THE ALUMBRADOS: DEJAMIENTO AND ITS PRACTITIONERS

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Historians of the heretical movements of the past have nearly always had to struggle with terminology. The heretic hunters at the time tended to choose names which none of the accused would have acknowledged. Later heretic hunters liked to see a continuity in heterodoxy and gave the same names to very different movements. The term *alumbrado*, “enlightened”, came into currency with an edict of faith issued in September 1525. A word devised by their enemies, none of the accused ever said it of themselves. Within a few years it was being bestowed on a thoroughly heterogeneous group of men and women suspected of various kinds of heresy, and it would remain in use for nearly two centuries to come. Yet the same edict of faith added other terms. It condemned 48 propositions attributed to persons “who called themselves enlightened, abandoned and perfect” (*alumbrados, dexados e perfec-tos*). However broad the meaning of *alumbrado* might become, the name *dejado* designated a specific group of individuals who were fully prepared to accept it. Although I shall occasionally use *alumbrado* in the broad sense in which the Inquisitors applied it in the 1520s and 1530s, it is the *dejados* who will be the subject of this article.

The Teaching

In the course of 1524 the Inquisition of Toledo arrested three of the leading *dejados* and drew up edicts of grace which would lead to the edict of faith of 23 September 1525. This introduced what seemed to be a new heresy. The condemned propositions included the denial of

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eternal punishment or the need for repentance, as well as expressions of contempt for the benefit of good works, the authority of the saints and the clergy, sacred images, and papal bulls. The statements have a familiar ring. The countless admirers of Erasmus would have agreed with many of them, as would readers of early Protestants. They had been uttered as the ground was being prepared, throughout Europe, for a reform not only of certain religious orders, but of the church itself.²

Yet the dejados were also accused of certain tenets which had a flavor of their own. They stressed the superiority of mental over oral prayer. They believed in their own perfection or divinity. One statement condemned in the edict was “that the love of God in man is God” and that “to this love of God, which affects people in such a manner that they can sin neither mortally nor venially, they should abandon themselves.”³ Judging from the edict, this essentially theocentric form of abandonment, to which the heresy owed its name, precluded any form of activity. The mind was to be cleared of all thoughts or memories. “In the state of dejamiento,” ran the 12th proposition, “they should not act, in order not to hinder what God wished to perform”; “they should not think of any created things”; “even to think of the humanity of Christ impeded abandonment to God”; and “they should reject all thoughts which presented themselves, even if they were good, since they should search for God alone.” “The labour involved in rejecting such thoughts,” the proposition continued, “was meritorious”; and, for those “in that state of quiet…it was a temptation even to remember God.”⁴

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³ “Que el amor de dios en el hombre es dios y que se dexassen a este amor de dios que ordena las personas de tal manera que no pueden peccar mortal ni venialmente y que no ay culpas veniales y que si alguna cosa paresciere liviana seran culpas sin culpa y que llegando a este estado no ay mas que merescer” (Márquez, Alumbrados, p. 276).
⁴ “Que estando en el dexamiento no avian de obrar porque no pusiessen obstaculo a lo que dios quisiesse obrar y que se desocupassen de todas las cosas criadas e que aun pensar en la humanidad de Xristo estorvaba el dexamiento en Dios e que deseassen todos los pensamientos que se les ofreciesen aunque fuesen buenos porque a solo dios debian buscar e que era merito el trabaxo que en desechar los tales pensamientos se tenia y que estando en aquella quietud por no distraerse tenia por tentación acordarse de dios” (Márquez, Alumbrados, p. 276).