

**Elena Zhizhko,**

Dr. hab., Full Professor of Academic Unit of Humanistic Studies

Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9680-8247

e-mail: [eanatoli@yahoo.com](mailto:eanatoli@yahoo.com)

**Gali-Aleksandra Beltrán,**

EDD, Associate Professor of Department of Geophysics

Technologic University of Durango

Durango, Mexico

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7186-332X

e-mail: [gali.beltranzh@gmail.com](mailto:gali.beltranzh@gmail.com)

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION IN NEW SPAIN

**Abstract.** This article presents the results of the historical-pedagogical study, which objective was to determine the philosophical foundations of New Spain education, to know, under what premises did the thinkers of the New World plan to educate the conquered peoples, what kind of man did they want to form. The study was carried out using the documentary-bibliographic research method. Authors found, that the philosophical foundation of the education of the conquered peoples in New Spain was the idea of their salvation and formation of good Christians. These foundations are formed from the reflections of New Spain thinkers on the problem of the discovery of the new continent; deliberations regarding what are the beings that inhabit these lands, if they are fit to learn, to be saved from their sins. This problem was approached in the first maximum houses of study on the continent from the medieval philosophical currents (scholasticism, humanism, hermeticism), modern philosophy brought to the Americas by the learned men of the time, mostly representatives of the Catholic religious orders: Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Jesuits. Thus, the scholasts, discussed the origin of the Indian doubting if he human is, on the other hand, the humanists had no doubt that they dealt with human beings with a fine culture and language. This vision was developed with the Novohispanic Eclecticism and ideas of the protection of Indians before Europeans, science education, need for elementary professional training of the marginalized population. Finally, the Catholic Church decided that while all Indians were great sinners, the Inquisition could not condemn them because they acted like children without understanding their actions. Therefore, they need to be taught and evangelized. Thus, the Catholic Church authorities gave the conquerors the so-called “permits to do

justice”, according to which they had the right to seize the lands of the Indians with all the inhabitants, provided them catechism teaching.

**Keywords:** education in New Spain; philosophical foundations; medieval philosophical currents; Novohispanic Eclecticism; evangelization and Hispanicization.

**Introduction.** The discovery of the Americas implied radical changes around the world speaking of the social, political, economic, cultural spheres, and, of course, educational. It was happened in the context of the birth of Modernity when borders were opened and globalization emerged: in 1516, Thomas Moore’s “Utopia”<sup>1</sup> comes out; in 1517, Luther starts the Protestant movement; in 1519, Cortés arrives in Veracruz; in 1520, the Calvinist movement begins and also Anglicanism is born; in 1521, the conquest of Tenochtitlan (Mexico) occurs.

Of course, with all these reciprocities, education and its philosophical foundations also suffered certain permutes influenced by the echoes of novel ideas that arrived from the New World. How did resolve the thinkers of New Spain the general philosophical statements about the organization of the world, about human existence, the education issues, etc.? How it was created the hybrid philosophical-cultural field in New Spain and what kind of man were they trying to educate?

To the problem of the philosophical foundations of New Spain education dedicated their works Anchondo-Pavón, 2012; Abad-Pérez, 1992; Beuchot, 1996; Baudot, 1990; Botta, 2016, Espinosa, 1964; Hernández de León-Portilla, 1980; León-Portilla, 1980, 2017; Lockhart, 1999; Merino-Abad, 1993; Merino y Martínez-Fresneda, 2004; Mollat, 1996; Murillo-Gallegos, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2012; Navarro, 1992; O’Gorman, 1971; Reynoso, 2011; Ricard, 1986; Ronan, 1993; Rubial, 1996, among others.

The objective of the work which results are presented below, was to determine the philosophical foundations of New Spain education, to know, under

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<sup>1</sup> Latin: *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia.*

what premises did the thinkers of the New World plan to educate the conquered peoples, what kind of man did they want to form. The study was carried out using the documentary-bibliographic research method.

**Developing.** It is important to clarify that many researchers do not recognize the existence of a New Spanish philosophy. However, given that philosophy in general raises and solves problems regarding human existence, the presence of Novohispanic philosophy cannot be denied. It addresses the problems regarding the discovery of America: what is the American man? Who has the right of dominion over American lands? Why did the wars with the Indians arise? What are the foundations of power and relationships among the peoples of the Americas? What is the fair way to carry out the conquest? What is the ultimate foundation that gives legitimacy to an action? Under what premises must the conquered people be educated and what kind of men must be formed?

Likewise, with the arrival of the Europeans, the philosophical traditions of the time were cultivated in the colony: scholasticism, humanism, hermeticism, modern philosophy (Cartesianism, New science, Enlightenment). The main problems that arise around the discovery of America and disturbed the novohispanos (the people of New Spain), are the following: about the nature of the American man (war, conquest); about the origin and history (power and dominion).

The philosophy of New Spain was cultivated in the first maximum houses of study on the continent: the College of the Holy Cross of Tlatelolco (1533), the Royal College of San Nicolás Obispo, Pátzcuaro (1540); the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico (1551); the Royal and Old College of San Idelfonso (1588); the Internal Schools for Indigenous People in Parras, Coahuila (1622) and in San Luis de la Paz (1640); the College of San Javier, Puebla (1751); the Royal and Pontifical University of Mérida, Yucatán (1767); University of Guadalajara (1792).

To understand the philosophical approaches of the New Hispanics on the aforementioned points, it is necessary to take into account the worldview of

medieval European man, in particular, Christian Catholic. Thus, it was believed in the unity of the human race, since they all come from Adam and Eve: man is God's creature made in his image and likeness (human dignity). In the Middle Ages, was also known Aristotle's vision that man is the rational animal or animal of language, is free by nature, is a social being, uses language for communication, he has laws and lives in cities.

Hence, the autochthonous groups of the Americas were included in universal history and the novohispanic thinkers proceeded to investigate, from whom of the sons of Noah, they descended. These searches are reflected in the texts of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas "History of Indias" (1527-1547), Fray Toribio de Benavente Motolinía "History of Indians of the New Spain" (1555), Fray Gregorio García "Origins of the Indians of the New World" (1607), Fray Diego de Avendaño "Thesaurus Indicus" (1668-1686), among others. The scholars of the time did not doubt the authority of the Bible, but decided to re-read it and find the answers to their doubts. Even in 1568, at the Council of Trent, it was decided to compile the Bible from many texts that were previously scattered. In this process, ecclesiastics find answers in the apocryphal texts and established that the Indians from Noah's grandson, Canaan, cursed by his grandfather and destined to serve, to be a slave to other brothers come (Beuchot, 1996).

On the other hand, according to the Ptolemaic model used in the Middle Ages, the Earth is the center of the Universe and there are only three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. That is why the question arose: where did another continent come from? Philosophy from the scholastic perspective was also dedicated to its resolution. The medieval Spanish scholasts who came to the New World, also discussed various issues, such as: where does power originate? (affirming the rights to rule of the Pope and the emperors). They spoke also of the Eternal Law (God) and the Natural Law (human actions, biological laws, etc.), as well as Human Laws (laws of each country, place), Moral Theology; discerned around marriage. In this search for philosophical answers, the representatives of

different Catholic orders who arrived in the conquered territory, stood out: the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, and the Jesuits.

The questions of philosophical anthropology were also disputed. Thinkers like Zumárraga, de Gante, López, de la Cruz, Betanzos discussed about interrogations such as: What is the nature of the Indians? How to treat them legally? How to introduce them to Christianity? Is the Indian a slave by nature? These problems were approached from the point of view of the Judeo-Christian philosophy (capacity to receive divine grace) with its classification of Christians, pagans, infidels, idolaters, heretics, sorcerers; as well as from the classical tradition (rational capacity) with the distinction of pagans, savages, civilized Christians, barbarians. From there, they conclude that the Indian must be perceived as a minor, immature (as someone who does not know what he is doing, does not respond for his actions) and cannot be subject to the inquisition. To save him, he must be educated and evangelized.

Following the scholastic tradition, the New Hispanic philosophers interpret the saints looking for the answers. Thus, the phrase of Saint Peter “slaves of sin”, referring to the situation of man as the property of sin before redemption, was understood at the time as “the one who conquers is enslaved”:

The first sin had upset the natural order; man, by nature king of creation, wanted to be like God, and as punishment he remained a slave, the property of sin; an unnatural sin, but an original one. There is therefore no slavery by nature, but there is as a consequence of original sin. If it altered the natural order, nature itself demands that that order be restored and that the sinner pay the penalty for it. Thus, slavery is expiation and penalty to be satisfied for that sin; this is its only naturalness (Muñoz-García, 2005, p. 24).

Hereafter, the Indians, because they are barbarians and sinners, are enslavable. As has been said above, in New Spain several philosophical traditions coexisted: scholasticism, humanism, hermeticism, modern philosophy, positivist scientific thought. Thus, the scholasts based on the Aristotelian-theological philosophy that sought the balance between reason and faith, used symbolism and

etymology, however, its followers could not think outside the framework of the Christian faith. As Francisco de Vittoria, a Thomist, founder of the School of Salamanca, maintained: “Faith without reason is blind; reason without faith is foolish”. There were three scholastic currents: Thomism (Dominicans); Scotism (Franciscans); Nominalism (or “extreme Scholastic Realism”, which advocated science) (Murillo-Gallegos, 2010, pp. 297-316).

So that regardless of the discourse between the scholastics and humanists’ philosophers, the Catholic Church decided that while all Indians were great sinners, the Inquisition could not condemn them because they acted like children without understanding their actions. Therefore, they need to be taught and evangelized. As for the war with ethnic groups, it was “justified” by thinkers in terms of Judeo-Christian philosophy and biblical texts: this war is just because it is carried out for the “good of sinners” and “cleansing” of their souls from sin, it carries the word of God to the sinners. Thus, the Catholic Church authorities gave the conquerors the so-called “permits to do justice”, according to which they had the right to seize the lands of the Indians with all the inhabitants, provided them catechism teaching.

**Results.** The study carried out showed that in the Novohispanic humanism of the time, a deep reflection on the human being was made. This philosophical current comes from Italian Classical Renaissance humanism (which defended the dignity of man) and Christian Renaissance humanism or Christian philosophy (which sought a return to primitive Christianity; one of its representatives was Erasmus of Rotterdam). In New Spain, humanism flourished in the Tlatelolco College (*Colegio de Tlatelolco*) with its representatives Rafael Campoy, Agustín Castro, Arnaldo de Basacio, Andrés de Olmos, Bernardino de Sahagún, Juan de Gaona, Juan de Focher, Francisco de Bustamante, Diego de Granado, Juan de Mancilla, Alonso de Molina, Francisco de las Navas, Antonio Roldán, Pedro de Oroz, among others, with the inclusion in the study plan of classical languages and Nahuatl (Baudot, 1990).

The Imperial College of the Holy Cross of Tlatelolco (*Colegio Imperial de*



*la Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco*) was founded in 1533<sup>2</sup>, as a college for the nobles. Its main promoter was Bishop Zumárraga and it was aimed at training the indigenous clergy, an aspiration that produced strong criticism and attacks from the Spanish. The Tlatelolco College was destined to be the most important center of higher education in New Spain. The order that prevailed in the College was the same as in Europe: it was lived in community as a boarding school, maintaining the poverty of the Franciscans. Among the subjects that were included in the curriculum, were the following: the humanities cycle formed by Latin grammar, morphology, syntax and rhetoric. Within the rhetoric program, there were general knowledge of geography, history, classical literature and literary perception (Espinosa, 1964).

The College's objectives were to train secular elements possessing a firm and deep-rooted Christian faith; to prepare people to serve as catechism agents to instruct those who do not have access to the College and to provide assistants and interpreters to religious who are not experts in the vernacular languages. One of the great concerns of the Franciscans was to provide the College with a good library. According to the inventories of the time, the first volumes that integrated it were ones of classical culture: Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Boecio, Cato, Cicero, Flavio Josefo, Juvenal, Marcial, Marco Antonio Plinio, Prudencio, Quintiliano, Salustio, Tito Livio, Virgilio, among others.

What regards patristic, there were the works of San Agustin, San Ambrosio, San Cipriano, San Jeronimo. Medieval science was represented by Santo Tomas de Aquino, Tomas de Kempis; the renaissance by Erasmus of Rotterdam, Antonio De Nebrija, Luis Vives and others of the time. In particular, rhetoric was learned with the support of the texts of Cicero and Quintilian, whose pedagogical method is based on the use of fables for the teaching of oratory in Latin. In fact, from these learnings, the friars take this teaching model and create

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<sup>2</sup> Later, was created the Royal College of San Nicolas Obispo, Patzcuaro (1540); the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico (1551); the Royal and Old College of San Idelfonso (1588); the Internal Schools for Indigenous People in Parras, Coahuila (1622) and in San Luis de la Paz (1640); the College of San Javier, Puebla (1751); the Royal and Pontifical University of Mérida, Yucatán (1767); the University of Guadalajara (1792).

the fables in Nahuatl for the evangelization of the Indians (Abad-Pérez, 1992).

It should be clarified that the first steps of the friars in the evangelization of the Indians failed. The local groups continued their pagan religious traditions and customs. To understand what they were wrong with and why the Indians did not understand them, they had to learn the native languages. This task was not easy, since the Christian and indigenous worldviews were very different (opposite in many respects). Thus, according to indigenous logic, religion is inseparable from social life: for example, rituals were carried out in markets; the notions of sin, God, marriage, etc. did not match. Hence, in trying to translate Christian sacred texts into local languages, the missionaries made many mistakes. Therefore, Catholic texts, and with them Catholic philosophy, translated (or rather, interpreted) into indigenous languages, necessarily obtained the connotation of indigenous cultures (philosophies), since many concepts that are used in Christianity, had to “adapt” to be understood by the local ethnic groups.

The economy and politics of New Spain experienced its ups and downs, and with them, of course, education. Therefore, in the sixteenth century, the time of the conquest of the New World, the ruling house of Spain was that of the Habsburgs. The period from the second half of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century in the history of New Spain is known as the “golden age”: the riches of the new continent allowed many Spaniards and other Europeans to make their fortune. They left the Spanish crown to wage costly wars, to enrich the clergy and nobles.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 18th century, a severe crisis began in Spain. On the other hand, in this period, the Enlightenment movement was born in Europe and had a great influence on the decisions of the European monarchs. Thus, Carlos III (1759 – 1788), initiated the Bourbon Reforms in Spain and the colonies, an event that radically transformed the life in New Spain (it was called “the second conquest”) and caused the independence movement (García-Ayluardo, 2010).

However, regardless of the political, economic and social changes that



occurred in these three centuries of the existence of New Spain, what remained unalterable was the situation of the native peoples. The Indians were always on the topsoil of society. They had very few rights, but on their shoulders, the whole colony stood. The economic, political and sociocultural development of the conquered lands revolved around the exploitation of the labor of the indigenous peoples subjected by the Spanish. The representatives of the autochthonous groups had to cultivate their own lands expropriated by the invaders, work in the mines, the constructions, etc. Likewise, the Spaniards introduced in the new continent new agricultural, textile, construction, mining technologies, new crops (citrus, wheat, sugar cane, olive trees, etc.), livestock (cattle, pigs, goat, poultry), began the systematic development of the terrestrial subsoils creating the large mining centers (Guanajuato, Pachuca, Taxco, Zacatecas, etc.).

The proper handling of these new technologies by the natives required some instruction and teaching provided by the conquerors, so schools for Indians were opened. Nevertheless, always accompanied by forced Castilianization and under the control of the Catholic Church, the main political, economic and cultural force in the colonies. With an unequalled campaign of evangelization of the Amerindians peoples, the Catholic Church held the “just titles” to the American possessions. Teaching the natives of religion and “good customs” was the condition that justified the license to the Spanish Monarchy from the western territories. Thus, indigenous education was linked to the right of Spain to dominate the new lands (Gonzalbo, 1990).

In turn, with the birth of modern philosophy and the advent of Enlightenment ideas, in New Spain the *Novohispanic eclecticism* arises with the works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Sigüenza y Góngora, Díaz de Gamarra, among others. Its representatives (Alzate y Ramírez, Bartolache, Eguiara y Eguren, Campoy, Díaz de Gamarra, Hidalgo, Mociño, Sigüenza y Góngora, among others) saw their mission in promoting industry in the colonies by eliminating the primacy of metropolis' industry. They argued that the proper training of indigenous male workers would increase their productivity,

furthermore, after some instruction by Indian women, their labor could be used in agriculture and manufacturing (Labastida, 2012).

In this period, the Jesuits stand out with their ideas of the defense of the Indians before the Europeans, science education, science history, literary criticism: Clavijero, Abad, Márquez, de Guevara y Basoazabal, Alzate, among others. For example, the thought of Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero (expressed in his principal works “Ancient History of Mexico” (1780) and “Physica particularis” (1770)) contains the following aspects: eclectic attitude expressed in seeking of reconciliation of modernity with tradition; using of the approach to verisimilitude as a criterion of knowledge in the process of adjusting to the truth within the philosophy of nature and history; believing in the knowledge of the different philosophical systems, in which the truth is found (López-Limón, Zhizhko, Flores-García, 2020, p. 94).

According to Clavijero, the education, at first, is a means or pre-text to refute the insults of European philosophers of the alleged inferiority of Mexicans, having as a premise the reason that illustrate speak. Education could be understood as the principle, on which a political-social system is based, in this case on the society of the ancient Mexicans. The education is the resource that makes possible the transmission of laws and customs, in short, a worldview of the world, which can be understood in terms more appropriate to culture. In Clavijero’s works, the role of teacher as counselor is evident, such as the importance of his dedication, ability and exemplary to his disciples. However, the confidence that Jesuits feel in Enlightened reason doesn’t force them to renounce their religious condition. Under their Christian principles, they analyze everything that they consider a positive contribution of the sciences, thus converting education into the strategic device of their thinking. It should be noted that Clavijero teaches his students to believe in the knowledge of the different philosophical systems, in which the truth is found (which is a primordial element of complex thought in the 21st century). That is, looking for academic training of his students, he finds that education is the best strategy of thought and freedom

(López-Limón, Zhizhko, Flores-García, 2020, p. 95).

Therefore, for the understanding of many aspects of postmodernity thinking, an essential place has the activity and work of the eighteenth-century humanists of New Spain, in particular, Clavijero, as they resisted and were ascribed to Enlightened modernity.

At the same time, at the end of the colonial period, “the jurists and critics of society [...] sought alternatives to control and eradicate the “bad living men” that were detrimental to the republic and public welfare” through the “narrowing of “to an honest trade and useful to society” (Magallanes-Delgado, 2004, p. 106).

In order to disseminate the new ideas and scientific and technical knowledge of the Enlightenment, the New Spanish enlightened people founded the *Societies of Friends of the Country*, through which they promoted the first schools for workers, which were prototypes of modern technical professional schools. Some prominent members of these societies saw fit [...] deliberate around the differentiation of occupations and useful knowledge for the popular sectors, to boost productivity and correct the idleness incurred by poorly entertained lazy people, the needy and beggars. Social sectors that accounted together for structural problems, such as poverty and unemployment [...] so, the establishment of houses of correction that would have manufacturing workshops in which marginal groups of society would be trained for work was intended. The promotion of occupations and useful knowledge would take place in the schools of arts and trades [...] that would alleviate poverty, unemployment (Magallanes-Delgado, 2008, p. 216).

The idea of training the poorest excited the conscientious New Spain society. Thus, several technical schools were opened for workers, including the famous Royal Academy of San Carlos of the Noble Arts of New Spain (Real Academia de San Carlos de las Nobles Artes de la Nueva España) (1781), where engraving, painting and sculpture was taught. Now is the National School of Plastic Arts. As well as the Royal Mining Seminary (1783) and the Spinning and Weaving School (1792) was founded. The last one was the first experimental

establishment for technical and manufacturing education to be instituted in the New Spain at a public level under new techniques “in which the manual skill of the natives would be used, in order to integrate them into a production from which they distanced themselves due to the disgraceful treatment generally received in the manufactures” (Sánchez-Flores, 1980, p. 188).

**Conclusions.** In conclusion, we can affirm that the philosophical foundations of Novohispanic education are developed since Europeans’ arrival in the New World and the appearance of New Spain philosophy. These foundations are formed from the thinkers’ reflections on the discovery of the new continent’s; deliberations regarding what are the beings that inhabit these lands, if they are fit to learn, to be saved from their sins; if the Europeans are empowered to possess the discovered lands, if the war against the Indians is just, on what the authority of the conquerors is based.

Thus, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the scholasts, based on Biblical texts and Judeo-Christian philosophy discussed the origin of the Indian, what place must be granted him in society and if it is possible to convert him to the Catholic faith. On the other hand, humanists had no doubt that they dealt with human beings with a fine culture and language that is “very elegant”. For the education and conversion of natives to Christianity, these friars did an unthinkable task establishing themselves in the villages, learning the local languages and cultures and teaching catechism in them.

Through philosophy, the conquerors tried to “see the New World and see themselves in front of it”, they were convinced that the Indians, although they were men like themselves, needed their help to be able to receive the grace of God, to be able to save themselves. To this end, they began the education, evangelization and Hispanicization of the Indians. Hence, the philosophical foundation of the Novohispanic education was the idea of Indians’ salvation and formation of good Christians. In this work of trying to understand the unknown and understand themselves in it, emerged a true fusion of two cultures, creating the hybrid philosophical-cultural field in New Spain.

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**Олена Жижко**

доктор педагогічних наук, професор відділу гуманітарних наук  
Автономного університету Сакатекаса  
м. Сакатека, Мексика

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9680-8247

e-mail: [eanatoli@yahoo.com](mailto:eanatoli@yahoo.com)

**Галі-Олександра Бельтран**

кандидат педагогічних наук, викладач відділу геофізики

Технологічного університету Дуранго

м. Дуранго, Мексика

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7186-332X

e-mail: [gali.beltranzh@gmail.com](mailto:gali.beltranzh@gmail.com)

## **ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ ОСНОВИ ОСВІТИ В НОВІЙ ІСПАНІЇ**

**Анотація.** У цій статті представлені результати історико-педагогічного дослідження, метою якого було визначити філософські основи новоіспанської освіти, дізнатися, на яких передумовах мислителі Нового Світу планували виховувати підкорені народи, яку людину вони хотіли сформувати. Дослідження проведено документально-бібліографічним методом дослідження. Автори встановили, що філософською основою виховання підкорених народів у Новій Іспанії була ідея їхнього порятунку та формування добрих християн. Ці основи формуються з роздумів мислителів Нової Іспанії над проблемою відкриття нового континенту; міркування щодо того, які істоти, що населяють ці землі, якщо вони придатні до навчання, щоб бути врятованими від своїх гріхів. До цієї проблеми підходили в перших вищих навчальних закладах на континенті від середньовічних філософських течій (схоластики, гуманізму, герметизму), сучасної філософії, принесеної в Америку вченими людьми того часу, переважно представниками католицьких релігійних орденів: францисканцями, домініканцями, августинцями та єзуїтами. Таким чином, схоласти обговорювали походження індіанця, сумніваючись у тому, чи є він людиною, з іншого боку, гуманісти не сумнівалися, що вони мають справу з людьми з прекрасною культурою та мовою. Це бачення було розвинене на основі новоіспанської еклектики та ідей захисту індіанців перед європейцями, наукової освіти, потреби в елементарній професійній підготовці маргіналізованого населення. Нарешті католицька церква вирішила, що хоча всі індіанці були великими грішниками, інквізиція не може їх засуджувати, оскільки вони поводитися як діти, не розуміючи своїх вчинків. Тому їх потрібно навчати і євангелізувати. Так, католицька церковна влада видала завойовникам так звані «дозволи на правосуддя», згідно з якими вони мали право захоплювати землі індіанців з усіма мешканцями, за умови навчання їх катехізису.

**Ключові слова:** освіта в Новій Іспанії; філософські основи; середньовічні філософські течії; новоіспанська еклектика; євангелізація та іспанізація.