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Review of Pamela Voekel, *For God and Liberty: Catholicism and Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1790-1861*

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Voekel, Pamela. *For God and Liberty: Catholicism and Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1790-1861*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. xv + 403 pp.

Following in the footsteps of noted North American scholars including Jordana Dym and Timothy Hawkins, Pamela Voekel recovers the voices of Central Americans in a time of upheaval and confrontation, emphasizing the regions of the Yucatán, Guatemala, and El Salvador during the age of revolution. The text proceeds chronologically as well as thematically and offers an intellectual and cultural history of religious doctrine, secularism, and retribution as revolutionary thought swept across the Hispanic Atlantic World. Consulting dozens of archives from the Vatican to Spain and the Americas, the author draws evidence from sermons, periodicals, proclamations, essays, epistolary networks, and ecclesiastical correspondence. In some ways, the structure of the argument resembles that of John McGreevy's recent global history of Catholicism in which he distinguishes between partisans of Reform Catholicism and reactionary ultramontaniam. Making claims that resonate for the entirety of the Spanish monarchy, the author ultimately adopts microhistory as the lens through which to pursue her subjects. Lesser-known clerics and laymen from Mérida, a city on the Yucatán Peninsula, serve as the initial protagonists and agents of change who push for individual liberty as well as "a godly alternative [to Romish excess] in the Augustinian tradition" (18). Voekel tackles these thorny issues promising to take "seriously the religious motives to which the actors so passionately testified" (18-19). Notably, topics related to independence and warfare remain in the background as this erudite study focuses on the intersection between ecclesiology, faith, and politics.

With a wide range of primary sources to engage, the book excels in illustrating the transatlantic nature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political and cultural debates. For example, the actions of conservative firebrand Quevedo y Quintano, the Bishop of Orense, sparked controversy not only in peninsular Spain but in Mérida among the outspoken advocates of constitutionalism. Newspapers in the Yucatán and in Spain carried reports of conservative women parading with a portrait of Ferdinand VII to Mérida's cathedral to welcome the king back to power in 1814. Voekel also charts the spread of the cult of the Sacred Heart from France into Spanish America as an avatar of conservative Jesuit observance. Lesser-known documents from the French Revolution resurfaced in disputes over church and state, and writers used the actions of Pope Pius VII to justify their own positions. The visit of a Salvadoran emissary to the Vatican is recounted as well. Yet more might have been included on connections between centers of the Spanish monarchy. Did developments in the Yucatán mirror those of other *novohispano* regions such as Oaxaca and Puebla?

In addition, some of Voekel's assertions merit additional contextualization. She argues that leaders of the *juntas* that sprang up in 1808 and 1809 during a vacuum of power in the Spanish monarchy claimed a legacy largely stemming from the councils and decentralized organizations of the early church. Yet liberals clearly and repeatedly cited political theory and precedent as a justification to form juntas representing the people in the absence of legitimate monarchical authority. In doing so, many invoked the concept of *pactum translacionis*, popularized by the sixteenth-century Jesuit Francisco Suárez. Furthermore, she cites a ban on clerical participation in governing bodies such as the Provincial Deputations (29). Although members of religious orders—the regular clergy—could not run, the constitution clearly stated that secular priests could serve as elected members of provincial deputations and the general Cortes. This is an important distinction, and many *eclesiásticos seculares* played pivotal roles in crafting the legislation of the time.

A following chapter maintains the focus on the period of constitutional reform and reaction (roughly 1810-1823) while working to link economic, political, and religious conflicts in the Kingdom of Guatemala and New Granada. A brief discursive analysis highlights the portrayal of luxury as a feminine beast that had to be chained and exiled. Accordingly, the land could be purified and freed from the hold of the opulent rich, a stand-in term for the vile Spanish. Tensions played out between reformist clerics in regional hubs such as San Salvador and vocal supporters of the Old Regime in Guatemala City. Subsequent sections of the book move beyond the independence era, exploring the brief history of the Federal Republic of Central America through the lens of the same religious schism that had divided the Cortes of Cádiz. Even small Salvadoran towns were not immune from the vitriol and conflict over spiritual and material concerns, including the tithe. The final chapter investigates the War of the Reform, providing a perfect bookend by arguing that far from seeking secularization, mid-century Mexican reformers also wanted a “godly alternative” to “Romish excess” (224). Voekel eloquently concludes that, “with their very fervor for lay individualism, the reformed church’s leaders put themselves out of a job” (224).

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