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## NEW MEXICO AND THE SACK OF ROME: ONE HUNDRED YEARS LATER

*By* ELEANOR B. ADAMS AND JOHN E. LONGHURST\*

WITH the development of the European national state system in the early sixteenth century, ambitious secular rulers waged a successful contest with the Catholic Church for political supremacy within their own borders. National independence of control from Rome was achieved in England by a direct break under Henry VIII. In nominally Catholic France, the Gallican Church was under control of the monarch. The rulers of Catholic Spain and its vast overseas empire displayed true fervor in the defense and propagation of the Faith, but this did not prevent them from being extremely jealous of their authority and privileges in the management of Church affairs.

The Roman Church did not abdicate its claim to political power without a struggle, and the conflict between the claims of State and Church continued to rage for many years. Although the Spanish monarchs professed undying loyalty to Rome, they would tolerate no interference by the Pope with their political ambitions. This was spectacularly demonstrated in 1527 when Emperor Charles V, angry at the attempts of Pope Clement VII to force Charles from Italy, permitted his troops under the Duke of Bourbon to sack the city of Rome with a ferocity unequalled since the days of the barbarian invasions.

This humiliation of the papacy at the hands of a secular

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prince revealed to Europe the hollowness of Church claims to universal jurisdiction over high and low alike. Nor was its significance appreciated only in the Old World. A century after the sack of Rome, a Spanish governor in New Mexico cited Charles V's attack on the Holy City as a proper example to follow against a clergy which questioned the supremacy of State over Church.

The Church-State struggle which precipitated the sack of Rome was repeated in the New World empire carved out by the Spanish conquerors. All over the American continents the Church played an important political role, and its claims to authority frequently conflicted with the ambitions of those who represented secular interests. In the northern outpost of New Mexico, conflict between Church and State was an almost constant factor in provincial life from the earliest days of the colonial period. Hopeful explorers and adventurers were soon disillusioned about the rumors of the golden cities to be found in the north. When they returned, however, with reports of a large native population, ripe for conversion, the Spanish Crown felt obliged to maintain the unproductive frontier region chiefly for the sake of missionary enterprise. The Franciscan Order, entrusted with the task of saving souls in New Mexico, naturally felt that their work greatly outweighed in importance any secular aims which threatened to interfere with their spiritual labors.

On the other hand, settlers and provincial officials were unwilling to accept the complete domination of the clergy in provincial affairs. They were determined to exploit what resources there were, and the Indian population as a potential labor force was the greatest of these.

Such conflicting aims often led to irreconcilable differences, not only over matters of Indian policy, but also over the related question of who held authority in provincial affairs. Many of the leaders of both sides were stubborn, hotheaded men, tenacious in their opinions and unable to compromise, and so in the seventeenth century a bitter struggle, with only short intervals of comparative agreement, went on until the native population took the upper

hand and drove all the Spaniards, clergy and laymen alike, from New Mexico in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

During the early days of the Church-State struggle in the province, perhaps the most articulate proponent of secular control of New Mexico affairs was Don Juan de Eulate, who became governor at the end of 1618. Eulate was a newcomer to America when he began to serve as a representative of the Spanish Crown in one of the most remote outposts of the Spanish Empire. He had seen service in Flanders and is said to have distinguished himself at the siege of Ostend, before coming to New Spain as a captain of artillery in the 1617 fleet.<sup>1</sup> This ambitious, irreverent professional soldier held a very exalted notion of his importance and authority as the King's governor, and as a result of his anti-clerical regalism, his term of office in New Mexico from 1618 to 1625 was one of the most bitter and shocking phases of the Church-State controversy there. In *Church and State in New Mexico, 1610-1650*,<sup>2</sup> F. V. Scholes has related the story of Eulate's acrimonious dispute with Fray Esteban de Perea, who was a worthy opponent of the governor in upholding the authority of the Church. It is not necessary to repeat this story here. What we wish to emphasize is that the situation in New Mexico was but one phase of a long conflict which caused such disasters as the sack of Rome, and that it is of interest to find that both the conflict and the story of the sack extended to the outermost fringes of the Spanish Empire in America.

Eulate soon became a vociferous spokesman for the anti-clerical element in New Mexico. He made no secret of his opinions on the subject and exercised considerable influence over the thinking of his supporters, who numbered both soldiers and settlers. Nor did he hesitate to acquaint the clergy with his views; on one occasion he furiously lectured Fray Pedro de Haro on the subject of Church-State relations:

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1. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, (hereinafter cited as AGI) Contaduría, leg. 720.

2. Historical Society of New Mexico, *Publications in History*, vol. 7 (June, 1937), Albuquerque. First published in the NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW, vol. 11 (nos. 1-4, 1936), vol. 12 (no. 1, 1937).

About a year ago [1620], he [Fray Pedro de Haro] heard Governor Don Juan de Eulate say that the prelate of this land and its churches had no jurisdiction whatsoever over any layman, but only the governor [has jurisdiction over them]; and that the lord archbishop in Mexico had no jurisdiction over any layman and that if he wished to punish or seize anyone, the Royal Audiencia immediately took the culprit away from him. And he said this with scorn for the Church and ecclesiastical persons. And on many occasions when he speaks scornfully of the Church and ecclesiastics, he speaks with such great contempt and scorn of the ecclesiastics that it seems that he wants to abase them and lay them low. In a certain conversation in which the said Governor Don Juan de Eulate and this witness took part, there was a discussion about the authority of His Holiness. The governor said that if the Pope gave him one command and the King gave him another, he would obey the King alone and not the Pope. And when this witness replied that if His Holiness' command was just and Catholic, it must be obeyed, the said governor replied with great anger, and his choler making him look like a demon, that in spite of everything he had no obligation to obey anyone but the King. . . . He has heard some persons say, and he even thinks he has heard the governor say that *el Rey es su gallo*,<sup>3</sup> and this in contradiction of the authority of the Pope and of the Church when ecclesiastical authority is under discussion.<sup>4</sup>

Eulate's chief adversary was Fray Esteban de Perea, prelate of the Franciscans in New Mexico during the first years of this governor's term of office. Perea was little impressed by the exaggerated claims of the soldier-governor, but Eulate's behavior, which was undermining respect for the Church, aroused his anger and spurred him to open resistance. Under Eulate's influence, he complained, the settlers of New Mexico

say that the secular state, especially that of war, which is their life here, is more perfect than the religious state, especially that of the

3. This cynical phrase comes from the Spanish saying *Buen gallo le cantó*: A good (or well-omened) cock crowed for him. This was said of a person who attained good fortune by the favor and help of another, and he referred to his benefactor as his *gallo* (cock). Hence the catch phrase, *El Rey es mi gallo*. Hereafter we shall translate this as "The King is my patron." Maestro Gonzalo Correas, *Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales y otras fórmulas comunes de la lengua castellana . . .*, Madrid, 1924. Correas was professor of Greek and Hebrew at the University of Salamanca in the first third of the seventeenth century and published a number of works on the Spanish language, but this *Vocabulario* remained in manuscript at his death.

4. Testimony of Fray Pedro Haro de la Cueva, Sandia, August 22, 1621, in *Ynformacion contra D. Juan de Eulate . . . hecha por Fr. Esteban de Perea, juez ordinario*, Archivo General de la Nación, México, (hereinafter cited as AGM) Inquisición, Tomo 356.

friars, who are the only clergy here. Others say in scorn of the authority the Church has over all the faithful, "The King is my patron," meaning that they have to obey only the King and not the Church.<sup>5</sup> In the same scornful way others say that the governor [Eulate] is their patron. . . . There are those who say and affirm that there cannot be two heads here, ecclesiastical and secular, for it would be a monstrosity, but only one, who is the governor who stands in the King's place, because there is no church or prelate or head of the Church; along with other propositions offensive to pious ears, suspect, and scandalous.<sup>6</sup>

By 1623, Fray Esteban de Perea was more than ever anxious for the backing of superior authority in his battle against Eulate and all he stood for. In a letter to the Holy Office, dated at Sandia on August 14, 1623, he requested permission to go to Mexico City to give evidence about conditions in New Mexico and stated his view of his differences with Governor Eulate in no uncertain terms. He complained that "this Antichrist" was responsible for the wretched state of affairs in the province

because he persists in holding the things of God and His Holy Faith up to scorn in both words and deed. . . . I receive reports to this effect momentarily, and I fear that if this land did not belong to so Catholic a King and Lord, we should be very open to reproach in the integrity of the Faith. He has so little respect for God or prelate, being of the opinion that the King is above everything and instilling this belief in the simple minded populace, especially four or five soldiers of his own stamp, wicked men who are under sentence, who support him and approve everything he says and does because they have need of him, that with their help he is oppressing this very new plant of the Church and its prelate and friars so that there is no way of resisting him because of his overweening arrogance and the concept that the King is above everything. When anyone discusses the Church and its authority with him, in an attempt to correct his sins and reform

5. One of Eulate's captains echoed the governor on this point. Testifying at Santo Domingo before Fray Alonso de Benavides, commissary of the Holy Office in New Mexico, on June 12, 1626, Fray Jerónimo de Zárate Salmerón reported that some years before he had taken part in a conversation at Isleta, during which Captain Juan Gómez "made the affirmation that in this land the King was more than the Pope. This was heard by Father Fray Juan de Salas, guardian of the said convent, Captain Alonso Ramírez de Vargas and his wife, Captain Juan López Mederos and his wife, Juan Lujan, Captain Domingo González, and this witness, for they were present. And when this witness heard this proposition from the said Captain Juan Gómez, he reproved him for it, saying that the son was not more than the father; that the King wrote to the Pontiff addressing him as Our Most Holy Father, and the Pontiff wrote to the King as Our Son King Philip." AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 356.

6. *Ynformacion contra D. Juan de Eulate.*

him; or to oppose them, they are usually confounded by the reply that the prelate is not qualified to go into such matters with him. He says that he treats him as one who has business with his governor and not as a prelate, for the governor considers himself superior in both spiritual and temporal matters.<sup>7</sup>

Sometime between 1622 and 1625, Governor Eulate was excommunicated by Vice-Custos Fray Ascencio de Zárate. We know little of the circumstances, but obviously the governor was not greatly humbled in spirit by the powerful manifestation of ecclesiastical displeasure. When one of his captains persuaded Father Zárate to absolve Eulate, the latter at first refused to go to the friar, insisting that it was the priest's place to come to the representative of the King. It was only after considerable persuasion that Eulate consented to visit Fray Ascencio and receive absolution.<sup>8</sup>

After Eulate's stormy term as governor ended, Fray Alonso de Benavides, commissary for the Inquisition in New Mexico, took a number of depositions about his conduct for transmission to the tribunal of the Holy Office in Mexico City. Benavides forwarded them to his superiors with the following comment:

The enclosed denunciations against Don Juan de Eulate seem to me to be most important, for according to what is said and his evil and scandalous reputation, one would never finish writing it. The outstanding characteristic of this man's conversation is that he always brings in, whether it is relevant or irrelevant, the downfall of bishops and ecclesiastical persons, for he seems to have purposely studied all histories for this evil end, glorying in relating them among this ignorant Spanish population here, and as a result they get a bad impression of ecclesiastical persons. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Among the histories Eulate had read "for this evil end" was an account of the sack of Rome in 1527. The Duke of Bourbon, who led the forces of Charles V in the assault on the Holy City, did just what Eulate would have done under the same circumstances. Eulate was first and last a supporter of royal authority, which, in his eyes, was superior

7. AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 345.

8. Testimony of Captain Juan de Vitoria Carbajal, Santa Fe, May 29, 1626. AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 356.

9. Fray Alonso de Benavides to the Holy Office, New Mexico, June 29, 1626. AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 356.

to any other, including that of the Church. In the sack of Rome he saw clear-cut justification of his own position in regard to the Church-State controversy in New Mexico. An unsigned statement made on August 31, 1626, gives the following account of a conversation in which Eulate took part when he was on his way to Mexico City:

On Monday, the thirty-first day of August of the year 1626, at about four o'clock in the afternoon in the pueblo of Alamillo near the Río del Norte in these provinces of New Mexico, the following persons were seated in the shade of a house: Father Fray Esteban de Perea, Father Fray Jerónimo de Zárate, don Juan de Eulate, who had just finished his term of office as governor of the aforesaid provinces, Captain Francisco Pérez Granillo, Captain Diego de la Cruz, Captain Tomás de Albizu, and I. We were all conversing, discussing the power of the King and the scope of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, especially the authority held by the prelates of this land and whether they can or cannot punish the governors of this land when they commit irreverences or sins against the Church. Fray Esteban de Perea was defending their right to do so, because the Church had authority for everything, and he cited a text: *Spiritualis homo judicat omnia*. Don Juan de Eulate replied and said, 'I do not know where there is any law that permits them to punish one of his Majesty's ministers. I only know that the King is my patron.' Therefore Fray Esteban de Perea said to him, 'Because of those words and others like them, the soldiers are beginning to repeat them and such unbridled statements as: 'The King is my patron whatever happens.' Don Juan de Eulate replied to this, 'I say so and I say it again, and I say that if my lord the King should order me to do what Bourbon did, I would do it.' Father Fray Esteban de Perea asked him, 'What did Bourbon do?' Don Juan de Eulate replied, 'When the Emperor Charles V sent him to sack Rome, he went and he sacked it; and so I say that whatever happens I must do whatever the King may order me, wrong or right. Let him judge his orders to me, for I am obliged to obey him.' Father Fray Esteban de Perea replied to these words, 'Look, your lordship, those are heretical propositions, and they are matters that will have to come out publicly in Mexico City.' And he replied, 'These things never come out in public, for here they lurk in corners.'

When they had mounted to overtake the wagons, Captain Diego de la Cruz asked, 'Sir, what could the outcome of this league against the Pope have been?' And Don Juan replied, 'That must be concluded by now, and if the King had sent me on that expedition as captain general, I would have gone willingly, even against the Pope.' And since this conversation was becoming more impassioned with every word, Father Fray Esteban de Perea left it at that without discussing the subject any further. I related this incident to Father Fray Alonso

de Benavides, commissary of the Holy Office, who told me that he did not take action as he could because of the inconvenience involved, but that I should set down in writing the details of what had happened against the time when it might be necessary to make a statement.<sup>10</sup>

On September 8, 1626, Benavides summarized this episode in a letter to the Holy Office, and said that he had not instituted proceedings because his secretary was not present and because all the witnesses were going to Mexico City and could make their statements there.<sup>11</sup> But if the Tribunal of the Inquisition in Mexico took action against Don Juan de Eulate, the records have disappeared. A few years after these events, in the early 1630's, he was governor of Margarita, where he appears to have found an outlet for his fervor in behalf of his King in vigorous efforts to expel heretical Dutch and English intruders from the island of Trinidad nearby.<sup>12</sup> Like the Duke of Bourbon a century before, he might lay a heavy hand on the Church in the interest of his royal master, but he was no friend to heretics.

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10. AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 356.

11. AGM, Inquisición, Tomo 356.

12. AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, leg. 180.