# *The Bishop's Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru* by Emily Berquist Soule (review)


Bianca Premo

The Americas, Volume 73, Number 1, January 2016, pp. 122-123 (Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press

*The, Bishop's Utopia: Envisioning Improvement in Colonial Peru*. By Emily Berquist Soule. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 287. Acknowledgments. Appendixes. Archives Consulted. Notes. Index. Sources. $45.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/tam.2016.24

Emily Berquist Soulé's work on Baltazar Jaime Martínez Compañón is worthy of its determined, dynamic, enlightened subject. This is no small feat. As bishop of the northern coastal area of Trujillo, Peru, in the late eighteenth century, Martínez Compañón brought unbridled enthusiasm to his work. He offered the region's native population a series of educational, urban planning, and scientific programs designed to remake them into ideal imperial subjects, rationalize their work, and classify their knowledge. Utopian though they were, his reforms were also practical, and however grand his pretensions, Martínez Compañón also valued native thinking and things. This makes him an intellectual avatar of an "American-born epistemology linked to, but different from, the scientific epistemologies of the Enlightenment" (p. 4).

Any historian of this bishop must be as much of a polymath as he was, and Berquist Soulé more than rises to the occasion. The book is equal parts biography, history of science, and visual, intellectual and social history. Each of its seven chapters is written in language as vibrant as the color plates that adorn the interior. The first chapter, on the books the bishop brought with him when he first traveled from Spain to his post in Trujillo, reveals his intellectual universe and shows that he came already bearing big ideas. The succeeding chapters detail various of his reforms, including information-gathering missions, town resettlement projects, vast educational plans aimed at children and youth, a "radical" plan for enlivening a Cajamarca silver mine with cooperation from the miners' gild, and, finally, the collection of botanical treasures and illustrations for a massive, nine-volume compendium on the human, animal, and botanical riches of the region called 'Trujillo del Peru'—what Berquist Soulé calls a "paper museum."

Ultimately, Martínez Compañón was a contradictory figure, and the projects he promoted were too. His ideas about the native populations often stressed equality and Indians' great potential, yet his take on "equality" remained structured by long-standing colonial prejudices. Berquist Soulé provides numerous examples of equivocations, quoting, for example, one letter from Martínez Compañón to the king in which he proclaimed "the Indians are very equal, or very little different from the other men of their *calidad*" (p. 101). His defense of native people and use of native knowledge was always in service of promoting greater wealth for the Spanish state and greater conformity with the moral and cultural dictates of Catholicism. But his plans were not without local support. Native communities showed enthusiasm for various schooling and town resettlement programs, and he enlisted them to contribute to his compendium, *Trujillo del Perú*. Though this project fit within the wider Western enthusiasm for encyclopedias and scientific missions, the bishop chose to use Quechua and Spanish rather than Latin to categorize his specimens, a move that reveals his commitment to native knowledge.

Many of his programs were unsuccessful. In fact, one could almost say that the failures, such as new town settlements, advanced secondary schools, and the utopian mine, reveal more of the dynamic history than do the successes, such as the establishment of primary schools. They show an interplay between Martínez-Compañón's vision and the reality of life in the region and, subsequently, allow the author to connect intellectual and scientific history to social and political history in meaningful ways. Many of the most ambitious programs foundered not because of native resistance but because of bureaucratic blockages, though it is not always clear why potential Spanish or creole allies stood in the way of the Bishop's utopian fantasies. Sometimes it might be a viceroy who harbored greater doubts about natives' potential than did Martínez Campañón, or a city councilman who got cold feet about the bishop's plan to reform and refinance a silver mine and provide it with native workers.

At other times, the reader gets the sense that the bishop himself—big thinker though he was—wavered as he tried to articulate local knowledge and practices with the global pretensions of enlightened absolutism. His own classification of his unfinished "museum" as "vulgar and common" might be translated simply as "vernacular." But he also seems to have harbored the notion that it was somehow "less-than" in the world historical production of scientific ideas of the era. When Martínez Campañón left his post in Trujillo for a new job as archbishop of Bogatá in 1791, he found the world he had imagined there, in which native subjects pacifically transformed into model Catholic colonial subjects, invaded by anticolonial pasquinades and increasing threat of rebellion. But maybe that world—full of half-done projects, volumes that sat collecting dust, and missing shipments of local specimens destined for Europe—really had been only his in the first place.

*Florida International University*
*Miami, Florida*

BIANCA PREMO

*La Verdad: A Witness to the Salvadoran Martyrs*. By Lucía Cerna and Mary Jo Ignoffo. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and Santa Clara University, 2014. Pp. xxvi, 186. Foreword by Michael E. Engh, S.J. Preface by José M. Tojeira, S.J. Introduction. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliographic essay. Index. Epilogue by Jon Sobrino, S.J. $14.98 paper.
doi:10.1017/tam.2016.25

This testimonial book engages a reader's mind and emotions. It foregrounds the brutal assassination of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter by the Salvadoran military before dawn on November 16th, 1989, a well-documented episode of the civil war in El Salvador (1980–1992). It focuses on the Salvadoran government's cover-up and the FBI's actions to silence a witness—the cleaning employee Lucía Cerna—who saw the priests' attackers and was sure they were military men in uniform, and not guerrillas as the government claimed. Some of the priests, scholars at the Central