

Presentation

CLERICS, CULTURE AND POLITICS. SPANISH CATHOLIC RATIONALISM IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Without doubt, the Enlightenment's objectives have not yet been achieved totally, and regenerative ideas had, at times, unanticipated, damaging counterparts. This is the current agony in which the Enlightenment is ensconced, "agony" understood in the sense that Miguel de Unamuno used the term, not as throes that augur, inexorably, death, but as the struggle to elude being overwhelmed by transcendentalist pessimism and to not sacrifice the universalist vision to undecipherable, artificial tribal particularisms.

Fernando Savater, "La agonía de la Ilustración"¹

At all costs—and not without a certain desire to provoke—we omitted the term "Enlightenment" from the title of this issue of *Relaciones*, though its *Thematic Section* is devoted to analyzing some aspects of, precisely, the thought and culture of the Hispanic world in the 18th century.² Why not mention the Enlightenment? This intentional omission is important, especially, in light of the publication of Anthony Pagden's most recent book (2013), which once again brings to

¹ Fernando Savater: "La agonía de la Ilustración", review of Anthony Pagden, *La Ilustración*, Madrid, Alianza, 2015, in *El País, Babelia*, 20 October 2015. [Consulted 22 October 2015: http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/10/16/babelia/1445013400_660365.html]

² The organization of this section was in the hands of Rafael Castañeda García. Our thanks to Rafael for convoking the group of authors interested in discussing, precisely, problems related to the Enlightenment and the Church in the Spanish world.

the debating table the problem of thought during the “Century of Light” in Europe in relation to the development of Spanish thought in that period. Though much historiography (from the most traditional to the most critical) tends to exclude the thought of Spain’s 18th-century cultural elites from the currents of the Illustration, it is worthwhile asking the rhetorical question of whether or not an enlightened project did exist in Spain, given that another area of historiography seeks to identify vestiges of the philosophical principles of the Kantian project in certain expressions that were characteristic of the Spanish political-juridical—even theological—culture and thought of the time. It is important to take up this discussion again because the term *Enlightenment* has become a kind of “sewing-box” that allows the lumping together of difficult-to-describe particularities in a homogeneous totality, though this means sacrificing the capacity to understand the specific historical and anthropological phenomena that must, necessarily, be the focus of our attention.

Now, an exercise of memory: it was in 1955 that José Antonio Maravall published a very interesting review of Jean Sarrailh’s complex book that appeared shortly before.³ In the second paragraph of his review, the Spanish historian showed how Sarrailh’s work might set off a debate in the academic world—closely-linked to a political debate centered on the emergence of modernity and explanations of the backwardness of some compared to others—in which it is commonly argued, with regards to the Spanish Monarchy, that it had no genuine Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th century, or that the ideas of the *Century of Lights* had only barely arrived from France—poorly and incomplete—in a society and culture mired in the most immovable tradition of the Europe of the time; namely, scholastic thought. The most significant contribution of Sarrailh’s classic encyclopedic, and of the works of Richard Herr⁴ or Maravall and their disciples,

³ Jean Sarrailh (1954), *La España ilustrada de la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957; original title, *L’Espagne éclairée de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle*, published in Spanish in Mexico shortly after its appearance thanks to the excellent translation by Antonio Alatorre. Maravall’s review appeared in the journal *Arbor*, no. 114, June 1955.

⁴ Richard Herr (1958), *España y la revolución del siglo XVIII*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1962

was not that they included the Spanish Monarchy in the concert of the enlightened nations but the fact that, quite to the contrary and despite their efforts, they laid the foundations for a better understanding of the particularity of Spanish cultural and intellectual development in the 18th century which, through a series of elements proper to it, emerged in the final years of the reign of Charles II from a profound reflection on its own *Century of Gold* (*Siglo de Oro*). But the reasons behind their insistence on the reality of a Spanish Enlightenment must be sought in the attempt to recoup those old ideas *a la* Menéndez y Pelayo, who considered Spain's 18th century "impious and corrupted" —perhaps due to French influences— seconded, though in the opposite direction, by an Ortega y Gasset (the "disastrous absence" of an "irreplaceable" century) who raised the idea of a Spain condemned to lose its stature as the grand empire of Philip II for its failure to enter the race towards modernity, with the consequence that it would be left outside history in the 19th century. This brief reflection on how history is written may serve to show —or to ask new generations of historians and anthropologists to consider— that it is necessary to shake off the yoke of established concepts and immerse oneself in particularities.

In reality, a vigorous critical rationality did develop among groups of Spanish thinkers, gaining expression in the rejection of superstitions, in the elaboration of more inclusive educational projects, and, above all, in its interest in a political economy —in the broadest sense of the term— with reflections on the participation of the state in the life of the market —Campomanes, Jovellanos, even Charles III himself. But it is difficult to sustain that a lay science in the French style was established; that is, a body of knowledge completely separated from the dogmas known up to then. The 18th-century Spanish thought that positioned itself in relation to the Enlightenment was elaborated, fundamentally, by scholars and clerics; thus, attention must center on the clerics.

Aude Argouse probes the protocols of Notary Publics in the city of Santiago de Chile in the early 18th century, tracing the wisps of a history as difficult to reconstruct as that of the book culture that existed in that militarized, frontier outpost of Spain's *fnis terrae*; that is,

the government of the *capitanía* of Chile. In a region where books apparently circulated only scantily, the possibility of analyzing the composition of the library of the Bishop of Santiago, Francisco de la Puebla González (1643-1704), provides an opportunity to reconstruct part of this circulation and identify features of book culture there. Also, it allows the author to reflect upon a figure whom hagiographers have held up as “enlightened”, and a precursor of Chile’s emancipation. Argouse reviews this Bishop’s public activities as he maneuvered amidst a complex discussion between the Company of Jesus and the government of the *capitanía general* on settlement policies, in which he supported the former.

María Cristina Pérez inquires into the complex social tension that emerged in 18th-century Nueva Granada with the application of new ecclesiastical policies regarding popular devotions and the use of liturgical images, phenomena that had been debated earlier throughout the Monarchy. What has at times been seen as a reformist Catholic Enlightenment was actually a tendency that sought to impose norms and controls on devotional practices among the faithful that were quickly being transformed into superstitious practices involving images and relics of the cult. In closing this section, Elisabel Larriba and Christophe Belaubre offer us two texts that discuss the reaction of some members of the ecclesiastical estate to the Enlightenment and the new practices of sociability it generated. On the one hand, the figure of Father Traggia, a Discalced Carmelite and connoted writer and collaborator with the *Diario de Valencia* newspaper, who declared that the press was more efficacious than the pulpit for conveying ideas; on the other, the reaction to the perils of the Enlightenment by the political elites of the *capitanía general* of Guatemala prior to the political crisis of the Monarchy.

In the *Documents Section*, Cecilia Sierra Paniagua presents an interesting analysis of the accounts of the confraternity of Don San Juan Pungarabato, which reveals how this documentation can provide a kind of x-ray not only of the nature of religious life, but also of the character of the social and economic life of populations in the Hotlands in the 18th century. In the *Notes and Debates Section*, Francisco Fernández López discusses some early results of his research

into the procedures of the *Casa de Contratación de Indias* in the 16th century.

The three articles that make up the *General Section* deal with diverse, but current, social and cultural topics and problematics. First, Alejandra Ojeda Sampson and Carla Monroy Ojeda examine the serious problem affecting the ex-hacienda of San Nicolás Esquiros, in Celaya, where the old hacienda house (*casco*)—catalogued as architectural patrimony—is still used as lodgings by some *ejidatarios* and new residents who have modified it with no clear idea as to its possible preservation as a heritage site. The authors conclude with a proposal in this regard. Second, Eleocadio Martínez Silva presents a history of the conflicts and resistances that have characterized the relations between a mining company and the community of San Miguel Arcángel, in the town of Aquila in the heart of the Nahuatl zone of Michoacán. Finally, Gabriel Rico Lemus calls our attention to the phenomenon of the disintegration and contraction of the P'urhépecha linguistic community in the region around Lake Pátzcuaro.

English translation by
Paul C. Kersey Johnson