The Catholic Church in Latin America, 1492-1900

Course Description
History 483
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The Catholic Church has been one of the most powerful, durable, and influential institutions in Latin America’s history since the European conquest. The Church has also held a particularly controversial role in the region. It played a crucial role in the conquest and formed an essential part of the imperial states. It protected the vulnerable (women, the poor, non-whites, etc.) and spread literacy and art. It and also became the largest, richest landowner in the Western hemisphere, and therefore earned the envy and enmity of many. This course begins with religious conditions in Europe, the Americas, and Africa before 1492, and then looks at the effects of conquest and the establishment of the Church across empires. We will then examine the dramatic changes that shook the Church during the Enlightenment, the wars of independence (1810s), and the nineteenth-century movements to modernize society and subordinate the Church beneath a secular state. Throughout, we will consider both the evolution of the Church as an institution (as an organization and as a player on the field of politics) and the evolution of Catholicism as a religion that deeply affected people’s culture, sense of the divine, ethics, and worldview.