



CLERICAL IDEOLOGY IN A REVOLUTIONARY AGE: THE GUADALAJARA CHURCH AND THE IDEA OF THE MEXICAN NATION (1788-1853)

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A Framework for Studying Clerical Ideology in Guadalajara

Clerical Ideology in a Time of Change

Clerical ideology played an important role in the complex cultural transition Mexico underwent from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. This study aims to accurately situate clerical ideology in relation to the social, economic and political transformation promoted by both the Enlightened absolutism of the late colonial regime and the new, independent state born in 1821. The first step is setting out an overall framework.

This period was marked by deep changes and the transformation or reformation of the ruling groups of society. Therefore, we should think about clerical ideology in the context of the changes produced in ideological hegemony. What new interests were effectively expressed in the ideological sphere? How much did inherited ideological patterns change? How much room was there to re-accommodate the interests emerging from new ideological forms?¹

In the pre-Bourbon status quo, the union of secular and religious power was laid down as the foundation of society. The effective exercise of royal patronage kept these two forces in delicate balance. The Church kept its autonomy on matters of faith; the state took up its authority by guiding suitable appointments. The Catholic state based its legitimacy on the support provided by the Church. Nearly a co-ruler, the Church watched over



the state in many ways, and was directly entrusted with preserving orthodoxy in morals and doctrine. The relationship between Church and state was rightly symbolized by repeated declarations of the union of “throne and altar.”²

Beginning with the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms, Spanish-American society underwent increasing secularization in the standards and assumptions of collective behavior. Considered “decadent” by many inside and outside the Iberian peninsula, Spain responded to its international marginalization with a progressively more ambitious and systematic program of changes and transformations. The bourgeoisie, long subordinated within the structure of imperial power, became a valued and protected element of society. The strength of rival foreign powers was seen as a product of their potent bourgeoisies and their efficient systems of production and distribution. To become their equal, absolutist Spain set out to alter the internal make-up of imperial power. This sparked – among other things – a process of secularization of the core institutions and values of society.³ When independence was achieved in 1821, the declaration of popular sovereignty caused the ideological make-up of Mexican society – already undergoing secularization – to be subjected to intense and open questioning of unprecedented depth and frankness. The ideological unmaking and remaking of the state, of state power in its most basic sense, was accompanied by a period of singular critiques proposing radical transformations.⁴

For the purposes of this study, the ideological production of this period (from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century) should be seen as part of the complex linkage of the Hispanic world to the most “advanced” northern parts of Western Europe. Overcoming “decadence” and developing untapped or neglected resources set the tenor for the period. Equally important was the new and unprecedented phenomenon of a growing number of lay people, inside government and out, asking questions and offering answers about the basic make-up of society.⁵ This was not just a matter of minor or technical proposals, but of wide-ranging and deep examinations which began with the ills that afflicted and weakened Hispanic society – as opposed to foreign powers. The crumbling of the Hapsburg Empire made critiques of its failings come to be prized. Independent Mexico would inherit this crisis of remaking state power from the late Spanish Empire.



The Bourbon monarchy had harvested this growing unease, and attempted to guide it to new ends. Clerics and statesmen in particular, from Feijóo to Campomanes, had subjected everything to questioning. They had proposed – with some differences of opinion – that the future of the Hispanic world had to significantly break with its past, lest the misfortunes of that past be repeated, which would be intolerable. This questioning was broadened, popularized and extended by political crisis, and its result, in nineteenth-century Mexico, was the shattering of any comfortable and triumphalist traditionalism – like that which might have characterized the prideful and buoyant Spain and Hispanic America of the Renaissance.⁶ The weakness of the Spanish state was seen as rooted in the nature of Spanish society and its economic and cultural practices. The overall make-up of society was inevitably problematized. Giving priority to the role of the bourgeoisie, secularizing the state, downgrading the corporations in favor of a single citizenship status, consolidating mechanisms for popular representation and promoting practical and general education became tasks for social development from the eighteenth century forward. Their place in independent Mexico is the logical, although conflicted, sequel to the crisis of the Spanish Empire.⁷

The Church was at the center of the debate, both as a participant and as a subject. Its role in the dialectic of change between society and the state should not be underestimated. This was a crisis of assumptions about the social life of man, an ideological and cultural crisis which affected the foundations of the social edifice and its possible state organization. Should the social achievements of man be governed by reason and free will inspired by self-interest, or should they be subject to a collective ideal which effectively overruled individual or group experience? In the latter case, a special body should be entrusted with spreading the vision of a collective life and setting and enforcing standards for socially acceptable behavior. The traditional Western response to this problem had been religion preserved by a jealous hierarchy. This avoided many problems concerning the relationship between society and the state. As an English thinker put it as late as the end of the eighteenth century: “He who worships God in spirit and truth will love the government and laws which protect him without asking by whom they are administered.”⁸ From this viewpoint, the laws governing collective life reflect and protect



that life. Particular interests cannot be imposed, but must first be debated and incorporated by a government which acts as arbiter over the supposedly harmonious whole of society. The Hispanic variant of this vision took the form of a society ordered into bodies and estates, within a supposedly organic whole, governed by accepted laws and customs under an absolutist monarchy.⁹

Orienting the society of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Hispanic world towards a more open approach to worldly life meant fundamentally changing the core standards and assumptions of societal behavior.¹⁰ This step was taken on behalf of the bourgeoisie, rather than directed by it. Naturally, it also affected any ideas of the state pertaining to worldly existence. No longer to be seen as a passing means to an other-worldly end, worldly pursuits would now be seen as ends in themselves. Instead of representing and adjusting an organic whole made up of corporate bodies and estates, the state would become the instrument for remaking society. By changing the legal and moral codes of society, the state would come to represent the collective interests of citizen-individuals. The conservation of the organic whole would give way to the promotion of individual interests as the assumed guide for state conduct.¹¹

Scholars have too often assumed that clerical ideology foolishly opposed this historical moment. Yet the survival of clerical ideology would seem to challenge this interpretation. The documents analyzed for this period in this study do not suggest any stuffy narrowness of thinking, or any retreat by clerical ideology, either intellectually or emotionally, as an *overall response* by the Church to the winds of change. In addition, it is singularly important to note that during the entire period under study – and until 1856 – the standards and legal framework keeping the Church joined to the state remained in force. Clerical discourse had the advantage of being able to take for granted the survival of a legal framework which favored it. So long as the Church did not fight for complete reaction, the established order reserved a privileged space for it at the core of society, despite the growing rise of ideologies calling for social change and the making of a single, anti-corporatist citizenship. The Church could employ this privileged space to influence changes, to moderate them, and sometimes even to eliminate them.¹²



Regional Pressures as Ideological Factors

As the center of an emerging but still peripheral region, Guadalajara could hardly aspire to merely keep the cultural and social structures of the past alive. The well-being of the city and its region depended on present and future gains. The past could be a starting point, but never a fixed goal. That is why it is important to examine the role of traditionalism in Mexican life in a region in an open process of transformation and consolidation. Clerical ideology, generally identified with traditionalism, was in particular tension on this point. Traditionalism, in this sense, was not only associated with keeping the Church bound to the state, but also with a vision of society as an organic and harmonious whole whose structure and hierarchy were protected by inherited cultural values. Traditionalism was characterized by emphasis on otherworldly religious themes and eternal values, rather than worldly social behavior and the pursuit of "progress."¹³

Guadalajara was a recently formed region where the Bourbon reforms had driven notable economic growth. It is likely that the anti-corporatist spirit of the reforms benefited the region rather than harming it. The attack on the interests of the merchant guild in Mexico City redounded to the benefit of commerce in Guadalajara. There was no solid guild tradition in Guadalajara and its industries accelerated around 1770 without resorting to that corporatist system.¹⁴

Far from the Atlantic and the threat of the English, and therefore a less vulnerable center of the Spanish Empire, Guadalajara seems to have experienced relatively little of the Bourbon reforms' component of anti-Creole suspicion. Creoles had achieved a level of political participation in the *audiencia* of Guadalajara far above what was customary in the capital of the viceroyalty. Even though this participation declined in this period, it spurred notable social and economic ties between Spaniards and Creoles.¹⁵ Regional energies were fueled by transformations and did not experience the weakening produced by a strong division between Creoles and Spaniards. If an entrepreneurial spirit was going to be more prized than before, that was a good sign for the region.

The traditional corporation with the deepest roots in Guadalajara was the Church. Within this institution, at the end of the colonial period, Spaniards and Creoles commonly associated with each other. The outstanding personalities of the Church, without distinction, gave the warmest of welcomes to



the implementation of Bourbon reforms in Guadalajara, *explicitly* because of what they promised in terms of regional development. In this way, Guadalajara became a singularly favored zone of America on the verge of Independence. It was a region where the firmest institutional base of the old order – the Church – aimed to identify itself with the forces of change. This began during the period of Bourbon absolutism and, although it underwent major changes after 1810, continued afterwards. The Church did not give up on its attempts to connect to social change, even after Independence and the proclamation of popular sovereignty as the political basis of the country.¹⁶

Forging the Region

Just as the *audiencia* of Guadalajara was originally created subject to the authority of the viceroy in the capital, so the regional economy was subjected to the ups and downs of the hegemonic center in Mexico. New Galicia was born dependent, economically and politically, on the controlling forces of Mexico City. The capital gave Guadalajara political orders and economic goods, receiving and distributing its major product, different kinds of livestock (cattle, mules and horses).¹⁷

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Guadalajara region had no possibility of forming its own economic space, or a semi-autonomous territory, within the great internal market of the Viceroyalty presided over by the merchant guild [*consulado*] of Mexico, formed in 1592. It is even doubtful whether we can speak organically of a region, since centrifugal forces wrested from Guadalajara whatever hegemony it may have coveted.

Yet by contrast, the course of the eighteenth century was shaped by the growing consolidation of a regional internal market based on the expanding population of the capital of Guadalajara. Between 1700 and 1800, city residents increased six times in number, reaching 28,000 in 1793, 35,000 in 1803 and 40,000 in 1821. Guadalajara came to be the third city in the Viceroyalty, and the population of its hinterland supported this prominence. Very important processes took place, especially in the fifty years before Independence. While available data do not allow definitive conclusions, it seems that the intendency of Guadalajara came to occupy first place, or close behind, in economic growth.



Extensive cattle raising was set up on the coast, while the eastern reaches of the territory consolidated a specialization in mule and horse raising. A transition towards intensive agriculture took place in a wide zone bordering Guadalajara, due to the city's growing demands.

In the midst of so many changes, all of society underwent a deep shift. With the mobilization of productive resources, disputes over borders between towns, or between towns and haciendas, became common. The demographic growth of the area outran the possibilities of labor absorption due to agricultural growth. As available land became scarce, the excess rural population faced a difficult situation. Peasants suffered from a more unequal distribution of natural resources within their own communities. Social difficulties aided in increasing artesanal production, a compensating activity at this critical socioeconomic moment. Similarly, crime, banditry and vagrancy also increased, clear indices of a hardly promising sociological outlook. With their subsistence threatened, more peasants hired themselves out for work on the haciendas. At the same time, the haciendas consolidated their control over the supply of food to the city. New investments and the expansion of areas cultivated directly by landowners pushed sharecroppers aside.

Yet while the most unprotected sectors of society went through difficult times, businessmen saw their luck improve. Hacienda activity was stabilized by the economic strengthening due to the nearby urban market. The commercial groups providing credit for agricultural activity and local distribution of goods prospered. Their political star shone ever brighter as they increased their presence in the municipal government of Guadalajara and achieved the establishment of a merchant guild there in 1795. No longer a mere stopping point for supplying California and Sonora, the port of San Blas was cleared for international commerce in 1796, which also favored the commercial groups. Mining in the intendancy was now in open decline, but despite that it did not cease to contribute to the making of great fortunes. The booming mining centers outside the region continued to be a powerful drive to local production of cattle, certain manufactured goods, and even agricultural products, all of which were to the benefit of commercial interests.



Ideology and Society

Ideological reactions to the changes in Guadalajara society were varied. City life required an economic and political regulation which was qualitatively different from earlier eras. Regional culture was promoted by the founding of a university, a printing press, and a theater towards the end of the eighteenth century. Problems of excess population and urban crowding were addressed by the creation of a new hospice and hospital and the building of housing under the bishop's auspices. In 1812 a mint was built to ease commerce, and in 1821 a patriotic society was created to contribute to "progress." Even before Independence, there were attempts at industrial development with capital and technical innovations. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities looked favorably on the spread of manufacturing, seen as providing useful work and creating jobs. Attempts at manufacturing would reappear during the national period.¹⁸

The Church still represented a key channel in the ideological continuity of Mexican society at the time. The critical thinking of *prominent clerics* in Guadalajara society did not only represent the interests of a privileged group.¹⁹ The clergy identified with the groups responsible for key transformations of the heart of society in order to influence political, economic and social change. We could say that what the Church in Guadalajara went through between 1790 and 1853 represented the crisis of its hegemony over a changing world. Clerical discourse, eminently social at every moment, was transformed by an ideological trend which only became clear at the end. The objective of clerical discourse was to overcome the swift fragmentation of society, the product of both economic growth and the greater prominence of lay critics in public affairs, by reaffirming an organic vision of social order as one and indivisible. Within this order, the clergy would maintain a vitally important role.

Such a reformulation was something to be won, not an automatic result. It had to respond to the growing complexity of a region subject to growth and consolidation which, for that very reason, was undergoing processes of social breakdown.

Secular ideologies – especially those of foreign inspiration – presented important challenges to the Church's struggle for social hegemony. As a result, it should not surprise us that in the midst of these internal ideological reformulations carried out by the members of the clergy, important schisms appeared within the



ecclesiastical hierarchy itself. The lack of a homogenous clerical response to the crisis became more serious and evident as the need to reorient the sociopolitical setting became crucial. It is worth stressing that because royal absolutism had begun the change, later losing out to the political and economic forces of Mexico, the Church never had the opportunity to present a clear or totally opposed alternative to the change underway.

Since the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Guadalajara had taken full part in the regionalist drive that promoted and reflected the social and economic restructuring of the area. It solidly supported the creation of the local university and the formation of the merchant guild. The high clergy debuted a new language for both, making allusions to natural rights and civil society based on property rights. They did not fail to speak of clerical abuses and of superstition as being opposed to true religion. Yet at the same time, they showed reticence towards the drive to restructure the Church along more modern and politically submissive lines which had originated in royal circles, and not directly with the clergy itself. Even so, the Enlightened clerics of the 1790s were ready to put up with the frustrations that went along with bringing their country up to date. Modernization was identified with a prosperity that both Church and society needed. In addition, Christianity would expand into new territory and reformulate the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual, between science and theology. All this was seen as a worthwhile gain.²⁰

In this period, the Church was still sure of itself in social life and the ideological sphere. Its discourse was optimistic and frankly positive. It mediated between the government and the governed with the assurance of being listened to. In keeping with the royalist tone of the 1753 Concordat and the 1771 Fourth Mexican Council, the Church obviously conceived of itself as a participant in an important change of direction for the Empire and for its region.²¹ Prosperity and greater competitiveness were fundamental for all of the Spanish Empire: the King, the Church and the people. The new businessmen, assertive regional interests and new knowledge were all allies in religious and imperial development. They were thought of as complementary, rather than opposed.

In the years after 1810, the ideological discourse of the prominent clergy of Guadalajara indicated a notable change towards the spirit of progress of the time. To be sure, the sociopolitical context had already changed. The introduction of Bourbon reforms in the



intendancy in those twenty years had not only promoted greater economic prosperity, but it had also intensified the materialism and scientific pretensions of the well-off. On the other hand, it had also sharpened certain social antagonisms. The ecclesiastical hierarchy had changed after the deaths of Bishop Alcalde and his immediate successor in the mid-1790s. Now the hierarchy raised new questions, or raised old doubts formerly silenced, about the possibilities of social progress. By then, the French Revolution was a menacing backdrop. Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 intensified the dilemmas of the Guadalajara clergy, and the consolidation of Independence would only continue to deepen them.²²

Throughout the period under study, however, the Church in Guadalajara refused to take a passive attitude towards the changes generated at the heart of society. It always demonstrated a certain ability to find points of contact between opposing social outlooks. Certainly this was something of a historical necessity if it wanted to preserve the vital role of the clergy as an intermediary in social conflicts and as the bond ensuring the coexistence of opposing interests. The difficulty of achieving this increased as royal absolutism was beaten back, and the doctrine of popular sovereignty managed to replace it, from Independence forward. In this sense, the period between 1810 and 1821 is a watershed in the clerical discourse of Guadalajara. Even between 1825 and 1831, when it lacked a bishop, the Guadalajara Church continued to struggle to adapt to the changes taking place. By first carefully marking religious terrain off from political terrain, then insisting on the organic whole that the "nation" represented, the Church attempted to demonstrate both its steadfastness and the vitality of its message for the social well-being of the country.²³

The Ecclesiastical Body

From the Ideology of Accommodation to Concrete Historical Change

This study looks at the clergy as an ecclesiastical institution, a "body" endowed with an ideological power initially intertwined with absolutist royal power. Immersed in the crisis of the Imperial state, it found itself implicated in the remaking of the power and therefore the international viability of the Spanish Empire. The intendancy of Guadalajara stood out as a thriving new region, and therefore offered an ideal site to



test the reformist drive of the clergy. Beyond this local factor, another factor was no less important. Throughout this process, the effective exercise of royal patronage influenced the advancement of appropriate clerical figures, because appointments to positions in the clerical hierarchy implied a recognition of political loyalty. The struggles after Independence over the effective exercise of this patronage by the newborn Mexican state aimed to preserve this balance of power.²⁴ The Mexican state was destined to lose this struggle, it is true, but the clergy would not cease to grapple with new directions in society and the state, despite this conflict. Indeed, the clergy would persist in its drive to coordinate and reflect the hegemonic interests of regionalism and nationalism, as well as to dominate the more narrowly political-ideological field.²⁵

Yet certain aspects of this should not be overlooked. From the beginning, regionalism in the intendency of Guadalajara opened up the possibility of going beyond a mere renewal within the Empire. It was associated with the emergence of new groups and a new awareness of identity. Although this would not clash directly with Bourbon reformism before 1810, it would do so afterwards. In fact, regionalism and the Mexican nationalism that historically went along with it would end up giving abstract liberal individualism a geographic and horizontal expression. Gradually connecting up with doctrines like popular sovereignty and the individual pursuit of self-interest, regionalism and nationalism threatened to break apart the organic unity of Mexican society, which until then had been a mere segment of Hispanic Imperial unity. Even without the effective exercise of patronage by the new Mexican state, the clergy could not dodge the complexity of this societal change. It found itself obliged to offer a view that went beyond the mere negation of new trends. From the end of the eighteenth century until 1853, its efforts were neither insignificant nor unimportant to the future history of Mexico, and they await detailed study.

We could associate liberalism with a certain break with the values of the past. By contrast, clerical ideology was always distinguished by its spirit of order, discipline and reverence towards the memory of things past. It did not deny change, but it required change to more clearly pass through mediations.²⁶ It explicitly supported the state as the preferred authority for this task of directing change. It strove to avoid religious or civil questioning which might threaten to destabilize the harmony of the social



collective. When disputes arose between social sectors or even between the civil and ecclesiastical bureaucracy, these were to be treated as administrative or perhaps jurisdictional matters, but never as deep disagreements. By contrast, both Enlightened absolutism and liberalism promoted a greater split between the secular and the spiritual and a weakening of traditional social arrangements. They shared an openly critical attitude towards the past.²⁷

As long as the traditional alliance of Church and state lasted, civil non-conformity was accepted and tolerated. But open civil dissent was not, as its spread might have threatened the peculiar unity of political and spiritual society. The difference may appear minimal, but it was crucial. The organic social whole still took precedence over the individual. Nevertheless, one should not lose sight of the decreasing naturalness of this over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to the multiplication of spontaneous or deliberate changes. This is when the long-delayed dispute between the Church and the state comes to the fore. Non-aristocratic social forces strove to fortify their position in the state at the expense of the status quo and the syncretic regime which until then had been the peculiar response of Spain and New Spain to the emergence of new forces within society. The Mexican Church was not ready to accept a radical liberal and individualist redefinition of the state, nor was it prepared to separate civil and religious society, sundering political and religious unity. It fought to impose metaphysical ideals on society, reinforcing the old alliance between Church and state, between Church and society, and between various social sectors and the state. From the viewpoint the Church repeatedly expressed, the civil government may have been supreme in secular matters, but the Church continued to set the ultimate goals of all of society on a transcendent plane. Together, the state and the Church would promote the unity of society.²⁸

According to its way of thinking, the Church was the moral and intellectual leader of state and society. Yet it would see its successes become progressively more fleeting and partial. The eighteenth century and the Bourbon reforms placed the status quo under tension and in question. The decline of the metropolitan economy spurred attempts to achieve a swift, guided change. The result was a dangerous balancing game, taking place within a new and stimulating tension. The half-measures came to an end when Napoleonic France decided to advance on Spain in 1808 and completely subdue the Spanish Empire. From this historical



circumstance, there emerged an archipelago of nations – and regions – of Latin America. And each fragment of the worn-out Spanish Empire would face the same challenge as the discarded metropolis: change or repeat? To adopt popular sovereignty, or to remain faithful to a sovereignty which was colonial, metropolitan, and – in the final instance – divine and distant from human view? Adopting popular sovereignty meant facing a threatening situation in which the multiple voices of a heterogeneous people were pulling social unity apart and questioning the authority of not only the royal sovereign, but also his historical ally, the Church. The importance of work in society could later be framed in terms of a human “progress” hardly oriented towards clerical consecration. In the face of such unknowns, the Mexican Church had to take a stand.²⁹

The nineteenth century in Mexico was marked by economic recession, open or latent civil war, and a tenacious dispute at the top of society to set the ideological framework to find a path out of the crisis. Society was opened up by the force of the blows dealt by groups and individuals demanding a voice and a vote. This itself was a sign of the breakdown of the status quo. But at the same time, the majority of the population could not fully take part in social debates, even though they did suffer from the experience of society’s failures and reshaping. The majority of the people were still poor, ignorant and far from the effective exercise of political power. Although overall social discontent seems to have intensified, those who could channel it effectively were part of a privileged minority whose social models were divided between periodically updated traditionalism and some adaptation of Northern European liberalism. Thus the crisis of breaking colonial ties and definitively forming a new nation was an extension of the crisis of the Catholic Hispanic world. The rupture of colonialism cracked and partly broke up the corporatist society of castes centered around royal absolutism. But Mexico was still far from being able to genuinely remake society as a collection of individualized citizens, with effectively equal rights, each one openly pursuing his sovereign personal interest.³⁰

What this implied for the possible structure of the new society would only emerge over time, and after bitter struggles.

Of course, Mexican society was only nominally aristocratic-monarchical in the European sense.³¹ Following the fleeting empire of Iturbide, the republican form of government was generally accepted, and it only lost its absolute hegemony after the



debacle of the war with the United States.³² Yet throughout this period, the clergy and the Church were granted a privileged space in society. Calling into question the role of religion and the Church in society seemed to threaten a nationality which was still weak and could hardly withstand more surgery than it had already undergone – or was undergoing – and still remain strong and unified against outside threats. But there was a great ambivalence. If priority was given to the surviving legal, administrative and cultural ties vital to linking society and the state, then only unavoidable changes should be undertaken, and even these should only be done slowly and cautiously. But if, on the other hand, priority was given to the need to bring up to date the representativeness of government and the distribution of wealth, in order to promote a new individualist and classist basis for society, then national sovereignty in the form of *popular* sovereignty should be given substance as quickly as possible. In that case, the aim would be a unity of compromise and convenience based on the notion of an explicit and reformable social contract.³³

The first approach underscored the social role of the Church in national life, pointing towards an organic, indissoluble unity, forged in a past that was still partly sacrosanct. That unity was perpetuated more through tradition, cultural norms, and bureaucratic authority than through open acceptance or interest, strictly speaking. In practice, the rejection of past Spanish rule was mitigated by administrative routine and by the real hegemony of the Church in interpreting past and present social life for most of the population. The danger was that this vision might not offer a swift and predictable resolution of national problems, and that it might sacrifice the strengthening of citizen participation and republican virtues for a passing strength forged from the dangerous denial of unsatisfied interests. The opposing vision also held its dangers. Based on an optimism that trusted in the national ability to quickly and deeply heal three centuries of difficult colonial history, it could hardly guarantee avoiding the socially divisive tendencies of rational individualism among a supremely heterogeneous people. Thus it is hardly strange that the initial period of self-government should be based on a fragile and perhaps desperate attempt at compromise. In this transition, popular sovereignty was checked first by monarchical principles, and later by a republicanism closely tied to the Church.³⁴

In any case, whatever their ideological preferences, the old corporatist bodies of the Army and the Church were not all that



had survived within society. The old confraternities of artisans and peasants also endured, the rural townships were intact despite some changes, the universities still sheltered those privileged by erudition, and the land owners and urban businessmen – who had never required a noble title to exercise their hegemony – continued to hold a status unreachable by the great majority. Society was still structured by behavior which required something more than mere liberal individualism to reasonably coordinate the interests of the whole. This is surely what guaranteed that ideological projects were always, whatever their premises, accompanied by a certain pragmatism designed to ensure their effectiveness in historically specific ways. The ideology of change, first absolutist and later liberal, never overcame the dilemma this implied.³⁵ Moreover, it made headway among governing sectors – statesmen, lawyers, those aspiring to popularly elected posts – but it left most of society intact. The autonomy and ideological viability of ecclesiastical institutions remained safe for a long time. Social discourse reflected this compromise with reality, and helped prevent a definitive reformulation of society and the state.

Clerical Pamphleteering

A Measure of the Continuities and New Possibilities of an Era

Drawing closer to actual society leads us to study the formation of the Mexican nation and the forging of Mexican nationalism as specific historical processes. Symptomatically, the clergy was very much present in both processes. Under Spanish colonial power, the formation of the nation was as an underlying and undesired process, and of course nationalism was officially ruled out. Following the national declaration of Independence in 1821, the tradition of submission to Spain, the presence of many Iberians in Mexico, and the Holy Alliance's support for Spanish recovery of its American colonies all underscored the dangers threatening the Mexican nation during the 1820s and 1830s. With the fading of the Spanish threat at the end of the 1830s, the specter of United States expansionism emerged with the breaking away of Texas in 1836. Foreign diplomatic challenges were evident throughout the period, accompanied each time by threats of internal breakup produced by the form of state organization and the ideological make-up of the nation. Although optimism was the dominant national attitude after the declaration of Independence, disillusion rapidly set in and the frustration and



perplexity produced by multiple failures was followed by bitter and dark pessimism after the war with the United States in 1847. These were not the adequate circumstances, externally or internally, for effective cohesion of the forces of change.³⁶

Nevertheless, with Mexican Independence and the strengthening of liberalism, there began a period suddenly based on a single clear set of ideological perspectives. Institutions and values should be based on singular principles guided by the rights and duties of an egalitarian citizen. In an incipient way, this society was becoming more plural so that social actors might become the representatives and agents of change. But the 1824 Constitution was only moderately liberal. It perpetuated the alliance of Church and state which, rooted in the Hapsburg past, had managed to survive the reformist absolutism of the Bourbons. Could such an agreement withstand the popular movement the most radical wing of liberal constitutionalism would lead in later years? Clerical ideology was more accustomed to social discussions about the speed and opportune moment of change than to debates about basic principles whose living embodiment was the historic alliance between Church and state. Thus, it was only partly ready for the new direction of public debates. But it would prove to be much more prepared than one might think, as available documentation from Guadalajara shows.

The aim of this study is to allow the ideological moments of social discourse to be defined by the thrusts and parries of the pamphlets of the time. This points us towards those sectors of the population who were able to read and write, and who were closely tied to political power. They could intervene in the processes which clearly defined the place of politics in society, publishing ideas and refuting those of their opponents. While this is a minuscule segment of the social whole, we must not forget that this is precisely the segment which set society's guidelines in terms of culture, politics, and social and economic standards, and set them all the more strongly the less effective democracy there was. This is the segment which exercised the intellectual control of structures hegemonic over the rest of the population and made checkered claims to reflecting and representing the interests of the whole. Spokesmen for the ruling institutions, or self-appointed spokesmen for transforming or preserving them, they were knights in a battle aimed to shape the destiny of all.

The clerical propagandists treated here are a particular portion of these elites. Close reading will allow us to more clearly identify



many of the authors of the pamphlets analyzed here. Further bibliographic research would undoubtedly reveal their positions high in the clerical ranks, or their aspiration to such positions. But that is not the path I have chosen to follow here, out of a conviction that it is more important to place emphasis on discourse than on men. For the analytical aims pursued here, it is more useful to stress the plasticity and adaptability of polemics than the supposedly unchanging nature of interests. This “decentering of the subject” of history allows us to follow how discourse itself “constitutes individuals as subjects.” Such subjectivities “do not refer back to ... a substance, but rather to a position which can be occupied by different individuals.” From this standpoint, what is in dispute is not only goods, posts, or specific influences, but how such goods, such posts, and such influences are seen and understood by members of society. There is no greater or better guardian of order than the consensus of public opinion.³⁷

One should very much keep in mind that freedom of the press was only established in 1812. From that year, it followed an erratic course until the declaration of the republic in 1824. With the coming of the republic, freedom of the press came to an entirely new legal and effective fullness. Even though censorship on religious matters had not yet been lifted, the point where politics ended and religion began could never be specified. That is why there was such effective freedom of the press that accusations of licentiousness were frequent and widespread. Since this was a “popular government,” a “government of the people,” the Mexican civil authorities did not generally dare to control the free expression of ideas. So there flourished everywhere the varied attitudes and opinions of a people becoming sovereign through the exercise of an authority whose existence required no more justification than the mere fact of being Mexican. In addition, Mexicanness was felt to be fully universal, without any barriers to hold it back or reduce it to the level of a provincial or minor experience. It is precisely in pamphlets where one can clearly sense that national independence included a popular revolt in Mexicans’ perceptions of themselves. These sharp dynamics of the period give it a moving vitality which even today impresses anyone interested in the constitution and reconstitution of the country.³⁸

Prior to full freedom of the press, the hegemony of conservative pamphlets over material published in Guadalajara was indisputable – except for the decrees and a newspaper issued during the brief government Hidalgo formed there (late November 1810 to



mid-January 1811). A wide range of publications appeared, but sermons and pastoral letters made up the key pamphlets of the period for the purposes of this study. It is worth pointing out that the counterinsurgency launched a newspaper – albeit a short-lived one – which during the brief constitutionalist period tried to form an alliance between localist forces striving for rapid provincial expansion and the larger forces of Iberian colonialism.³⁹

After 1821, the very same ideological writings associated with the exercise of political sovereignty produced an expansion of the genres in print. In these pamphlets, the roles of the central and regional governments were discussed, and all kinds of constitutional debates took place between the various pamphlets and newspapers. Clerical publications continued to include sermons, pastoral letters and ecclesiastical edicts, with updated themes and outlooks, except for a lapse due to a lack of a bishop between 1825 and 1831. Clerical thought was also clearly expressed in polemical pamphlets since this was a time when there were attempts to found sovereignty on specific constitutional and organizational acts that were subject to debate. This was likely accentuated precisely by the absence of a bishop. In addition, the establishment of local presses increased the number of publications and the production of publishers.⁴⁰

This marked an impressive break with the days when things were published only in Spain or in Mexico City, without any need for a local press. With its interest in economic and social development, Bourbon Enlightened absolutism had already brought about a change in this situation by supporting a press and other institutions representative of potentially dynamic local interests. But the press still spoke from the top of a pyramid of power, and pamphleteers adopted the tone of authorities setting directives for a people not yet able to speak for itself. When they wished to, these documents could capture and reflect reigning local feeling. But they selectively gave voice to interests who could demand rights within the frame of governing imperial institutions. It is also significant that certain fundamental documents from the period – some of which are examined here – were not printed, despite their great importance in shaping public life.⁴¹ Public life was clearly still governed by mediating groups which were far from popular and which, despite the changes, continued to do without an open, public forum.

The sovereignty theoretically exercised by the people required turning that pyramid upside down. Everything constituting



sovereignty had to be the product of a more direct popular voice. That is what was theoretically achieved by the nearly unrestrained freedom of the press. With a pen, paper, and some connection with a printer, any Mexican could be a true sovereign, exercising the sovereignty shared by all the people. Political institutions should therefore be shaped to take forms appropriate to a differentiated and heterogeneous public. This assumption was inherent in the idea of freedom of the press as it appeared in Mexico at the time. Yet it was in deep conflict with the usual proceedings of the bureaucracy and the Church, as well as with the social groups nurtured under the colonial order who had become the pillars of society. Writers at the time could hardly avoid referring directly or indirectly to these contradictions, whether to reconcile those institutions and groups to the new national situation, or to wage an assault upon them.⁴²

Since popular sovereignty could only be exercised by the people, the nature and character of this group had to be defined. Popular sovereignty and its exercise represented a problem and an opportunity which could not be separated from the messy issue of sorting out the nation-state. This question not only involved the problem of constituting "public affairs," but went further, because it included the idea of sovereignty within the concept of "national being." Prior to Independence, no debate on such a theme could have officially taken place.⁴³ There were Peninsular Spaniards and American Spaniards, peoples of mixed origin, and indigenous peoples. All were included, even at the level of their group interests, within an idea of empire which, despite its clearly Spanish origin, did not yet establish a full nation-state identity. In this sense, the Hapsburg accommodation to the coexistence of different types of peoples or communities was still in effect throughout the entire Bourbon period up to the eve of Mexican Independence.⁴⁴ Sovereignty had a dynastic origin which claimed a universal basis. There was no need to define a united people in order to give it a fixed, civic meaning. The universality of the empire was eaten away by the implications of the conquest itself, the resulting regime of discrimination against castes and Indians, and the Bourbon tendency to attack American Creoles and subordinate them in various ways. But the premise of universality would radically change only with the spread of theories of popular sovereignty.⁴⁵

Harvesting the fruits of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thought, nineteenth-century Mexico would face the question of how to exercise popular sovereignty within the



territorial and demographic confines of a nationality in the making. This problem included the need for social coexistence beyond the level of principles and general standards of idealist thinking about sovereignty. That is why the groups contending in this period for a dominant role in defining the Mexican nation and nationality should be seen in the fullness of their contradictions and their historical presence. That is to say, the presence of tensions and the resulting contradictions at the core of their ideologies should be understood as a product of the efforts of their ideologues, in the midst of the struggle, to play a vital and effective role in defining the future course of the nation. For example, liberalism would repeatedly evince a need to observe certain conventions in order to help overcome a constantly unmanageable present. To preserve the liberal state that emerged from the 1824 Constitution, its supporters prized order and the respect for governing authorities, whether based on liberalism or some other ideology. In this context, clerical ideology offered a potentially important support, since it underscored the obligation of all Catholics to obey the established authorities. In the face of such circumstances, liberalism's drive towards the effective exercise of popular sovereignty could weaken. On the opposing side, it was only by means of a double movement, looking to the past but also to the future, that the traditionalist ideology of the clergy could hold back the destructive outburst of new events and opinions. These threatened to overthrow clerical ideology, with the priority it gave harmony and the social whole over dissension and the individual. In any case, the architectural richness of the historical moment clearly appears, in both cases, as a specific interweaving of competing hegemonies.⁴⁶

Pamphlets are an ideal place to study the fractures within ideological positions in their contemporary political dimensions. It is in pamphlets that we can capture the elaboration of shared hegemonies in which opposing positions weave new points of effective agreement. It is the best place to analyze the points of continuity.⁴⁷ The needs of the state and the bureaucracy as well as the traditionalist opposition represented a burden difficult to cast off in Independent Mexico. The exigencies of internal order and international peace were tasks worth consideration. The recognition of the new national state by foreign powers, even the Papacy in the religious-diplomatic sphere, became a problem of state as much as a liberal dilemma. The state could hardly emphasize its liberalism with complete disregard for other practical



considerations. The Mexican state was subject to the inertia of its bureaucratic past and to a need to endure even at the expense of sacrificing its liberal character. Besides, there was no single or homogeneous interpretation of liberalism, and there were always debates among its supporters.⁴⁸

What has been said about the problems of the liberal state is no less true for the study of the clergy and its traditionalist ideology. They, too, can be studied more subtly through pamphlets. The clergy did not enjoy full ideological hegemony, as was already clear from the emergence of Bourbon reformism during the crisis of the Spanish Empire. The clergy could hardly have such hegemony after the declaration of Mexican Independence and the emergence of popular sovereignty. The clergy had taken part in the crisis of the Hispanic world from the eighteenth century, and under Bourbon reformism, they had participated in some of the solutions to this crisis. Thus the clergy had some reformist and enlightened credentials in their theoretical positions and practical actions.⁴⁹ Pamphlets enable us to take the measure of this reformism, both during the Bourbon period and after Independence. Similarly, pamphlets can help us understand how the Church, just like the state, faced a situation where it could not exercise complete hegemony over ideological domains, and thus made its own adjustments between past ideological orientation and the irreducible present. The Church underwent renewal in Independent Mexico, but at the same time managed to perpetuate a traditionalist organic understanding by employing certain aspects of liberal ideology itself and important facets of the nationalism of the newly independent country.

Clerical pamphlets were guided by three basic premises: doctrinal orthodoxy, the organic character of society as a whole, and the indispensable role of the ecclesiastical body in watching over both. This gave clerical discourse a deep anchoring in past doctrine and practice. But it did not obviate the need for creative updating with an eye to the dilemmas of the moment. Clerical discourse did not predetermine the specifics of the material and civil life of man. It only presupposed general guidance, whose specific outline was subject to debate. The specific responses to new moments always recovered the ideological inheritance of the Church, but also adjusted to the new social setting of which the clergy themselves formed a part. The desire for shared hegemony with the state even rewarded a certain flexibility towards changes in national ideology.⁵⁰



The clergy made an appreciable effort to adapt advantageously to the new course of the country. The clerical *modus operandi* demanded that the individuals with the right to speak about the moment be selected according to the standards of the ecclesiastical body. In Jalisco, except for the period immediately following the death of Bishop Cabañas in late 1824, there is a recognizable shaping of clerical ideology by the bishop and his cathedral chapter (college of canons of the diocese). Even anonymous clerical pamphlets, since they generally did not spark rejection by the church authorities, can be presumed to have been published with their tolerance or tacit support. While their positions certainly varied, they were clearly instruments in the Church's search for a sure path as an institution. Once an officially proclaimed position had been set, all other parts of the Church owed obedience. In the meantime, the coexistence of different and heterogeneous elements within the ecclesiastical body was assured, although there was an attempt to keep certain common assumptions about doctrinal orthodoxy, the vital role of the clergy in national life, and the organic integration of the whole of society. That is why the pamphlets can be read as an expression of the tensions between inherited ideology and the demands of the moment. We can measure the efforts of the Church to position itself vis-à-vis the dominant social groups of the period by examining the discourse Church spokesmen, official or self-proclaimed, produced at different political moments to achieve that clear objective, and even by examining the inconsistencies, contradictions, and variability of that discourse. This suggests that the official positions of the Church itself were to a significant degree reached by debate between the potentially different opinions of the various clerical leaders.⁵¹

In summary, during this period clerical ideology proved itself as shifting in its expression and formulation as liberal ideology. Therefore the reconstitution or transformation of clerical ideology is best viewed in terms of ideological hegemony. The parameters of social domination changed constantly and profoundly throughout the period under study. The union of government power with the Church was constitutional until 1856, but even so, as an ideological foundation of the state, it suffered significant blows. Society allowed for more people to express their views, since liberalism exalted individual rights. That in itself reflected a change in the status quo. Independence gave voice to an increasingly more plural society, where social actors became the representatives and



agents of change by appealing to the central and unquestionable principle of the basic freedom of man.

Independence was connected to a new concept of sovereignty. Now sovereignty should be a product of freedom directly exercised by the people, which, as already suggested, implied turning the traditional pyramid of power upside down. In fact, the nearly unrestricted freedom of the press would exert pressure on the structures of political power. There was an aspiration to shaping the country so as to include a collection of groups with equal rights in social and political life. But, meanwhile, in the midst of the change towards popular sovereignty, the interests of the bureaucracy and the Church continued to exercise a power which is still not adequately understood. To put it differently, the state bureaucracy and the Church bureaucracy would have to redefine themselves with regard to popular sovereignty, even while still entertaining doubts about it. In turn, sovereignty was vulnerable on questions of internal order and foreign threats. The following chapters will explore some aspects of this dynamic, placing special emphasis on the central role of the Church in Guadalajara.

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