

CHRISTIAN IDEAL AND COMMITMENT
IN THE WORLD.
THREE LAY PEOPLE OF THE 16TH CENTURY

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SUMMARY: I. *Introduction*. II. *Catalina de Bustamante (ca/1490-1545)*. III. *Pedro López (ca1521-1597)*. IV. *Emanuele Ne Vunda, “The Negrsta” (ca1574-1608)*. V. *Concluding reflections*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Texcoco, 1554. Mexico City, 1597. Rome, 1608. Our reflections take these years and places as a starting point, marking as they do the deaths of three lay people of the 16th century, three individuals whose lives this article will explore in depth. I apologize for starting on an unhappy note, but it is the duty of the historian to contextualize the life and times of his subjects. But who are these people? Before answering that question, I would like to offer some brief introductory remarks.

The laity of the Church can be studied from many different perspectives: theological, pastoral, social, economic, etc. We will consider them here through the lens of Church history, which is to say history enlightened by faith. The approach will be that of the Founder of Opus Dei, Saint Josemaría Escrivá. He considered lay people as active and responsible members of the Church, who don't pursue holiness on the fringe of human activities, but precisely within them.

Before getting to the heart of the subject, I would like to offer some sociological considerations. The well-known Russian-American sociologist Pitirim A. Sorokin identified what he called the “Idealistic Culture Mentality”. In this worldview, the primacy of spiritual values coexists with a positive evaluation of the material world:

For [this mentality]—says the author—reality is many-sided, with the aspects of everlasting Being and ever-changing Becoming of the spiritual and the material. Its needs and ends are both spiritual and material, with the material, however, subordinated to

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the spiritual. The methods of their realization involve both the modification of self and the transformation of the external sensible world.¹

According to Sorokin, this mentality—where the pre-eminence of the spiritual does not overturn matter—represents a balance rarely achieved. But “despite the comparative infrequency of this type of Mixed mentality, its contribution to cultural value is qualitatively of a very high order”.²

These are, in our opinion, very interesting ideas, which shed light on our topic: the search for holiness in the middle of the world, “in the middle of the street”, as Saint Josemaría loved to say.

But we won’t be developing these reflections from a purely theological³ or sociological perspective. Rather, we will reconstruct the figures of three personalities of the Early Modern Age (16th century) who responded well to the challenges of the first globalization. All three, as has been said, were lay people, and all three crossed the Atlantic and died far from home. Today we would call them “global persons”. But above all, they internalized the Catholic faith in an admirable way. At that time lay people were not canonized unless they were martyrs or royals, but that doesn’t mean that there weren’t eloquent witnesses of Christian excellence among them.

II. CATALINA DE BUSTAMANTE (CA1490-1545)

The first personality is a woman, Catalina de Bustamante, born around 1490 in the Spanish town of Llerena (Badajoz, Extremadura). She was a Franciscan tertiary who possessed that profound spirituality which, between the end of the 15th century and the early 16th century, began to permeate the lives of many women of high cultural and religious society, such as, for example, the women of the court of Isabella I of Castile.⁴

As a humanist and teacher, Bustamante was part of the renewal of the woman’s education in the Early Modern Age. Particularly significant on this subject is the testimony offered to us by Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), a philosopher, writer and advocate of women’s access to education. Her most famous work, *Livre de*

¹ P.A. SOROKIN, *Social and Cultural Dynamics. A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law and Social Relationships*, Routledge, London – New York 2017, 28-29.

² *Ibidem*, 49.

³ For an outstanding example of such a reflection, cfr. M.P. RÍO GARCÍA, *Los fieles laicos, Iglesia en la entraña del mundo: reflexión teológica sobre la identidad eclesial de los laicos en un tiempo de nueva evangelización*, Palabra, Madrid 2015; V. BOSCH, *Santificar el mundo desde dentro: curso de espiritualidad laical*, BAC, Madrid 2017.

⁴ Cfr. Á. FERNÁNDEZ DE CÓRDOVA MIRALLES, *La Corte de Isabel I. Ritos y ceremonias de una reina (1474-1504)*, Dykinson, Madrid 2002, 167-171.

la Cité des Dames (1405) (*The City of Ladies*), shows how the alleged inferiority of women does not derive from nature, but lack of education. The volume inaugurated the so-called *querelle des femmes* (literally, ‘women’s dispute’), which gave rise to a series of treatises of widely disparate opinions. Among the best known are the *Tratado en defensa de las virtuosas mujeres* (1441) (*Treaty in defense of virtuous women*) by Diego de Valera, and the *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mujeres* (1446) (*Book of famous and virtuous women*) by Álvaro de Luna. In the 16th century we find authors such as Juan Luis Vives, who wrote the *Institutio foeminae christianae* (1523) (*On the Education of the Christian Woman*), which took an intermediate position between promoting the condition of women and relegating women to the background, at least from the cultural point of view. There’s also Saint Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, who educated his daughters Margaret, Elizabeth and Cicely. To varying degrees all these authors promoted the revaluation of women and of their spiritual and cultural abilities, against those who asserted their intrinsic inferiority and considered them only good for procreation, the Christian education of children and the care of house and husband.⁵

In May 1514 Catalina moved to Santo Domingo. She went with her husband Pedro Tinoco, the son of the *Comendador* Diego Tinoco, and their daughters María and Francisca.⁶ The monarchy was strongly in favour of Spanish settlement of the New World (it’s no coincidence that Mexico was called New Spain), and this made the presence of women indispensable.⁷

We have a gap between this resettlement and her activity in the 1520’s. The Franciscans worked to promote the education of indigenous women. On this score we might mention Fray Toribio Motolinía and Bishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga. They wanted to save them from the abuse of the first *conquistadores* and to evangelize them, following a “vertical scheme” analogous to the method used for evangelizing men. As Motolinía explained, “it was not good only to look after men, because in the beginning God created both sexes, and after the fall He came

⁵ For the historical context cfr. A. LIROSI, *Libere di sapere. Il diritto delle donne all’istruzione dal Cinquecento al mondo contemporaneo*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2015, 1-22; G. FRANCO RUBIO, *El talento no tiene sexo. Debates sobre la educación femenina en la España moderna*, in J. BURRIEZA SÁNCHEZ (ed.), *El alma de las mujeres. Ámbitos de espiritualidad femenina en la modernidad (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, Ediciones Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid 2015, 365-374. For an introduction to feminism and Christianity, cfr. M. FAZIO, *Desafíos de la cultura contemporánea para la conciencia cristiana*, Promesa, San José de Costa Rica 2010⁴, 56-66.

⁶ E. GÓMEZ-LUCENA, *Españolas del Nuevo Mundo. Ensayos biográficos, siglos XVI-XVII*, Cátedra, Madrid 2013, 123; Archivo General de Indias (Sevilla) [AGI], Contratación, 5536, l. 1, f. 368(6).

⁷ Cfr. M.M. LEÓN GUERRERO, *Visión didáctica de la mujer pobladora en América en el siglo XVI*, «Revista de Estudios Colombinos» 10 (2014) 66-68.

to search for, heal and save both.”⁸ In the case of women, missionaries would start from the top, with the daughters of the *caciques*, and then reach down to the rest of society. Two types of institutions were created: schools for externs and boarding-schools.

The friars needed Spanish women who would take care of the education of these indigenous women. The choice immediately fell on Catalina de Bustamante, who (as Bishop Zumárraga explained to the king of Spain), besides being Spanish, led an exemplary, “decent, honest [and] virtuous life.”⁹ She was a widow, and probably endowed with a good cultural background and solid Franciscan spirituality (she was, as has been said, a secular Tertiary of the Franciscan Order). With these qualifications, Bustamante became the first director of the boarding school of Texcoco for the daughters of the *caciques*. The seat of the institute was the ancient palace of King Netzahualcoyotzin, which stood about 40 km from Mexico City. Inaugurated by the Franciscans Toribio Motolinía and Luis de Fuensalida, the structure accepted unmarried women, widows and the daughters of the *caciques*, and enjoyed the economic support of the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés. Within the walls, life was organized in a manner analogous to a convent.

The teaching, broadly speaking, was similar to that given to young lower-class Spanish women. The language was Castilian. They were taught reading (but not writing), the catechism, and (at least for the younger ones) home management according to the Spanish model, in which marriage based on monogamy and free consent was key. Their communication with men was very limited.¹⁰ For girls and adolescents all this represented the beginning of a great cultural change. As Josefina Muriel (a pioneer in the study of Mexican female culture) notes, “[Catalina de Bustamante] had the task of teaching indigenous girls a new way of life, different from their own and from their cultural bases.”¹¹ Catalina taught them new ways of dressing, working and living the virtues, all based on Christian doctrine and transmitted through the Castilian language. In turn, the girls particularly connected with certain devotions, such as the recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady.¹² Over time the indigenous women began catechizing other indigenous people.

⁸ TORIBIO DE MOTOLINÍA, *Memoriales*, chap. 62, Fidel de Lejarza, Atlas (BAE 240), Madrid 1970, 103. Our translation. Original Spanish: “...que no era bueno de sólo los hombres tener cuidado, pues ambos sexos hizo Dios en el principio, y después de caídos a ambos vino a buscar, curar y salvar”.

⁹ Letter from Juan de Zumárraga to Charles V, México, august 27, 1529, in J. GARCÍA ICAZBALCETA, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Primer obispo y arzobispo de México*, Antigua Librería de Andrade y Morales, México 1881, Apéndice, doc. 1, 18.

¹⁰ Cfr. LIROSI, *Libere di sapere*, 11.

¹¹ J. MURIEL, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas*, vol. 1: *Fundaciones del siglo XVI*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México 1995, 56 (our translation).

¹² See TORIBIO DE MOTOLINÍA, *Memoriales*, chap. 62, 103.

Some scholars have interpreted this educational system as uprooting indigenous women from their own cultural world.¹³ Others have more realistically recognized it as an opportunity for synthesis between two different worlds and cultures.¹⁴ The Native American women excelled the Europeans in the field of weaving, for example, a field in which they were considerably more competent. (Consider the famous *huipiles*, women's tunics in embroidered cotton). We should also regard the native contribution to the culinary arts, in which food and flavors of the Old World merged (and continue to merge) with the rich offerings of the New (potatoes, chili, corn..., not to mention chocolate).

But times were not good in New Spain. After Hernán Cortés left the scene, during the so-called expedition to Honduras, a dangerous power vacuum was created. One after the other, four unjust and ruthless men took control of the government of Mexico: the royal factor Gonzalo de Salazar, the governor of Pánuco Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán, and the judges Juan Ortiz de Matienzo and Diego Delgadillo. We hear of numerous episodes of abuse, especially against the natives. They often went to the bishop in tears, begging for justice, and the prelate often clashed bitterly with those evildoers, especially Delgadillo. Emblematic, in this regard, is the vile injustice committed by Delgadillo and his brother Juan Peláez de Berrio (it was not uncommon at that time for two brothers to have different last names). He was known for his dissolute morals and arrogant acts against the natives. While crossing the city of Texcoco during the night, Peláez ordered two servants to break down the wall of the boarding-school and kidnap two particularly attractive indigenous women. This, unfortunately, was only one of his many crimes.

But Catalina de Bustamante did not remain silent. She immediately went to Zumárraga to inform him of the evil done by the Spanish *alcalde* and to ask for justice. The bishop publicly denounced Peláez. With the approval of the prelate, the woman also wrote to the king of Spain. The letter came into the hands of Queen Isabella of Portugal. Charles V was absent at the time, and so she held the reins of the Kingdom. Bustamante's words provoked a firm reaction from the

¹³ D.C. MONTERO MOGUEL, L.A. ESQUIVEL ALCOCER, *La mujer mexicana y su desarrollo educativo: breve historia y perspectiva*, «Educación y Ciencia» nueva época, vol. 4, nº 8 (22) (julio-diciembre 2000) 51-59. On p. 52 we read: "En este colegio se formó un nuevo tipo de mujer con cuerpo de india pero con ideas, creencias y comportamientos de blanca."

¹⁴ Cfr. LEÓN GUERRERO, *Visión didáctica*, 72. María Antonia del Bravo affirms: "En este contexto, el papel de la mujer en América va a tener una importancia singular. Ella es la sintetizadora de dos culturas diferentes, ambas con raíces profundas en sus propias tradiciones, pues como consecuencia del choque étnico y cultural, las mujeres adquirieron importancia como refundidoras de viejas tradiciones e impulsoras de novedades generadas por los problemas que planteaba la vida cotidiana." *Apuntes para una historia del Cristianismo en la Nueva España a través de la literatura y la actividad educativa femenina*, «Hispania Sacra» 58 (2006) 332.

Queen, who began to take a personal interest in the education of the indigenous girls of New Spain. On August 24, 1529 she issued a royal document in which she ordered Bishop Zumárraga to protect the “religious women” of Texcoco and Huejotzingo. On August 31 she signed another document, this time addressed to the civil authorities of Mexico, in which she expressed her full support for Catalina de Bustamante, a “woman of good and exemplary life”. Perhaps her membership in the Franciscan Order recommended her, as the order was very dear to the sovereign.

Isabella officially guaranteed full support to what was called the “Convent”. With the establishment of the so-called *Second Audiencia*,¹⁵ human rights began to improve considerably. This was due above all to the “good qualities” of the new rulers and to the work of people such as Zumárraga or Bustamante, who were the first to defend the dignity of indigenous women against the abuse of the Spanish and the *caciques*.¹⁶

At the insistence of Juan de Zumárraga, another group of Franciscan tertiaries reached Mexico. Among them was Catalina Hernández, who went to Texcoco to support Bustamante. But the number of schoolgirls increased and more help was needed. It was then that Bustamante crossed the Atlantic to explain the problem to the Queen. She assured the Queen that “she had worked and suffered a great deal to look after and assist so many maidens, daughters of settlers [...] and of natives”, but added that the work had become too intense for her to continue “to attend to it by herself”.¹⁷

Queen Isabella, being a convinced promoter of women’s education in Mexico, agreed to send three more teachers. The expenses of the journey were paid for by the Crown. In October 1534 the four women left for the New World to attend to the “education of the young women and daughters of the natives”, as can be read in the document issued by the *Casa de Contratación*.¹⁸

The last event of Catalina’s life that we know about happened in 1545. A terrible plague had broken out in central Mexico. It would last three years and cause the death of eight-hundred thousand people. Bustamante and the other tertiaries died at their workbenches, next to their boarding-school girls. Unfortunately, the project did not continue.

¹⁵ The *Real Audiencia de México* was the most important court of the Spanish Crown in the New Spain.

¹⁶ We know that Zumárraga and the teacher Luisa de San Francisco denounced the abuses perpetrated by the indigenous *caciques*, which treated their daughters as bargaining chips. Cfr. MURIEL, *La sociedad novohispana*, 74-75.

¹⁷ Quoted in MURIEL, *La sociedad novohispana*, 71 (our translation).

¹⁸ AGI, Contratación, 4676, Quoted in MURIEL, *La sociedad novohispana*, 72. Founded in Seville in 1503, the *Real Audiencia y Casa de la Contratación de Indias* was essentially in charge of controlling trade and travel between the Iberian Peninsula and the american territories.

It can be said that Catalina de Bustamante is one of those “women who have outlined the guidelines for cultural transformation in Latin America”.¹⁹ Her contribution wasn’t forgotten by successive generations. The municipality of Texcoco erected a beautiful statue in her honor, which portrays her with a pen in her right hand, writing a letter. On the pedestal appears the inscription: “Teacher Catalina de Bustamante, first educator of America”.²⁰

III. PEDRO LÓPEZ (CA 1521-1597)

The second person we’ll discuss belongs to the secular world of the Renaissance. This is doctor Pedro López, a Spaniard like Catalina de Bustamante, but from the next generation. He was born around 1521 in the town of Dueñas, between Valladolid and Palencia, along the road that connects Castile to France. In his youth he was immersed in the world of Spanish medicine and healthcare; but from the second half of the 16th century he developed the medical discipline in Mexico City, where he would live for forty years. López probably had Jewish blood (before the expulsion of the Catholic Monarchs, in fact, there was a flourishing Jewish community in the city of Dueñas): this would explain both his choice of the medical and business professions.²¹

He graduated in medicine from the University of Valladolid. The pedagogy was far from innovative. It was still based on the classical texts of Hippocrates, Avicenna and Galen. (It is no coincidence that the terms “galeno” and “doctor” are synonymous in Spanish).²² He married Juana de León of Palencia, but family problems soon forced him to change his life radically. His sisters were unmarried (one had married, but had become a widow) and without means, and Pedro was forced to move to Mexico to take care of them. This probably happened in 1550.

¹⁹ G. CARRIQUIRY, *Mujeres que han marcado pautas de transformación cultural en América Latina*, «Humanitas» 88 (2018) 258-277 (our translation).

²⁰ “Maestra Catalina de Bustamante, primera educadora de América”. See GÓMEZ-LUCENA, *Españolas del Nuevo Mundo*, 132.

²¹ For a biography of Pedro López see M.L. RODRÍGUEZ-SALA, *Pedro López de Medina: vida familiar, profesional y religioso-filantrópica*, in M.L. RODRÍGUEZ-SALA, L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER (eds.), *Socialización y religiosidad del médico Pedro López (1527-1597): de Dueñas (Castilla) a la ciudad de México*, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de México (Serie Los médicos en la Nueva España 2), México 2013, 25-71.

²² P. LAÍN ENTRALGO, *Historia de la medicina*, Masson, Barcelona 2006, 252; M.E. RODRÍGUEZ, *La Real y Pontificia Universidad y las cátedras de medicina*, in G. AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, R. MORENO DE LOS ARCOS (eds.), *Historia general de la medicina en México II: Medicina novohispana. Siglo XVI*, Academia Nacional de Medicina – Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – Facultad de Medicina, México 1990, 261-271. Cfr. also J. SOMOLINOS PALENCIA, *La medicina galeno-hipocrática y el Renacimiento español*, in AGUIRRE BELTRÁN, MORENO DE LOS ARCOS, *Historia general*, 121-126.

There López got down to business: he began working in real estate and made a fair profit. He validated his medical degree at the newly created University of Mexico, and shortly afterwards obtained a doctorate. (At the time it was not difficult to obtain a doctorate quickly).

Having achieved professional stability, the young doctor asked his wife to join him in Mexico City. Five children were born: three boys, José, Agustín, Nicolás, and two girls, Catalina and María. The couple also adopted a little girl. The first two, José and Agustín, embraced the priesthood. In the meantime, López worked tirelessly in different sectors. As a physician he was responsible for overseeing pharmacies. He held various positions at the University, especially in administration. His private practice also thrived, bringing him into contact with the city's elite. Among his patients there were also some religious communities, such as the Dominicans, among whom the Spanish doctor had many friends.

In 1572 he was accused by the Inquisition of New Spain, recently established, of having thrown a crucifix into the trash. This was a serious accusation, because it presupposed a lack of respect for an image of Christ just when the Council of Trent had reaffirmed the veneration of images. The trial ended without a verdict for lack of evidence. Everything suggests that there was a personal enmity at the basis of the accusation.²³

The truth is that López was a man of faith. An anecdote regarding his concern for the liturgy might illustrate the point. Like many other faithful, López used to take part in the solemn Sunday Vespers of the Cathedral of Mexico. At a certain point he noticed that the organ was played in such a way that no one could hear the *Gloria* sung at the end of the Psalms. He wrote to Pope Pius V to explain the problem. It may seem surprising that someone would “disturb” the pope over such a matter, being so far away geographically. But no less surprising was the double answer, the two briefs that came from Rome. The first was addressed to the bishop, the second praised the doctor's initiative and established a change in the use of the organ during Vespers.²⁴

Pedro Laín Entralgo once wrote that a doctor is not only the mirror of the society in which he lives, but he is also a “revealer of history”, an “actor” who recognizes his own possibilities to intervene in society, to fight illness and pain.²⁵ As for Pedro López, in any case, we see this in the charitable activities to which he devoted himself in the last part of his life. He was able to embark on these

²³ Cfr. J.A. RAMOS SORIANO, *Pedro López, ¿mal cristiano?*, in RODRÍGUEZ-SALA, MARTÍNEZ FERRER (eds.), *Socialización y religiosidad*, 81-120.

²⁴ L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER, *Pedro López y la Santa Sede*, in RODRÍGUEZ-SALA, MARTÍNEZ FERRER (eds.), *Socialización y religiosidad*, 123-148.

²⁵ P. LAÍN ENTRALGO, *Estudios de historia de la medicina y de antropología médica* I, Ediciones Escorial, Madrid 1943, 53.

after guaranteeing a certain economic stability to his family, due to his remarkable ability in business.²⁶

López took care of both the European and black communities of Mexico City. The latter constituted the majority in Mexico City at that time. In particular he devoted himself to free Blacks, who did not enjoy any assistance. With his Dominican friend Juan Ramírez, the future bishop of Guatemala, he organized some Lenten conferences for them, but the initiative was not successful. There were strong linguistic and cultural difference among the Africans in the city. López, however, didn't give up. He asked the Third Council of Mexico (1585) to found a confraternity for them, and just before had opened a hospital for them: the Hospital of the Epiphany or of the *Desamparados* (homeless and forsaken), which also served mestizos.²⁷

The Hospital of the Epiphany was not the first founded by the Spanish physician. That honor belonged to the San Lázaro hospital, for the care of lepers. His son José was sent there as chaplain in 1572. And with that experience behind him López built the Hospital of the *Desamparados* in 1583, a hospital in which Blacks, Mestizos and indigent Spaniards were treated. These were "categories" of patients who had lacked a hospital of their own in the city. And since there were no institutions dedicated to orphans, he reserved a sector of the hospital for them. Their life was difficult: abandoned in the street by their mothers, they were often victims of stray dogs. He also established a women's confraternity, entrusted with the task of collecting newborn babies left anonymously in a wheel (the orphan wheel). His care for these children was such that López asked the Third Council of Mexico for a special dispensation for the boys, one that would allow them to be eligible for the priesthood (being born out of wedlock, they were irregular for orders). This was a singular request, considering that the doctor (who already had seen two sons become priests) was now quite advanced in years, would not live to see the ordinations of those boys, as at that time they were still very young. In fact, López died at 1597.

López undoubtedly had considerable organizational skills. It was not uncommon, at the time, for lay people to contribute financially to the construction of a hospital, which would be run by the *Cabildo* (Municipality), the Crown or a religious institution. But it was very uncommon for a lay person to found and manage a hospital, let alone two, nor to be so actively involved in their operations and economic upkeep. After his death his family, unable to continue his work,

²⁶ Works of charity have always been a hallmark of good Christians, especially in the Counter-Reformation era. Cfr. LIROSI, *Liberi di sapere*, 10.

²⁷ L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER, *Pedro López y los negros y mulatos de la ciudad de México (1582-1597)*, in RODRÍGUEZ-SALA, MARTÍNEZ FERRER (eds.), *Socialización y religiosidad*, 179-212.

ceded the Hospital of the *Desamparados* to the Order of St. John of God, which managed it for centuries.

All the exterior works of charity carried out by Pedro López were born of a profound spiritual life. We can reconstruct and analyze this spirituality through his writings, especially his long will and from the letters he addressed to the Third Council of Mexico.²⁸ For the sake of brevity, we will dwell only on a few particularly relevant points in his will.

At that time, as is well known, wills usually began with a profession of faith in the Trinity, in the divinity of Jesus Christ and in other fundamental mysteries of the Catholic faith. Pedro López decided instead to put before the confession of faith a short paragraph written in dialogical form and with very personal content:

Hear ye heavens and Blessed of the Heavenly Court, let the whole earth know, with all the inhabitants who dwell in it; let it be manifest to the prince of darkness and to all his kingdom and to the inhabitants of hell, as I Dr. Pedro López, physician, before the throne of Mercy of the King of glory Jesus Christ my love, who, being God without principle, wanted to be born as a man of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Our Lady...

Only after this introduction the usual profession of faith begins. I admit that the first time I read this text I was rather surprised. Why should the last wishes of a Spanish physician transplanted to the New World be interesting to all the inhabitants of the earth, to angels and demons? Then I realized that, beyond the strong rhetoric of the *incipit*, López probably wanted to affirm that he had led an honest and sober life, as angels and demons would soon verify, to the joy of former and the rage of the latter. With his testament, therefore, he gave proof of his Christian life.

The dialogical phrases that express his absolute dependence on God appear sincere: “I confess with all my heart and by the light you gave me, I know that it is a great truth that I am yours and that I owe myself to you”.²⁹ And later he added: “I am yours in many ways, I want to be yours and I am proud of this more than anything else, and I beg you to possess me wholly and entirely”.³⁰ It is probably not excessive to say that we are dealing with mystical phrases, and it is not surprising that, after the death of the doctor of Dueñas, many authors

²⁸ Cf. L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER, *Apuntes sobre la dimensión religiosa del médico novohispano Pedro López de Medina (1527-1597)*, «Puertas. Libro anual del ISEE» 15 (2013) 215-222.

²⁹ N. FERREIRO, N. SIGAUT, *Testamento del “fundador” Dr. Pedro López. Documentos para la historia del Hospital de San Juan de Dios*, «Historia Mexicana» 217 (2005) 167.

³⁰ FERREIRO, SIGAUT, *Testamento*, 168. These sentences recall those pronounced by Saint Filippo Neri in 1595, a few days before his death: “He who wishes for anything but Christ, does not know what he wishes”, quoted in A. CAPECELATRO, *La vita di S. Filippo Neri*, lib. 3, cap. 19, Desclée – Lefebvre et C., Roma – Tournay 1889³, 614.

and numerous representatives of the Dominican Order and of the University of Mexico recognized and affirmed the sanctity of his life.

IV. ANTONIO EMANUELE NE VUNDA (“THE NEGRITA”) (CA 1574-1608)

The third and last character we’ll talk about belongs to the next generation. He is Antonio Emanuele Nsaku ne Vunda, of the ancient kingdom of Congo (a Christian kingdom of West Africa, which occupied present-day northern Angola) born around 1574.³¹ His name reveals, on the one hand, his Portuguese origin and, on the other hand, his noble blood. He was in fact a marquis belonging to the Ne Vunda (or n’Funta) clan, the first group which settled in the territory south of the Zaire River, in the province of Nsundi. In the absence of the missionaries, the Ne Vundas usually helped organize Christian catechesis. In the ’80s the young Emanuele met the Spanish Carmelite Diego de la Encarnación, who, together with two religious brothers, lived for some time in Congo as a missionary.

We have decided to talk about this Congolese nobleman because of his service to King Álvaro II Mpanzu a Nimi (1587-1614), apparently his cousin. Congo had been Christian since the time of King Alphonsus I (1506-1543), whose proximity to the Kingdom of Portugal had facilitated the presence of missionaries in the African country. From 1580 the Portuguese and Spanish crowns were united in the person of King Philip (even if the government of the two countries enjoyed considerable autonomy), and this union allowed the Spanish Carmelite missionaries to settle in Congo. Unfortunately, however, the European influence also introduced Congo to the slave trade.

Álvaro II’s greatest desire was to be considered a Catholic king on par with all the other kings of Christendom. He sent ambassadors to Portugal and Rome, and from their travels and reports came the book *Relatione del Reame di Congo*, written by Filippo Pigafetta and published in Rome in 1591. The book brought the Christian kingdom of West Africa to public attention. In a letter sent to Pope Clement VIII in 1595 the African sovereign wrote: “I, Don Álvaro II, by the grace of God king of Congo, greet Your Holiness, the pastor and head of the universal Church, in the same way that all other Christian kings and princes do, thus recommending myself highly to your paternal protection”.³² The letter concluded with a petition to the Holy Father that he not forget the requests made,

³¹ For an introductory view cfr. G. MISTRETTA, *Un ponte lungo quattro secoli: il rapporto antico e speciale fra Italia e Angola*, Gangemi, Roma 2013, 17-22; O. COELHO, «Negrita». *Uma vida inteira por amor de África*, Il Sextante, Pinzolo (TN) 2020.

³² Letter from Álvaro II del Congo to Clemente VIII, september, 21 1595, quoted in T. FILESI, *Le relazioni tra il Regno del Congo e la Sede Apostolica nel XVI secolo*, Casa Editrice Pietro Cairolì, Como 1968, 187.

“to which I trust that, by the mercy of God, Your Holiness will be in agreement, considering that these kingdoms of mine are so remote and far from Europe and from the favour of Your Holiness, to whose holy prayers and sacrifices I recommend myself a thousand times, along with all these Christian kingdoms of mine”.³³ A year later, in the capital of the Congolese kingdom, the diocese of São Salvador was erected.³⁴

From the text, as can be seen, there emerges the awareness of being “periphery”, of being far from the European “center”. This is often found in the letters that reached the Holy See at that time. It is not by chance that in those years countries being Christianized sent frequent embassies to Rome. We might mention as examples the Japanese embassy of 1585, the one sent by Persia between 1600 and 1601, and naturally that of Ne Vunda.

Álvaro II, as has been said, sent ambassadors to Lisbon and Rome. The requests he entrusted to them were almost identical: the King demanded from the Pope greater jurisdictional autonomy for the royal chaplains from the bishop of São Salvador and a wider freedom in the collection of tithes. He urged the sending of Spanish missionaries, especially Dominicans and Carmelites. Then he asked for religious ornaments, tabernacles, bells and books for worship, etc., to be sent.

On August 17, 1604 two ambassadors left with their retinue from the capital Mbanza Congo.³⁵ One of them was Antonio Emanuele Ne Vunda. His journey was marked by disasters and dangers. As he was going up the African coast, his ship was hit by a violent storm, which claimed the first casualties of the trip. Later a Dutch boat carrying some Calvinists attacked and looted the Congolese vessel. The cargo was ransacked, but fortunately human lives were spared. Some sources report that the group detoured to Brazil, where it stopped for several months before resuming the journey to Europe. On November 22, 1605 the delegation finally reached Lisbon. The stay in the Iberian Peninsula lasted about two years.

The situation was not easy for Ne Vunda. The king of Spain and Portugal had the case examined by the Portuguese Council’s *Mesa da Consciência e Ordens* and by the Council of the Indies.³⁶ The king decided that the ambassador should

³³ *Ibidem*, 188.

³⁴ Bull of Clement VIII establishing the diocese of São Salvador, 20 May 1597, in VISCONDE DE PAIVA MANSO, *História do Congo (Documentos)*, Typographia da Academia, Lisboa 1877, 142-146.

³⁵ We essentially follow L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER, *Álvaro II do Congo e Paulo V Borghese: da África a Roma a través do Negrita*, in L. MARTÍNEZ FERRER, M. NOCCA (dir.), “Coisas do outro mundo”: a missão em Roma de António Manuel, Príncipe de N’Funta, conhecido por “o Negrita” (1604-1608), na Roma de Paulo V: Luanda, *exposição documental*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2003, 23-53.

³⁶ Instituted by King John III of Portugal in 1532, the *Mesa da Consciência e Ordens* dealt with all

not go to Rome, but should present his requests to a royal functionary who was stationed there. This functionary would then report to the Pope. In other words, Congo was not to communicate directly with Rome. Ne Vunda, already worn down by the difficulties of the journey, could only give in. In his only letter that has come down to us, sent to Pope Paul V and dated August 28, 1606, the Congolese nobleman writes:

I came to this court [Madrid] with great happiness, knowing that I would go to the Roman Curia, because this was the greatest joy that could be given me in life, and I praised God Our Lord for the supreme gift of being able to come and kiss the most holy feet of Your Holiness on behalf of my king and all his people.³⁷

Soon after, however, he added with deep regret that his wish would not come true:

It seemed appropriate to His Majesty [Philip I of Portugal] and his Council that I should interrupt this journey because of the inconveniences that might occur, and to attend personally to make these requests [those made by Alvaro II] to Your Holiness through the functionary of the Crown of Portugal [Giuseppe de Melo] who resides at that court [of Rome]. He assures me that Your Holiness would grant me everything as if I had gone to plead with You personally, as I desired.³⁸

Powerful forces, however, were trying to help Emanuele Ne Vunda reach Rome. Pope Paul V intended to intensify relations between the Holy See and the new countries of the “periphery”, especially those not subject to the influence of the Spanish Patronage or the Portuguese *Padroão*. In the Rome of the time, some prominent figures were the Carmelite Pedro de la Madre de Dios, superintendent of the Missions, and Fabio Biondo, ex-Apostolic Collector in Portugal. The two worked to remove the obstacles that impeded the ambassador’s freedom of movement. In Spain, meanwhile, the nuncio Giangarcia Mellini and the Carmelite Diego de la Encarnación, while acting with great caution, tried to move forward Ne Vunda’s cause. Ne Vunda wrote other letters to the Pope, which unfortunately have been lost. Paul V’s response to one of them, however, is revealing:

We have a great desire to see you, to be informed by you about many things that we would like to know better, [to hear you] relating the piety, devotion and religious spirit that animate our beloved children, your King and Queen and beloved Prince Daniel as well as all the faithful people of the kingdom of Congo and the other kingdoms that are under the authority of King Alvaro.

questions concerning moral conscience.

³⁷ Letter of Antonio Emanuele to Paul V, Madrid, 28-VIII-1606, AAV, Misc. Arm., 1 (91), f. 168r. Original Portuguese. Our translation.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

From others we have been informed of noble things concerning their attachment to the faith and which fully correspond to what you write in your letter. And that is why we want to persuade you that your coming will be most welcome to us, and we also wish that your arrival be fixed in the way that is most convenient for you.³⁹

Another not insignificant problem was the precarious health of the young ambassador, probably worn out by the many vicissitudes and difficulties he had had to face. The documents speak of kidney stones, for which he was presumably taking a medicine based on *Judaic grass*, which had diuretic, expectorant and anti-diarrheal properties. A valuable testimony about the life of Ne Vunda is offered to us by a document drawn up in the convent of Mercedari Fathers who hosted him in Madrid:

I, Master Brother Cristóbal González, Provincial of the Order of the Mercedarians of this Province of Castile, attest that at this convent [...] Mr. Antonio Emanuele, ambassador of the King of the Congo, stayed for three months, during which time he lived with great recollection, giving a great example to everyone by his life and his relations with others, because he was never seen leaving this holy monastery, except to deal personally with things concerning his embassy with our Lord the King or his Christian ministers.

Moreover [bedridden, he suffered] great pains and urinary travails with great patience and resignation to the Will of God. So that by his recollection and honest behavior, both his and his servants', we are all, in this holy monastery, very edified, and [we remain] alone without his good company, [because] he leaves this court to go to Rome...⁴⁰

The situation, therefore, was finally unblocked. In October, 1607 a small group, which included the nuncio Mellini, went to Rome: it left Valencia and reached Livorno by sea. Here Ne Vunda suffered another blow: the death of a close relative (probably a nephew), who had accompanied him through all the vicissitudes of the journey. At the end of December the ship finally arrived in Civitavecchia, but the ambassador was now exhausted. The Pope sent doctors, medicine... and a stretcher. His entrance to Rome was not the magnificent one that Paul V had planned: on January 2, 1608, in fact, Ne Vunda entered the Eternal City on a stretcher. The color of his skin and a surname that was not easy to pronounce earned him the nickname "Negrita".

The assiduous care given to him by the doctors proved useless. The documents report that he had a "continuous and malignant fever, with sore throat, pain in

³⁹ Letter of Paul V to Antonio Emanuele, Rome, 9-XII-1606, Italian translation in T. FILESI, *Roma e Congo*, 29-30. In AAV, Misc. Arm., 1 (91), f. 184r translation from Portuguese.

⁴⁰ AAV, *Misc. Arm.*, 1 (91), f. 241r. Original Spanish. Our translation.

the chest and kidneys and in urination”.⁴¹ The night between 5 and 6 January the physicians declared that his end was imminent. Despite the late hour, the Pope wanted to visit him personally. This was the most touching moment in the ambassador’s life:

On the eve of the Epiphany—one reads in the *Relação da embaixada*—about one in the morning His Holiness, with much pity and charity, came down from his rooms [...] and visited the ambassador, with whom he stayed for about half an hour; though he was not in a position to speak, [Ne Vunda] made an effort to do so, because he wanted to discuss some matters, and His Holiness with much gravity and humility, told him not to worry, and that once he was healed there would be time to talk; after comforting him with much gentleness, His Holiness touched his forehead several times and blessed him.⁴²

Through an interpreter, Ne Vunda finally managed to explain his King’s requests, accomplishing the mission for which he had been sent to Rome and had faced so much difficulties.

The King of the Congo, his lord, entrusted his Christian people [to the Pope], so that [the Pope] would send ministers to that kingdom, and finally commended his soul and that of his six servants to him.⁴³

When the Pope left the room, Ne Vunda received Viaticum and Anointing of the Sick. He passed away, leaving a profoundly Christian image of Africa. The *Relação da embaixada* describes “Don Antonio Emanuele, Marquis of Funta”, cousin of King Álvaro II, as a “man of about 33 years of age, with black skin, but of noble and austere and, above all, pious and devout customs, not lacking in skill and prudence in negotiating”.⁴⁴ As is well known, he was buried in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, where he is commemorated by a beautiful bust and a plaque.⁴⁵ The Pope also placed on his grave a long epitaph, now lost, which read:

⁴¹ *Relação da embaixada de D. António Nigríta*, 1608, in A. BRASIO, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, V, 407 (our translation).

⁴² *Relação da embaixada*, 407-408.

⁴³ *Relação da embaixada*, 408.

⁴⁴ *Relação da embaixada*, 405.

⁴⁵ On the historical context of the works of art dedicated to Ne Vunda the Negrita, cfr. M. NOCCA, *Lo sguardo sull'altro. L'immagine del nero nell'arte europea, fino all'arrivo del Negrita a Roma (1608)*, in MARTÍNEZ FERRER, NOCCA, “*Coisas do outro mundo*”, 62-73. Cfr. also J.L. KOERNER, *The Epiphany of the Black Magus Circa 1500*, in D. BINDMAN, H.L. GATES, JR., *The Image of the Black in Western Art. From the “Age of Discovery” to the Age of Abolition*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 2010, 7-90.

Paul V, Pontiff Maximus, visited Antonio Emanuele, Marquis of Funta, first ambassador of the King of Congo to the Apostolic See. He, exhausted and infirm due to the hardships of the journey, after losing all his travel companions, was received in the Vatican in desperate conditions. He [the Pope] listened benevolently to him as he exposed the account of the legation and offered to the Apostolic See the kingdom [of Congo] in the name of its king; he gave the dying man the apostolic blessing; he wanted funeral honors worthy of a king to be celebrated [for the deceased] in his sacellum; he placed this monument with paternal love. In the year 1608, in the third year of his pontificate.⁴⁶

From the historical point of view, the sacrifice of the Negrita allowed the start of the *Missio Antiqua* of the Italian Capuchins in Congo. This was a result of a convention stipulated between the Holy See and the Iberian monarchies, and remains the most important outcome. But to relate that would be another story.

V. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What unites the three persons we have discussed? Certainly chronology; in some way they are all representatives of the secular world of the 16th century (even if the story of Ne Vunda, the Negrita, took place at the start of the 17th). All of them were people who crossed the Atlantic to perform significant functions. They were “global characters”. And in those global challenges his Christian faith was proven.

The sociologist Sorokin would say that they were three people who, while not neglecting the material aspects of life, gave priority to the spiritual. That’s how they became movers of social change. At the theological level, Saint Josemaría taught that

Being a Christian is not something incidental; it is a divine reality that takes root deep in our life. It gives us a clear vision and strengthens our will to act as God wants. So we learn that the Christian’s pilgrimage in the world must express itself in a continuous service in all kinds of ways, varying with each person’s circumstances, but always motivated by love of God and of our neighbor.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The original text is in VISCONDE DE PAIVA MANSO, *História do Congo (Documentos)*, Typographia da Academia, Lisboa 1877, 147: “D.O.M. Paulus V. Pont. Max. Antonio Emmanueli Funestae Marchioni, primo Regis Congi ad Apostolicam Sedem Oratori, quem itineris difficultatibus fessum et agrum [sic], sociis omnibus amissis maestum in Vaticanum exceptum, ac decumbentem inuisit; legationis summam exponentem, Regisque sui nomine regnum Sedi Apostolicae offerentem benigne audivit, moribundum Apostolica Benedictione muniit, mortuum funebri, quasi Regia, pompa honorifice in suum sacellum offerri voluit, paterni amoris monumentum posuit. Anno MDCVIII. Pont. Sui. III.”

⁴⁷ SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Christ’s Death is the Christians’s Life in Christ is Passing By*, nr. 98, Scepter, New York, 1974.

In fact without God's love one could not explain and could not understand the life of our three protagonists, apparently so different from each other, but in reality so united in the one thing that is truly important: the theological dimension.

ABSTRACT

The article deals with three laity of the 16th century: Catalina de Bustamante (ca1490-1545), educator of women in Mexico; Pedro López (ca1527-1596), doctor in Mexico; Antonio Enmanuele Ne Vunda (ca1574-1608), ambassador of the King of Congo to the Holy See. The three characters can be exponents of the world of "first globalization". They are examples of how the Christian faith transforms the lives of secular people.