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SECULARIZATION OF FOUR NEW MEXICAN MISSIONS

LAWRENCE AND LUCIA KINNAIRD

THE MOST SENSATIONAL NEWS to reach New Mexico in 1767 was that the Jesuits had been expelled from all Spanish possessions and their missions in Sinaloa, Sonora, and Baja California turned over to the Franciscans. Arriving at about the same time was unpleasant news for the Franciscans. A few days after Viceroy Croix had ordered the arrest of all Jesuits on June 24, 1767, he approved the secularization of Franciscan missions at Santa Fe, Santa Cruz de la Cañada, Albuquerque, and El Paso. The government was obviously tightening its control over the mission system.

Under existing conditions, it was surprising that efforts to secularize these New Mexican missions had been delayed so long. The mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at El Paso was more than a century old. The missions of Santa Fe and Santa Cruz de la Cañada had been in existence for over seventy years.¹ Missions were not designed to be permanent. When the missionaries had completed the task of Christianizing their Indians and had taught them to be self-sustaining village dwellers, they were expected to move on to other areas and turn over their missions to curates, or parish priests. The financial significance of secularization was that missionaries received *sínodos* which were government stipends; the curates had to be supported by their parishioners.²

Missions in New Mexico differed from those established among primitive tribes because missions usually consisted only of a church or chapel adjacent to an Indian pueblo and a house for a Franciscan. The Pueblo Indians were already agricultural and self-sustaining village dwellers. Another difference in New Mexico was that, from the time of the reconquest after the Pueblo revolt,

Franciscans at Santa Fe, Santa Cruz de la Cañada, and Albuquerque were expected to devote more time to serving Spanish settlers than Indians. As the Spanish population increased, the Indians decreased, so that there were too many Spaniards and not enough Indians in those places to justify maintaining missionaries at government expense.

From the time of Santa Fe's re-establishment, Spanish settlers there had always outnumbered the surviving Indian population. In population records, unless otherwise specified, the term Spanish was very broadly used to include Spaniards, *mestizos*, mulattoes, and even Hispanized Indians from the Valley of Mexico and elsewhere who had been brought north as settlers. For example, in 1695, Padre Francisco Farfan, the Franciscan *procurador*, conducted seventy Mexican families from El Paso and founded the villa of Santa Cruz de la Cañada. This new villa had a military guard and was organized under an *alcalde mayor*. Padre Moreno was the first minister and his duties seem to have been more to serve the settlers than to Christianize the local Indians. When, in 1706, Governor Cubero founded the villa of Albuquerque with thirty families, the same situation existed.³

Prior to the secularization decision, there had been various inspections of New Mexican missions and conditions there were well known. The most careful survey was made by Bishop Tamaron of Durango in 1760. He set out from El Paso in April with a retinue of sixty-four men and an armed guard of twenty-two soldiers. At the various missions and settlements, he confirmed 13,544 Indians, *mestizos*, and Spaniards. The *visita*, which lasted approximately three months, met no open opposition from the Franciscans.⁴ The Marqués de Rubí, on his inspection tour of the northern frontier of New Spain, visited New Mexico in August and September of 1766. Nicolás de Lafora, who kept the official record of the Rubí expedition, wrote at El Paso that "the inhabitants at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe are Spaniards, *mestizos*, mulattoes, and Indians of the Tigua and Piro nations, and some *genízaros*." Along the right bank of the Rio Grande to the east there were four other missions. In his description of the presidio of El Paso which was adjacent to the Guadalupe mission, Lafora wrote that "the captain of the company is also the *alcalde*

mayor, and the people are administered by five Franciscans who attend the five missions, each with a stipend of four hundred pesos annually paid by his Majesty." Then he added that "these stipends could be saved by placing there two curates with assistants," and observed that "this saving would be by no means small." The same reasoning was applied to other missions of New Mexico.⁵

As the result of recommendations by the Bishop of Durango and various other reports on conditions in New Mexico, *Fiscal Velarde* recommended to Viceroy Croix that four of the twenty-eight New Mexican missions be secularized. The recommendation was approved, and on July 18, 1767, Croix transmitted the secularization order to New Mexico's Governor *Mendinueta*. *Velarde's* document of July 4, 1767, was historically important not only because it initiated secularization in New Mexico, but also because it gave the most accurate statistics for the four principal New Mexican population centers in the late 1760s. It revealed the surprising fact that at Santa Fe, Santa Cruz de la Cañada, and Albuquerque the only Indians served by the Franciscans were *genízaros*, Indians who had been captured as children and reared in Spanish families. Usually they were from such tribes as Apaches, Comanches, or Navajos. Since these Indian children were trained as servants by Spaniards, they learned the Spanish language and mode of life. Consequently, they had more contacts with Spaniards than with Pueblo Indians, and were eventually absorbed into the mixed Spanish population. Thus the *genízaros* added one more element to that great Spanish frontier "melting pot." Only at the El Paso mission were there some Indian families, *Piros* and *Tiguas*, who could not speak Spanish.

Few documents pertaining to early New Mexican history are more significant than those which marked the beginning of mission secularization. Following are English translations of the letters, which now reside in the Bancroft library.⁶

MOST EXCELLENT SEÑOR:

The subject discussed in this document is one which was proposed by the Bishop of Durango in a letter of October 15, 1765, in regard to the change into clerical parishes of four of the twenty-eight missions in the district of New Mexico. They are now in charge of the

Franciscan Observant Friars of the Provincia del Santo Evangelio of this realm. They are: the mission of the capital villa Santa Fé, the mission of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, the mission of the villa of Alburquerque, and the mission named El Paso del Norte.*

In the first the governor resides and the presidio under his command is situated there. The second and third are each the head of an alcalde mayor's jurisdiction; and at the fourth is situated another presidio also named El Paso. From confirmatory reports containing practical knowledge made by the Vicar Ecclesiastical Judge of the province of New Mexico, Don Santiago Roybal, formerly ecclesiastic here, which he communicated to the Bishop of Durango, and from those made by his Eminence to your Excellency on the 15th of October, 1765, on the 10th of April of the present year, and the one dated the 24th of January made by the governor of New Mexico, the following conclusion results. The four missions mentioned above are in a condition suitable for delivery to the diocese to be formed into parishes because they have a sufficient number of parishioners, Spanish and other civilized people, who, with their contributions, will furnish a competent sustenance to their parishes. Thus the stipend will be saved to the royal treasury with which it assists the friars at present employed in them. This fact verifies the report and records of visits made in that province by the governor himself. These documents are to be found in the possession of the *fiscal*.

From them it appears that the capital villa of Santa Fé has two hundred and seventy-four families of Spaniards and other civilized people which total one thousand four hundred and fifty-eight persons of both sexes. In addition, there are eighty soldiers of the presidio garrison who represent just that many more families who comprise five hundred and fifty-two persons. The Indian families in the said capital amount to thirty-six and comprise one hundred and twenty-eight persons. They belong to those known as *genízaros* who were captured when they were young, or ransomed from the wild barbarians, and reared in the homes of Spaniards; and, as such, they speak and understand the Spanish language perfectly. From all this it is clear that the mission of the capital villa is ready to be made into a parish.

From the reports regarding the town of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, the head of that jurisdiction, it appears to have two hundred and

*Spellings and accents in the documents are kept faithful to the Spanish.

twelve families of Spaniards and other civilized people comprising one thousand three hundred and six persons. There are only five families of Indians here consisting of fifteen persons, all *genízaros* who, as has been said, because of having been brought up among Spaniards from childhood, speak and understand the Spanish language. The same thing is true in the town of Albuquerque and its district. For according to the evidence gathered from the aforesaid reports, it has two hundred and fifty families of Spaniards and other civilized people, totalling one thousand five hundred and fifty-one persons. There are only thirty-one Indian families comprising one hundred and forty-five persons who are also among those called *genízaros*. In the presidio of El Paso also, according to the account of the governor and report of visits made by him, there exists at the present time the same disproportion between the families and persons of civilized people and the families and persons of Indians. Of the latter it appears that there are only ninety-seven, comprising three hundred and forty-five persons, while there are two hundred and forty Spanish families which include one thousand five hundred and fifty-one persons.

The *fiscal* thinks that in the said missions there is an incomparably greater number of Spaniards and other civilized people than of Indians. Since the first pay tithes with which their priests can be supported, it does not appear just or equitable that because of the smaller number of the second they should continue to depend upon stipends when the Illustrious Señor Bishop furnishes priests who will serve without them. Although in the mission of El Paso there are Piros and Tiguas Indians who speak their own language, it appears that the missionaries do not know it. Since the Señor Bishop offers to provide the mission with a qualified priest, it is to be presumed that he will know the language of those Indians. Although the Reverend Father Commissary General of San Francisco of this New Spain in his report does not consider this proper, yet many of the reasons upon which he bases his contention persuade one to deduce that these missions are already in a condition to make this possible. There is evidence that these are the ones possessing the greatest number of civilized people as well as the most thriving. This is true to such an extent that they are in the habit of providing not only for the other missions, but even for the inhabitants.

The other reasons which the Reverend Father Commissary General offers in support of his opinion are contrary to those advanced by

the Vicar Ecclesiastical Judge and the Governor of New Mexico and substantiated by the most Illustrious Señor Bishop. The first two are eyewitnesses of the things they report while the Reverend Father Commissary depends solely upon the information given him by the missionaries in those parts. The other reports deserve, in justice, more attention and credence. They leave no chance to the *fiscal* to disregard them, especially since it appears that those parishes would be sufficiently supported without the expense of the stipends. His Illustrious Reverence asserts that he has persons familiar with the ministry with whom to provide them. It is of no less importance that, as a result of the rivalry between the priests who may be put in those missions and the friars who will remain in the others, they will both strive to excel each other in their pastoral ministry.

In view of all this, your Excellency will be pleased to order that the aforesaid four missions of Santa Fé, la Cañada, Albuquerque, and El Paso shall be erected into parishes as proposed by his Eminence the Señor Bishop. You will also order that he be informed of this decision with a copy of it so that when he has selected suitable persons to serve in those positions they will present themselves, in accordance with the rules of the Royal Patronage, before the Royal Audiencia of Guadalajara where such matters are now executed in that district. Thus, after the collation has taken place, they may receive the missions, their churches, and property. The Reverend Commissary General must be informed of this so that he in turn shall carry out his orders by transmitting them to the missionary padres for their observance.

Mexico, July 4, 1767.

(signed)
VELARDE

Mexico, July 11, 1767.

As requested by the Señor *Fiscal* who sends copies of his petition to his Eminence the Bishop, to the most Reverend Commissary of San Francisco, to the Governor of New Mexico, and to the President of the Royal Audiencia of Guadalajara.

(signed)
DE CROIX

It agrees with its originals referred to me which remain in the office of Government and War of this Kingdom under my charge.

And so that it may be made known to his Reverence, the Commissary General of San Francisco, in virtue of the order I issue the present document. Mexico, July 16, 1767.

JOSEPH DE GORRÁEZ (Rubric)

No. 946

I herewith submit to your Excellency the enclosed document of my resolution to make parishes of the four missions of Santa Fé, La Cañada, Alburquerque, and El Paso which, in those provinces, have been under the charge of the regular rule of San Francisco. This is forwarded to you so that such steps as shall fall within your jurisdiction may be taken.

May God preserve your Excellency's life many years.

Mexico, July 18, 1767.

MARQUÉS DE CROIX (Rubric)

Señor Don Pedro Fermín de Mendinueta

New Mexico

NOTES

1. The mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at the ford (El Paso) of the Rio Grande was founded by Padre García de Zuñiga among the Mansos Indians in 1659. A church was built there and dedicated in 1668. The Pueblo revolt in 1680 caused a great influx of refugees from the upper Rio Grande and in 1682 the presidio of El Paso was established. The missions of Santa Fe and Santa Cruz de la Cañada were created in the 1690s during the process of reconquest. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Arizona and New Mexico* (San Francisco, 1889), 182-83, 205, 213-14.

2. Herbert Eugene Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies," reprinted in John Francis Bannon, ed., *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1964), 192-93.

3. Bancroft, *History*, pp. 213-14, 228.

4. Bancroft, *History*, p. 257.

5. Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *The Frontiers of New Spain: Nicolás Lafora's Description, 1766-1768* (Berkeley, 1959), p. 83.

6. Velarde to Croix, July 4, 1767, and Croix to Mendinueta, July 18, 1767, MSS in the Pinart collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.