CHAPTER 6

The Religious Orders and the Expulsion of the Moriscos

Doctrinal Controversies and Hispano-Papal Relations

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It is not easy to analyse the issue of the role played by religious orders in the Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spanish territories from 1609 onwards. It is, however, an issue of great significance, especially when we take into account the fact that the presence of priests from the regular orders (Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, etc.) strongly influenced the dynamics of European royal courts throughout the Early Modern period, and particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Priests’ views also influenced decisions taken by political authorities, especially on issues of a markedly religious nature.1 Starting with the key works of Boronat y Barrachina and Henry Charles Lea,2 numerous references can be found in all general modern histories dealing with Spain’s Moriscos and their final Expulsion to specific religious figures who played roles of varying importance in the exhaustive debates regarding the Christian acculturation of the Morisco population and the lengthy preparations for their expulsion. The names of these figures are so well known as hardly to need specifying: one such churchman was Ignacio de las Casas, the great Jesuit champion of the Morisco cause, who favoured a long, patient process of evangelisation and was resolutely opposed to coercive and violent

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methods, and whose death in 1608 spared him from having to witness the
Expulsion itself. But there were also the Dominican priests Jaime Bleda and
Damián Fonseca, both of whom opposed las Casas during the great debates of
the early seventeenth century, and who played an active role in negotiations
between Madrid and Rome. Neither should we forget Jerónimo Javierre, Diego
de Mardones and Luis de Aliaga, Philip III’s Dominican confessors. Then there
were those theologians in the regular orders who were consulted by the Juntas
convened by Philip II and Philip III and by the episcopal authorities in the
Andalusian and Valencian dioceses, where the Morisco question was of par-
ticular significance. These men were called upon to reach a consilium sapientis,
indispensable if this thorny doctrinal, pastoral and political issue were to be
handled with the requisite sensitivity.

Finally there are those religious men like the Augustinian Pedro Arias, who
sent memoriales to the King, or to his various Councils, offering their personal
views on the situation. Moreover, the priests of the regular orders were not
only theologians: we should not forget, for example, the Expulsion’s chroni-
clers, among whom the Carmelite Fray Marcos de Guadalajara y Xavier stands
out. Such writers gave birth to a literary genre whose mission was to justify the
Expulsion by disputing with the group of so-called “politicians,” which included
Pedro de Valencia, Manuel Ponce de León, and Feliciano de Figueroa, Bishop
of Segorbe. These priests’ mission was primarily to extol the grandeur of
Philip III, portraying him as a new David who had been successful where his
predecessors, from John I to Philip II, had failed.

We know that these figures interceded endlessly on issues relating to the
Moriscos’ Expulsion. But this does not necessarily make it easy to decide from
their contributions what might have been the “official positions” of the various
religious orders, or, to be more precise, the orders’ “dominant tendencies”
regarding this complex issue. Neither is it easy to reconstruct the exchange of
information and instructions between these priests and their respective head-
quarters, whether at the provincial level or that of the general Curias in Rome.
It is primarily a problem of documentation: in most cases, such sources as are

3 For the Jesuit and Morisco Ignacio de las Casas, see the detailed study by Youssef El Alaoui,
féauxites, morisques et indiens. Étude comparative des méthodes d’évangélisation de la
Compagnie de Jésus d’après les traités de José de Acosta (1588) et d’Ignacio de las Casas (1605–
4 See Boronat y Barrachina, Los moriscos españoles, II: 91–92.
5 See María Luisa Candau Chacón, Los moriscos en el espejo del tiempo. Problemas históricos e
historiográficos (Huelva: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad), 1997; Francisco Javier
Moreno Díaz del Campo, “El espejo del Rey. Felipe III, los apologistas y la expulsión de los
moriscos,” in La Monarquía hispánica en tiempos del Quijote (Madrid: Sílex), 2005.