Scott Eastman


This book is a study of the role played by the clergy in the development of a nationalist ideology in both Spain and New Spain in the late eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century. Mostly focusing on two cities, Valencia in Spain and Puebla in New Spain, the book analyzes many of the countless sermons with a political content that were preached on both sides of the Atlantic in the period. The author should be thanked for having uncovered all these sermons that had been gathering dust at the Spanish national military archive (why this kind of documentation should be kept at a military archive escapes this reviewer, and Eastman says nothing in this respect). The author argues that, contrary to what many historians contend, sermons did contribute to political sociability by eliciting a response and rebuttal in the same way editorial pages did. In this respect, preaching contributed to developing a lively Catholic public sphere that defined the Hispanic Enlightenment. Though they might have been highly critical of the clergy, secular liberals did not denigrate religion, and the essentially liberal Constitution of 1812 was to be proclaimed in churches and cathedrals across the monarchy. Eastman points out that in contrast to the heated debates over the suppression of the Inquisition, issues of race, class, and gender and how they intersected with citizenship did not generate great controversy during the debates that led to the promulgation of the Constitution. According to the author, the regime inaugurated in 1812 did not essentialize a national, racial body, as Spanish nationalism was “based more upon religious requirements than upon ethnic identification” (120). That would explain the exclusion of Jews, Protestants, and atheists from the emerging Spanish nation.

Throughout the book the author examines the ways in which sermons dealt with crucial historical events of the period, starting with the war against the French Revolutionary Convention in the 1790s and following with the French invasion in 1808, the proclamation of the liberal constitution of Cadiz in 1812, the re-establishment of the same constitution in Spain in 1820, and the independence of Mexico in 1821. In the first chapter, Eastman identifies a crucial change in the rhetoric of these sermons. While the majority of those delivered in the 1790s against the “impious” French had God as the main protagonist, by 1808 the people, *el pueblo español*, had replaced God as the main protagonist of the sermons. Chapters three and four discuss the emergence of a Catholic public sphere in Spain and the ways in which sermons contributed to the
formation of a Spanish Catholic citizen. Chapter five focuses on New Spain and the shifting loyalties from the king to the *pueblo americano* first and the *pueblo mexicano* later. The final chapter examines the ways in which liberal priests preached constitutionalism in Spain and independence in Mexico during the *trienio liberal*, the brief period of time from 1820-1823 when the constitution of Cadiz was reestablished after being abrogated by Fernando VII in 1814.

In one sense, this book is a history of how two separate nations, Spain and Mexico, came to be created out of the convulsions produced in the Spanish Empire by Napoleon's invasion of Spain. This topic has been the subject of an enormous historiography, increased even more so by the recent celebration of numerous anniversaries: in 2008, the French invasion of Spain; in 2010, Hidalgo's rebellion in Mexico; in 2012, the approval of the first written constitution by the Cortes of Cadiz. While the majority of these studies tend to approach the subject from the perspective of the nation-state, Eastman contends that the creation of two separate nations was not inevitable. In the initial stages of the upheavals caused by the Napoleonic invasion, a strong current existed in the Hispanic world that envisioned the creation of a transatlantic Spanish nation built on the ruins of the age-old Spanish Empire. That is exactly what the liberal constitution of 1812 envisioned. According to the author, “the new constitution established the radical idea of a transatlantic nation-state and ushered in the era of nationalism across the Hispanic Atlantic world” (123).

One of the most interesting points this book makes is that Hidalgo and other clerics in New Spain espoused a nationalist discourse that was strikingly similar to the one articulated by the clergy in Spain. Ironically, the defense of the *patria* in the name of religion and the trinity of God, King, and Country “provided ideological ammunition for those fighting the French in Spain as well as for insurgents battling the Spanish forces in New Spain” (131). It was not clear at all that independence was the inevitable conclusion of the political upheavals that started in 1808. But after 1814 and the abrogation of the Cadiz Constitution by Fernando VII, the idea of a transatlantic Spanish nation became almost an impossibility, and the master narratives of Spanish and Mexican nationalism started to acquire their familiar contours. In Spain, liberal clerics helped create a national identity that dated the origins of the Spanish nation to the Visigoths and the conversion to Catholicism of King Recaredo in 587. For Spanish liberals, the defeat of the *Comunero* revolt in Castile in 1521 had ushered in centuries of imperial despotism. Across the Atlantic, liberals found in the Aztecs the roots of the Mexican nation. Here too, the year 1521 was seen as ushering in three centuries of imperial despotism.

Although the discussion of the Spanish side is stronger than the Mexican one, part of the originality of this study lies in the fact that the author approaches