Antonio Peñafiel Ramón

Murcia y el arrebató misional en el siglo XVIII. Murcia: Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia. Pp. 121. Pb, 12.00 Euros.

Professor Antonio Peñafiel has dedicated his large body of scholarly work to the study of social reality in eighteenth-century Murcia; among his more notable studies in this area are *Testamento y buena muerte: Un estudio de mentalidades en la Murcia del siglo XVIII* (1987) and *Amos y esclavos en la Murcia del Setecientos* (1988). Frequently, his works have paid special attention to religious phenomenon, as seen in *Mentalidad y religiosidad popular murciana en la primera mitad del siglo XVIII*. There can be no question, then, that he is an expert on the topic addressed in his most recent book, *Murcia y el arrebató misional en el siglo XVIII*.

The book is a rigorous analysis of a social phenomenon of the Spanish modern era that is not often studied, particularly with regards to the eighteenth century: Catholic proselytizing missions in peninsular Spain. The lack of scholarly interest in this subject is particularly notable when compared to the attention given to evangelizing missions in the Americas, about which dozens of books have been written.

Professor Penafiel's study shows the importance of the peninsular missions and their character as social events. The preachers gathered surprisingly large crowds: according to attendance figures that the author provides and documents, the sermons of Fray Diego de Cádiz in 1787 drew 32,000 people on April 15; 28,000 on April 19; 27,000 on April 21; and 26,000 on April 17 and 20. Such figures illustrate the importance of the sermon in modern Spanish society and highlight the role played by priests who specialized in speaking to crowds or to personalities of utmost importance. Among their ranks were preachers of the court, to whose sermons the king and nobility listened regularly and who were very influential in their time.

Professor Peñafiel focuses on one such figure: Fray Diego de Cádiz, a preacher who traveled on foot through most of the peninsula, presenting his sermons in many cities and regions. The priest was noted for his theatrics, through which he displayed a frightening vision of religiosity representative of the Baroque mentality. Using elaborate staging, he ruthlessly attacked the Enlightenment ideas and reformist trends that had begun to permeate Spanish society in echo of the changes that were occurring across Europe at the time. Fray Diego thus embodied the reactionary vision of the Spanish church, even as other religious promoted reform and tried to push religious structures to adapt to the changing times.

As was the case during the most intense years of the fight against the Protestant Reformation, terror was one of the key weapons wielded by preachers in the missions, and Fray Diego de Cádiz was one of the most active in this sense. The fear of dying in sin and consequently suffering an eternity of punishment in the fires of hell was a powerful tool for creating a deep impression on people attending sermons.

Such techniques often brought the preachers into conflict with church authorities, who accused the missionaries of displaying excessive zeal. One early example of such a controversy—and one that will be of particular interest to readers of this journal—was the case of Father Calatayud (1689–1773), a Jesuit priest whose sermons noted the decline of faith and encouraged a return to religion. He was accused of being over-zealous in his approach, since his preaching focused on the fear of death and punishment in the afterlife; but Calatayud's sermons, particularly those developed in Murcia in 1734, had a great impact on the people of his time and became the basis for the work of later preachers such as Fray Diego. That such sermons could be met with popular acclaim yet drew severe criticism from ecclesial officials illustrates the tension between reaction and reform in the eighteenth-century Spanish church.

In his book, Professor Peñafiel analyzes the general phenomenon of missions—personally, geographically, and chronologically—using a specific case: Fray Diego's mission in Murcia, begun in 1787 in the aftermath of the reign of Charles IV, the most enlightened of the Spanish monarchs. This approach is helpful, as it brings a concrete illustration to what has otherwise been a somewhat abstract analysis. The data—specific dates and figures that the author provides about the work of Fray Diego and its impact on Murcian society—helps the reader understand the true importance of the missions at that time and the vital role played by the preachers in the Catholic Church.

The book is divided into five chapters and some brief conclusions. Structurally, it moves from the general to the specific, beginning with an overview of mission structures in the time and place chosen and then proceeding to an analysis of the case of Fray Diego de Cádiz. The first part of the study focuses on the congregations and confraternities present in Murcia, especially the Venerable Congregación del Pecado Mortal, an institution that was carried to Murcia by the powerful Cardinal Belluga. The author pays particular attention to the rules of this congregation, called “constitutions.”

Of special mention in the work is Professor Peñafiel's document-based analysis of the style and methods of preaching employed by the missionaries in their tasks and travels. They were real specialists, whose ultimate goal was to achieve the greatest possible impact on the masses. Hence, when addressing

crowds, the preachers abandoned the ornate language and the often rhetorical or metaphorical sermons that they employed in the court and the noble houses, resorting instead to plain and simple words comprehensible to the less-educated people of eighteenth-century society. Fray Diego, for example, used the frequent repetition of easily understood symbols—such as crosses, crowns of thorns, and skulls—to enhance the theatrical staging of his sermons. Professor Peñafiel thus shows that the missions' true objective was to re-inflame the religious passions of the common people and make the church and Catholicism once again present in the lives of Spaniards.

If anything can be said to be missing from Professor Peñafiel's book, it is a framework for situating the Murcian missions within the general eighteenth-century Spanish context so that the reader could know whether the case analyzed is an exception or the rule—that is, whether the crowds gathered by Fray Diego represented an above-average success or were typical for a mission of its type. But that is a small criticism of an otherwise excellent work, one which illustrates in detail a neglected aspect of the strength and activity of the church in eighteenth-century Spain and restores the crucial social dimension to a religious phenomenon. The use of documentary sources, such as those kept in the Municipal Archives of Murcia, gives the book unquestionable gravity. Professor Peñafiel's study greatly contributes to our understanding of religion in a Spain caught between two ages and two ways of contemplating religion.

Leandro Martínez Peñas

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

b223baker@yahoo.es

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00201005-16