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Blanco y Helguero of
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The Viceroy Revillagigedo and Amarillas, Bishop Blanco y Helguero of Oaxaca and the Matter of Fray Juan Amador O.P. (deceased)*

The basis of this paper is the correspondence between the Viceroy Revillagigedo and Amarillas and Bishop Buenaventura Blanco y Helguero of Oaxaca from 1756 to 1757. This followed the death of Fray Juan Amador of the Dominican *doctrina* (Indian parish) of Zimatlan, Central Valleys, and its importance lies in its demonstration of the power of the viceroys in exercising the *Patronato Real* on behalf of the Spanish Bourbons, who wished to increase their ecclesiastical power by placing secular priests in the friars' *doctrinas*, and the predicament of the bishop in carrying out their wishes. The latter lay in the lack of secular priests fluent in the indigenous languages and the effectiveness of the strategies formulated for dealing with this is considered in the final part of the paper.

In 1486 the *Patronato Real* of Pope Innocent VIII gave the Spanish Crown the power to appoint all clerics and was extended to the Americas in bulls dated 1501 and 1508.¹ However, the mendicant friars were appointed as missionaries to the New World and the Bull *Exponi Nobis*, the *Omnimoda*, of 1522 gave them exceptional privileges such that they acted as parish priests in their *doctrinas* but were answerable to their provincials and Rome rather than to the bishops and the Crown. Thus, when the bishops reached New Spain some years later they found a functioning Church, which was largely outside their jurisdiction, even though they ordained those friars who became priests.²

* The research upon which this paper is based was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, which is gratefully acknowledged.

1 H. Kamen, *Spain 1469–1714. A Society of Conflict*. (London, 1983), pp. 45–6.

2 S. Poole, C.M., *Pedro Moya de Contreras Catholic Reform and Royal Power in New Spain, 1571–1591* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 67–8.

The first Bishop of Oaxaca reached the capital, Antequera, in 1536, seven years later than the Dominicans, and had the monumental task of establishing the administration of this huge diocese. In the meantime, despite their initial difficulties, the Dominicans had become established in their *doctrinas* as parish priests. Furthermore, they were very independent, better educated than the secular priests and studied the indigenous languages.³

The question of secularisation was first seriously mooted by the Archbishop of Mexico, Moya de Contreras (1573–86), who was an upright regalistic cleric; that is a supporter of the *Patronato Real*. This was in 1580, despite the fact that he had examined the priests in the archdiocese and found a number lacking in morals and poorly educated. Often, too, they were so ill paid that they had recourse to commerce in order to increase their stipends. This was to the detriment of their parish work.⁴

The Bishop of Oaxaca was more charitable but admitted that his older secular priests, whilst reliable, only spoke a little Nahuatl. The younger ones, on the other hand, spoke some of the 21 languages of the See, but were mere boys and so a danger to themselves and their parishioners.⁵

Oaxaca had been part of the Aztec tribute empire so Nahuatl was spoken by some of the Zapotec nobility in each *pueblo*. It had been used as the lingua franca by the first friars, who preached in it whilst studying Zapotec and Mixtec.⁶ It was also spoken by the Tlaxcalans who had accompanied the Conqueror Orozco and were settled near Antequera.⁷

The *Ordenanza de Patronazgo* of Philip II fulfilled the wishes of Moya de Contreras in 1574, in that secular priests were given beneficed parishes with a guaranteed stipend. Further, in order to be appointed to them they had to enter for *oposiciones* (written and oral competitive examinations) and it was the bishops, rather than the viceroys and the *audiencia* who chose them. This included the friar's *doctrinas*, thus increasing the

3 Padre José Antonio Gay, O.P., *Historia de Oaxaca* (1881) (México, 1982), p. 185; Poole, *Pedro Moya de Contreras*, pp. 67–70.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–9.

5 J. García Icazbalceta, *Relación de los obispos de Tlaxcala, Michoacán, Oaxaca y otros lugares en el siglo XVI* (México, 1904), pp. 95–7.

6 Fray Francisco de Burgoa, O.P., *Geográfica descripción*. vol. I, (México, 1934), pp. 42–3.

7 Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, pp. 137–9.

bishops' power. Even so, the king and the viceroy now had more authority in ecclesiastical matters.⁸

The attempts of the Bishops of Oaxaca, even when they were friars themselves, to assert themselves over the Dominicans was a cause of scandal in the See from the early seventeenth century, when the Dominican Fray Juan de Bohorquez (1617–33) was bishop. Further, attempts to secularise their parishes, particularly by the litigious Archdeacon Cárdenas (1652–54), and the time and expense consumed in defending them, was a cause of distress among the Dominicans. Their missionary work was seriously undermined, as the nineteenth century Dominican historian Padre Gay argues, and there were a number of cases of idolatry in the bishopric by the end of the century.⁹

However, as far as this paper is concerned, the most serious innovation introduced by Moya de Contreras was ordination by *título de idioma*. In such cases, a youth, generally one who could not afford to complete his studies, was apprenticed to a priest to study the language, or languages, of his parish. This was a certain means of ordination and appointment to a beneficed parish.¹⁰ Matters came to a head during the episcopacy of Bishop Fray Angel Maldonado (1702–28). A member of the strict Cistercian Order, he was unable to accept that time given to their missionary work among their parishioners, which included study for preaching, was more important to the Dominicans than strict adherence to the Rule in matters of liturgy.¹¹ Naturally, in the urban friaries in which the novices studied, the Rule was followed in its entirety. These customs were established in the *Actas* (records) of their mid-sixteenth century chapters.¹²

Maldonado wished the friaries to be integrated so that there were eight friars in each *doctrina*,¹³ and nominated ten for secularisation. A *Cédula Real* (Royal Decree) allowing the secularisation of ten *doctrinas*

8 J.F. Schwaller, 'The Implementation of the Ordenanza de Patronazgo in New Spain,' in J.A. Cole (ed.), *The Church and Society in Latin America* (New Orleans, 1984), pp. 38–50. Poole, *Pedro Moya de Contreras*, pp. 48–51. The full implications of this are discussed by Poole, on pp. 79–87.

9 Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, pp. 335–9, 360–2.

10 Schwaller, *The Implementation*, pp. 40–1.

11 F. Canterla and Martín de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII* (Sevilla, 1982), pp. xvii–xviii, 30–1.

12 Fray Daniel Ulloa, O.P., *Los predicadores divididos. Los dominicos en Nueva España, siglo XVI* (México, 1977), pp. 217, 219.

13 Canterla and de Tovar. *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, pp. 30, 32–4.

was promulgated in 1706. However, they were to be the first ten which became vacant rather than those nominated by Maldonado.¹⁴ In 1707 the bishop requested a further ten secularisations and a memorial from the Provincial, Fray Joseph de Arjona expressed his fear that '*Su Ilustrísimo*' was seeking 'the total destruction and loss of the Province of San Hipólito Martir of the Order of Preachers'.¹⁵

It is probable that it was as a result of the prolonged and bitter nature of this conflict; the possibility of its continuing interminably, for Maldonado had refused translation to Orihuela, Spain; and the fear of the situation spreading to other sees, that in 1713 the Council of the Indies refused to allow further secularisations.¹⁶

There the matter rested until, in 1749, a *Real Cédula* of Fernando VI (1746–59) returned to the subject.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the promulgation of such Royal Decrees demonstrates the determination of the Spanish Bourbons to implement the *Patronato Real* and the *Ordenanza de Patronazgo* as a basis of their power.

However, in Oaxaca, Bishop Gomez de Angulo (12.12.1744–52) who, having been in possession for four years would have known his diocese well, paid scant attention to the order. The Dominicans had been 'scrupulous' in their mission, the diocese was at peace and he had no desire to provoke them.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the king was intent upon secularisation, and a further *Real Cédula* was issued on 1 February 1753. The viceroy, the Conde de Revillagigedo the Elder (1745–55), handed a copy of this to Bishop Blanco y Helguero (1754–64) upon his arrival in Mexico from Calaharra, Spain, where he had been Vicar General.¹⁹ In fact, Revillagigedo's zeal for secularisation was even greater than that of the king, and, like Moya de

14 Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa, Museo Santo Domingo, Oaxaca (hereafter BB), *Caja 1. exp.* 10.

15 BB, *Caja 3.* 19. 93.

16 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, pp. 78–85, 84 fn. 37.

17 The king was influenced, states Brading, by his ministers, the Marqués de Ensenada and José de Carbajal y Lancaster as well as by his Jesuit confessor. He suggests, too, that they might, in their turn, have been influenced by negative reports on the friars sent by the Admirals Jorge Juan and Ulloa from Peru and Ecuador. D.A. Brading, *Church and State in Bourbon Mexico. The Diocese of Michoacán 1749–1810* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 62–3.

18 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, pp. 96, 111–4.

19 *Ibid.* pp. 110–4, 100.

Contreras and Maldonado before him, he quite ignored the fact that the friars had been sent to the New World as missionaries.²⁰

He expressed his frustration, in his *Instrucciones y memorias* of 8 October 1755, to his successor the Marqués de Amarillas. It was necessary, he stated, to remove the friars from their *doctrinas*, but there was a lack of secular priests fluent in the various indigenous languages. The religious, the mendicant friars, were dispersed throughout the realm, and were reliant upon *obvenciones* (parish fees), but if so many were sent to the principal houses without sufficient rent and alms it would cause a public scandal. Hence, the most opportune way of dealing with the matter was on the death of a friar. A secular priest could then be placed in the *doctrina* as *interino*, *oposiciones* could be held and a suitable replacement appointed in the customary manner.²¹

He was incensed by their cost to the Crown, which gave each *convento* (friary) that had a sacristy lamp six *arrobas* of oil and each priest one and a half *arrobas* of sacramental wine for the mass each year. Moreover, he stated, that the *doctrinas* deprived the Crown of tribute. However, he ignored the fact that the Order had maintained the fabric of their *doctrina* churches and friaries in this very seismic area, which suffered many earthquakes during the eighteenth century.²²

He also argued that the Indians in the *doctrinas* lacked *bienes de comunidad* (community funds) and were kept in subjugation by the friars on the pretext that they were neophytes. This, however long the *doctrinas* had existed.²³ These statements appear to be greatly exaggerated, although there would have been abuses. In fact the *cajas de comunidad* (community treasuries) and the limitations upon their use by the friars were discussed in the sixteenth-century Dominican chapters.²³

20 Brading, *Church and State*, p. 65.

21 E. De la Torre Villar, *Instrucciones y memorias de los Virreyes Novohispano*, vol. 2 (México, 1991), p. 831, item 147. The trustees of the National Library of Scotland are thanked for their permission to photocopy this material. There were in fact 156 friars but only 105 cells in the principal houses; see AGI. Méx. 2586. *Relación de las casas dominicas de Oaxaca*, 5. 8. 1770. *Relación de las casas, curatos y conventos dominicos en la Provincia de S. Hippólito Martir de Oaxaca*. 9. 10. 1770.

22 *Ibid.* p. 832 nos. 152–4. AGI. México 2525. *Limosna de vino, cera y aceite*. After the severe earthquake of 1702, the Order gave grants for the repair of their *doctrina* churches and friaries; see Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca*, p. 385.

23 Torre Villar, *Instrucciones y memorias*, p. 832, nos. 153, 154; Ulloa, *Los dominicos divididos* pp.170–2, measures against the abuse of *cofradía* and hospital funds are also recorded in the *Actas* of the sixteenth century chapters.

The bishop informed the viceroy on 10 August 1755 that the *doctrina* of Zimatlan, Valles Centrales, had become vacant due to the death of the Reverendo Padre Fray Juan Amador. Given the above circumstances, this unfortunate occurrence was sadly ill-timed. The provincial and the prior had asked that Fray Joaquín Rodríguez be placed there as ‘*interino*’, but Blanco y Helguero had responded that he could not do this without informing the viceroy and that it would only be done in order to please them, and so that the faithful should not lack spiritual nourishment.²⁴

The correspondence which ensued, some 60 folios, demonstrates both the dilemma which secularisation posed for the bishops and the power of the viceroys, as the kings’ vicepatrons, in their dealings with them. However, the *Recopilación de Leyes de las Indias, Libro 1, tit. 3* forbade their taking any personal decisions in this regard which might cause strife.²⁵

Revillagigedo, who had in effect been handed a gift, therefore replied circumspectly, on 20 August, that he approved the bishop’s ruling, and a religious could undertake the administration of the *doctrina* but without the title of *cura interino* (interim priest). Normally, clerics were placed as *interinos*, he said, but, given the humanity and charity with which the religious should be treated, they should be allowed some time in which to leave. Adding, ‘It will be less bitter for them, and sensitive to do so ... this is how it has been done in this archbishopric and *Su Ilustrísimo* should do the same until the Act of Possession ...’²⁶

The bishop’s reply of 31 August shows his understanding of his limitations. These would have been greatly increased by the fact that he was unfamiliar with Mexico; that this was his first preferment as a bishop; and that, although he appears to have begun his visitation, he could not possibly have learned enough about his huge See to deal with the viceroy with the assurance of his predecessor. It transpired that he had doubts about how to act, the *doctrina* of Zimatlan was still in the possession of the Dominicans and this was his first experience of taking one of their parishes from them since his preferment. Hence, he stated:

24 Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), *Ramo de arzobispos y obispos* (hereafter RAO), vol. 13, *exp.* 50.

25 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, p. 67.

26 AGN, RAO, *exp.* 50–50v.

... and as I esteem the Holy Religion of Santo Domingo so much: and at the same time am determined not to deviate one iota from the Royal Orders in this matter, nor in any other, I very much wish that Your Excellency will deign to advise me openly on what I should do in the present case ... because only in this way can I indemnify myself against all complaints and censure.²⁷

In the absence of a reply from the viceroy, a perturbed Blanco y Helguero wrote again on 28 September, enclosing a copy of his original letter and begging that His Excellency would give him the security of advising him firmly what to do.²⁸

This crossed with an exasperated letter from Revillagigedo, dated 1 October, in which he stated that as his previous letter had dealt with the matter he had nothing to add to it. He therefore repeated its text. However, he did urge, at some length, that 'moderation and prudence' should be used in deciding what would be the most convenient course to take in accordance with the orders received. His final letter, of 8 October, in reply to that of 28 September, was short, for he was preparing to receive the Marqués de Amarillas, who had arrived in Vera Cruz. The hapless Blanco y Helguero had therefore to act on his own and deal with the formidable Dominicans as best he could.²⁹

The bishop, in Antequera for a short period, wrote to Viceroy Amarillas on 26 January 1756, virtually repeating his initial letter to Revillagigedo regarding Zimatlan and asking for his decision on the matter. However, nothing could be done until June for his visitation work took up all his time, and Lent, during which his priests had to undertake the 'awful task' of confessing the Indians, was approaching.³⁰ Amarillas was less exercised in the matter of secularisation than his predecessor, so, given that Revillagigedo had approved the arrangement with a Dominican friar as *interino*, merely trusted that the matter would finally be dealt with.

27 *Ibid. exps.* 50v–51.

28 *Ibid. exp.* 51v.

29 *Ibid.* 51v–52, 52.

30 *Ibid. exps.* 48–49v. In a large parish thousands would be confessed during Lent. The incumbent of Miahuatlan states that, whilst one *vicario de idioma* suffices during the rest of the year, during Lent another is necessary as over 3,000 have to be confessed. *Cuestionario*, vol. 1, p. 118.

He also hoped that *curas* would be placed in vacant *doctrinas* and friars removed from others from time to time.³¹

These letters may give an impression of timidity and indecision, but the bishop had good reason for both, for his visitation had confronted him with the realities of the situation in the See. Given the substantial problems caused by the *curas*' deficiencies in learning the many indigenous tongues, a *Real Cédula* of 5 June 1754 decreed that Christian doctrine should be taught in Spanish, in the unrealistic hope that by the end of a year the Indians would express themselves well in it. This was duly given to the bishop by the viceroy, who firmly believed that by learning Spanish the Indians would be rescued from the barbarity of thought and custom which resulted from their retaining their languages. Blanco y Helguero, therefore, set up 28 schools in the Mixtec Alta during his first visitation; a considerable administrative task. But he reported that, as everyday communication was conducted in Mixtec, the pupils had not even understood the doctrine well.³² This will be discussed further in the context of the Fourth Mexican Provincial Council of 1771.

The problem of the *curas*' competence was a very real. A list of 69 priests throughout the diocese dated 1747 shows that six were Dominican friars, and of the others only two had the degree of *licenciado*, whilst the rest had the *bachillerato*.³³ The implications of such educational disparities have been discussed by Brading for Michoacan and Taylor for Guadalajara.³⁴

The realities of the situation in Oaxaca were stated by Blanco y Helguero in his report to Amarillas of 29 March 1756. This was written after 'the most exact and diligent examinations' in order to find out which priests were 'skilful in competence and language' in all the 21 languages spoken in the See. There were none in the languages used in the *doctrinas* held by the Reverend Dominican fathers. There were, however, six approved in Valley Zapotec, but, as there were eight secular

31 AGN, RAO, *exps.* 53–54v.

32 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, pp. 101–2. Brading, *Church and State*, p. 65.

33 Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca (hereafter AHAO), Siglo XVIII. Fondo Cabildo. Sección Admin., *Pecuniaria, Serie Contiduría. Libro 1747, fcos 13–33v.*

34 Brading, *Church and State*, pp. 105–20, William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred. Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, 1996), pp. 88–97.

parishes in that language, it was necessary to keep five *curas* free in case an incumbent died or became ill.³⁵

In April, having held a synod to ascertain the quality of his priests, he reported his dismay, for they were generally 'very poor in preparation and language'; and some had 'totally forgotten one or the other'. He had suspended some from celebrating mass and given others time to improve, but still had to suspend some of these. Some had been berated for their laziness, but those who worked had received help. He also, in a further letter, contrasted the sophistication of the Archdiocese with its plethora of theological courses and candidates with the financial means to complete them, with provincial Oaxaca with its few courses and candidates who could mostly only study with scholarships. Furthermore, there were only two languages as opposed to the 21 of Oaxaca, and, among those 21, some with such linguistic variations that they required separate *títulos de idioma*.³⁶ This would have been the case with Valley Zapotec.

The bishop's argument would, surely, have been expressed more forcefully had he been aware that the archbishop was then undertaking his visitations and examining his priests. Despite the few languages spoken in the Archbishopric, he reported in 1758 that the knowledge of moral theology and *idioma* of even his most competent priests 'declined considerably' as they were examined later when attempting to move parishes. This he blamed, in the spirit of his times, on the lack of refinement of their parishioners.³⁷

In the meantime, Blanco y Helguero had reviewed the situation with regard to Valley Zapotec and informed the viceroy on 31 March 1756 that the Order of Preachers of the Province of San Hipólito possessed 14 *doctrinas* in that language, whilst he had only six priests able to minister in it. It was therefore impossible to remove the friars except by abandoning the spiritual administration of their *doctrinas*. However, one of his six *curas* was now free to take over the long-vacant *curato* of Zimatlan.³⁸

The next series of letters concerns the cumbersome procedure for secularising a *doctrina*. A decree and letter were sent to the *alcalde mayor*

35 AGN. RAO, *exp.* 62.

36 *Ibid.* *exp.s.* 74–75v, 81–82 (These two *expedientes* are virtually identical), 84–87.

37 Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, pp. 94, 572, fn. 118.

38 AGN. RAO, *exp.* 63.

(Spanish civil administrator) of Zimatlan and his lieutenant. A judge was appointed to carry out the Superior Orders on 31 March; an Order for Secularisation according to the dispositions of the Council of Trent and the Laws of the *Real Patronato* was issued; and, on 26 April, the bishop appointed a commissioner to remove the Dominican fathers from the administration of the *doctrina* of Zimatlan.³⁹

Finally, in May, the bishop had excellent news. A messenger had been sent to Zimatlan and possession taken in 'peace and tranquillity'. Thus, edicts could be displayed so that *oposiciones* could be completed for seven *curatos* by 1 July 1756 and *ternas* presented to the viceroy. A *terna* was a list of three candidates, from which the first was usually chosen, for each vacant *curato*. In fact, this *terna*, for four *curatos* in Mixtec, one in Chatino, one in Zapotec and the one in Valley Zapotec for Zimatlan, was not sent until 14 October 1756, 14 months after the death of Fray Juan Amador.⁴⁰

The Marqués de Amarillas advised Blanco y Helguero, on 28 July 1756, that he had received various Royal Orders informing him of Fernando VI's 'royal determination' to remove the friars from the *doctrinas* which they had served with '... saintly and apostolic perseverance since the beginning of the Conquest'. These had been '... erected precariously in their care'. However, arguing that there were now *seculares* able to undertake the spiritual administration of the *doctrinas*, he had issued this *bando* (viceregal order) so that they could now be relieved of this 'Office and Burden' as far as possible, in order to follow their vocation and Rule better in the peace of their cloisters free from '... the precise distractions that parochial office and ministry entailed'.⁴¹

This view hardly accords with the vision of Santo Domingo de Guzmán when he founded the Order in 1215 with the mission of evangelising pagans throughout the world through their preaching. It is obvious that in order to do so the study of languages was essential, and this is where so many *seculares* failed.⁴²

39 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 64, 65, 66, 68, 69.

40 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 84–87, 125–6.

41 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 97–98v, 103–5. These two *expedientes* are identical.

42 Humberto M Vicaire, O.P., *El espíritu de Santo Domingo y su intención en la fundación de los predicadores* (México, 1982) pp. 19–26. In fact, when the initial missionary zeal was failing in 1571, the Dominican Pope, Pius V (1566–72), conceded that Dominican missionaries should receive plenary indulgences on sailing from

The *bando* continued to the effect that not only should any *doctrinas* which had been vacated in recent years be secularised but also those in possession of friars known to have ‘... some vice, defect, or incompetence ...’ He further charged the bishop ‘... to remove and separate the Reverend Padres Fray Francisco Gonzalez, Fray Manuel de Umaña and Fray Joseph de Villafaña, of the Order of Preachers ...’ from the *doctrinas* of Santa Maria Ayuquesco, Santa Cruz de Ixtepequi and San Martín de Tilcajete ‘with all their *anexos* and *visitas* ...’ (subject towns and hamlets) and replace them with *seculares* as *interinos*.⁴³

He ordered that two testimonials be drawn up, one for the bishop, the other for the Corregidor of Oaxaca, so that the Padre Provincial of San Hipólito Martir

may carry out the order that the friars leave the said *doctrinas* and *conventos*, and entrust them to the *curas interinos* destined for them, because his religious are expected to obey the decisions of our King adapted to what has been determined, and declared, by the Holy Apostolic See at the instance of His Majesty and his glorious predecessors.⁴⁴

He was advised by the bishop on 16 August that he had presented the provincial with his testimonial which he had heard ‘with great conformity’. Further, a person had been sent to arrange the secularisations, but bearing in mind Amarillas’ fear that the friars might alienate property and treasure, he had been sent first to Tilcajete, which was unaware of its fate. Ayuquesco and Ixtepeque had, however, been advised and inventories of their possessions been drawn up with the assistance of the Indian *principales*, so that they could be compared with what was now there.⁴⁵ So, whilst the *principales* (nobility) had been consulted the Dominicans had not. It should be mentioned that this person had had to travel considerable distances from the Valley of Ocotlan to that of Zimatlan in the Central Valleys and then to Villa Alta in the sierra.

Spain; on reaching New Spain; and at the end of an exemplary religious life, as well as 100 days’ indulgences each time they preached in an indigenous language. Fray Agustín Davila Padilla, O.P., *Historia de la Fundación y discurso de la provincia de Santiago de México de la Orden de Predicadores* (México, 1955 [1596]), pp. 499–500.

43 AGN. RAO, *exps.* 104v–105.

44 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 97–98v, 105–105v.

45 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 99–100.

Given Crown policy, and this devious undermining of Dominican authority by himself and officers of the Crown, it is hardly surprising that the bishop commented that he had been informed that the regular priests were not happy in their administration and that the Indians, knowing that they would be removed, were not obeying them. He feared that this would introduce bad customs and the parochial rights of the parishes would be lessened.⁴⁶

It would appear then, such was the power of the viceroys in carrying out Crown policy, that in this very short period Bishop Blanco y Helguero's moral misgivings concerning the secularisation of the *doctrinas* and the manner in which he was expected to deal with the Dominicans had been completely overcome. And this, despite his dismay at the linguistic and educational shortcomings of many of his priests.

His successor, Bishop Alvarez de Abreu (1765–74), articulated the disadvantages of the *título de idioma* passionately. In a letter to the king he stated that the majority of those who wished to be ordained were poor and had left their studies after having learned 'stuttering' Latin, and hardly completed philosophy. They then went to a parish to learn the language and abandoned their studies in all but a few cases. Then, after ordination, they remained in the same *beneficio* for years with a low stipend that inhibited their work.⁴⁷

It may be assumed that a number of those with *título de idioma* had vocations but lacked education and funds. Certainly, all the eighteenth-century Bishops of Oaxaca complained about them, whilst at the same time wishing to place the *seculares* in the Dominican *doctrinas*. Even Alvarez de Abreu, educated in the Canary Isles by the Dominicans, commented in his letter to the king quoted above '... I must confess a truth to your Majesty. The friars would be better in their houses than in their parishes: but the parishes would be better with the friars ...'⁴⁸

The *título de idioma* was abolished in 1769,⁴⁹ and it may be that it was the problems arising from the death of Fray Juan Amador, which had alerted Revillagigedo and Amarillas, and through them Archbishop

46 *Ibid.*, *exps.* 110–111v, 112.

47 AGI, *México, Eclesiástico. Obispo de curatos, idiomas* 1770, fols. 7–8

48 *Ibid.*, fol. 14.

49 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, p. 109, fn. 22.

Lorenzana, to the laudable need to overcome these linguistic difficulties by encouraging Indian vocations.

The enlightened ecclesiastical hierarchy of the latter half of the eighteenth century, led by Archbishop Lorenzana (1766–71) endeavoured to form the Indians into full members of Christian colonial society. Thus, during the unratified Fourth Mexican Provincial Council of 1771, which Lorenzana convoked, and which was principally concerned with the expulsion of the Jesuits, they attempted to do so by using the expropriated Jesuit Houses as seminaries. A third of the students were to be Indians or mestizos in the hope that, by seeing their kin as clerics, more would be established in the Faith.⁵⁰ Some had entered the priesthood earlier, but at a price. Bishop Dr Nicolás del Puerto (1679–81) from the *cacique* family of Santa Caterina Minas, Oaxaca had endured much clerical prejudice in Oaxaca and only returned as bishop in old age after a long and distinguished career in the archbishopric.⁵¹

Lorenzana had stated in his Pastoral Letter of 6 October 1769 that the doctrine should be taught in Spanish in order to eliminate the Indian languages (1766–71). However, delegations to the Council, even when fluent in Castilian, begged for confessors using their own languages and so some *estudiantes de idioma* were still to be admitted, but confined to the lesser priestly orders. Certainly, Bishop José Gregorio de Ortigosa (1775–93) still blamed its existence for the poor preparation of his priests in his letter to Visitador General José de Gálvez dated 1776.⁵²

It could be argued that the difficulties encountered in teaching Spanish in the Oaxacan parishes can only be fully understood through an analysis of the replies to a *cuestionario* Bishop Antonio Bergoza y Jordán (1802–14) left his priests on his visitation of 1802. In this, Item 6 concerns the Spanish schools in their parishes, and the 58 extant replies illustrate the problems inherent in maintaining such schools, although the quality of the information given varies considerably.⁵³

50 P. Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 'Del Tercero al Cuarto Concilio Provincial Mexicano, 1585–1771,' *Historia Mexicana*, XXXV, vol 1 (1985), pp. 5–31, 13.

51 Gregorio M. de Guijo, *Diario. Tomo II*. 1648–64 (México, 1953). pp. 60, 67, 83, 190, 188, 208. A. de Robles, *Diario de sucesos notables. Tomo I*. 1665–1703 (México, 1972), pp. 8, 251, 302.

52 Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *Del Tercero al Cuarto Concilio*, p. 20, fn. 22. Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, pp. 191–5, especially 194.

53 Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (hereafter AGEO), *Cuestionario de don Antonio Bergoza y Jordán, obispo de Antequera a los señores curas de la diócesis*, Documentos del Archivo General del Estado de Oaxacavols. I and II.

It should be stated that a *doctrina* or *curato* consisted of a *cabecera* and from two to ten *sujetos* spread over extensive and often hostile terrain. Very few had any endowments to cover the teachers' salaries, therefore, in most the *padres de familia* paid half a real monthly, or provided food, or cultivated a plot for them. The solution, as one priest stated, would have been to use funds from the *Caja de Comunidad* (parish treasury), but the *subdelegados* (civil administrators) only permitted half the salary to be paid in a few remote areas. The *padres de familia* paid the rest.⁵⁴

School, when there was one, usually began in January and lasted for three or four months until the agricultural cycle began. Parents were often reluctant to send their children, so not many attended. Often, the only school was in the *cabecera*, but in Cuicatec-speaking Teutila and Papalo the *estudiantes de idioma* taught, so that in the latter there were masters in all the nine *sujetos*, whilst the *fiscales* (the priest's Indian representatives) were the teachers in Ixtlan and the *indios cantores* (the church choristers) in Ozolotepec during Lent.⁵⁵ It is strange that these solutions were not, apparently, used elsewhere, as these personnel would have been sufficiently educated for this task.

Given all the circumstances, it seems that the Church was dependent upon training more indigenous priests, but in fact the *Seminario Real de Indios de San Carlos* had still not been established in the ex-Jesuit college in Mexico City. A *Real Cédula* of November 1789 refers to repeated Royal Orders that this should be done, and it was referred to again in 1801. However, Taylor states that five per cent of the priests in the archdiocese were Indian.⁵⁶

Among the priests answering the *cuestionario*, a few were from the Indian nobility; of these two came from the *cacique* family of Santa Cruz de Tayata, Tlaxiaca, Mixteca Alta. The elder, Br Don Francisco Feria, aged 71, had been a priest for 40 years, whilst the younger was one of the few *licenciados*. He was Matias José Feria, aged 51. Another was also from the Mixteca Alta and one, Don Domingo López, came from Sierra de Miahuatlan. All of these served in their native areas⁵⁷

54 *Ibid.*, 1802. vol. I, pp. 120, 139, 173.

55 *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 42, 37, 130.

56 Torre Villar, *Instrucciones y memorias*, p. 1400.

57 *Cuestionario*. vol. I, pp. 150, 152, 141–2, 137, vol. II, p. 330.

There were 15 *vicarios*. They had been ordained into this minor order through *título de idioma*, and included Creoles and *mestizos*, who might have been too poor to complete their studies. This was certainly so in the case of the son of a cathedral chorister. They were usually paid a stipend of 500 pesos by the *curas*, but in a number of cases the parishes were too poor for them to afford this, and this limitation upon the numbers who could be employed would have been another factor mitigating against increasing indigenous ordinations.⁵⁸

There are only seven references to *estudiantes de idioma*, some of whom might have been native speakers, but one of the only four priests with the degree of *licenciado* in this sample — Valleys, the *cura* of Tlacoahuaya — trusted to God that there would be none there as they were often not very good and were principally a cause of embarrassment to priests with families to support.⁵⁹ Although this information is not otherwise recorded, there can be little doubt that priests often had dependents with them, for instance mothers and sisters, and in a poor remote parish a student or *vicario* would certainly have been a further financial embarrassment.⁶⁰

Only six *doctrinas* were recorded in the sample: three in the Mixteca Alta and three in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The important parishes of Teposcolula, Yanhuitlan and Coixtlahuaca in the Mixteca Alta conformed to the wishes of the Crown in that they were served by eight religious, including the prior in Teposcolula and two Mixtec brothers from the *cabecera* in Yanhuitlan. Coixtlahuaca still retained 17 of its 22 *pueblos*. Those in the isthmus were much smaller. That of Zanatepec, with five *pueblos*, usually included a *vicario* who helped the two friars in charge of the province's haciendas, whilst Juchitan merely had three, and the Huave *doctrina* of San Mateo del Mar consisted of four but no information is given regarding the friars serving them.⁶¹

58 *Ibid.*, vol I, pp. 38, 46, 55, 68, 80. Few replies state the race of the *vicarios*, but of those which do five are Creoles: pp. 40, 37, 50, 153, 178, and two are *mestizos*: pp. 77, 123.

59 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 283. None of those replies regarding *estudiantes de idioma* give their race.

60 Both Taylor and Brading refer to priests with families: Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, p. 139; Brading, *Church and State*, p. 119.

61 *Cuestionario*, vol. I. pp. 3, 85, 165, 210, 268, 332.

A comparison of the *curatos* covered in the *cuestionario* (see page 13) with the list of clergy in 1747 suggests that their education had improved little despite the protests of the bishops. In both cases the number of parishes covered was almost the same, although only seven were common to both. Yet, after 50 years, there were still only four priests with the degree of *licenciado*.⁶² This may be, however, because the replies from few first class parishes have survived.

Bishop Alvarez de Abreu stated that it was possible for a poorly prepared priest to live 70 leagues from his family and still not see his Indians because they lived in the mountains producing cotton and *grana* (cochineal), and only returned to the community for the fiesta. He was stressing the wretched lives such priests lived in the isolated tropical areas with poor living conditions, exposed to disease and walking leagues to confess the sick.⁶³ However, these comments also emphasise the importance of the fiestas celebrated by the confraternities, especially the patronal one, as unifying factors in the communities. The *mayordomo* of each *cofradía* would ensure that the monthly masses of the saint or Virgin he served were observed as well as the fiesta.⁶⁴

Many *libros de cofradía* (the *mayordomos*' account books) for the colonial era have not survived, and there are none for Zimatlan in the eighteenth century, but those of Zaachila cover the whole century, year after year, but with no reference to its secularisation in 1753. The books are simply concerned with the yearly account of the saints' possessions in candle wax, herds or crops and the amount spent on monthly and fiesta masses.⁶⁵

62 *Ibid.*, vol. I. pp. 50, 107, 141, 276. *Licenciados*.

63 AGI. México. *Eclesiástico. Obispo de curatos, idiomas* 1770, fol. 15–16.

64 Archivo Paroquial de Zaachila (hereafter APZ), Archivo Paroquial de Etlá (hereafter APE). The *libros de cofradía* of both these archives have been analysed.

65 See N. Farriss's review of Oaxacan Parish Archives including Zimatlan. The *libros de cofradía* give information regarding, for example, the number of cattle held each year, and the tithe paid on them, as they were European, but they do not give the reason for the fluctuations in numbers. However, Padre Gay refers throughout his *Historia* to the dates of the earthquakes, epidemics, droughts and extreme frosts which beset the area, so this gives some explanation of the situation. The only crop on which tithes were paid was the wheat of Etlá, the colonial breadbasket of the area. APZ, APE.

Table I: Secularisation of Dominican *Doctrinas* in the Valley of Oaxaca

Dominican <i>Doctrinas</i> in 1702: San Pablo, Antequera, Zaachila, Etna, Huitzo, Cuilapan, Santa Ana Zegache, Santo Tomás Jalieza, Ocotlán, Minas de Chichicapa, Teitipac, Teotitlán, Tlacoahuaya, Tlaxitaca, Santa Cruz.
Projected aggregation of <i>doctrinas</i> to <i>conventos</i> : initiated after Maldonado's Visitation of 1702: Zaachila, Zimatlán, Ocotlán, Santa Cruz Minas, Jalieza, Santa Ana – to Cuilapan.
Tlaxitaca, Tlacoahuaya, Teitipac, Teotitlán – to San Pablo, Antequera.
1704. Projected secularisation of ten of the 45 <i>doctrinas</i> in the See.
1706. Ten <i>doctrinas</i> secularised including Santo Tomás Jalieza, Teitipac.
1707. Among projected secularisation of 12 parishes by division into 32 – Zaachila, Zimatlán, Huitzo, Ocotlán, San Pablo, Santa Cruz, Cuilapan.
1713. El Consejo de Indias refuses further secularisations.
1753. <i>Reales Cédulas</i> : 1–2–1753; 23–6–1757.
Secularised: Zaachila, Etna, Minas, Zimatlán, Tilcaxete, Ayoquezco, Tlaxitaca, El Marquesado, Mixtec speaking Cuilapan, Central Valleys, where Mixtec was taught.
Dominican: Santa Ana Zegache, Ocotlán, Teitipac, Zautla, Teotitlán, Tlacoahuaya, Huitzo.
The Province of San Hipólito Martyr in 1771: 156 friars.
The Valley Houses: Santo Domingo, Antequera: 73 friars, including novices. San Pablo: 12.
The Valley <i>doctrinas</i> of Huitzo, Zautla, Teitipac, Tlacoahuaya, Santa Ana Zegache: three friars each. Tlaxolula: four friars, Ocotlán: six friars.
1776. The See: 111 secular parishes. 23 Dominican <i>doctrinas</i> .
1781. Carlos III's solution to avoid the loss of the Province:
Secularised: Zautla, Santa Ana Zegache, Tlacoahuaya, Huitzo.
Dominican: Ocotlán, Teitipac, Teotitlán del Valle, Tlaxiaco.
1786. Secularised: Teotitlán del Valle.

Source: Francisco Canterla y Martín de Tovar, *La Iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII* (Seville, 1982)

Table I, covering secularisations in the Central Valleys, gives some idea of the trauma caused the Dominicans and their parishioners as they were involved in the turmoil of the *doctrinas* being secularised and, in some cases, returned to them and removed again. It is based upon data in Canterla and de Tovar, but the instance of Zimatlan shows that the process of secularisation was far more tortuous than can be demonstrated in a table, whilst it suggests that the dates may well be an approximation.⁶⁶

This paper, by having concentrated upon the relationship between the demands of the viceroys, as vicepatrons of the Church, and the bishop; the bishop's predicament; and the shortcomings of the secular clergy, may suggest that their parishioners were helpless pawns, but this was hardly the case. In fact, it can be argued that in a number of instances it was the constancy of the religious *cargo* (office) holders which ensured religious continuity during this period, for, regardless of any differences in attitude and observance introduced by the change from regular to secular priest, the *cofradía* masses and fiesta celebrations would have continued as before.

These *cargos* were held by the *fiscales*, the sacristans, but above all the *mayordomos*, with their monthly or weekly *cofradía* masses and fiesta celebrations, who were members of the nobility in the Valleys during the colonial period. All such offices would have been some compensation for those with a priestly vocation, which they were unable to fulfil. Further, that of *mayordomo* had similarities with the role of the *caciques* (prehispanic lords) of each town for the fiesta celebrations included the feasting and drinking which it had been the Zapotec lords' duty to provide. This, despite the Church's attempts to suppress these since the *Junta Eclesiástica* of 1539.⁶⁷

In Zaachila, Bishop José Gregorio de Ortigosa (1775–91) true to Bourbon policy and in the enlightened manner of his times extinguished a number of *cofradías* in 1776, because he thought them 'unsuit-

66 J. Starr, 'Ideal Models and the Reality: from *cofradía* to *mayordomía* in the Valles Centrales of Oaxaca,' unpublished PhD thesis Glasgow, 1993, Part 11, chapter 6, p. 273.

67 J.K. Chance, *Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, 1978), pp. 24–7; J.A. Llaguno, S.J., *La personalidad jurídica del indio y el III Concilio Provincial Mexicano (1585)* (Mexico, 1983), p. 17.

able'. However, he omitted to remove the books and the *mayordomos* continued with their masses and celebrations, by the elegant expedient of having the accounts and change of *mayordomo* witnessed yearly by the civil *cargo* holders: that is by the *gobernador* (governor), *regidor* (councilor), *alcaldes* (*pueblo* officials) and *escribano* (scribe), *instead* of the priest. The bishop relented on his next visitation, but the books were witnessed by the *cabildo* until 1829, with a different *escribano* each year.⁶⁸

A rather calumnious fear that Blanco y Helguero had expressed was that if the interregnum before secularisation was too long the friars might hide 'some parochial goods' and '*albas*' (treasures) to the grave detriment of the incoming secular priests.⁶⁹ A later instance suggests that this prophecy was prescient, but the civil-religious hierarchy rather than the Dominicans appear to have been culpable.

Padre Julián Castellanos, the *cura* of Achiutla, Mixteca Alta, had entered the *doctrina* in 1793 or '94, and found that the Dominican *memorial* left for him made no mention of the sacristy book detailing the goods belonging to the churches in the *cabecera* and its *sujetos* (subject towns). It must have been the Indian governors who told him that the sacristy book had included an account for a flock of 500 sheep, which was used to maintain the *cura* and the *vicario* so that the parish need give nothing to them. He had not received these, and they appear not to have existed, for a letter from the incumbent friar to the Prior in 1770 referred to the *doctrina's* possessions as consisting of 4,300 pesos in *fincas* (estates) in Puebla.⁷⁰

Apart from this there was no bed in the friary, only a few old chairs and tables, and most locks and keys were missing. He was still sufficiently incensed in 1802 to enclose some of the acrimonious correspondence that had passed between himself and the friar in his reply to

68 APZ. *Libros de Cofradía de San Nicolás de Tolentino, Nuestra Señora del Rosario, del Santísimo Sacramento, and de la Limpia Concepción*. Archivo Castañeda Guzmán, *Libro de Cordilleras 1776–1802*, entries June 1776. APZ, *Libro de Cordilleras 1779–1789*. *Visitation* 1789.

69 AGN. RAO, vol. 13, *exps.* 86–87, 112.

70 *Cuestionario*, pp. 305–7. Such attitudes were more extreme in Highland Guatemala, for Van Oss states that the secular priests had to conform to the Mayan *cofradías'* religious observances, however unorthodox, or lose their income from the *cofradías'* masses. A. Van Oss *Catholic Colonialism. A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524–1821*. (Cambridge, 1986), p. 140.

the *cuestionario* of Bishop Bergoza y Jordán. The friar, his nephew Fray Juan Joseph Castellanos, had angrily refuted the accusations that he had removed a chalice as well as the fittings, and stated categorically that a *libro de sacristía* had never existed! It seems that the Mixtecs of Achiutla had deliberately stirred up trouble for the incoming secular priest as a form of protest, but the uncle's references to 'impertinences', and the nephew's addressed 'Querido Tío y Señor mio' to 'ridiculouses' also give some insight into the feelings engendered by a tragic century of disputes.⁷¹

What did the Zapotecs require in their priests? The orthodoxy observed by the Dominicans and which they had become accustomed to since the Spiritual Conquest it seems! The *principales* of Zapotec Villa Alta complained of their lack of masses and celebrations, whilst, in Zaachila, the priest wished to leave, but the entire *República de Indios* (community) wished him to remain, because he administered the sacraments; taught and explained Christian doctrine every Sunday; celebrated the fiestas with due solemnity; and lived an exemplary life.⁷²

It has been shown in this paper that the ardour of Viceroy Revillagigedo the Elder in imposing the Spanish Bourbons' policy of secularising the *doctrinas* of New Spain, and thereby strengthening their power base vis-à-vis the Church, was thwarted in Oaxaca by Bishop Blanco y Helguero's inability to find a suitably qualified priest with linguistic ability for that of Zimatlan. In fact, it was during the viceroyalty of the Marqués de Amarillas, and not until 14 months after the death of the incumbent friar of Zimatlan, Fray Juan Amador, that this was possible.

It has been argued that the difficulties thus evinced might have been the catalyst for the solutions suggested during the unratified Fourth Mexican Provincial Council of 1771. These included the suspension of ordination by *título de idioma*, the setting up of seminaries for Indian priests and the elimination of the Indian languages by teaching Christian doctrine in Spanish in the *curatos*. However, an analysis of the extant replies to Bishop Bergoza y Jordán's *cuestionario* of 1802, suggests that, whilst few *doctrinas* remained, neither the number of indigenous priests nor of those

71 Canterla and de Tovar, *La iglesia de Oaxaca*, p. 133.

72 AGEQ, *Obispado. Curia de Gobierno y Administración. 1804*, leg. 14, exp. 3. AGEQ, *Curia de Gobierno y Administración: Serie Correspondencia. 1783–84*, leg. 13, exp. 4.

with the degree of *licenciado* had increased since a list of similar length had been drawn up in 1747. It is hard to determine the extent to which the *título de lengua* was still a means to ordination, as, whilst there were few *estudiantes de idioma* in the sample, the incumbents rarely gave this information about themselves.

The priests' replies show clearly the difficulties involved in teaching Spanish, when funds for teachers were negligible or completely lacking, to a rural population, whose primary need and concern was the care of its livestock and cultivation of the land rather than schooling.

This, then, was the unfortunate result of a century of turmoil as the Oaxacan *doctrinas* were secularised. The Crown, the viceroys, as vicepatrons of the Church, and the bishops had succeeded in their wish to increase their power by ridding themselves of the independent Dominicans, who were answerable only to their superiors and to Rome. However, this was done at a high price. By the end of the century the Dominicans had all but lost their Province of San Hipólito Martir, as predicted by the Provincial in 1707, and their parishioners had lost the priests who best served their spiritual needs; for the Dominicans were better educated than the *seculares* and had studied and preached in the indigenous languages of their province. However, it does appear that three centuries of Dominican teaching had inculcated a desire for orthodox worship among their parishioners, which continued after secularisation and led to their appreciation of those priests they deemed to be dedicated to their ministry.

