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p. 153-164

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CHURCH AND STATE DURING THE FIRST VICE-REGENCY OF DON LUIS DE VELASCO, THE YOUNGER

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Don Luis de Velasco, the younger, is unique among viceroys of New Spain in that he served two non-consecutive terms as viceroy. His first term lasted from 1589 until 1595, when he was appointed viceroy of Peru. His second vice-regency ran from 1607 until 1611. The period of his first vice-regency was one in which Church-State relations were relatively tranquil. For this reason it provides scholars with a very useful insight in to how the two institutions could cooperate and work to mutually support one another. Quite simply, during this period there were no major confrontations between bishops and archbishops, on the one side, and the viceroy and royal government, on the other. The viceroy was generally supportive of the activities of the religious orders, and they saw him more as an ally than as a foe. Similarly the secular clergy also maintained relatively cordial relations with the viceroy, in spite of the fact that this period saw the consolidation of many of the ecclesiastical reforms dictated by the Ordenanza del Patronazgo. In summary, no major obstacles arose to inhibit the peaceful correspondence of the Church and State during the vice-regency of Velasco. Consequently, it serves as a model for the manner in which the crown in all likelihood intended the two institutions to comport themselves.¹

¹ A general view of the government of Velasco can be found in Juan Pablo Salazar Andreu, *Gobierno en la Nueva España del virrey Luis de Velasco, el Joven (1590-1595) y (1607-1611)*, Valladolid, Quirón Ediciones, 1997, pp. n173-191. This book is a very basic outline of the major themes and events of Velasco's rule.

Velasco was a unique figure in the history of New Spain. He was the son of the second viceroy, don Luis de Velasco, the elder. Although the younger Velasco had been born and raised in Europe, he came to Mexico at a fairly young age, approximately 20, and lived for several years with his father in the viceregal palace. Prior to traveling to Mexico, the younger Velasco had attended the University of Salamanca, traveled to England in the company of Prince Phillip when the latter married Queen Mary of England. Velasco then stayed with the royal court, eventually arriving in Brussels where Phillip, now King, inducted him into the military religious order of Santiago. As a result Velasco had very close ties to the young monarch and had many important friends and allies in the royal court.²

Various trends merged in order to create this period of Church - State tranquility. A primary condition was the absence of a prelate for the archdiocese. The king had appointed the ruling prelate, Archbishop don Pedro Moya de Contreras, to be President of the Council of the Indies in Spain. In spite of canons to the contrary, Moya took the position, and neither the King nor the Archbishop seems to have moved to appoint a coadjutor to govern the archdiocese. When Moya died, in 1591, the cathedral chapter ruled, *in sede vacante* until the appointment of Archbishop Fernández de Bonilla. Unfortunately Fernández de Bonilla failed to govern the archdiocese personally, since he was engaged in a *visita general* of Peru at the time. While he did send a governor, that person also pursued a policy of tranquil engagement with the secular arm.

Just as the archdiocese lacked a prelate, so did several of the suffragan dioceses. In particular during various portions of Velasco's rule, the diocese of Guadalajara and Michoacan also lacked bishops. This left only the dioceses of Oaxaca and Puebla with prelates. In Puebla, don Diego Romano served as *juez de residencia* and *visitador*, along with Velasco in the investigation that followed the government of the Marquis of Villamanrique. Thus Romano and Velasco were close political allies of one another. In Oaxaca, the bishop was don Fr. Bartolomé de Ledesma, a relative of the royal secretary Pedro de Ledesma. For some thirty years Velasco had carried on a private correspondence with Secretary Ledesma, and

²John F. Schwaller, "The Early Life of don Luis de Velasco, the Younger, The Future Viceroy as Boy and Young Man", *Estudios de Historia Novohispana*, vol. 29, 2003, pp. 17-47.

the two were also close allies. As a result, there were few bishops and archbishops who would, or could, quarrel with Velasco and cause a disruption of Church-State relations.

The secular clergy, who administratively served under the authority of the bishops, did not pose a major disruption to Church-State relations. On the one hand, Velasco supported the policy of granting preferential treatment to creoles, in particular the sons of the conquerors and first settlers, when it came to filling ecclesiastical positions under the Royal Patronage. Nevertheless, there were several suits initiated during this period to clarify various aspects of the Royal Patronage. These focused on more clearly defining the rights of individuals appointed to ecclesiastical posts by the crown, *vis a vis* those appointed locally by the viceroy and archbishop. Clearly Velasco, as vice-patron, had a crucial role in these suits.

The regular clergy had for years been highly critical of the royal government, particularly with regard to the various labor policies enacted by the crown. The religious orders had been in the forefront criticizing the *encomienda*, pressing for the application of the New Laws, and generally protecting the natives from abuse at the hands of Spanish officials. In general, Velasco had a cordial relationship with the religious orders. In spite of being one of the largest landowners and *encomenderos* himself, Velasco espoused reforming the Indian labor system, and the institution of further protections for the native peoples. In fact, some of the most vocal critics within the religious orders praised Velasco's intentions.³

Looking more particularly at the relationship between don Luis de Velasco and the bishops of New Spain, the major feature, as has been noted, was the general lack of prelates. The situation of Moya de Contreras was particularly embarrassing. As one of the leading proponents of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, Moya found himself in violation of one of the major tenets: that is, that a prelate should occupy his see and be an active pastor there. Moya spent the last several years outside of his archdiocese as a courtier in Spain. As a result the archdiocese for several years passed to the hands of a governor appointed by Moya, but one who lacked true canonical authority to govern, since he had not been

³ The so-called *Codex Mendiceta* contains several letters written by the friar to Velasco relating to the latter's native policy. Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Códice Mendiceta: Documentos franciscanos, siglos XVI y XVII*, México, Imp. Francisco Díaz de León, 1892.

consecrated as a bishop coadjutor. Moya's death, then, caused the archdiocese to fall to the hands of the cathedral chapter, *in sede vacante*. This group of priests could have created serious problems for Velasco, but chose to work quietly with the royal government. One major reason was that the chapter had come to be dominated by creoles. As noted earlier, Velasco clearly supported the policy that privileged creoles in offices of preference in the Church. Fernández de Bonilla, never took personal possession of the archdiocese, but rather also sent a governor, who lacked full authority.⁴ Consequently no one within the higher reaches of the archdiocese was either able or willing to confront the viceroy on ecclesiastical matters.

The other dioceses manifested many of the same issues seen in the archdiocese, either being vacant or having prelates who for one reason or another were politically closely allied to Velasco. The viceroy complained frequently to the crown about the vacancies in the dioceses. In his first official letter to the King and Council of the Indies, Velasco announced the death of the Bishop of Guadalajara, don Fr. Domingo de Alzola, O. P. In the same letter he noted that the king had not yet named a successor for Moya. Nevertheless, he conceded that the members of the *cabildo eclesiástico* of Mexico had acquitted themselves well in the governance of the archdiocese, in the absence of their prelate. Velasco noted that since he was only newly arrived in the colony he could not yet offer suggestions as to suitable candidates for these prelaties.⁵

A few months before Velasco arrived in New Spain, the Bishop of Michoacan, don Fr. Juan de Medina Rincón, died. Thus three of the five dioceses of central New Spain experienced vacancies when Velasco took office. As noted, the two sitting bishops, don Diego Romano of Puebla, and don Fr. Bartolomé de Ledesma of Oaxaca were closely tied to Velasco. Romano served jointly with Velasco in the *residencia* of Viceroy Villamanrique, and the two were quite supportive of one another. Ledesma, although he had gained a reputation for being difficult to deal with, and had caused some serious problems early in his career, starting as an aide to Archbishop don Fr. Alonso de Montúfar, had mellowed by the late six-

⁴ Stafford Poole, *Pedro Moya de Contreras: Catholic reform and Royal Power in New Spain, 1571-1591*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp. 206-207.

⁵ Archivo General de Indias [Hereafter: AGI], México, 22, núm. 18, Velasco al rey y Consejo, 3 de enero de 1590.

teenth century and offered no major opposition to either Velasco or the royal crown.⁶ Furthermore, Velasco's long relationship with Ledesma's kinsman, the secretary Pedro de Lesdesma, must have also entered into the relationship with the Oaxaca bishop.

One can see Velasco impact more with regard to the secular and regular clergy. The secular, or diocesan, clergy always took second position in most people's thinking, after the regular clergy. Popular opinion held that the seculars were less apt, poorly educated (if not illiterate), venial, and altogether less spiritual than the friars. Throughout the sixteenth century the bishops and archbishops made a concerted effort to improve the quality of the secular clergy. The creation of the University of Mexico was a major step in this effort. More than this, the King, through his ecclesiastical policy, had a tremendous role in the improvement of the clergy. With the promulgation of the *Ordenenza del Patronazgo*, the King created a system of *oposiciones* (competitive examinations) through which to choose the best clerics to serve the parishes under the Royal Patronage. At the same time, the monarch converted most parishes into benefices, ecclesiastical posts enjoying a guaranteed income, which the beneficiary could enjoy for a lifetime. At the same time, the monarch reserved to himself, and to those to whom he delegated the authority, the right to name beneficiaries both through *oposiciones* and outside of the system. During Velasco's first government in New Spain a confrontation occurred between beneficiaries appointed by the viceroy through the system of *oposiciones* and beneficiaries appointed directly by the king.

In 1594 various suits emerged that focused on defining the rights and privileges of beneficiaries. In one of the cases, the Bishop of Guadalajara rejected two beneficiaries named by the King. According to the prelate, the priests appointed by the King lacked the necessary qualities needed to serve their benefices. In another case, two of the curates beneficiaries of the cathedral of Mexico filed suit against the other two; there were a total of four beneficiaries. The two who filed the suit had been named by the King, and the two against whom they filed were appointed locally by the viceroy and archbishop. The suit claimed that the two appointed by the King could enjoy all of the revenues of the offices.

⁶ John F. Schwaller, *The Church and Clergy in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1987, p. 153, *et passim*.

Royal judges viewed the Guadalajara case not so much as an issue of the competency of clerics appointed by the crown, but rather as a clear challenge to royal authority. Ever since the promulgation of the Ordenanza del Patronazgo, many American bishops had rejected royal claims of authority over local ecclesiastical appointments. They considered that the secular arm had reached too far into the internal administration of the Church. In spite of this, the King and the royal government continued to claim and enforce royal supremacy in this area. Moreover a large body of established law held that the royal courts were the appropriate venue for the resolution of questions relating to the interpretation of such canonical documents as the bulls of erection and the bulls which granted the Patronage to the crown.⁷ Velasco, as viceroy, supported the crown in this interpretation.

The suit of the two cathedral curates occurred during Velasco's government of Mexico. They had sued the cathedral chapter and governor of the archdiocese over the fruits of their benefices. According to the bull of erection, the cathedral was to have four curates. These received their salaries in the form of a portion of the division of the tithe, according to a very complicated distribution scheme. In fact, by the end of the sixteenth century rather than receiving a portion of the tithe, their salaries were a fixed amount of pesos, but still paid from a portion of the tithes.⁸ As offices stipulated in the bull of erection, the right to fill these offices fell to the King as royal patron. After 1574, they also became part of the offices filled through *oposiciones*. Yet the crown retained the right to directly appoint persons to any of the offices under his control. The two beneficiaries appointed by the King, thus filed suit claiming that as the only curates appointed by the King they had complete right to all of the fruits of the office, under the provisions of the bull of erection. The royally appointed curates also claimed that since their offices were stipulated by the bull of erection, the local authorities had no authority to fill them.⁹

Velasco and the judges of the audiencia supported the archdiocesan officials in rejecting the curates' claim. In earlier decades pre-

⁷ John F. Schwaller, *Church and Clergy...*, pp. 186-87

⁸ John F. Schwaller, *Origins of Church Wealth in Mexico*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1985, pp. 58-63.

⁹ AGI, México, 71, núm. 108, Velasco y la Real Audiencia al rey, 26 de octubre de 1594.

bendaries appointed by the king had made the same claim against those appointed locally. The courts had ruled that the needs for qualified persons to serve these offices was so serious that it was more important to have persons serving these offices rather than give generous salaries to the few who held royal appointments.¹⁰

To further clarify the issues, the King requested, in 1590, that Velasco send his own observations regarding the four beneficiaries recently appointed by the crown. Specifically Velasco had to discuss the four and report on their abilities to serve. The King gave Velasco permission to reject the provision of beneficiaries with royal appointments since the royal will was that "those who serve be the most sufficient."¹¹ Velasco sent a detailed analysis of the situation and of the beneficiaries. Of the four, two were absent. One had gone insane and disappeared. Another had already left New Spain, en route to the Philippines. Of the remaining two one of the royal appointees had previously won the position through *oposición*, and so the royal appointment merely served to confirm the earlier appointment. The last had also received a post through *oposición*, but one different from the royal appointment. He was very talented in the language of the native peoples where he currently served, but not particularly in the parish where the crown had appointed him. As a result the viceroy preferred to leave him in that one and not appoint him to the other.

In order to qualify for a royal appointment, a job-seeker had to request a summary of his merits and past service (*relación de méritos y servicios*). This document was developed by the judges of the audiencia in the form of a *relación de parte y de oficio*. The court would then send this document to the crown along with its own recommendation. Notably a very high percentage of the summaries sent to the crown were at the request of creoles. In one of the letters Velasco wrote early on in his vice-regency, he supported the policy of naming creoles to the various vacancies on the cathedral chapters. He wrote:

[...] y demas de aberse hecho muy buena election y a ellos m[e]r[ce]d la ha V mag[esta]d hecho a todo el reyno con servirse de naturales

¹⁰ John F. Schwaller, *Church and Clergy...*, pp. 187-188.

¹¹ "que los sirvan los que fueren más suficientes", AGI, México 22, núm. 28, Velasco al rey, 6 de diciembre 1590.

del con que se animan a seguir las letras y virtud en que estavan muy desmayados por falta de premios yo beso a las reales manos a V. mag[esta]d por el favor y m[e]r[ce]d que a este reyno a hecho y a sido de gran importancia y lo sera proseguirlo pues ay muchos benemeritos en el.¹²

In this same letter, Velasco recommended various persons for vacant seats on the cathedral chapters of the realm. Most significantly the majority of those recommended by Velasco were creoles. In fact, by this time the majority of members of cathedral chapters had become creoles.¹³ It is clear that Velasco pursued a policy of favoring creoles for offices under his control. Part of his motivation might have been self-interest. His own children were creoles, although he was required to send them to Spain during his government. But he was also related to many of the leading creoles of the colony, through his own marriage and that of his uncle. As a result a policy of preference had important social ramifications for Velasco and his extended family. For instance one of the leading members of the cathedral chapter of Mexico was his "cousin" don Juan de Cervantes. Cervantes and Velasco shared an uncle. Velasco's father's brother had married Cervantes's mother's sister. Another characteristic of the persons recommended by Velasco was that they generally had university titles: doctors, *maestros*, or *bachilleres*.

Examples of both characteristics are Dr. Francisco de Loya and Canon Alonso de Écija. Both were creoles. Both held university degrees from the University of Mexico. Both served all of their careers in Mexico and its environs. Écija and his brother, Serván Rivero, served as choir boys in the cathedral of Mexico. Being a talented musician, he continued his service in the cathedral after maturing. He eventually became one of the chaplains of the cathedral. In 1576 the King appointed him to a *ración*, which he served while also being the subcantor (*sochantre*). Finally in 1576, the crown promoted him to a canonry. Loya, for his part, was ordained in 1574, and for many years served as the chaplain of the village of Iztapalapa, which fell under the patrimony of the City of Mexico. When all parishes were converted to benefices, under the Ordenanza del Patronazgo, Iztapalapa fell to the crown, and Loya then became the beneficed curate.

¹² AGI, México 22, núm. 52, Velasco al rey, 6 de junio 1591, f. 1.

¹³ John F. Schwaller, *Church and Clergy...*, p. 228.

Eventually he became the Provisor of Indians in the archdiocese of Mexico.¹⁴ The documentation, then, demonstrates rather clearly Velasco's policy of favoring creoles, and especially sons of conquerors and first settlers, in his ecclesiastical appointments.

Velasco's relationships with the religious orders were also quite amicable. In fact he had some deep ties to the orders. For example, his father, the second Viceroy of Mexico, was not buried in the cathedral but rather in the church of the Dominican Order in Mexico. One of his own sons, his homologue, was a novice in the Company of Jesus, in Spain. At the same time, as noted earlier, he maintained a correspondence with the famous Franciscan chronicler, Fr. Gerónimo de Mendieta. Quite clearly, on the surface, one would expect no major troubles to befall Velasco from the hands of the religious orders.

From his correspondence to the crown, Velasco manifested his interest in the religious orders and his deeply held conviction that persons serving in positions of authority in the New World should have prior experience there. For example in 1591 visitors were reforming both the Dominican and Augustinian orders. Although the purpose for the visitation was praiseworthy, something that Velasco strongly supported, the visitors did not have any experience in the Indies. Velasco wrote: "he visto que resultan inconvenientes y desasosiegos de que los que hubieren de hacer este oficio vengan de fuera por la poca noticia que de las cosas de aca tienen." He then suggested that the King make recommendations to the generals of the orders that in naming visitors in the Indies, that they choose either persons already resident there or those with experience in the colonies.¹⁵

Velasco also became involved in issues relating to the female orders. As in the case of the male orders, Velasco had various family members among the nuns. Three of his own daughters were professed nuns in the convent of Regina Coeli.¹⁶ Yet, even beyond this, he recognized the important role that convents and *casas de recogimiento* served in the colonial social order. In a letter from 1590, Velasco supported a request for a royal grant to sustain three con-

¹⁴ John F. Schwaller, *Church and Clergy...*, pp. 135-136. *Cinco Cartas del Illmo. Y Exmo señor D. Pedro Moya de Contreras...*, Madrid, Porrúa Turranzas, 1962, pp. 127-128, 130.

¹⁵ AGI, México 22, núm. 46, Velasco al rey, 29 de abril de 1591.

¹⁶ AGI, México, 218, núm. 17, Información de parte del convento de Regina Coeli, 1586, ff. 1-3.

vents: La Penitencia, Santa Mónica, and the *Colegio de Niñas*. Velasco described them as “de verdad son de los recogidos y exemplares monasterios de la cristiandad y donde mejor se guarda su regla y mas se sirve n[uest]ro S[eño]r”.¹⁷

In a very similar manner, Velasco took an active concern over the confraternities and hospitals of the kingdom. He demonstrated a true concern over the quality of care offered in the hospitals. Most of the hospitals of the realm were managed by the religious orders, although the bulls of erection called for the creation of at least one hospital in each diocese to be supported by the tithe. In 1585, the Dominicans received a royal cédula requesting that the viceroy send information to court regarding the advisability of granting a royal stipend to support their hospital in the amount of 700 pesos a year. Velasco supported the request.¹⁸ Similarly the Franciscans requested support from the royal treasury to sustain their hospitals in the amount of 600 pesos annually. Velasco also supported this request, using almost exactly the same language as with the Dominicans.¹⁹

Velasco was unique among viceroys in that he lived in the colony for an extended period of time as a private citizen prior to his appointment as viceroy. During the nearly thirty years he lived in the colony, he became involved in many local activities. One that was particularly close to him was his membership in the *Cofradía del Santísimo Sacramento*. He was not just a simple member, but took on many of the important leadership roles in the confraternity and guiding it through some of its difficult times.²⁰ While other details of his life remain to be studied, at this point, it is clear that not only did he take an interest in lay religious activities, he was very active personally.

This short view of Church – State relations during the vice-regency of don Luis de Velasco illustrates several important aspects of early colonial Mexican history. Quite clearly the period was relatively calm. There were no major issues that disrupted the relationship. This is partially explained by the relative absence of prelates,

¹⁷ AGI, México 22, núm. 18, Velasco al rey, 5 de junio de 1590.

¹⁸ AGI, México 22, núm. 40, Velasco al rey, 11 de marzo de 1591.

¹⁹ AGI, México 22, núm. 52, Velasco al rey, 6 de junio de 1591.

²⁰ Los papeles de la *Cofradía* are located in: Joaquín García Icazbalceta Manuscript Collection [1500]-1887, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

bishops and archbishops, who might be in a position from which they could politically oppose the actions of the monarch and royal government. Neither did the lower clergy, both the regulars and seculars, precipitate conflict. While there were important issues confronting the lower clergy, they tended to deal with internal matters. Only a handful of cases would proceed to the royal courts, such as the issue of the royally appointed beneficiaries.

Another factor that might explain the absence of major conflict is Velasco's own experience. As reflected in his letters and comments to the crown, he honestly believed that people with experience in the Indies could better handle the problems of the Indies. He reiterated this when discussing the visitors for the religious orders and it pervades his appointments and recommendations for appointments where he openly favored creoles and others from the region. His position was based on three major points. First of all the crown had articulated this policy even before the promulgation of the New Laws, but certainly that code openly proffered positions in the Indies as a reward to placate the *encomenderos* who were to lose their grants. Secondly, Velasco had to pursue enlightened self-interest. His own children were grand children of conquerors and first settlers as were his cousins and their children. He had a deeply vested interest in aiding these groups, even if he himself was not a creole. Lastly, one must always recognize that experience is a good teacher. Velasco, having lived in the Indies for all of his adult life, had seen administrators come and administrators go and honestly believed that the great flaw in the Spanish imperial system was that too few officials with critical power had any true understanding of the colonies. He clearly supported the appointment of persons with experience. Needless to say, this also supported his own career which was founded on two basic strengths: he enjoyed a personal relationship with the monarch forged in the period of Philip's marriage to Mary Tudor, and Velasco had a unique history of experience in the Indies.

