



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

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Tensions at the Heart of Clerical Ideology in a Revolutionary Era, 1810–20

From Confidence to Caution

Perhaps the clergy of Guadalajara experienced the late eighteenth-century questioning of the dominant ideology of New Spain more forcefully than clergy elsewhere in the country. Nonetheless, the high clergy were ready to accept Bourbon Enlightenment and, especially, its material benefits. Those benefits were identified with greater Church income and the propagation of Christianity into new lands, in keeping with regional interests. The clergy was not averse to reformulating the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual, and between science and theology, along modernizing lines. Despite their misgivings, the high clergy of Guadalajara publicly and enthusiastically accepted the new social orientation coming from Spain. The clergy do not seem to have carefully weighed all the theoretical and practical implications of this movement. Neither did they fully take into account the possibility that certain local forces might appropriate this shift, taking it further and more radically calling into question those who had made up the established order under the Spanish monarchy.¹

Uneasy with the Bourbon reforms, the high clergy of Guadalajara had opted nonetheless for a relatively confident attitude towards reformism. They elaborated a discourse in which the



ecclesiastical reform measures put forward by the Bourbon regime were considered issues open to negotiation between Church and state. The goodness and religiousness of the ruler were the final guarantee that everything would turn out well in the end. The Church had a considerable ability to adapt itself to new circumstances, and if a single Church policy could be identified, it would be moderation between extremes. A confident and self-assured clergy could consider themselves part of an imperial crusade for modernization. Didn't the acts of the clergy even mean a certain religious and imperial advocacy of the value of things Spanish? Feijóo had clearly seen the purification of the faith and the modernization of Spain as compatible and related matters. Both aimed to recover the ancient grandeur of the country. Wasn't there some influence of this kind in the clergy of Guadalajara?² Clearly, Guadalajara's location between the north and the center-south of the country contributed to its ideological posture. Long-standing economic dependence on Mexico City was locally resented. This matter of regional advocacy undoubtedly added an element of self-interest to the clergy's actions.³

But the local element could complicate the region's linkage to the new imperial project as well as easing it. Evidently, this gradually became clear to the high clergy of Guadalajara. Encouraging change did not ensure being able to shape or direct it. The new movements at the core of society could still distance themselves from the guidance of Church and state, and thereby threaten to go beyond the limits they imposed. If such movements managed to challenge the authority of the King, they could place the union of throne and altar in danger. If the Church did not always have sure recourse to a religious monarch, the moderate and ultimately trusting strategy of the clergy would be placed in check. There is a certain element of inevitability to the clergy's conduct, here. As far as sovereignty was concerned, the status quo beneath a strong monarchy was the best guarantee that no change would radically alter clerical hegemony.⁴

The welcome given to the Enlightenment gradually turned cautious and circumspect. The basis for this shift by the high clergy had already been evident at the close of the eighteenth century. The outbreak of the insurrection led by Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla in 1810 gave it greater force, but the political and social movements that motivated the public stances taken by the clergy after 1810 were swift and unforeseeable. Ecclesiastical interventions were, for their part, so opportune and intentional that their



assumptions had obviously already been worked out (as argued in the last chapter).

The year 1810 does represent a watershed for the clergy of Guadalajara, but this is only because their misgivings towards change crystallized in the face of its social implications. Those misgivings themselves could no longer be held in check by confidence in the good will of the monarch. Since he was jailed in France, he offered no guarantees whatsoever. The headless Spanish state, handed over to liberals, did not steer a clear course. In such an uncertain situation, clerical uneasiness deepened and turned towards more open critique and moral condemnation. Clerical enlightenment had run into new social motives, and it quickly turned to freely questioning the basis of political liberalism. It worried about the difficult situation of the monarchy, now leaning towards secularization. The changes the monarchy had made were ultimately unable to overcome imperial decadence and internal social division.

The deepening of ecclesiastical reservations towards change did not mean a radical rupture with earlier thinking. The clergy continued to struggle to overcome the increasing crisis of the dominant ideology and to find points of agreement between opposing orientations. Regional clergy persisted in their complex political stance. They maintained their deep sense that they not only belonged to and represented local interests, but they were also the cornerstone for any social alliance, indispensable for present and future well-being. The clergy's declarations of support for absolutism were sincere, but the passing of time would show that the clergy could do without it. What did prove essential was its gradualist strategy for reaching out to social sectors benefiting from change, so long as it did not go beyond certain social limits.⁵

This chapter will try to go deeper into the ideological transformation of the clergy of the intendency of Guadalajara. Looking over the independence period, we note a shift. Our analysis will emphasize sermons published between 1811 and 1820 in particular, although we will also draw on additional materials. More often than not, these sermons were the product of members of the cathedral chapter of the diocese. Printing such sermons, like those already seen, required the authorization of the highest local church authorities. Therefore, the scrutiny of ecclesiastical authorities suggested that the sermons had a trustworthy basis in dogma and that there had been consideration of the political repercussions that publicly taking a position in a printed sermon might have.⁶



Only one of our major sources for this period comes from outside the high clergy. This is the newspaper *El Telégrafo de Guadalajara*, published between 1811 and 1813 by the priest Francisco Severo Maldonado. Is this a case, as suggested in Chapter One, of the high clergy's extending beyond the limited circle of the bishop, the cathedral chapter and others of similar authority? Was a unique education especially valued in an era when freedom of the press was already under debate? Could a lone clerical voice assume an important role, authorized only by the power of his arguments, even without holding a position among the traditional high clergy? One could argue that his prestige and influence had given Maldonado a voice in a society that was now more ready to listen to those who were not members of the elite. The Enlightenment era was a particularly propitious moment to begin to redefine power and authority. Now criticism of the past and the invocation of reason enjoyed new legitimacy. In this context, we should view *El Telégrafo de Guadalajara* as a first indicator of the cracking of the traditional limits of the high clergy, and of their broadening in the atmosphere of a new era, reformist at first, and later revolutionary in inspiration.⁷

Not only did the ecclesiastical authorities readjust their own values; they also found themselves obliged to tolerate and even condone the ideological activities of notable members of the lower clergy. Their weight in lay society allowed the lower clergy to forge values and concepts along lines parallel to those of the traditional high clergy's. They could range beyond the pulpit, as in the case of Maldonado, and place themselves in the field of royalist-constitutionalist journalism. This broadening and reorienting of the high clergy to give voice to new elements can also be seen in the case of the priest ultimately called to preach a sermon on behalf of independence under Iturbide.⁸ Later on, in the 1820s, this tendency was in some ways accentuated by the absence of a bishop due to the lack of resolution of the state patronage problem.⁹ The high clergy was undergoing an ideological transition in two dimensions, both in terms of its ideological discourse and in terms of the shifting makeup and autonomy of the group of priests who spoke publicly.

We have already suggested some of the traditionalist and corporatist aspects of the social discourse of the high clergy of Guadalajara. These aspects hardened with the arrival in 1796 of the new bishop, Juan Cruz Ruiz de Cabañas y Crespo. Inspired by a desire for spirituality and social peace which doubtless was



intensified by the French Revolution, Cabañas expressed conservative ideas and acted accordingly, within the larger context of the Bourbon reforms. After 1810, the Mexican counterrevolution deepened this tendency. The counterrevolution demanded an ideological mobilization of the discursive resources and social network of the Church. Thus the Church made use of its role as legitimator of established society and its future development. At this moment, traditionalism was renewed, to the disadvantage of more progressive ideological reformulations.

The high clergy's uneasiness with new social causes, its partial retreat from progressive political theory, its renewed devotion to spirituality and other-worldliness, as well as its sudden rediscovery of social hierarchy and the limits to man's social improvement, all reached their fullest expression after 1810. However, more attention should be paid to how careful the clergy was not to give up the ideological discourse supporting societal change. For all its growing misgivings, the Church was inevitably committed to an attenuated modernization.

The documents discussed here are not treatises aimed at the erudite, but rhetorical pieces that aim to convince. In this sense, clerical speakers prudently attempted to ground their positions in the most deep-rooted convictions of their external and heterogeneous audience. Therefore, this discourse is not strictly religious or ecclesiastic, but eminently social in nature. The course of Church history in Guadalajara suggests that there was more behind the discourse of the high clergy of Guadalajara than the pure calculation of oratorical effects.

Even so, there is a change of degree from the period before 1810. Before the insurrection, authority was more firmly established and secure. It is true that some clerical misgivings had been evident even in Bishop Alcalde's pastoral letters and sermons after 1788. Then the French Revolution, the invasion of Spain, and the overthrow of the King in 1808 had made the situation much more difficult. But with the 1810 insurrection, clerical ideology had to directly assume its old role as the foundation of social unity. It had to promote the overcoming of the differences at society's core, so that the whole of society might take priority over the fragmentation of its parts. The Church insisted that they come together in harmony, as a single, indivisible whole.

Above all, the greatest difference from the ideological statements analyzed earlier is the speaker's clear sense of being on the defensive, fighting against imminent peril. This contrasted



significantly with the earlier period, in which the clergy, invested with greater optimism, allied itself to the modernizing drive directed by the civil authorities. The discourse, then, and not just society itself, had in fact traveled from enlightened absolutism to this difficult struggle between different parts of the great social edifice over reconstruction. The civil war represented by the insurrection was set against the other war, no lesser in scope, of minds. At the heart of the ideological counterrevolution lay the seeds of the forced transition towards a society with an axis of its own and a greater diversity of members given voice and vote. Clerical discourse was cautious to recognize this process, but it did not deny it either, and this dynamic is constantly evident.

Bishop Cabañas was an interesting example of this. In his sermons, he had not attacked non-aristocratic property or riches; he had implicitly accepted them. But he had asked that they be distinguished from luxury, vanity, and prohibited games of chance. In April 1810, he solicited funds for the counterrevolution.¹⁰ He declared then that "I am not asking you to take solemn vows of poverty, or to place all you have and possess at the feet of the first ministers of God ... but I exhort you in the name of the Lord to give whatever you have left over." Growing riches and the morality related to encouraging and keeping them undoubtedly worried the prelate. In the end, he could not completely disassociate it from political calculation and thus from an orientation that threatened to undermine social life by emphasizing self-interest. It seemed to be negating the existence of God and making idols "of sensual pleasure and sordid interest, following the erroneous principles of the evil and dominant philosophy of the last century" as the only motives for social man. Ultimately, he suggested, leaving material concerns behind was more noble and honorable. So he stated that "I can tell you with confidence: prideful luxury and intolerable vanity ... have never provided nobility and honor."¹¹

Similarly, intellectual modernization had been a given in Cabañas' thinking. What he seemed to deplore was that science should descend to a simple "mania for [crude] calculation." In the same way, while it was not worthy of condemnation to speak "of social ties, as they are now called," it may have seemed more astute to shore up the social edifice by invoking "the infinite importance of holy brotherhood and mutual love," more recognizably traditional and Christian concepts.¹²



Two years later, in the 1812 document, Cabañas had offered thanks for the support given to the counterrevolution.¹³ At that moment, he could contrast “the great and still glorious edifice of our religious, political and moral society, the Holy Sanctuary of Laws, of Justice, of Truth and Majesty” with “the dark and deep abyss of the anarchy of the most loathsome immorality and impiety.” But once again he assumed material progress as an integral part of this society suddenly redrawn along traditional lines. Therefore he made immediate mention of “the Fields, Haciendas, and Mines, which for the good of all were greatly prospering, and still aspire with honest and interesting aims to greater increase, richness and perfection.” Clearly, this material well-being and its development were in contrast with the destruction of the insurrection, but it was established that the status quo was now a guardian of such progress, and never its opponent, nor a disinterested observer. However, on this occasion, civic participation was only seen in connection with “the essential and public virtue of subordination,” the same virtue that members of the priesthood should promote without any other concerns.¹⁴

Cabañas would speak again in 1815, before the convincing triumph of the royalist forces brought a prolonged silence on these dilemmas. Due to the publication of the Constitution of Apatzingán, he once more expressed the outlines of his social ideology.¹⁵ Just as in 1810, the prelate was worried by the arrogance of a thinking which located the development of society in mere self-interest. This time, he pointed out that this meant attributing “to chance the most perfect works and the economy and conduct of always adorable Providence.” Popular sovereignty did not allow for men to form “any society but that which they themselves were willing and able to form under the tumultuous impulse of the crowds.”¹⁶

But Cabañas pointed out that opposition to popular sovereignty need not exclude civic participation. On the contrary, one of the worst aspects of the Constitution of Apatzingán was that it claimed to speak for all the inhabitants of New Spain, but it was not true that all of them had united “their voices with those of the rebels.” In any case, what he was looking for was the peace and well-being of the “goods and lives of the law-abiding, and the just, the industrious, the hard-working, and the peaceful, who *should place themselves within the civil, military and ecclesiastical corporations formed by the whole populace.*” The building of a “great and



powerful nation" was not at all in conflict with a "rational, equitable, and just" government. But those characteristics were viewed as inherent characteristics of the government, and not responses to popular outcry.¹⁷

However, the Bishop did not clear up doubts on this point. He was more inclined to moralizing than towards conceptual clarity.¹⁸ The faithful should oppose every "internal division of the Church" and concern themselves only for "liberty rightly understood." This equilibrium should be achieved without "the audacity of believing ourselves judges of iniquity or justice, or good or evil, of truth or falsity." Navigating without a clear conceptual direction, under the aegis of a tradition that had only been partly renewed from top down, Mexicans should "postpone our whims, passions and personal interests *in favor of the inviolable rights of the community*." Cabañas was losing his intellectual clarity, here, and giving himself over to a confused and defensive all-inclusiveness. He also intended to lead his flock down the same path. The political possibilities of a mediated discourse of this kind should not be underestimated.¹⁹ Brian Hamnett has pointed out the delicate balance of the feelings of the New Spain Creoles, who were no less alienated from an authoritarian and fiscally burdensome monarchy than from the masses they looked upon with condescension and fear.²⁰

In the frame of mind set out in Cabaña's discourse, we can glimpse the general tendency evident in the other documents under analysis from 1810 to 1815, with the partial exception of Maldonado's newspaper. An "elegiac song" from 1811 found that the insurrection had set the horde against "all sensible and enlightened souls."²¹ "Machiavellianism" and "materialism" were like a contagion, a "malign plague" spread by Hidalgo. Once again, arrogance and anarchy were presented as enemies of civil society. Only the rabble questioned "the legitimate powers," but the priest contradicted himself by recognizing the general appeal of Hidalgo's anti-European ideas of a better future. He had to resort to the specter of a government of the masses, enemy of the Church, to dissipate the possibility that fascination with things new might lead the people down the wrong path.²²

A similar fear was expressed in other documents from the same year. One of these spoke openly of the civil war and attack on the material basis of society that the insurrection represented:



Now no one respects a compatriot, and being honorable, or having goods, is a crime. . . . No property is secure. The towns are sacked and their inhabitants reduced to misery. Commerce is blocked, and the most-needed articles are missing. Mining has been made impossible, as well as reaping any of its fruits. Agriculture, the perennial source of public prosperity, has decayed and laborers are lacking.²³

The world was returning to “the primitive chaos it came from” without improving the basis of society. Yet the priest denied that “the present war is a war of religion” – instead, it led to anarchy and the loosening of ties between men. It only indirectly implied their distancing from God. What was worrisome, in addition, was that the heads of the insurrection should claim leadership without enjoying “the vote and consent of the nation.” Only laws and subordination to the authority of the ruler – which he affirmed came from God – could be the basis of public happiness. Curiously, the relationship between popular votes, laws, and sovereignty was not specified; perhaps he felt that the connection was clear or inevitable, and there was no need to belabor the obvious.²⁴

Nonetheless, four years later the same priest struck against the apparently resilient doubts of his parishioners.²⁵ Pride and ambition were not the basis for anything, but the product of original sin.²⁶ Human well-being was based on otherworldly virtue and not on a socio-political structure or its transformation:

Whatever state you find yourselves in, being solidly and truly great depends on you, understanding that true greatness has no other basis but humility, regardless of differences of class or condition. Neither nobility of descent nor inherited honors, neither luxury nor wealth, none of these makes you great except in the eyes of the world.²⁷

But the role of laws and the popular vote were left out of consideration, here, while sovereignty seemed to be equated with submission and conformity, since all recourse to self-interest was denied. On the other hand, the priest’s dismissal did away with all social pretensions, even of the noble, and not merely that of the rising bourgeois.

The traditional high clergy thus found itself close to an irresolvable dilemma in its discourse between 1810 and 1815. Yet



this cannot be said of a new and potent voice whose lesser clerical standing and clear ties to Spanish constitutionalism perhaps allowed him to resolve the problem more expeditiously. This was Francisco Severo Maldonado, the insurrectionary priest and ally of Hidalgo who, taking advantage of the offer of amnesty, dedicated himself to counterrevolutionary journalism for a period of two years after 1811.²⁸

Breaking Ranks: Maldonado and Renewed Reformism

Like those priests of twenty or more years before, Maldonado began with the idea of "the flawed and complicated system that has ruled over the monarchy for a period of two centuries." The reforms begun by Charles III and Charles IV were once more presented as the cornerstone upon which to construct considerations of social, political and economic questions. Meanness of thought, for Maldonado, was the product not of popular sovereignty but of old corporatism, represented by the fleets and mercantile monopoly of Cádiz, the monstrous offspring of "sordid interest and incompetence."²⁹

Maldonado contrasted the "defects and vices of our ancient Spanish constitution" with the enlightened and enthusiastic reforms to be expected from the Spanish Cortes re-established in 1810, where Americans were active participants in sovereignty. The new political situation meant the possibility of bringing the work of Charles III and Charles IV to culmination without violating the natural, that is to say gradual, course of things. The reformist path offered greater security in the international setting of the war-torn Atlantic. It also promoted peace among the distinct and ultimately opposing segments of the American population. Every war for American independence would turn into a civil war, disastrous to longed-for progress. Besides, viewed as a whole and in comparative perspective, Spanish colonialism was not so terrible, especially at that felicitous political moment, which offered all the benefits but none of the risks of independence.³⁰ The ex-insurgent's choice of terms is quite revealing. In the fourth issue of the newspaper, published on 17 June 1811, Father Maldonado had gone on about the broad distribution of civil and ecclesiastical posts to Creoles within the Spanish empire, refuting an opposing passage from *El Despertador Americano*, which he himself had directed.³¹ Similarly, he insisted



that the Creoles called to serve the state and the Church under the Empire had included men of exceptional abilities. But those raised up by Hidalgo had been "some scoundrels of obscure extraction, without education or principles, who didn't know how to read or write."³² Maldonado admitted that there had been problems with equality between Spaniards and Americans under the Spanish regime. But he summed the situation up thus:

The barriers to commerce and industry cause no more delays and damages to men of Europe than to men of the Indies. We all reciprocally suffer from the defects and flaws of our ancient economic constitution. And we all find ourselves more needful everyday of the reform and improvements which we should so justly promise ourselves from the enlightenment and zeal of our representatives meeting in the august assembly of the National Magistrature [the Spanish Cortes].³³

The editorial for this issue ended with a reference to the sorrows Ireland suffered under British government, in comparison with the "singular and enviable benefits" Spain always granted America.

In issues five and six of his newspaper, Maldonado had called upon the Indians of the region who had been charmed by Hidalgo's promises to free them of Spaniards and return them their lands.³⁴ In issue seven he again took up the theme of imperial decadence. He contrasted the "the flawed and complicated system that has ruled over the monarchy for a period of two centuries," causing economic backwardness, with the healthy Colbertism promoted by Campillo and Ward. Under the government of Charles III in particular, Indians were freed from coercion in their work. Some taxes were suppressed, while others were lowered, along with the price of mercury. The government then proceeded to abolish the fleets, a measure "only resisted by sordid interest and ignorance." This allowed the flowering of agriculture and industry in America, which earlier had not been profitable. Despite Godoy, his private favorite, the government of Charles IV had continued to contribute to "the good fortune of Americans [by permitting] ... the free distillation of *aguardiente* from sugar cane, an article important due to its great consumption." It also freed certain products from paying *alcabalas* [sales taxes] and gave license to form "the university, and the merchant guild, establishments which are as healthy as they were longed



for, and which have contributed so much to spread light across all of the province [of New Galicia].” Finally, in the face of the French invasion, the Spanish government “made us participants in sovereignty, associating us with the august body of the Supreme Magistrature, and placed the improvement of our future fate in our very hands.” The greatest barrier to all this achievement was none other than the “monster Hidalgo.” Father Maldonado closed his commentary: “Americans, when will you see the light?”³⁵

Maldonado dedicated himself to helping them see that light. In the next three issues of his newspaper, he first published Hidalgo’s retraction, signed on 18 May in the Royal Hospital of Chihuahua. Then, he briefly and summarily reviewed the “conduct of foreigners in their colonies compared with that of the Spanish government,” basically finding that Spain had established its dominion “not by force of arms, but only by virtue of the peaceful insinuation of the Gospel.” Finally, he rendered severe and astute judgment on “Friar Bartolomé de las Casas’ slanders against the conduct of Spaniards in America.” The following issue, number eleven, was dedicated to demonstrating the “failed calculations of Hidalgo about the fate of Mother Spain,” an error the insurgent made because he spoke without “fully knowing Spanish character.”³⁶

But the journalist priest sensed that he had moved away from his reading public. Issue twelve of *El Telégrafo de Guadalajara* begins:

Every journalist in Spain without exception openly and frankly confesses to the hard oppression Americans have suffered in past centuries. Meanwhile, the seductive printed words in the *Telégrafo* herald only the softness, generosity, Enlightenment and principles of wise and healthy politics constantly followed by the last Spanish government.³⁷

Maldonado had the valor and astuteness to publish “the cry that has risen up against the author of this newspaper,” but only in order to refute it. He declared it unjust because it failed to take into account the “noble frankness” and “ardor for restoring the Cortes” which motivated Spaniards. Public outcry suffered from exaggeration. What was missing was reflection:

It is necessary not to lose sight of the great existing difference between political government and economic government. The first leaves absolutely no room for complaint, since we have been made



equal to the vassals of the metropolis, and since the same laws that govern Spain also govern, with minor differences, the Indies.

If we turn our gaze to economic government, we will find it defective and prejudicial to industry in more than a few of the branches it addresses. But on this same point we should make one observation, namely that this erroneous system has been proportionately more damaging to the metropolis than to the colonies themselves. Hence Spain has collapsed at the same time America has progressed to reach the flowering state we see it in now, which makes it the object of foreigners' envy.³⁸

Thus, in opposition to the revolution Hidalgo promoted, Maldonado turned to the protection of the constitutional framework of the Cortes. He promoted the idea that America was already achieving progress within a reformist setting.

The editor of *El Telégrafo de Guadalajara* had evidently come to the conclusion that the economic, social and political costs of independence under Hidalgo would have been too great. The rise of reform in Spain assured the impulse that Americans needed to achieve prosperity by means of gradualism. He immediately dedicated various issues to demonstrating progress in agriculture, manufactures and the domestic and foreign commerce of America, utterly denying that public agencies or Spanish "free trade" policies were responsible for paralyzing the economy of New Spain because they exported money overseas. He insisted on the liberal reformism of Spaniards in Spain and America, pointing out how the Spanish and their fortunes were Americanized in the New World. He praised the multiplication of merchants, artisans, and small producers since 1778.³⁹

Maldonado stressed again and again the need for a union of Americans, as opposed to the disunity promoted by Hidalgo:

Entirely occupied in disuniting Americans from each other and in sowing the seeds of enmity and mutual persecution between classes in every way, the apostate [Hidalgo] never attempted, or even pretended, to organize anything. He remained in this unfortunate capital for two months, and in that long period it was nothing more than a theater for all kinds of theft, looting, murders, evils and assaults. Nothing of reforms or improvements. It is true that he furiously declaimed a few times against the system of government our Spaniards had set up in this and the other [i.e., South] America. But it is also true that he entirely conformed to that system, without any



difference beyond replacing the well-deserving and capable officials appointed by the legitimate authorities with the most vile, inept and despicable subjects from the lowest of the rabble.⁴⁰

Maldonado had become convinced that the independence of Mexico was impossible because it went against the natural course of things. He expressed the opinion that Mexico was still a very backward nation. He claimed that because of this it did not have, on its own, the means to promote the union of its children; only the tie to the motherland could give Mexico true social peace. Without it, Mexico would tear itself apart. In this, he asserted, there was no comparison with the United States. That country had enjoyed the support of three European powers in its independence, had been forged out of the mutual tolerance of its inhabitants, and was fully dedicated to true economic development, not “the extraction of factitious [*sic*] and conventional wealth.” The fate of Mexico did not fit into that happy picture.⁴¹ Maldonado had already judged that:

... we find ourselves facing the unavoidable choice between being an integral part of the magnanimous and generous nation which tries to treat all our ills, or of being victims of a foreign despot who imprisons us by regaling us with promises of friendship and protection. Only our union can save us.⁴²

Later on he would add: “every war for independence launched in America will necessarily degenerate into a civil war which will destroy the realm rather than separating it from the metropolis.”⁴³

Free of the growing ambiguities of the Church authorities and equipped with erudition and a voice supported by the civil government, Maldonado valiantly returned to faith in reforms and modernization.⁴⁴ A similar faith had originally characterized González de Cándamo and the cathedral chapter of Bishop Alcalde in supporting the creation of the merchant guild, but subsequent complications, and now the fleeting quality of this constitutionalist moment, underscored the difficulty of the transition. Even so, another attempt would be made in the 1820s, proving temporary and less than fully successful. The path was treacherous, particularly because the high clergy could not allow themselves to forget their corporatist role, and this implied not merely a set of material interests, but a whole conception of social and political life.



Yet the clergy could not ignore changes in Mexico or abroad. That is why the exact connection between reformism, sovereignty and the growing plurality of popular interests, a burning issue throughout the Independence period and subject to even greater debate in the 1820s, continued to elude clerical thinkers. It is worth stressing that Maldonado's fragile solution, based on how Mexicans would share sovereignty in the Cortes with Peninsular Spaniards, would not prove viable after 1814.⁴⁵

Grappling with Politics and New Values: The Debate Intensifies

Clerical discourse did not stand still between 1815 and the 1820s. Sermons would continue their uncertain and frequently contradictory casting about for solutions. Another sermon, now in 1816, celebrated the surrender of the forts of Mezcala and Cuiristarán (San Miguel) to the royal forces.⁴⁶ Preached by a priest from the diocese of Valladolid, it was nonetheless printed in Guadalajara in 1817. Manuel Tiburcio Orozco found that "the prideful leader of the rebellion" had overturned the temporal and spiritual order as well as "the glory of the Lord, the rights of the throne, and the reciprocal rights of man, which were violated, offended and trampled upon by the horrific system of the insurrection." Both the Faith and the state had been endangered by the winds of an insurrection which, under the appearance of a mere political reform, had managed to "completely delude the lesser ranks." But the real question went deeper, as became clear later on. The heart of the question was "that a popular commotion, promoted by a corrupted priest, should deform customs in a moment, alter the faith, confuse reason, and cause the most ominous damages in the moral as well as the political order."⁴⁷

Having taking the side of good in this struggle, the Church had been accused by rebels of being "despotic, when it was all sweetness," and of being "infected, when it was all purity and holiness." "Should, then, the Church in its rulings accommodate the whims, the ideas and the disorderly aims of its proscribed children, in order to weaken the faith and destroy the precepts of Christian morality?" The philosopher's Enlightenment had unacceptably come to be framed as an alternative to religion that only required the prior suppression of the state, the "first and principal support" of religion, in order to prosper. The return of Ferdinand VII in 1814 had shown that the argument based on the issue of



sovereignty was a farce. According to that argument, which always bypassed Peninsular resistance to foreign invasion, sovereignty had been usurped by Napoleon and was therefore returned to the people for its own protection. Just as ridiculous as this was “the whole gaggle of brilliant and resounding phrases” about liberty, equality, reforms, citizen’s rights and liberal principles.⁴⁸ Therefore it followed that

[t]he unjust system of insurrection, based on the subversive maxims of Diderot, Helvetius, Bayle and all their converts, does not lead to anything more than anarchy, disorder, impiety, the demolition of the throne. It leads unlucky America, choking on the cursed bait of the Enlightenment, to fall into the clumsy trap laid by its immoral regenerator [Hidalgo].⁴⁹

Yet it seemed that those lofty-sounding Enlightenment words had found a public avid to hear them in Guadalajara and its hinterland, because the speaker immediately moved to accept them, giving each of them a new significance. The “wise” had to transmit this new content to “their ungrateful children.” Significantly, the priest concluded by admitting that the true struggle was emerging among the people themselves. To the portion of the people which still stood in favor of the established order, the preacher exclaimed:

Encourage them, therefore, make them understand that true *liberty* consists in subjecting oneself to that divine order which commands us to fear God, to honor all, to obey the King, and to order our aims by fixing them on peace; that true equality is not found in that foolishness which libertines give the specious name of patriotic independence, but in living united in the faith as the branch is to the vine, and as the sun’s rays spread and gather in complete accord with the ardent dispositions of their center; that *reform* was never the work of a proud and voluptuous spirit, and that for its practice useful methods abound which subjects can propose without in any way justifying and exalting insolence and rebellion. Finally, exhort them, tell them that we are fully convinced that this so-called Enlightenment is the monstrous offspring of Machiavellianism, while on the other hand we perfectly understand that enlightenment aimed at the public order has such high and elevated ends as can never be achieved or reached except by Christian policies; that the honorable subordination the Gospel authorizes and commands



is not *servility*, nor can it be called so without great crime, by those who preach deceit, fraud, complacency, pleasure, wildness and all the excesses of execrable insolence and abominable pride under the wretched cloak of liberalism, who *could* indeed be called unfortunate slaves of ignominy; that the rights, the aims, the duties, and the effective obligations of man as citizen are not composed of opulence or the heavy burden of popular titles and representation, but of the keeping by each – scrupulously watching over this precious gift – of their conformity with the destiny to which God, for their happiness, has called each.⁵⁰

This sermon made explicit the semantic redefinition of the terms of political discourse current since the times of Charles III which had more or less implicitly underlain many of the clerical efforts since then. Concerned about Bourbon reforms, the clergy had opted to accept them, while the practical and theoretical conditioning of the clergy shaped their specific understanding of the reforms. Clerical conduct and discourse would continue to reflect this compromise. Even the clergy's insistence on otherworldly themes and the insufficiency of exclusively human efforts to understand and act on the world was a way of accepting the search for ideological, social, and economic transformations, while making that search subordinate to certain crucial portions of the Old Regime. The restoration of the hierarchical sense of life was at the heart of the Church's efforts. Originally, this effort was turned towards both the political and spiritual regime. Little by little, emphasis would shift towards the spiritual dimension, and towards the transcendental mission of the entire nation. An interesting example of this, from before Mexican independence, came from the ongoing debacle of the Spanish monarchy in those years. The immediate cause was the death of Queen Isabel de Braganza y Borbón.⁵¹ The cleric duly preaching the appropriate sermon in Guadalajara, José Simeón de Uría, took advantage of the moment to point out that

[m]iserable mortals clumsily wander, dragging themselves across the earth in search of an illusory and elusive happiness which they can never find, because [the earth is] sown with flowers and with thorns, alternating just like days and nights, joys and sorrows, fortune and misfortune.⁵²



Proof of this was precisely the fatal alternation of good and evil, glories and failures, which "characterizes the epoch of our current rule" and which Isabel had to live through. It had been Isabel's fate to "see the most pathetic contrasts between exaltation and collapse, until she was completely disillusioned with the inconstancy of Earthly glories and greatness...."⁵³

The tragedy of Ferdinand VII and his followers after the French invasion in 1808, like the offenses the Spanish nation suffered at the hand of France, had served to disillusion Isabel with this life.

The King, the throne that makes her great, and the nation that raises her up, were the shining instruments used by the Lord to make her [Queen Isabel] understand from very close up how weak and fragile is the axis on which the pompous and complacent machinery of the most enviable fortunes turn.

Renowned nation, illustrious nation, never praised and magnified enough for the glory of your religion and your valor: you, you are the one whose horrible metamorphosis has given the most pathetic testimony of the fatal upheavals to which everything the world praises and magnifies is subject! Ah, Princess of the Nations, you who have ruled by stepping over the decadence or utter ruin of other, once cultured and religious, nations where a bracing, fiery wind has slashed the precious vine of the faith, while Catholic Spain has preserved it in all its beauty....

For more than seven years, afflicted Spain offered the most lamentable and bloody catastrophe to the world's gaze. As you well know, ... religion, state and nation were the miserable victims sacrificed in the sacrilegious and bloody pursuit of the blindest fury and the most unheard-of perfidy....⁵⁴

Here was a notable shift. A González de Cándamo had seen the Spanish nation as benefiting from the transformations carried out by Charles III, without any clash with religiosity properly understood. The cathedral chapter of Guadalajara in 1794 had held a similar opinion about the region under its charge. Facing insurrection years later, Bishop Cabañas and other priests had suggested that no one benefited from destruction carried out on behalf of independence. But Uría took things a step further. One could sense that the Spanish nation had been entrusted with the special mission of uniting the Enlightenment to Catholic religion, and of binding both to national destiny. This discourse had gone from an abstract semantic redefinition to a complete



reinterpretation of the social objectives of the nation in a revolutionary era. The idea that destruction was a leveler sweeping away progress was retained, along with the idea that the sovereign should support progress, but a new element of mission had been added, even as Guadalajara and New Spain were still considered within the horizon of Spanish sovereignty and a greater Spanish nationhood.⁵⁵

The following year, 1820, opened with a sermon by José Miguel Ramírez y Torres, a funeral oration delivered on the death of Lady María Luisa de Borbón.⁵⁶ This occasion allowed the preacher to clarify some things urgently demanding clarification at a moment when, as the priest put it, the world found itself “in the storms of the tempestuous sea of this life on which we are swept back and forth without ceasing.” The roles of Kings and people in this difficult life had to be defined. He found that only religion could give meaning to things, “because without true religion, man is nothing more than a theatrical figure who plays his role and disappears.” Once again the theme of other-worldly transcendence appears, but this time more forcefully. No longer was it a matter of nobility and honor opposed to material wealth, or of all three contrasted with simple Christian humility. The split was more radical. Transcendence only came on the basis of religion, and not in relation with civic life. Yet who was knowledgeable about religion?⁵⁷

Ah! I know all too well, that not even the perfidious heretic or resister, the fascinated philosopher, the simple but poorly taught faithful follower, the superficial and vain wise man, the careless or dreamy devotee, the firm and exalted pious believer – and to put it simply, as I feel it – I know all too well that all Christians who are novices or inexperienced in science and virtue confuse or forget the genuine and essential idea of the religion of Jesus Christ, tacitly thinking themselves better and more Catholic than others, when in reality they are only less practical and trained.⁵⁸

But on spiritual matters, outside of the priesthood and the Vatican, “that unmoving and divine center of religion,” everything else was deceit. Under the Vatican’s direction, faith must once more be placed at the center of all human activity:

Morality, politics, customs, and reason must be rectified and guided by what the Church alone communicates, by the divine rules She alone



teaches and prescribes, which are the sole means for judging whether man is truly great, happy, a hero, or the most vile and despicable thing, a mere ghost, a nothing who plays its role, and disappears.⁵⁹

Outside of religion, everything else in life was fleeting and open to question. No longer was monarchy or any other facet of the public life of man invested with a drive or value of its own. Disillusion was complete, and palpable reality was all too clear:

Empires and the periods of their political lives are nothing more than the fatal cycle of value, conquest, luxury and anarchy ... The throne, Majesty, the most legitimate and well-founded independence and sovereignty are nothing more than an elegant edifice built on the crumbling foundations of any old thing, a shiny vapor which clears and dissipates just after it appears.⁶⁰

When properly understood, religion “did not depend on the scepter of any monarch.” If religion supported kings, it was “only out of grace, to ennoble their authority and consecrate their power; if they sustain and protect it [religion], then God defends them, and is the most robust and immovable refuge and support of their throne.”⁶¹

If the Spanish monarchy, fallen to the blows of the era, had managed to re-establish itself, that was due not to the praiseworthy enlightenment of the members of the ruling house, but to the providence of God, who “joined together the scepter and the priesthood according to the goal of his mission, the plan drawn out for eternity.” Enlightenment and society itself depended on religion. Fortunately, the Bourbons knew how to defend it, as Lady María Luisa had shown with her “exemplary and rare veneration of the priesthood.” And so, in this way, the high clergy in early 1820 underscored the theme they had already sketched out. They also pointed out to kings and to the people what should be understood as “true virtue, prudence and wisdom,” defined as ever by the Catholic religion and the clergy.⁶²

On the next day, another sermon was offered in praise of Charles IV, with the preacher another member of the cathedral chapter of Guadalajara. While there are echoes of both the heavenly strain of clerical discourse and of the domesticated Enlightenment in this new speech, it is worth emphasizing that the relationship between the two had changed.⁶³ The author of the sermon aimed to combine the idea that a king should be



“kind to his people” with the conviction that only God could be the judge of his efforts. This should give due warning to kings, but security to the people. He proclaimed sententiously the moral conclusion: “What shame for criminal kings! What satisfaction and happiness for just kings! And what consolation on this day for us all!” Even royalty was exposed to the temptations of the nefarious thinking that had come out of revolutionary France.⁶⁴ Not everyone understood that

[t]he throne and the altar were always the libertine’s pitfall, since they are precisely the barrier to his dissolution and arrogance. Both were objects of the hatred and anger of the impious, who have promoted the same ideas under different names, down to the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment. Possessed by pride and impiety, those unruly men filled the atmosphere of France with their pestilent doctrine, artfully spread their poison, and managed to draw *persons of the highest rank* to their cause.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, the cleric managed to console himself with the “solid piety of Charles IV,” which had been based on a firm agreement with Rome in all his proceedings.

His deference and consideration of the Apostolic See were as well known as the religiosity out of which they flowed. He always went to the Highest Pontiff, as to a source of light and truth. He loved him as his own father, he listened to him as an oracle, and he venerated him as the first dispenser of the graces of Heaven.⁶⁶

Even more, while still in mourning for the death of his father, he went against “the ceremony of his court” to speak with the Chief Inquisitor “and with the most energetic expression entrusted and recommended to him the Catholic religion, which was to be the heart of his entire reign.” In this context, the priest celebrated the impulse that the now-deceased monarch gave to “the printing of the Holy Bible in our national tongue,” since the sacred book “gives everyone abundant nourishment according to his situation and obligations ... and teaches subordination and proper discipline.”⁶⁷

This canon of the Guadalajara cathedral had constructed a framework in which the ideas of a monarch who serves his people and an Enlightenment which promotes progress were invested before our very eyes with clerically authorized traits:



The titles of dignitaries and of the powerful dazzle and intimidate. Yet they do not move anything or drive anything, and the heart of man can only be won and surrendered without violence, when virtue is presented in all its beauty and splendor, or when the tender feeling of sincere gratitude sweetly obliges his spirit.⁶⁸

Charles IV had won the love his subjects owed him because his “generous charity” was concerned with measures

to spread in his dominions the knowledge that religion and culture demand of a Catholic vassal, to promote the arts, to put into practice theories of known usefulness, and in conclusion to advance the sciences.

He knew that Enlightenment properly understood, without the mysteries of impiety which corrupt and deform it, is a rich river which flowing between distant fields carries fertility and abundance all over. He knew that it produces holy and instructed priests who teach the people doctrine and morality, magistrates zealous in the observance of the laws and the distribution of justice, fearless sailors who bring the riches of all nations into contact, striving agricultural workers who provide the basis for the state and raw materials for all the arts, hard-working artisans and, in sum, all the trades and professions necessary, useful or extravagant in the present state of weakness of nations.⁶⁹

In America, the orator continued, Charles IV had extirpated smallpox with “the admirable pus of the vaccine.” On an economic order, “agriculture and commerce, the true wealth of all nations, constituted the object that drew all his attention, and that he tried to protect with his fullest efforts.” He made fall “a sweet rain of benefits and graces, which enlivened, encouraged, and made flourish these provinces of the Mexican realm, to a degree not seen since the days of their conquest [by Spain].”⁷⁰

Then what justification might the rebellion that had shaken New Spain after 1810 have?

You are the witnesses of the many millions that were coined annually, of the rapid perfection that weaving achieved, of the progress of many other branches of industry, and of the general abundance that held sway in America: all due to the loving zeal and charity of our tender Father [Charles IV].⁷¹



The priest immediately went on to review other improvements, like the port of San Blas, the Royal Tribunal of the merchant guild (whose creation was “as useful as it was necessary for this province”), the Royal College of San Juan, and “the singular grace of the foundation of our university.” All these gifts had been granted or consolidated during the reign of the late King. Other signs of the benevolence of the government of the recently deceased monarch were the House of Charity and the Clerical Seminary – forge of “exemplary ecclesiastics” – which under the guidance of Bishop Cabañas had earned a “manifestation of the royal gratitude of His Majesty, Charles.”⁷²

A reproach to the cultural prominence of new men, who were sometimes prone to question the established order, could be glimpsed, here, but on the other hand, the priest asserted that “the heart of man can only be won and surrendered without violence.” Contrary to the royalist and exclusive bent of the previous day’s sermon, this one praised Charles IV for having “spread across his dominions the knowledge that religion and culture demand of a Catholic vassal,” without making any distinctions of rank. Attention was centered on the deceased King’s reforms, but there were also echoes of growing unease about “Enlightenment properly understood, without the mysteries of impiety which corrupt and deform it.” Only that kind of reform would yield the necessary fruits of prosperity, productivity, ecclesiastical renewal, religious development, respect for the law, and strengthening of the state “in the present state of weakness of nations.” The region of Guadalajara in particular had received numerous benefits from the hands of the late monarch, and the enumeration of them was the strongest proof of how unjustified the 1810 rebellion was. The unity of throne and altar, founded on the solid piety of the monarch and his firm agreement with Rome, was presented here as the “libertine’s pitfall,” the bulwark against social dissolution, arrogance, and restless men full of pride and impiety. Overall, the work of Charles IV had represented “a sweet rain of benefits and graces, which enlivened, encouraged, and made flourish these provinces of the Mexican realm to a degree not seen since the days of their conquest.” The references to secular life and worldly reasoning were very evident in this sermon, along with powerful echoes of the general tenor of the clerical thinking developed since Hidalgo’s 1810 insurrection.



The high clergy's ideas did not develop in a linear way. Neither was there full intellectual or conceptual coherence among their parts. A little more than a month after this last sermon, another was preached which can be more easily ascribed to the frightened, defensive, otherworldly tendency clearly dominant since 1810. It began with the conviction that the passions of "these calamitous times have tried to undermine the foundations of religion, and to sack the edifice of the Church."⁷³ Since antiquity, a line of thinking worthy of condemnation had emerged making human reason, the reason of "insolent man," the measure of all things, governed "by the appetites of the heart and the lights of a curious and rebellious intellect." This current culminated with the present wish to see religion as "a purely human invention, ridiculous and superstitious,... denying that its mysteries were beyond the reach of human reason," and seeing it as exercising only "limited authority." The representatives of this deistic and materialist orientation proposed to overthrow the throne and the altar, the priesthood and the empire, in search of an "imaginary liberty." They saw a combination of natural causes at the origins of everything, and were blind to the invisible hand and wisdom of divine providence. The result was a persecution of the Church only comparable to the first centuries after Christ.⁷⁴

Even worse than this was the fact that evil had spread beyond the sectarians who were openly anti-religious, or transparently mistaken or corrupt, to reach those who claimed to be "children of a holy, pious and faithful nation." But even though they

knew divine providence, and confessed it with their lips, they denied it with their works and conduct, looking with cold indifference and apathetic insensitivity upon the most common works of that very same providence, and counting solely on the resources of human providence – riches, power, authority, talent and valor – in their endeavors.⁷⁵

Significantly, in "these times of dissolution and licentiousness," in the face of "the universal flood of iniquity," this priest recalled the career of the Jesuits, seen as so unjustly expelled from Spanish dominions and such "strong columns of the justice of kings, light of nations, storehouse of science and fathers of public virtues." He had not forgotten knowledge and society, but rather had placed both in their supposedly proper place within a world undergoing swift and dangerous change. In "this unhappy and unfortunate



age,” the “restless spirit of innovators” could bring about anything save the very collapse of the Church. Its constitution and government were a divine work, “the beginning of the stability which will see centuries and monarchies come and go without experiencing the least alteration of its component parts.”

And so the otherworldly strand of clerical thinking had reached the inevitable end of its ideological development. Faced with the dangers of the moment and of men whose motives were disconnected from religion, it discovered once again that “eternal divorce from the world” was one of the essential and fundamental elements of the Catholic religion. The identification of throne and altar was still present, but in the end, it simply became unnecessary. The only essential matter, to which Providence itself was utterly committed, was saving the integrity of the Church – there was nothing more. And just as the modernizing strand of clerical thinking had not yet worn thin, so this otherworldly strand would not vanish in the years ahead.⁷⁶

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