco Jiménez arrived in a town," she writes, "he began by explaining to the inhabitants that he had come to give 'the medicines necessary for the health of souls to those who were spiritually ailing.'" God's grace was a medicine; Christ's sacraments were a treatment for "soul-sickness." The Indians had long believed that moral misdeeds could provoke physical disease, and when Franciscans connected sexual excess to dismal physical consequences, the Indians apparently nodded in agreement. The hard leap for the Nahuas was the notion of spiritual sickness as a state distinct from physical ailments. For the Spanish, becoming civilized was learning to feel sinful about ungodly actions or thoughts apart from physical consequences, to apprehend sinfulness in general. It meant coming to know a certain divine healer and to recognize the debilitating condition that only he could heal.[22]

The seventeenth-century Pueblo Indians had just as much trouble as the Nahuas understanding the concept of sin. Yet without grasping the notion of sin, how was it possible to truly know or believe in Jesus, whose divine-human identity revolved entirely around his sacrifice to atone for human sin? Missionaries in all areas could finesse this problem by focusing on the power of Christ's physical healing and the heroism of his physical martyrdom. The Franciscans could finesse it further, since belief for the Spanish was formal and collective in structure. Religious experience and religious ritual were virtually identical for the Franciscan-taught Indians of New Mexico. The Native Americans of New France and New England, by contrast, were expected to exhibit an individually felt and articulated conviction about Christ the savior. Still, the Pueblo Christians made individual confessions, which required an enumeration of discrete sins. They were told to "study their sins," according to Alonso de Benavides. To help remember their misdeeds, they "recorded" them "on a series of knotted strings" which they brought along to the confessional. The Indians could understand the concept of breaking rules or taboos. They just had trouble grasping the idea that they offended Christ by disobeying his moral commands.[23]

It did not take the Pueblo Indians long to realize that the friars were strangely fixated on sexual sins, and they often submitted to the outward form of Christian marriage to placate the priests. According to the Franciscans, the seventeenth-century Indians rarely sought out the marriage sacrament on their own. Ramón Gutiérrez, in his imaginative reconstruction of seventeenth-century Pueblo Indian experiences of Jesus, has shown how the Franciscans brought Christ to bear on their campaign of sexual reform. Like the Jesuits in New France, they used Jesus as a tool for reforming behavior that struck them as animalistic. Christ was both civilizing means and spiritual end. The friars tried to root Jesus in the deepest recesses of Pueblo life, at the junction of spatial and temporal experience. The mission church was placed at the sacred center of the pueblo, the first major step in the assault on the Indians' ancestral

religion. Within the church Christ was visualized on the cross and among his saints on the three-tiered *reredos,* a wooden, wall-mounted screen depicting a variety of holy personages as well as the Trinity (see figs. 2–3).

The events of Christ's earthly life were fixed on the annual calendar, while the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass regularly rehearsed the peak episode of that life: his Passion. The emotional intensity of the transubstantiation—the conversion of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood—was magnified by its spatial prominence on the high altar of the church. Special Christian celebrations were superimposed on Pueblo rituals, most notably around Christmastime. Good Friday observances joined prior Pueblo practices of flagellation and bloodletting to Christian ones. Jesus the bleeding Son of God made eminent religious sense to many of the Pueblo Indians, even as many of them resisted him for being a tool of European conquest. Gutiérrez puts his finger on the dense web of religious and political forces at the heart of interlocking European and Indian experiences of Jesus. From the Indians' standpoint, the friars' (and Christ's) extraordinary self-renunciation in choosing lifetime celibacy signified profound holiness, and the priests' rites of bodily mortification gave further evidence of their sanctity.

Some Indians were drawn to the conquerors, and to their Jesus, because of the disciplined piety modeled by Christ and followed by some of his priests. The governor of New Mexico himself participated in the self-mutilation during the Good Friday observance in 1598. He "cruelly scourged himself, mingling bitter tears with the blood flowing from his many wounds." In 1660 Fray Salvador de Guerra was so upset to see the Isleta Pueblo Indians performing a prohibited katsina dance that he took off his clothes, whipped himself, placed a crown of thorns on his head, and walked back and forth carrying a large cross. The dancing stopped immediately, and some of the tearful Indians asked the priest's forgiveness.

We cannot tell how many Indians moved from knowledge of Jesus as healer and martyr to full-fledged embrace of him as savior.

We do know that the Pueblos were divided about how to respond to Christ and how to respond to the European invasion. We can be sure that thousands of Indians participated in Christian rituals. Events such as the Via Crucis procession involved hundreds of marchers. In 1655 a reported six hundred Carac and Tajique penitents carried "large and small crosses on their shoulders" while an undetermined number of Hopis dressed as hermits in haircloth shirts and beat themselves with nail- and wire-studded whips. And we know that when thousands of Pueblo warriors revolted against the friars and against Spanish rule in 1680, they struck back at Christ too. Altars were desecrated, statues and paintings smashed, churches demolished—retaliation for two generations of Spanish confiscation and destruction of Pueblo religious objects and structures. Priests sometimes met their deaths at the hands of the very Indians whom they had "most favored" and whom they regarded as the "most intelligent." As they prepared to die, some allegedly told their killers of their joy to be leaving this world as martyrs for Christ.[24]

Before the revolt, the Franciscans believed that their spiritual goal—replacing the rule of the devil with the reign of Christ—was jeopardized as much by the Spanish as by the Indians. The Spaniards modeled avaricious dealing, casual sexual conduct, and worse. How did Satan operate in New Mexico? asked Alonso de Benavides. "One of his usual tricks" was to appeal to "the greed of our Spanish governor," who did not hesitate to kill even Christian Indians or sell them into slavery if it would increase his income or power. The chief obstacle to Christian conversions, according to some Franciscans, was the venality of their own countrymen. When the friars returned in the mid-1690s after fifteen years of exclusion, their main concern was rooting out the forbidden moral and religious practices to which the Indians had reverted in their absence. Fray Gerónimo Prieto tried to stamp out the circular stone structures where the Indians offered corn, green grass, or feathers in petitioning the spirits for rain or other favors. "When I knocked them down," he wrote, "the interpreter came to tell me that the people

said that I should not have done so, that it was their custom, which they had always observed, and that the kingdom had revolted because this had been taken away from them, and that if it were to be taken away from them they would again rise in rebellion. To this I exhorted them that it was a deception of the devil, that the stones could give them nothing, that only God was the all powerful to whom they should appeal for help." Gerónimo Prieto tried both "kindness and threats," but to no avail. "I have torn them down various times, but each time they have again set them up." The Indians' error lay not in petitioning an unseen power for gifts, but in failing to petition the correct unseen power.[25]

Fray Francisco Corbera was an itinerant in the Zuni and Moqui Nations in 1692, enduring "the severe cold of winter . . . without sleeping under a roof." When he accepted an assignment to the Pueblo mission of San Ildefonso in 1694, he acknowledged the danger posed by rebellious Indians. But for him and his fellow friars "losing our lives" was insignificant if it meant that "the souls of these poor people could not be lost." One effective means of bringing them to Christ was for the missionaries to live in poverty themselves. "They are very much influenced by the friendly treatment and love" of their ministers, and even more so by "personal abnegation." Francisco Corbera was upbeat about future prospects for the faith among the Indians but conceded that he could judge only by what they showed him. They might be deceiving him. As one of his colleagues put it, "As regards their inner thoughts, only God can know." But even if "everything goes wrong," Corbera wrote, "it will only be a benefit to us, as they would take our lives . . . and what greater gain could we achieve than to lose our lives for the salvation of souls?" He did not believe that the Pueblo Indians would rise again against the Spanish, however, for in his estimation the Pueblos' main enemy was the Apaches, from whom the Spanish had often protected them. Francisco Corbera's prognostications were wrong. Eighteen months later he received the unsought but welcomed benefit of dying for Christ. In June 1696, in the last act of

Pueblo resistance against the Spanish, Native American warriors killed Corbera and four other friars by torching his church, in which he and other Spaniards had taken refuge. His martyrdom became a symbol of heroic sacrifice in the Spanish community, just as the Indian warriors' attack became a legendary act of courage in Pueblo memory. For the Europeans the deaths in the church magnified the image of Jesus as martyr and supplied renewed impetus for Christian colonization in the eighteenth century.[26]

IV

When Parisian historian Mark Lescarbot announced in 1610 that "le nom de Jesus-Christ est annoncé ès terres d'outre mer" ("the name of Jesus Christ has been spoken in the lands beyond the sea"), he meant that Christ had finally been preached correctly—that is, not in the Spanish manner. True, the Spanish had brought "some light of the Christian religion" to the New World, but their efforts were compromised by "cruelty and avarice." At the French colony of Port Royal (in today's Nova Scotia), by contrast, "la parole immuable de notre Sauveur Jesus-Christ" ("the unchangeable word of our Savior Jesus Christ") had been spoken and heard. He proudly reported that the Native American Micmac leader Membertou, along with twenty of his family, had just been baptized by Father Fléché, the secular French priest at Port Royal. Yet the Jesuit Pierre Biard, who arrived in New France the following year, promptly challenged the Membertou clan's conversion. He tested Membertou's family and found that they had no grasp of "the common creed, the Lord's Prayer, the commandments of God, the sacraments," and other doctrines "totalement nécessaire" to the making of a Christian. They could not remember their baptismal names and kept messing up when they tried to make the sign of the cross. Biard believed that his Jesuits would bring more rigor to the missionary field. In his view, Lescarbot's critique of the Spaniards did not go

far enough. It was not just their "avarice and greed" that needed correcting, but their practice of mass baptisms. The North American battle to purify Christianity of magical or worldly corruptions began not when Pilgrims and Puritans arrived in New England in the 1620s and 1630s, but when French Jesuits arrived in New France in 1611.[27]

The Jesuits, like the New England Puritans, were slow in making baptisms because they thought true faith depended upon the individual believer's consciousness of Christ's saving power. Having that kind of consciousness depended, in turn, on being civilized. The Puritans objected to the Catholics' explicit use of Jesus as a civilizing agent, but they too wished the Indians to learn civilized habits. On the other hand, Jesuits and Puritans were clear about the limits of civilization: it was not an end in itself, only a preparation for a life dedicated to the sacrificial love of Christ. The Jesuits were so convinced of the necessary-but-not-sufficient character of civility that they often regarded their own deeply ingrained civilized behavior as a spiritual threat. Many of them saw their careers in New France as a way of combating European ease and complacency. Sharing the Indians' hardships much of the time, they effected a cultural crossover in which they taught civilized styles of thought and action to the Indians while partially renouncing such styles themselves. Each party needed a spiritual exchange with the other in order to fulfill its own proper imitation of Christ. The Jesuits needed the Indians' help in stripping their lives down to essentials, and the Indians needed the Jesuits' help in learning to think and act in accordance with Christ's commands (no polygamy or vengeance, for example) and with modern standards of rationality (no more taking dreams as portents or commands, and no more listening to "sorcerers").

The Jesuits had "to become savage with the savages," as Father Paul Le Jeune put it, if they were going to have any success at either civilizing the Indians or purifying themselves. To teach civilized habits, they needed to learn the local language, and that

demanded isolation from other Frenchmen. In 1634 Le Jeune joined a six-month winter hunting expedition of the Montagnais. The party barely escaped starvation, as he recalled in a long report for his superiors and for potential French donors and recruits. He and two dozen Indians were reduced to eating wood, bark, and old bits of hide, which not even the famished dogs would touch. "A soul very thirsty for the Son of God, I mean for suffering," he wrote, "would find enough here to satisfy it." On Christmas Day there was nothing to eat, a privation more easily borne, Le Jeune thought, if one recalled the dire condition of the Holy Family "in the stable at Bethlehem." The Montagnais rested in their tent cabins, "wasted and thin, silent and very sad, like people who parted with life regretfully." Le Jeune spent the day getting two prayers translated and preparing a special Oratory. He placed a napkin on a cabin pole and attached to it a crucifix, a reliquary (containing the bones of a holy person), and an image from his breviary. Then he called the Indians together to hear the prayers. The first one was a petition to Jesus enmeshed in a doctrinal lesson and a call to faith:

> O Jesus, son of the All-powerful, you who took human flesh for us, who were born of a virgin for us, who died for us, who were resurrected and ascended into heaven for us, you have promised that if something is asked in your name, you will grant it. I beg you with all my heart to give food to these poor people, who wish to believe in you and to obey you. These people promise you entirely that if you help them they will believe perfectly in you, and that they will obey you with all their hearts. My Lord, hear my prayer; I offer you my life for these people, very glad to die that they may live and know you. Amen.[28]

The Montagnais interrupted him just before the end of the prayer, when he expressed his readiness "to die." "Take back those words," one said, "for we all love you, and do not wish you to die

for us." They thought he was actually going to kill himself. He tried to explain that he was not announcing a course of action, but affirming a conviction. Loving, in his calculus, had a logical connection to dying. As the Gospel of John expressed it, the greatest love ("agape" in the Greek) revealed itself in a willingness to lay down one's life for one's brother. Le Jeune was conveying a central Christian tenet, showing the Indians that religious faith involved a state of continuous mental exertion. One could list one's beliefs as a series of propositions, and distinguish them from the false beliefs of others through rational disputation. Faith revitalized itself by vanquishing objections mounted against it. The prayer also attempted to communicate Le Jeune's own special vocation, for the moment different from theirs. They needed to learn how to believe and what to believe; he needed to prepare to give his life out of love. Even being killed by Indians, he had written in 1633, was not to be feared, since dying at their hands would bring the deceased closer to "our good Master, put to death by those to whom he came to bring life." Le Jeune was fighting an uphill battle in teaching that death was a logical outlet for love or that belief was an exclusionary affair. One Montagnais tried to persuade him that pluralism of belief was superior to a single truth for all. He argued that "all nations had something especially their own. . . . Just as he [the Montagnais] believed us when we [the Jesuits] told him something, or when we showed him a picture, so likewise we ought to believe him when he told us something that was accepted by his people." To believe something meant accepting it as the honorable conviction of someone, either oneself or another.[29]

Half a decade later the Montagnais were still dubious about Le Jeune's contention that the Jesuits had to come to New France out of love for them. In 1639 Le Jeune reported again that they could not fathom what he and other Jesuits meant when they spoke of following Jesus by sacrificing themselves for others. Even the brightest ("les plus spirituels") of the Indians assumed there had to be some other motive for the priests' leaving France, putting up

with privation, and giving the Indians so many "good things" without asking anything in return. Some concluded that the Jesuits intended the Indians' "ruin," a conclusion supported by the obvious fact (frequently attested to by the Jesuits) that since the arrival of the French the Montagnais had been far sicker than before, while the French had not been sick at all. Before the Europeans came, said one Indian in 1637, "only the old people died," but "now more young than old died." Le Jeune only made matters worse when he pointed out that the priests had come to Canada for benefits that would be experienced only after death. Hearing death mentioned again, even the most "fair-minded" of the Montagnais, including some of the Christian Indians, thought it all the more certain that the priests had come to kill them.[30]

Sometimes these Christian converts became so extravagant in their piety that the priests had to rein them in. The Jesuits were alarmed at the zeal displayed by Indian families settled into a Christian village at Sillery in the 1640s. These ardent believers begged for harsher penances. Father Buteux, a Sillery priest, gave an especially mournful man "a penance three times as severe as I would have given a Frenchman for the same offense," whereupon the sinner complained, "Is that all you assign for so great a sin? Make me endure something that will torment my body." Downriver at Tadoussac a priest was initially pleased when Ignace, a Christian Indian cured of an illness, reported that he had visited heaven, where he saw and spoke to Jesus. Jesus "showed me his hands and his feet, pierced by great nails, and then he said, . . . 'Ignace, what you have endured during your illness is nothing. It is I who suffered, while hanging on the cross for you, I who am your Creator and your King. When I send you any affliction—hunger, thirst, sickness, poverty—suffer it patiently for me, and in imitation of my example.'" The priest was not sure whether the vision was "veritable" or imagined, but he liked its initial effects: "The wicked were frightened and the good were consoled." Men, women, and children scourged themselves "in imitation of the holy Penitents of

whom they had heard." But the contagion got out of hand as individuals tried to outdo one another in lashing themselves with a knotted cord. The priest "assured them of the pardon of their sins" and "warned them not to perform any other public penance without the advice of their Confessors." Civilized behavior was temperate behavior, and proper piety occupied a middle ground between self-satisfaction and self-laceration.[31]

The Tadoussac priest's endorsement of Ignace's vision for its practical fruits is noteworthy in light of the Jesuits' usual condemnation of the Indians' belief in the truth of their dreams. No other Native American habit or practice, apart from polygamy, seemed to the priests more uncivilized. "I make sport of their dreams," said Father Le Jeune in 1634. His dismissal mystified the Montagnais. "What do you believe then," they asked, "if you don't believe in your dreams?" When he replied that "I believe in him who has made all things, and who can do all things," they thought he was making no sense, since unlike them he was believing in something he had not "seen." "They have a faith in dreams that surpasses all credence," wrote Father Jean de Brébeuf of the Hurons. "If Christians were to act upon all their divine inspirations with as much care as our Savages carry out their dreams," he quipped, "they would no doubt very soon become great saints." Putting so much stock in dreams played havoc with a properly rational sense of cause and effect. Taking dreams as messages from the spirit world blurred the line, in the Jesuits' view, between the supernatural realm of God's spontaneous agency and the natural world he had created, a world that ordinarily operated according to observable and predictable laws. Like many Puritans, the Jesuits were determined to root out any popular belief in spirits that compromised the hegemony of the one God in three persons.[32]

That stance allowed them to leave room for God to modify the normal workings of cause and effect whenever he wished, a loophole that permitted much overlap in practice with the Indians' own dream-centered perspective. In effect the Jesuits were telling the

Indians that conversion to Christianity did not entail a total rejection of their traditional worldview. It required only the purifying of it, seeing themselves as individual souls linked directly to a single higher spirit, the triune God, who alone could redeem people from their sinful state. The new conception was essential if Native Americans were to develop a correct sense of their true situation: sinners deserving of perdition but offered rescue by a wonder-working God. This God valued them just as he did the Europeans. They were "souls redeemed at the same price as ours," said Father Julien Perrault, by "him who has loved us all so much." Human worth had nothing to do with cultural level. The Indians' value would not increase when they became civilized. Only their knowledge of their value would increase.[33]

The Jesuits' reports contained many examples of divine intervention in the natural world, acts of God that supplied a point of contact and credibility with their Native American hosts. During a dry summer spell, a Huron sorcerer blamed the lack of rain on the cross planted in front of Father Brébeuf's door, an explanation the priest thought ridiculous on the face of it. Yet when a group of Huron youths put up another cross in order to shoot their arrows at it, he reported that "our Lord did not permit them to hit it even once." Brébeuf then repainted his own cross, placed "the body of our Lord crucified" on it, and had the Indians "adore and kiss" it. When this ritual was followed by rain and "a plentiful harvest," he encouraged the Indians to believe (and may have believed himself) that the cause of their good fortune was the penitent observance. The sacrament of baptism was a repeated instance of fudging the line between the magical and the spiritual. While the priests usually preached that "the life-giving waters of Holy Baptism principally impart life to the soul, and not to the body," as Brébeuf put it, they sometimes encouraged the Indians to believe that physical ills could indeed be cured by it. When a woman baptized on her deathbed recovered and "broadcast everywhere" that the baptism had healed her, Brébeuf welcomed the publicity. "Indeed," he

noted, "she was virtually dead, but as soon as she was washed with the holy water she began to feel better." Jesus seeped into early American cultures as a miracle-worker who made sense to people all along the spectrum from magical to non-magical consciousness.[34]

Of course the Jesuits' reserving so much space for supernatural agency in the physical world left an opening for anti-Christian disputants on the Indian side. These opponents showed the priests that if disputational skill was a sign of civilization, then some Native Americans were further along than the Jesuits had expected. In an after-dinner speech Father Le Jeune told an assembly that his love for them had come from the God "who created the first man, from whom we have all descended." That made them all brothers, who "ought all to acknowledge the same Lord, . . . to believe in him, and obey his will." A "sorcerer" interrupted him to announce that he would believe in this God only if he could see him. Le Jeune countered that he could recite the names of those who had seen the Son of God on earth, and name all the countries those witnesses had visited. The sorcerer replied, "Your God has not come to our country, and that is why we do not believe in him." Le Jeune answered that there were two kinds of sight, spiritual and physical. What you see "with the eyes of the soul may be just as true as what you see with the eyes of the body." The sorcerer saw his opening. "I see nothing except with the eyes of the body, save in sleeping, and you do not approve our dreams. . . . You don't know what you're talking about. Learn to talk and we'll listen to you." Le Jeune was being arbitrary, the Indian was saying, ruling out or approving spiritual perception when it pleased him, not to mention making an illogical leap from his own expressed motivation for coming to Quebec to the claim that the Jesus he had brought with him was the universal God. A universal savior would logically have revealed himself to *all* peoples, not *some* peoples.[35]

The vigor of the sorcerer's response as reported by Le Jeune suggests that some Jesuits may have wondered if the line between

savagery and civility was blurrier than their letters home could admit. Le Jeune believed that the Montagnais were at Aristotle's "survival" stage of development, prior to the next two stages of "civilization" and "contemplation." They were so continuously chasing after their food that they did not have the leisure to cultivate logically defensible beliefs about anything, much less belief in a Jesus brought to them from Europe. They were so hungry so much of the time that one Indian told him his favorite Christian prayer was "Mirinan oukachigakhi nimitchiminan" ("Give us today our food, give us something to eat"). Yet he was also convinced of their intelligence and generosity, as in the ease and eagerness with which they simplified their language in order to communicate with him. The Hurons evangelized by Father Brébeuf were far more settled and agricultural than the Montagnais, and hence in the Jesuit view readier for civilized practices. Brébeuf came close at times to seeing them as virtual Christians already, on account of their extraordinary hospitality toward all strangers. "I think I have read, in the lives of the Fathers," he wrote, "that a pagan army was converted on seeing the charity and hospitality of a Christian town, the inhabitants of which vied with each other in caressing and feasting the strangers—judging well that those must profess the true religion and worship the true God, the common Father of all, who had hearts so benign and who did so much good to all sorts of persons, without distinction." This was a nation that "our Lord" appeared to have "predisposed" to "the fire of his graces."[36]

Still, the Indians were in the dark night of ignorance even for Brébeuf, and he prayed it would please God "to illumine them." From a doctrinal standpoint the civilizing process had to begin with the fact that "their souls, which are immortal," were destined to eternal placement in either heaven or hell, and that they had "the choice, during life," to go whichever way they wished after death. The red-hot tortures of hell seemed to have registered with many Indians, who quickly got the point that it was better not to burn. "A good old man responded," wrote Brébeuf, that "whoever wants to

go into the fires of hell is welcome to do so; as for me, I wish to go to heaven." But some of the old men remained obstinate, appealing for support to the "all-purpose refuge" of their belief that "their country is not like ours, that they have another God, another paradise, in a word, other customs." Hence the Jesuits centered their conversion campaign on the young.[37]

Targeting children made good sense if the goal was to remake secular habits as well as religious beliefs. And children's consciousness lent itself to the rudimentary language skills of the priests. With Indian children as well as the few French children living with the Jesuits in Canada, the priests could civilize through a combination of carrots and sticks—prizes of food or trinkets for good responses at catechism, whippings for misbehavior of all sorts. Yet using the rod on Indian children required getting them away from their parents, who thought the French treatment of children was barbaric. When a group of Indians visiting a ship on the St. Lawrence observed the French about to mete out a whipping to a French cabin boy (for having hit an Indian on the head with his drumstick), one of the Indian adults stood in the way and asked to be whipped in his stead. Indians complained about the French hitting their children, while the Jesuits found fault with Indian men for hitting their wives, though they felt there was nothing they could do to stop it. In the case of children, the Jesuits repeatedly pleaded for French donations to support boarding schools in Quebec in which proper discipline could be enforced without shocking the tender sensibilities of Indian parents.

It was the Huron girls (Brébeuf thought) who showed a special interest in Jesus. He reported in 1636 that the priests went from dwelling to dwelling teaching all the young children, baptized or not, the sign of the cross, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Prayer to the Guardian Angel, all in their own language. The younger kids would then teach the older ones. Girls returning from the forest would intercept a priest and "begin to recite what they know. What

a consolation to hear these districts resound with the name of Jesus, where the devil has been, so to speak, adored and recognized as God for so many centuries." Two decades later the Huron Christian community was made up mostly of women. "I can say with truth," wrote Father François Le Mercier in 1654, "that among savages as in the rest of the world, they are the devout sex." Yet the Jesuits' letters are full of heroic stories of male as well as female piety, among children as well as adults. Most of the children simply learned their prayers by rote, but Father Le Jeune took special pride in one precocious boy who went beyond memorized truths. "You say it's necessary to believe in order to go to heaven," Le Jeune said to a young Montagnais boy. "Do you believe?" "Yes, I believe, I do my best to believe," the boy answered. "What do you believe?" "I believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost; I believe that the Son was made man in the womb of a virgin named Mary." "Is the Virgin God?" After thinking a moment, the child replied, "No, she is not God, because you say that there is only one God."[38]

Systematic catechizing was directed at the children, but the Jesuits were always eager to bring the behavior of adults into line with Christ's prescriptions. The marital bond enjoined by Christ was as unknown to the eastern woodland tribes as it was to the Pueblo Indians. All the missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, bemoaned "the liberty with which," as Brébeuf put it, Indian men "change their wives at pleasure." Father Perrault on the island of Cape Breton noted that the locals paid no attention to the indissolubility of marriage, and he hoped to change their "polygamous" ways by linking sexual continence to the worship of Christ. Jesus modeled bodily discipline, giving his body up for "torture," then offering it in perpetuity in the Eucharist "en viandes" ("as food"). As Father Perrault saw it, in a perfect circle of causation, Jesus presented his own flesh each day for the "sole purpose" of helping us to glorify him for the sacrifice on Calvary that had made his flesh available to us in the first place. The elegance of Perrault's formulation shows that while his time among the Indians of Cape Breton

may have done little to change the customs of the island, it certainly helped him articulate his own Christological vision.[39]

The same goes for the Jesuits' efforts to persuade Native Americans to follow Christ's love-commandment in their dealings with one another. In 1637 Father Le Jeune managed to persuade a Huron war party to forgo the "filthy custom" of enjoying a pre-battle feast in which they were served by "completely nude" women. But he had a harder time convincing them to Christianize their approach to war. He saddled them with a set of fine distinctions. The right to kill their Iroquois enemies depended upon loving them too. He would offer God's benediction for their campaign only if they gave the Iroquois every opportunity to observe an earlier peace agreement. The Hurons had to give God a fair chance to make the Iroquois honorable. The leaders of the war party promised to obey these strictures, got the priest's blessing, but then reverted to old habits. Once among the Iroquois they exhibited an "intolerable pride" and committed "countless insolences," such as proclaiming themselves magically protected (perhaps partly because of the Jesuit blessing), and were promptly smitten by the enemy. "God greatly humiliated them, for their Captains and some others were put to death." In 1639 a joint Huron-Algonquin war party captured over a hundred Iroquois, who were distributed among the Huron villages for torture. The Jesuits were on record in opposition to these ritual killings, especially to the eating of enemy flesh, and they did their best to baptize the Iroquois victims before their deaths. But the Hurons, concluding that these baptisms fortified their victims, "resolved no longer to allow us to baptize these poor unfortunates, reckoning it a misfortune to their country when those whom they torment shriek not at all, or very little."[40]

A decade later Brébeuf was himself tortured to death by the Iroquois, who had overrun a Huron encampment. According to the later report of some escaped Huron prisoners, his attackers were assisted by Huron infidels acquainted with Christianity. They transformed the torture into a considered anti-Christian statement.

In addition to applying the usual necklace of red-hot hatchets and belt of burning bark, they cut off his tongue and lips to prevent him from uttering the name of Jesus. As they stripped "the flesh from his legs, thighs, and arms, to the very bone, and then put it to roast before his eyes, in order to eat it," they derided him by saying, "You see plainly that we treat you as a friend, since we shall be the cause of your eternal happiness. Thank us, then, for these good offices which we render you, for the more you suffer the more your God will reward you." This flesh-stripping, according to Jesuit Christophe Regnaut, was common in Huron tortures of the Iroquois as well as Iroquois tortures of the Hurons. What was novel in Brébeuf's case was the "kettle full of boiling water . . . poured over his body three times, in derision of Holy Baptism." Each of the three ablutions was accompanied by the words "Go to Heaven, for you are well baptized."[41]

Of all the Jesuits in New France Brébeuf may have been the best equipped to grasp that his own ritual torture in 1649 was the result not of savagery but of a different system of cultural practices, a system even in this extreme instance adapting itself to novel European beliefs. For over a decade Brébeuf had tried to counter the widespread impression that the Hurons lived like beasts. Granted, they were not "perfectly civilized" like the Japanese and Chinese. But assembled in villages of three hundred or four hundred households, and supporting themselves year-round by agriculture, they did have a "political and civil life." Bringing Jesus to them was therefore a problem of *translating* as much as *civilizing*. The challenge was to give the Hurons access to the meanings of Christian stories and symbols—meanings hidden from them by differences of language as well as experience. "The parables and the more familiar discourses of Jesus Christ are inexplicable to them," wrote Jérome Lalemant, Brébeuf's colleague among the Hurons, in 1640. "They are unfamiliar with salt, leaven, castle, pearl, prison, mustard seed, casks of wine, lamp, candlestick, torch; they have no idea of Kingdoms, Kings, and their majesty; not even of shepherds,

flocks, and a sheep-fold." Brébeuf found it impossible even to convey the sense of the sign of the cross to the Hurons in their own language. In 1636 he asked his superior, Paul Le Jeune, for permission to retranslate it. Instead of "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," he suggested "in the name of our Father, and of his Son, and of their Holy Ghost." That form was required by their language, in which all personal nouns were preceded by possessives:

> Certainly it seems that the three persons of the most Holy Trinity would be sufficiently expressed in this way, the third being indeed the Holy Spirit of the first and second; the second, Son of the first; and the first, our Father, in the phrase of the Apostle [in Ephesians 3 and in the Lord's Prayer]. . . . Would this usage be acceptable until the Huron language is enriched, or the mind of the Hurons opened to other languages? We will do nothing without advice.[42]

For the Jesuits of New France as for the Franciscans of New Mexico, bringing Jesus to the Indians meant living in their villages and instructing them in his gospel. "A missionary does no great good to the savages unless he lives with them," Father Jacques Gravier wrote from the Mississippi River in 1700. The Indians needed monitoring: practicing the faith meant literally *practicing* it, rehearsing it. Heathen habits would dissolve when overwhelmed by repeated acts of Christian worship and virtue. This Catholic sense that the faith could be learned by the doing of it rested on the assumption that after Adam's fall human beings, however weakened in apprehension or resolve, had retained a "natural" inclination to know and serve God. That universal human potential gave Catholic missionary work a special urgency. Since even uncivilized peoples had enormous untapped spiritual capacity, missionaries could have a dramatic impact upon their eternal fate. Bringing Jesus to them could turn them away from sin, leading them to choose obedience to

God's commandments. Franciscans and Jesuits felt that countless souls depended on them for deliverance. Believing that God had selected them for this weighty calling, they could submit with equanimity to final torments of the sort endured by Brébeuf.[43]

Where the French Jesuits differed from the Spanish friars was in their reticence about adult baptism. They baptized only those Indian adults who were dying or who had come to a well-articulated conviction about Christ as their savior and themselves as sinners in need of his redemption. But baptism was only the outward sign of an inward grace, as Father Pierre Biard pointed out in 1612. Indians who responded to the gospel of Jesus with "true repentance," who wished to "incorporate themselves with our Savior, Jesus Christ," would be saved even without baptism. The reverse was also true. Any baptized Christian might die in sin and be damned in perpetuity. In the Jesuits' eyes the heroes of the faith were not those who were baptized, but those who had caught the gospel spark, baptized or not. Joseph Chiwatenhwa, a Huron from the village of Ossossane, was baptized only when seriously ill. According to Father François Mercier, he had long "passed for a Christian among his own people," having never gambled, smoked, used charms for luck, had more than one wife, or "indulged in diabolical feasts." After recovering from his illness he made the final surrender "to reason and to the Holy Ghost" by "ridiculing his dreams" and meditating on the "Holy Commandments." He took to praying for forty-five minutes at a stretch, "all the time on his knees, which is a very difficult position for a savage." For Father Mercier, Chiwatenhwa was a shining light of French civility, but more important he had received from God the gift of "a holy tenderness of heart." After his baptism he went on to preach "Jesus Christ boldly and on all occasions" until captured by the Iroquois and martyred for the faith in 1640.[44]

The Jesuits knew that French-style civility was no end in itself. Like Joseph Chiwatenhwa, a young, unnamed Algonquin man went far beyond moral uprightness in voicing an obedience that in Father Le Jeune's estimation transcended human cultural identity

altogether. "Some of my people cast upon me the reproach that I am becoming a Frenchman, that I am leaving my own nation," the nineteen-year-old told him in 1639. "I answer them that I am neither Frenchman nor savage, but that I wish to be a child of God. All the French, including their Captain, could not save my soul; it is not in them that I believe, but in him who has made them themselves." Le Jeune added that "he expressed all this to us better in his own language than I can report in ours." Of course the young Algonquin was not transcending culture, but catching the universalizing thrust of the culture of Jesus, putting on "the new man," as Paul said in Colossians 3:10–11, "where there is neither Greek nor Jew" but "Christ is all, and in all."[45]

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Robert H. Schuller, "The Hour of Power," June 3, 2001. In his autobiography, *My Journey: From an Iowa Farm to a Cathedral of Dreams* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), Schuller notes that Pentecostal televangelist Jimmy Swaggart, critical of Schuller's "nonbiblical" ministry, embarked on a campaign to displace him from the airwaves (p. 418).

2. The church council at Chalcedon came up with a formula—Christ was one "person" with two "natures"—designed to protect his unity as a single person against both the previously condemned Nestorians (who believed he had two separate identities) and the countervailing Monophysites (who believed he had one nature, his divinity having intermingled fully with his humanity). From a cultural standpoint, one suspects that when contemporary Americans say Jesus is both human and divine, most are not interested in propositional precision or even in the question of who Jesus is in himself. If asked, they would probably say they want to protect their *experience* of Jesus as both human and divine. Western intellectual culture shifted so profoundly after the eighteenth century that even many theologians began viewing propositions about the person or nature of Christ as poetically true rather than metaphysically true. An excellent introduction to the various meanings given to such terms as "Messiah," "Son of man," and "Son of God" in early Jewish and Christian usage is E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993; New York: Penguin, 1995).

3. Christine Heyrman's marvelous book *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997) discusses the gendered contours of "democracy" in early-nineteenth-century evangelical religion. See especially p. 322, n. 1. She shows how the "popular" style of an explosively expanding Protestant evangelicalism was quite compatible with hierarchical organization and anti-democratic social views on the position of blacks and women. The same points could be made about an explosively expanding Irish American Catholicism beginning after the 1840s. Popular religion was "democratic" but only partially "egalitarian."

4. A perspicacious study of the unique complexities of the Catholic case is John T. McGreevy's *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: Norton, 2003). For the nineteenth-century American Jesus, see pp. 28–29.

5. On the Latino Catholic experience of Jesus, a fine place to start is Roberto Goizueta's essay, "The Symbolic World of Mexican-American Religion," in *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism,* ed. Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 119–38.

6. A survey in the 1980s showed that 48 percent of African Americans read the Bible at least once a week, compared to 32 percent of all Americans. Given a choice in 2001 between describing themselves as "religious" or only "somewhat religious," 49 percent of non-Hispanic black American adults chose the former, compared to 37 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans, 30 percent of Hispanic Americans, and 28 percent of Asian Americans. George Gallup, Jr., and Jim Castelli, *The People's Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 122; The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), City University of New York, 2001 (www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_index.htm). To my mind the most profound treatment of the intersections between African American and white southern experiences of Jesus is still Donald G. Mathews's wonderfully written and conceived *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977). Contrary to the dominant trend among contemporary historians of American religion, Mathews grasps that conceptions of Christ are integral to people's experiences of Christ. Ideas cannot be sequestered from "practice." Many religious historians, rightly rejecting an exclusive interest in the lofty thoughts of intellectual elites, have gone too far in the other direction. Mathews offers an important corrective by showing how ordinary believers make ideas about Jesus an essential element of their experiences of him. The next step is to insist that the ideas of innovative intellectuals (Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and others) exert tremendous influence—through their own writings and oratory and through their chain-reaction impact on a large cohort of popularizers—on the ideas of many ordinary believers.

7. "Religion and Public Life Survey," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, July 24, 2003 (www.people-press.org). Gallup and Castelli, *The People's Religion,* p. 64 , reported half of Americans were "born-again" in 1988, while in the mid-1970s "Poll Finds 34% Share 'Born Again' Feeling," *New York Times,* Sept. 26, 1976, p. 32 ("tried to encourage someone"). Polling data on church attendance are probably inflated, because respondents are thinking about how they wish they acted, not only about how they do act. The same may be true about belief in Jesus. People may be thinking about what they sense they are supposed to believe rather than about what they do believe. Even if that is the case, the data are still very revealing about American attitudes about Jesus. A sizable majority of Americans either believe he is divine or think they should believe it. Andrew Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), p. 13, reports that 77 percent of Americans believed in the divinity of Christ in 1952, and a virtually identical 76 percent did in 1983. On a 10-point scale measuring how "important" God was in

the lives of Europeans and Americans, Americans ranked at the top with a figure of 8.2, followed by the Irish (8), the Italians (6.9), the Spanish (6.4), the British and Germans (5.7), and the Swedes (3.9). On a 10-point scale measuring "certainty" about the resurrection of Christ, 65 percent of Americans were dead certain (10), another 11 percent almost certain (8 or 9). Internationally, the only national population rated more "religious" than Americans are the Indians. Kenneth Briggs, "Gallup Poll Finds Evidence of Pervasive Religious Character of U.S., With Only India More Committed," *New York Times,* Sept. 12, 1976, p. 25. Figures on European church attendance are supplied by Sheena Ashford, *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values* (Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth Publishers, 1992), p. 46. Canadians diverge from their neighbors to the south as much as western Europeans do. Only 30 percent of Canadians say religion is important to them, and only 21 percent claim to go to church or synagogue regularly—figures one-half or lower than U.S. percentages. Clifford Krauss, "In God We Trust . . . Canadians Aren't So Sure," *New York Times,* Mar. 26, 2003, p. 4. In the 2003 "Religion and Public Life Survey," 60 percent of Americans said religion was a "very important" part of their life, and another one-fourth said it was "fairly important."

8. ARIS, City University of New York, 2001; Michael Hout and Claude S. Fisher, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review* 67 (Apr. 2002): 165–90.

9. ARIS, City University of New York, 2001. On the "new" American religions—Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism—see Diana L. Eck's important book *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

10. No doubt verses about Jesus have been added to "Amazing Grace" over the last two centuries. In the seven-stanza early-nineteenth-century version (the seventh stanza was added to Newton's original six stanzas by an unknown author), Jesus is not mentioned. It is available online at www.cyberhymnal.org, where the hymn's universal American reach is affirmed by the printing of Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Kiowa, Navajo, and Spanish translations of the lyrics. On the commercialization and mainstreaming of contemporary Christian music, consult Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (Lexington, KY: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1999), and Neil Strauss, "Christian Bands, Crossing Over," *New York Times,* Jun. 10, 2003, p. E1. Of course contemporary Christian music sells records that protest against secularizing Christ's message. See Jacob's Trouble's song "The Church of Do What You Want To," which laments the churches' choice of doctrinal ambiguity and liturgical entertainment over the Bible, the Savior, and absolute right and wrong. Thanks to Nicholas Lopez for this reference.

11. A good entry point into the vast sociological literature on American Christian social life is James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, *American Congregations,* 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994). English scholar and Anglican churchman N. T. Wright reflects helpfully on American-European differences regarding Jesus in "The Great Debate," *Bible Review,* Aug. 1999, pp. 12, 54.

12. On the complexities of the Mormon understanding of Jesus, whom many contemporary Latter-day Saints view as "literally our elder brother," since all human beings are "begotten and born of heavenly parents" (God being married himself), see the trenchant treatment by Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), p. 325 and passim. It makes sense that contemporary Americans devoted to the sanctity of the family would turn to the LDS Church—which values Jesus but does not worship him with the same exclusive intensity that marks Catholic and Protestant piety—since Jesus, for all his passionate strictures against divorce, was decidedly of two minds about the family. Some of his sayings suggest that leaving family behind in a life of holy itinerancy was the spiritual path of choice. On the general question of how culture shapes religion I concur with H. Richard Niebuhr, whose books *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941) and *Christ and Culture* (1951) seem to me right on target. Religion is decisively molded by culture, but the power of culture to delimit the range of religious expression and feeling does not reduce religion to a function of culture. I discuss Niebuhr's views in "The Niebuhr Brothers and the Liberal Protestant Heritage," in *Religion and Twentieth-Century American Intellectual Life,* ed. Michael J. Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 94–115.

13. "The Divinity School Address," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures,* ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 79; Peter Dickson, "Fame by the Book," *Washington Post Book World,* Sept. 12, 1999, p. 7. Throughout this book I use the King James Version of the Bible, since it is the translation that has had the most significant impact on American culture, secular and religious, to this day. Even the Puritans, we now know, cited the KJV along with the Geneva Bible. A complete history of Jesus in America would have to trace the history of the various translations of the words the gospel writers attributed to him. That history would address at least two collateral histories: the cultural trajectory of "literalism" in general, and the cultural shift in the weight Americans have assigned to Christ's words as such, compared to his deeds and to his physical image. The first of those collateral histories is addressed by Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: New Press, 2000). The second awaits its undaunted chronicler. One of his or her major topics will need to be the simplification of the gospel text in recent editions of the Bible.

14. Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Preaching* (1925; New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 373–76. An excellent study of American cosmopolitan patriotism is Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890–1920* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

15. See Jay P. Dolan's *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830–1900* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1978) on Catholic efforts to reinvigorate piety. A telling instance of the Catholic tendency to believe that "the real Jesus" is always available, and that efforts to decipher his actual first-century words and deeds (as the "Jesus seminar" of the 1980s attempted to do) are beside the point, is Luke Timothy Johnson's *The Real Jesus: The Misguided*

Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). To understand Catholics' relation to Jesus in America or anywhere else, it is essential to realize that their "pro-life" instincts are not limited to the abortion issue, but extend to cloning, genetic engineering, environmental damage, and all other basic alterations of the "natural" human order—God's creation. Catholic emphasis on the divine child Jesus and even divine fetus Jesus is part of a broader commitment to him as a fully natural being whose integral humanity is biological as well as historical. Those who believe in him must therefore respect the integrity of all human bodies. "Human rights" include the protection of the human body against any tampering; those who wish to tamper with it have no natural or human right to do so. Conservative Protestants may join conservative Catholics in opposing liberal abortion laws, but they often do so out of a desire to protect the family as a social and religious institution, not out of a "natural law" commitment to preserving the created biological and natural order as ordained by God.

16. *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Ralph H. Orth and Alfred R. Ferguson, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 7; *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Merton M. Sealts, Jr., vol. 10 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), p. 389.

17. "State Fair's Masterpiece in Butter," *Omaha World-Herald* (Iowa ed.), Aug. 14, 1999, p. 1.

18. Consult Frederic Cople Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), for evidence that nineteenth- and even twentieth-century American anti-Semitism was significantly based on a specifically Christian (i.e., religious) animosity toward the Jews.

CHAPTER ONE

1. This chapter and the next contrast the Catholics of New Spain and New France to the Calvinist Protestants of New England. A comprehensive treatment of early European-Indian contact in North America would obviously need to examine Virginia too, from Thomas Harriot's *Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) to Pocahontas's trip to England in 1616 and the killing of three hundred English Virginians in 1622, an event that cooled the English on evangelizing the Indians. The Puritans, whose numbers swelled after their arrival in Salem and Boston in 1629–1630, left us a rich body of reflections on the problem of bringing Christ to the Indians (see Chapter Two).

2. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr., eds., *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage, 1492–1493* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1989), p. 19; Joseph Jouvency, "An Account of the Canadian Mission" [1710] in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610–1791,* vol. 1 (Cleveland: Burrows Bros., 1896), p. 211. On the cultural intricacies of "possession," Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*

(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991) is very suggestive. See, for example, pp. 58–60, 167 (n. 7).

3. Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez,* ed. Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (1542; Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1999), vol. 1, p. 173; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations* 38:115, 117, 139; 2:52. When I cite an even-numbered (French language) page of *Jesuit Relations,* it means I have made my own translation; when I cite an odd-numbered page, I have used Thwaites's English translation from a century ago. His translation is sometimes off the mark, as Joseph P. Donnelly, S.J., shows in his *Thwaites' Jesuit Relations: Errata and Addenda* (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1967).

4. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions,* p. 63.

5. The Europeans often called the Indians "savages," but in the seventeenth century they usually meant by that term "wild" or "uncivilized," not "subhuman." And the wild members of their own societies frequently struck them as less salvageable than the Native Americans. "The savages are brighter ["ont plus d'esprit"] than our ordinary peasants," wrote Father Paul Le Jeune in 1634; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations* 6:230. James Axtell discusses "savage" and other related terms in "Forked Tongues: Moral Judgments in Indian History," in his *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 39ff.

6. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 35:204.

7. Cabeza de Vaca, *His Account,* 1:153, 177, 195.

8. Cabeza de Vaca, *His Account,* 1:107, 219.

9. Rolena Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios,*" in *New World Encounters,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), gives a cogent analysis of Cabeza de Vaca as shaman. See esp. p. 58.

10. Garcilaso de la Vega, "La Florida," in *The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando De Soto to North America in 1539–1543,* ed. Lawrence A. Clayton et al. (1605; Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993), p. 434.

11. Jacques Cartier, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 61, 63–64. François-Marc Gagnon, *Jacques Cartier et la découverte du Nouveau Monde* (Quebec City: Musée du Québec, 1984), offers a magnificent interdisciplinary assessment of Cartier's voyages—archaeological, anthropological, material-cultural, artistic, and historical.

12. Cartier, *Voyages,* p. 26.

13. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 4:35, 37; *Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage,* pp. 157, 219.

14. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 41:150. In the Catholic ministry "secular" priests are distinguished from "regular" clergy. Franciscans and Jesuits, as members of international orders, are regular clergy; secular priests are appointed by diocesan bishops to serve within that diocese only. David E. Stannard's *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992) is an example of legitimate outrage tethered to the view that missionaries (and Christianity) were the wholehearted

handmaidens of genocide. See James Axtell, "Columbian Encounters: 1992–1995," *William and Mary Quarterly* 52 (Oct. 1995): 684.

15. Fray Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls: The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides, 1630,* ed. Baker H. Morrow (Niwot, CO: Univ. Press of Colorado, 1996), p. 72. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992; chap. 4 ("Conquistadores of the Spirit") is a finely balanced overview of the Franciscans' presence in Florida and New Mexico. Like most of the scholarly and popular literature published on the occasion of the sesquicentennial of Columbus's voyage, Weber's book rightly stresses the Europeans' imperial disregard for whatever stood between them and the riches or lands of the New World. But Weber does not let the coercive character of Spanish rule—religious and secular—blot out the concurrent fact that the seventeenth-century Franciscans in New Mexico got their conversions only when the "Indians cooperated," and that the cooperation occurred "only when they believed they had something to gain from the new religion" (p. 115). Those gains, he notes, combined spiritual and material benefits.

16. Bartolomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (1552; DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 178–80. See also Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), and David M. Traboulay, *Columbus and Las Casas: The Conquest and Christianization of America, 1492–1566* (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America, 1994).

17. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls*, p. 82. J. Manuel Espinosa, in the "historical introduction" to his collection *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696 and the Franciscan Missions in New Mexico: Letters of the Missionaries and Related Documents* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 19, 33, estimates that there were thirty-five thousand "Christianized Indians" in New Mexico in 1629, and that the number was down to twenty-five thousand in 1680. David Weber gives the figure of thirty-five thousand for the entire New Mexican Pueblo population in the early 1600s, and believes the number was down to about half of that (mainly because of disease) by 1680. "Blood of Martyrs, Blood of Indians: Toward a More Balanced View of Spanish Missions in Seventeenth-Century North America," in *Columbian Consequences,* ed. David Hurst Thomas (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), vol. 2, p. 436.

18. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* pp. 83–84.

19. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* pp. xix–xx, 30–32; Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 73–74.

20. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* p. 80; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America,* p. 107. Of course, the European interest in the "fabulous" was not limited to the invisible world of spirits. The Spanish friars would never have gotten to New Mexico if adventurers and government officials had not been seduced by tales of untold riches waiting for them in "the Seven Cities" of "Cibola" in the Zuni country. George P. Hammond, "The

Search for the Fabulous in the Settlement of the Southwest," in David J. Weber, ed., *New Spain's Far Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1979), p. 21. The impressive work of William A. Christian, Jr., on sixteenth-century Spanish piety suggests that the New Mexico Indians had plenty of support for their magical visions from the secular as well as clerical Spaniards in their midst: *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981) and *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981).

21. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* pp. 64, 68, 72.

22. Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1989), pp. 173–74, 183. See also Susanne Klaus, *Uprooted Christianity: The Preaching of the Christian Doctrine in Mexico Based on Franciscan Sermons in the Sixteenth Century Written in Nahuatl* (Bonn: Sauerwein, 1999).

23. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* p. 42. Spanish formalism is well described by Stephen Greenblatt in his discussion of Columbus's ritual proclamation claiming possession of New World real estate. Saying the right words was the substance of the transaction, whether of secular ownership or religious assent. *Marvelous Possessions,* p. 59.

24. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* pp. 86–88, 137. During the Pueblo Revolt twenty-one Franciscans were killed. Gutiérrez calculates that of the roughly one hundred priests who served in the pueblos in the seventeenth century, forty-nine met the martyrdom that Franciscan tradition cherished. It takes nothing away from Gutiérrez's massive intellectual achievement to note that he sometimes subverts the delicate interpretive balance of religious and political meanings that his book, at its best, achieves. In order to underline the Franciscans' or the Spanish officials' destructive impact on Indian culture, he sometimes needlessly doubts the sincerity of their religious professions. Why suggest, for example, that the governor's pious self-flagellation in 1598 may have been a "purely political ploy" (p. 88)? It accords better with Gutiérrez's overall perspective to assert that it was probably *not* a ploy. The brutality of Spanish political power, he notes again and again, is perfectly compatible with genuine religious convictions on all sides. Gutiérrez shows better than anyone else has managed to do that the fateful drama of Christ's introduction into the Indians' Old World and the Europeans' New World includes *both* Christ's cross-cultural religious appeal and the aggressive use of him by Europeans to modify or extirpate Native American cultures.

25. Alonso de Benavides, *A Harvest of Reluctant Souls,* p. 76; Espinosa, ed., *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696,* p. 120. According to Espinosa (p. 27), the conflict between Franciscans and local Spanish government officials from 1610 to 1680 was an "almost endless confrontation." When the Franciscans returned to the Pueblos from their Texas exile in 1694, they found the Indians notably uninterested in sanctifying their sexual unions with the sacrament of marriage (pp. 116–44).

26. Espinosa, ed., *The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1696,* pp. 122, 124–25, 137.

27. Marc Lescarbot, *The Conversion of the Savages Who Were Baptized in New France During This Year, 1610* (Paris: Jean Millot, 1610), reprinted in Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 1:54, 58–59, 61; Biard in *Jesuit Relations,* 1:162–63. A few English Jesuits preached to the Indians in Maryland between 1634 and 1645, but they did little living among Indians or learning of native languages. In those years there were never more than five Jesuits in Maryland at a time; in Quebec there were never fewer than twenty, along with numerous lay brothers. James Axtell, "White Legend: The Jesuit Missions in Maryland," in *After Columbus,* p. 83.

28. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 5:168; 7:55, 145, 147, 150.

29. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 5:159, 161, 224.

30. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 11:193; 17:124, 126.

31. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 22:60; 27:189–93, 200.

32. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 10:168; 6:182, 185.

33. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 8:161.

34. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 10:13, 39, 49; 8:134.

35. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 7:101, 103.

36. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 8:37, 127–29.

37. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 8:129, 144–46.

38. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 10:25–26; 41:148; 11:230, 232. Karen Anderson's *Chain Her By One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (London: Routledge, 1991) rightly notes that the Jesuits' very male God in Jesus helped extend patriarchal structures already well cemented in Montagnais and Huron cultures. The Jesuits often regarded Indian women as Jezebels who threatened the virtue of Indian men, and failed to realize that the campaign to end polygamy had disastrous material effects on wives let go by Christianized husbands. Anderson might have added that the Jesuits also thought that Indian men threatened the virtue of Indian women, and that the Jesuits' male God in Jesus could unsettle gender relations by giving new spiritual authority to individual women as well as men. Carole Blackburn, in *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632–1650* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 2000), concurs with Anderson's judgment about the Jesuits' view of women but offers a much more nuanced analysis of gender and power relations between colonizers and colonized. She shrewdly observes that "the expression of dominance in the *Relations* is not necessarily equivalent to dominance in their actual relations with Native people" (p. 12). Her Introduction shows why a "post-colonial" perspective is indispensable to a full understanding of the cultural transfer of a figure such as Jesus. On "cultural transfer" as an alternative to "acculturation" in social theory, see the Introduction to Laurier Turgeon et al., eds., *Cultural Transfer, America and Europe: 500 Years of Interculturation* (Laval: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996), pp. 33–54.

39. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 8:151, 166–67.

40. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 11:214–19; 17:63–65.

41. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 34:29, 31.

42. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 10:118, 120, 211; 20:70.

43. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 66:265.
44. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 3:153; 15:79–81, 95, 97.
45. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations,* 16:115–17.

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Late in life my father liked to imagine he would write a book about Jesus. He had the enthusiasm but lacked the obsessive gene that produces books. This volume is far from the kind of book he would have written about Jesus, but he is ultimately responsible for it. While pondering his impact on me, and hence on this book, I came across the letter William James wrote to his father from Europe in 1882, as Henry James, Sr., lay ill in Massachusetts, approaching death. "In that mysterious gulf of the past into which the

present soon will fall and go back and back," William wrote, "yours is still for me the central figure. All my intellectual life I derive from you; and though we have often seemed at odds in the expression thereof, I'm sure there's a harmony somewhere, and that our strivings will combine. What my debt to you is goes beyond all my power of estimating—so early, so penetrating and so constant has been the influence." William's letter didn't arrive in time for his father to read it, but he didn't need to read it to know what was in his son's heart. Nor does my father need to read this book to know where it comes from, or to know that it's for him.

About the Author

Richard Wightman Fox has taught American intellectual and cultural history, with emphasis on religion, at Yale; Reed College; Boston University; and has recently returned home to Los Angeles, where he teaches in the history department of the University of Southern California. Professor Fox is also the author of *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago, 1999) and of *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (Pantheon, 1985).

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