



"Conservative" civilization through some conceptualizations of the 1840- 1860 period Part II.

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INTRODUCTION

Continuing with the theoretical exercise of reconstructing the culture that identifies the so-called Conservative Regime in Guatemala, from the methodology of the history of concepts, other ideas are presented that allow us to know, analyze and interpret this period of the country's history. For a better interpretation, the interested reader is suggested to consult the article entitled: The "Conservative Civilization through some conceptualizations of the period 1840-1860. First part", published before in the Magazine which precedes the content of this article.

For a better understanding, let me make a brief reference to the title. Civilization is one of the most used terms in the discourses of the temporality addressed, contradictorily it opposes and complements that of modernity, "conservative" is a word that between quotation marks pretends to make us reflect on the purely conservative, the modern conservative or the modern conservative. In this regard, it is appropriate that as historians we question these terms (which are not only nuances or simple word games) in relation to the statements that we recognize and often assume and reproduce

without any or with little reflection, asking ourselves: how conservative? or how modern? And when this last question is accepted and even identifies us (starting from liberal projects) we can confirm that if we consider that we have been modern, what do we understand by pre- or post-modern? These and other questions are intended to be clarified by investigating the semantic content of many words that are linked in state logics to give the same meaning, but that, nevertheless, escape with their own dynamics, moving ahead or lagging behind with respect to the moments in which they are situated.

Finally, in order to address with more certainty, the content and meaning of some of the prevailing ideas of the so-called "Conservative Regime", it is opportune and necessary to indicate that the ideological rupture generated by the liberal movements and governments of the early 19th century represented the motivations and actions of a new, energetic and reduced urban elite that, by imposing a different form of "modern liberal" thought, violated a predominantly Christian worldview. However, during the three centuries of Hispanic influence, in local spaces, the exercise of pre-Hispanic cults gave way to religious secrecy. The insertion of a new ideology implied not only the social, economic and political destructuring of the colony, but more importantly, the change of mentalities rooted in the different urban and rural social sectors promoted by the well-articulated conservative elite that, in addition to the city linked and controlled - with great efficiency - the rest of the territory. This particularity helps to understand the conservative political victory in the first half of the 19th century.

Taking into account the previous observations, I have selected the following concepts:

DIVINE PROVIDENCE, THE OPTIMUM AND MAXIMUM.

From a political perspective, the divine government of the world, the divine Providence, is crystallized indistinctly in the figure of the ruler, head of the State of Guatemala (who enjoys the confidence of the people in his actions because they are providential will) or what at that time is conceived as the State. A document of the time that made reference to the constitution of the independent Republic and foreigners, illustrates the idea that summarizes Divine Providence, the ruler and the State as the protectors: "... With respect to the foreigner, he will in no way alter the principles he has professed until today, and they are the same as those professed and practiced by all educated nations; on the contrary, he will dispense the broadest protection to the industrious inhabitants of other countries who wish to come to the State to exploit some of the many and varied branches of wealth that abound; not omitting, in this part, anything that may lead to inspire confidence and give security; without, however, authorizing abuses or opening the way to unjust and exaggerated pretensions".¹

From another perspective, although Divine Providence manifests itself in the figure of the ruler or in the state, his actions -which guide the destiny of the people- are inevitably influenced by the world of the real existing things. Thus, there is a greater purity of the providential essence in the ruler, which diminishes in the application or in his actions.

One of the ways to understand the relationship between Divine Providence and the ruler is the following: the ruler is a protected and protective being. Protected earthly by the divinity and protector of the people, an example of the first relationship is expressed in the following fragment that refers to an attack

suffered by General Rafael Carrera in August 1841: "The president of the State to the troops of the garrison". "SOLDIERS! I congratulate you because Divine Providence, as on many other occasions, saved your general last night. Let us all recognize the powerful hand of God and let us pay tribute to Him because He watches over us and protects us. Soldiers! The author of the attack paid for his crime on the spot, and justice is actively engaged in making, above all, the corresponding investigation. Your general is surrounded by all the aids of the art, and he will soon be recovered. So, rest assured in the care that the Government is lavishing on him".²

Divine Providence took pity on the ills of humanity, helped and worked miracles in earthly men. However, like all superior entities, it inhabited a plane that existed outside material reality, rational and finite, high above, in the celestial sphere, unreachable - but at the same time allowing communication. The fundamental idea of being above, above all and above everyone is reproduced on the earth plane. The higher, more perfect, we see in this case in the relationship children-parents, teacher-principal, principal-board, departmental-Corregidor, Corregidor- Holy Father Priest, in such a way that the authorities (located on a higher scale), even in the legislative framework, were considered the representatives of God on earth.³

With significant frequency the Official Gazette reproduced articles of international authorship, one of these referred to the fact that



¹ Carrera, Rafael. Manifiesto del Excelentísimo Señor Presidente del Estado de Guatemala. Printing Press of La Paz, Guatemala: March 21, 1847, 13.

² Gaceta Extraordinaria No.19. August 9, 1841. 74.

³ Decree Number 88, issued by the President of the Republic of Guatemala. September 16, 1852.

the divine commandment, the religious spirit whose belief is unique and is given by faith, dwelled in the heart of the American societies.

He also considered that today's peoples should triumph over themselves rather than over others.⁴ From this we can infer that, the divine essence should general peace within the peoples and that those who achieved it through the protective rulers and administrations should procure it over other peoples or nations.

In greater depth the idea of Divine Providence was conceived in itself as a unique, real and independently existing creation. In its origin it did not need other elements to conform itself and its infinite essence was explained by its unlimited nature.⁵ Returning to the contributions of classical culture, the thought of Aristotle, then interpreted by St. Thomas and later by Espinoza, among others, the idea of God and Divine Providence could not be understood without the notion of the essence of Being, which is understood as "that which remains what it is, despite the fact that accidents change".⁶ These principles applied to the understanding of the earthly world of men, which reproduced the order of the celestial world, validated the providential intervention in the plane of history.

GENERAL LAW OF NATURE: GOOD FOR THE SAKE OF GOODNESS ITSELF

Nature exalts the common and private good above all that surrounds it. Self-love is an instinct of self-preservation, a reasoned impulse that emerges from the heart, from the soul. Thus, it was explained how, on the earthly plane, individual happiness was coupled, adhered to and lent in function of collective happiness, which in turn had continuity in the consecration of eternal happiness.

By divine nature and celestial passion it was considered that the nature of human beings was

formed - to a great extent - with elements of good; the existence of these elements in the sphere of the earthly world caused the actions of the inhabitants to be attracted by its principles, in such a way that all civilizing cultural expression should be directed to the external stimulus of the exercise of good for the sake of good itself, because only in this way would it transcend to the celestial, eternal world. The individuality of this principle makes us understand that the practice of good in relation to the needs of others responded to the needs of the soul.

The idea of good as a practice opposed to evil continued to be confusedly understood in relation to the possession of material goods. An example of this is illustrated by the approach of happiness as the end of society, which required to be governed with reason and justice, exercising the good in order to live in security, respecting the rights of man, without offenses and preserving the acquired goods.⁷

THE CONSERVATIVE ORDER

The idea of order was associated with the heavenly and earthly planes. The term was a perfect expression of the perfect heavenly world. However, more often the definition was applied to the understanding of society and reproduced in and by individuals. According to official positions of individual behaviors they were to be subordinate, moderate, disciplined, law-abiding, and of admiration and gratitude towards superiors.⁸



⁴ Gaceta Oficial No. 29. October 22, 1841.127.

⁵ The opposite of the earthly world where the finite existence was subject to the infinite.

⁶ Espinoza, p. XVI

⁷ *Constitutional Project for the Republic of Guatemala*. Printing Press of La Paz, Guatemala: 1848, 2.

⁸ Gaceta Oficial, No. 14. July 13, 1841. 53.

The moral and legal regulations that guided individual and collective behavior were intended to maintain a harmonious balance between the different sectors that structured society. The idea of order was also linked to the promotion of social security and tranquility; ultimately these experiences were aimed at the internal and external stability of the conservative State.

If in the celestial sphere eternal order prevailed, in the imperfect earthly world of men and logical, distinct things could generate the opposite, the experience of disorder.⁹ The state of disorder was a constant threat that implied a greater domination of the scenario, of things over the artistic actor, the individual. While it is true that disorder was an ephemeral manifestation, it could affect (delay) the degrees of evolution towards the perfection of the soul that was the eternal essence of being.

RELIGIOUS MORALITY AND REASONED MORALITY

The religious morality systematically taught through the university courses to the young students, docile disciples, pointed out that the formation of the man who privileged the soul should generate moderate, respectful behaviors, beings capable of listening, of noble proceeding, formal in the performance of their duties, of good feelings, generous, modest, efficient, practitioners of donations and gratitude. Because only on the basis of these achievements would the country improve and advance. Improvement understood as a starting point in the individual and advancement as a starting point in the individual and advancement as a secondary element in the material work of society.

On the contrary, the reasoned morality promoted by the emerging liberal sectors built a society based on universal reason, secular

education and the dissemination of science. These and other principles that were present as a critical, questioning and alternative discourse, had validity and decades later were gathered in texts such as Rafael Spinola's, entitled *Moral Razonada y Lecturas Escogidas*, the first edition dating from 1900, its content according to the official programs of the educational centers still managed to completely separate itself from religious education, since in its pages the difference was made between, boys and girls who were educated to live in a modern world.¹⁰

The new order posed duties and moral virtues that arose from human nature itself, so its exercise was given in levels of interpretation, the first were of the individual for himself (sensitivity, intelligence and will). The second for man and his fellow men in the urban and social sphere. They were followed by the duties towards nature, whose objectives were to perpetuate the species and that of other beings of creation, and finally, the duties towards the homeland and the State.

In men there is a manifest duality in their actions, the sensitive inclinations (passions) and the rational ones (will).¹¹ The rational will is free, and it is here where we find an important point for the understanding of a transitory thought that links the "conservative" with the "modern". In this conception of freedom, men cannot be limited with obstacles that extrinsically or intrinsically limit them in their actions, this freedom of will goes beyond the freedom that is promoted with elements of the material, real world, because they can decide to execute



⁹ Gaceta Oficial, No. 29. October 22, 1841. 127.

¹⁰ The interested reader may consult the text: Spínola, Rafael. *Moral Razonada y Lecturas Escogidas*. Primer Curso. Fifth Edition. Tipografía Nacional, Guatemala: 1994.

¹¹ Balmes, J. *Filosofía Elemental*, Volume III. 353, 354

different things or to stop doing them, exercising at the same time their internal freedom, which is experienced in every moment of life, and which is not taught.

The freedom of will makes it possible for there to be harmony between the individual and the domestic, family and social coexistence. The civil laws and the art of persuasion among others, are elements existing in all times, it corresponds then to the exercise of this freedom the choice of virtues, vices, merits, demerits, rewards and punishments.

ETERNITY

Eternity did not remain on the margin of all those concepts that were part of the Western feudal mentality and that influenced the societies of Hispanic America, because like other definitions of the time, by its very nature of meaning, its understanding and application was passive, slow, with little mobility, variability and progress, therefore responding -in some way- to the apparent staticity of humanity: eternal life.

One of the purposes of the State was to direct the people by channeling their temporal actions and needs, towards the immutable eternity that referred to the soul which in its essence is immaterial, invariable and immortal. Eternity was also directly linked to the salvation of the soul; hence the homeland was the stage for good men who prepared for the true homeland, conceived in celestial space.

The eternal creator (the full substance, absolute truth, the total, perfect, infinite and indivisible, optimal and maximal idea) existed as a constant generality outside and independent of the earthly world, its essence was reflected in some privileged, virtuous men and in the hearts of the righteous. The eternal had no identification in time, so that in the temporal dimension it was not (past) and would not be

(future), it was only as a continuous being in its totality in the present, in this notion eternity could not be understood with limits or measures, especially those referring to space and temporality that were proper to the human earthly world, to the world of things that are subject to local movement.¹²

HISTORY

In addition to admiration, observation and contemplation, elements typical of a conservative culture, History is conceived as a dimensional and useful art that recovers the past times where the protagonists, individuals chosen by divine providence, should be remembered for their feats and significant actions and that people should make them endure in their memory in order to learn from them.

It contemplates a future temporality based on comparisons with other facts, it makes inferences giving or not the reason and judging not in the present but in the future. The individual, the collectivity of people and at the political level their representative entities, everything and everyone is and are subject to evaluation. Referring to the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Guatemala, the following quote illustrates and affirms these appreciations: "The present Assembly is certainly the most respectable body, to whom the People have entrusted their fate, and it must be said, its acts have given stability to the peace that the weapons conquered, and guarantees even to the defeated ones - The administration of deputies has not been, as it was in another time, a party act; but all those who were appointed, were never rejected from the position.



¹² A la Muerte del Presbítero Ciudadano José María Gálvez. Arévalo Printing Press, Guatemala: 1844, 2, 4.

Now whether or not the Assembly has done the possible good; whether or not it has acted according to the will of the People; whether it has obeyed their will and preserved the guarantees; its official acts; history, and comparison, will be those who will pronounce in due time".¹³ The master history of life teaches because it compares.

From the academy, specifically at the University, the study of history was done taking into account the philosophical work of Jaime Balmes. The *Criterion* was perhaps the most important work. The importance of this concept is the transcendence of its content for the time by promoting a critical and reflective study of history, questioning the work of the historian, the foundation or basis of the new history (which modern and positive was reduced to the document and the data) and the doubt of the narrative as to the background of the fact and its circumstances. In this regard, Balmes proposes the following rules as the norms that historians should take into account¹⁴:

1. To pay attention to the means the historian had at hand to find the truth and the probabilities of it being real or not (nowadays critical of the sources).
2. All circumstances being equal, the eyewitness is preferable.
3. Among the eyewitnesses (all circumstances being equal), the one who did not take part in the event, neither won nor lost, is preferable.
4. The contemporary historian is preferred, taking care to compare his opinions with others and to separate in both the narrated fact, of the causes that are pointed out to him, resulting attributed and judgments of the writers (partialities and passions).

5. The anonymous deserve little trust (referring to the authors).

6. Before reading a story it is important to read the biography of the author (who he was, his conduct, morality, character, position and life circumstances). Regarding this rule the author states: "Few are the men who completely overcome the circumstances that surround them; few are those who drag a great danger for the sole cause of truth; few are those who in critical situations do not seek a compromise between their interests and their conscience. In the face of grave risks, to remain faithful to virtue is heroism, and heroism is a rare thing".¹⁵

7. Posthumous works published by unknown or uncertain publishers are suspected of being apocryphal or altered. In relation to this rule, the author also indicates: "I have expressed much distrust of posthumous works, especially if the author has not been able to give them the last hand, leaving them to a person of very sure integrity and who will do nothing more than publish them..."¹⁶

8. Stories elaborated in secret memoirs, unpublished papers (documents) and manuscript works in which the editor indicates that he has limited himself to introducing order, ironing out sentences or clarifying passages. Their credit must be given only to the person responsible for the work.



¹³ Gaceta Oficial No. 12. June 30, 1841. 45.

¹⁴ Balmes, J. *El Criterio*, Obras completas, Volume III, pp. 608-613.

¹⁵ Balmes, J. *El Criterio*. Obras completas, Volume III, p. 611.

¹⁶ Balmes, J. *El Criterio*. Obras completas, Volume III, pp. 612-613.

9. Information about hidden negotiations, state secrets, anecdotes about the private life of personalities, intrigues, and so on, should be treated with extreme suspicion.

10. In the case of very ancient or remote populations, little credit should be given to information about the wealth of the country, number of inhabitants, treasures, patrimony, religious ideas and religious customs.

The Criterion is a work that disseminated good thinking in harmony with the practical understanding that guides the application of theory. Its content synthesizes two cosmogonies: the material and objective world of the universe and the moral, subjective, inner, immaterial world of man, the latter of which had to conquer the former. The conception of history is summarized in the evolutionary trajectory of the people whose journey is the incessant search to know the truth of things on the basis of the existence of God. The evolutionary path is equal to the achievement of civilization, a degree of perfection that contains the Christian religion.

History contemplated the contradiction between Protestantism and Catholicism. The former was characterized and consolidated the peoples that were called modern and liberal, the latter the civilized ones, this was the true dynamics of history. An important social interpretation that established that during the advance along the path of civilization, the people went through different stages, in the closest to their childhood and adolescence where the human lineage was simpler, there was no place for pride and vanity, there its inhabitants assumed in a natural way the true origin, destiny, authority and principle of truth: God. On the contrary, the following stages that are situated and experienced more in the advances of the material civilization (libraries, communication routes, among others), believing themselves to

know the whole truth and possessors of science, they teach their spirits, filling themselves with egos and vanity. It is in these "more advanced" phases and stages where the lack and great need for the knowledge of the authentic Christian truth is manifested.

Christianity was opposed to the force and violence of the infidel nations, it conceived that the power was in the seizure of knowledge, of the ideas of the citizens, on this basis it promoted prosperity and plenitude to the people in all generations, in the different times without distinction of ages, sex or social condition, converting them, regenerating them slowly and peacefully leading its disciples to a double health: their temporal well-being and their eternal happiness. He provided them with improvements, encouraging high human dignity, leading them to eternal happiness by means of lasting knowledge, the highest, sublime, profound, wise and divine philosophy that dealt with the highest truths about God and men as well as the purest morals contained and spread in his doctrines.

The divine Christian religion knew man not only in his capacities and virtues but also in his weaknesses and inconstancy, so that according to these characteristics it implanted as invariable rules in his conduct, to teach him tirelessly and with unalterable patience, the beneficial and elevated truths professed by the Catholic Church. The continuous preaching and teaching of its maxims contained in the Holy Scriptures included public instruction. The learning and assimilation of these understandings (formation of the heart) was linked to the existence of the public conscience, which was to be conceived as the sum of private consciences that in general terms incorporated the knowledge that individuals possessed of themselves.

Societies that did not reproduce Christianity were considered barbaric or savage. In these untamed, backward and rustic people, individuals, devoid of life, possessed only their unconscious existence, immobile they did not advance, they only observed the passing of generations. Among these societies there were some with a lot of activity and movement, dazzling but blinded by a mercantile spirit and greedy industrial movement that completely limited the search and the exercise of the inner happiness, they walked accelerated and in retreat to their own ruin. Violent, fanatical and unhinged, they tried in vain to drag Christian civilizations along with them.

Imitating the high civilizations concentrated in the privileged and cultured European continent, in the Guatemalan community the "conservative" power groups took up these and other ideas to express how the uncivilized and barbaric liberal sectors with their turbulent spirit acted in favor of destabilizing, weakening, creating discord, disturbing public tranquility and diverting individuals, families, society, the nation and its institutions from the right path.

Finally, as Balmes states in his work: *El Protestantismo comparado con el Catolicismo*,¹⁷ Europe was civilized because in its extensive geography and numerous inhabitants resided the Christian religion, full of life, superior in intelligence and culture, it was the continent that by its history, characterized by the battles and calamities provoked by Protestantism to deviate the course in favor of Christianity, was destined to civilize the world. European superiority was also understood in relation to the bond of circumstance and understanding. This continent, with true religious principles had cultivated the heart, the passions, the morals and the enlightened understanding of its individuals,

families and groups, walking together to an ever more perfect state.

IDEAS ABOUT PRE-HISPANIC MONUMENTS

Regarding the monumental archaeological remains of the pre-Hispanic communities, specifically Jocotán, Palenque and Quiriguá, ideas were spread and prevailed that at the time acquired credibility among the inhabitants. One of these was that these ruins -as they were called- were the witnesses of the presence of more cultured nations than the Indians, among which were the Phoenicians, Carthaginians or the Roman Empire itself.¹⁸ History has not explained how these inhabitants became extinct, so it is possible to think that the Indians themselves and their descendants exterminated them, hiding the truth from the conquerors to avoid generating greater distrust and worse treatment.

These arguments were also expressed with geographical details and racial explanations, as illustrated by the following quote: "It is not out of order that the founders of such ostensible ruins were from the ancient continent... that thrown from the coasts of Europe by some strong storm towards America, they disembarked in the Laguna de Términos, in Izabal and in the Motagua River, and that by going a little inland they founded populations. The Indians were able to exterminate them, destroying them, for that reason the Conquerors found only one race of man, the previous ones were finished".¹⁹



¹⁷ Balmes, J. *El Protestantismo comparado con el Catolicismo*. Collected Works, Volume IV, pp. 473-483.

¹⁸ The term used in the documents is "Indian", the construction of the indigenous semantics arises in the liberal theoretical conception.

¹⁹ Gaceta Oficial No. 25. September 24, 1841. p. 102.

These and other ideas provide the necessary data to intentionally omit pre-Hispanic societies from the historical periodization promoted by the so-called conservative sectors.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I indicated at the beginning (of the first article) the proposal of the history of concepts transcends history without relationships, to propose a history-science embodied in meanings where the axis is the linguistic, because language is one more element to approach the past since concepts are in concepts. Let us remember that language, besides making possible our understanding of the world, also affects it in some way.

With these and other new interpretations I can affirm that the so-called "Conservative Regime" covered up with great vitality and at all levels the conceptual principles that gave rise to the modernity of liberation, which officially established a new meaning to political life with the order of the nation replacing the order of the homeland. Undoubtedly, the new languages were innumerable, but we begin by rescuing political life from a political language that is linked to the history of civilization. Contrasting the languages of public opinion with the academic and civilizational spaces with modern ones led me to consult a fundamental source: the historical archive of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Among the invaluable documents I found one of significant importance for my study, the records and reports of the cloister corresponding to the years 1851-1866 and the controversy generated by proposing the reading of the works of the Jesuit philosopher, the Spaniard Jaime Balmes (1810-1848). The important thing is that by reviewing his work we confirm with real sources that indeed, like this theologian, the Guatemalan and Central American academy moved away from Thomistic

philosophy trying to update the Catholic religion, adapting it to the advances of scientific thought and the current problems of those times.

The content of the articles and the previous statements allow us to indicate that the concept of civilization at that time identified theoretically a religious, Christian culture, whose society was organized with the principles of a spiritual moral order, which privileged the past and present moments. On the contrary, modernity was a concept that caught the winds of change, the time forwards, the moments of utopias, the new institutionalism, it had as referents the French revolution and the North American culture, it was the time when the great meta-narratives emerged, men took off the theological veil, guided their own destiny, utilitarianism was boosted, market freedom, mass production, social coexistence in harmony and freedom.

It remains for another similar article to address the ideas of time, temporality, chronology and of greater interest to historians and scholars of the social sciences, the criteria for periodization, the selected contents of the national history (Republic of Guatemala) that will later be called or replaced by the so-called national history.

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"De Optimo Maximo" words that identify the facade of the Church of San Francisco.