

THE RELIGIOUS ORIGINS OF MODERNITY IN MEXICO



PAMELA VOEKEL

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The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham & London 2002

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Printed in the United States of

America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by C. H. Westmoreland

Typeset in Quadraat with Post Antiqua

display by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-

in-Publication Data appear on the

last printed page of this book.

Ten graphs summarizing information

about the wills discussed in this book

appear on the author's Web site at

www.religiousorigins.org.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication
Data*

Voekel, Pamela.

*Alone Before God : the religious origins
of modernity in Mexico / Pamela Voekel.*

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and
index.

ISBN 0-8223-2927-1 (cloth : alk. paper)—

ISBN 0-8223-2943-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Mexico—Church history. 2. Church and
state—Mexico—History. 3. Catholic
Church—Mexico—History. 4. Church and
state—Catholic Church—History.

5. Cemeteries—Social aspects—Mexico—
History. 6. Burial—Social aspects—
Mexico—History. I. Title.

BX1428.3.V64 2002

282'.72—dc21

2002001654

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acknowledgments

I didn't want to leave Mexico after completing the research for this book in 1996. The Zapatista rebellion had galvanized Mexico's left, and in the town of Tepotzlán, where I wrote much of this work, my neighbors were giddy with hope for real political change. University of Montana students and some dedicated Missoulians made the transition an easier one. Their passion for Latin America's history and their dogged efforts to globalize the resistance to neoliberalism inspired me during every step of this work. I especially want to thank Melissa Bangs, Kate Keller, Mark Carey, Scott Nicholson, Raquel Castellaños, Joanna Arkema, Camile Becker, Paul Ryan, Jen Sens, Burke Stansbury, Genena Bradley, Egan Bradley, Jordan Dobrovolsky, Janet Finn, Andrea Olsen, Lynn Purl, Paul Haber, John Norvell, Kimber Haddix, Leida Martins, and María Bustos-Fernández.

Latin American historians are lucky: many of our most gifted practitioners are as generous as they are talented. Carlos Forment, Sylvia Arrom, William Taylor, Stanley Stein, Nancy Vogely, Linda Arnold, Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy, Anne Rubenstein, William Beezley, and Gil Joseph either greatly improved the manuscript or offered valuable encouragement. Two reviewers at Duke University Press, as well as Valerie Millholland, Miriam Angress, Judith Hoover, and Rebecca Johns-Danes made this a much better book. In Mexico City, I learned a tremendous amount about death in Latin America, as well as some choice Spanish words, from Elsa Malvido and her Seminario de Historia de la Muerte. The Colegio de México's Seminario de Historia de Mentalidades offered key comments that transformed both my research and my thinking. The work owes any sophistication it can claim to the tireless input of Jorge Bracamonte, Fanni Muñoz Cabrera, Cecilia Riquelme, Elliot Young, Isabel Toledo-Young, Liz Norvell, Michael Snodgrass, Anabel Ruíz, and Pablo Piccato: during intense weekend meetings of our splinter faction, their rigorous criticism was rivaled only by their enthusiastic investigations of Mexico City's *bajos fondos*. A special thanks to

my *cuates* Jennifer Bowles and Josefina Flores, who tried to warn me, and to Teresa Fernández Leido, Marisa Cerro, Aida Baez Carlos, and Lourdes Rojas, who reminded me that not all of the drama was in the archives. At the University of Montana, the Feminist Research Avengers led by the fearless Anya Jabourl and the spectacular Ken Lockridge proffered sage advice that transformed the work. At the book's most embryonic stage, Ana Alonso and the late Daniel Nugent provided an interdisciplinary frenzy of intellectual excitement in their seminars; I am deeply grateful for the project's exposure to their brilliance. My advisor, Susan Deans-Smith, deserves special praise for her patience and unflagging enthusiasm, as does Sandra Lauderdale-Graham for her insistence that style matters, even in history. Las Reinas, Alex Brown, Rebecca Siegel, María Zalduondo, Danalynn Recer, and especially Jessica Chapin made Texas a hotbed of political and intellectual stimulation. And way back at Mount Holyoke Joan Cocks, Jean Grossholtz, and Teresa Renaker taught me that scholarship and activism are mutually dependent, not mutually exclusive.

The Social Science Research Council, Spain's Ministry of Culture, the Mount Holyoke Class of 1905, the University of Texas, and the University of Montana's wonderful History Department funded the research and writing of this work, and I am deeply grateful for their confidence. Mexico's dedicated and underpaid archivists spent extra time locating documents that proved invaluable. I especially want to thank the entire staff at the Archivo de Notarias in Mexico City.

Finally, my greatest debt is to my family, especially John, John Patrick, Haley, Swen, Penelope, and Hilda Gail. The beautiful and talented Bethany Moreton propelled the book forward and gave it whatever nuance it contains. Only Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz has the eloquence to express my gratitude to her, so I won't even try. Solidarity Forever!

introduction

In 1787, ministers of the Spanish King Charles III outlawed the practice of burying the Empire's dead in or around churches; in its place, the edict ordered the construction of suburban cemeteries throughout the King's domains in Europe and the Americas. A seemingly innocuous measure, the new system of burial grounds struck at the heart of the *ancien régime*, for it threatened a key medium of displaying and sacralizing social hierarchy and sundered the intimate relationship between the dead and the living that fueled baroque piety. Not surprisingly, the subsequent implementation of the edict provoked impassioned encounters between those with church burial rights and the procemetery faction, who called themselves *sensatos*, or the enlightened ones.

Strictly speaking, the self-styled enlightened could not claim victory in this pitched battle. By the time of Mexico's Independence in 1821, their projected network of verdant, hygienic public burial grounds had suffered overwhelming resistance at the hands of multiple foes. More prosaically, the crusaders were broke. The resulting cemeteries were few and shabby at best.¹

But the physical reality of suburban cemeteries is only the infrastructure for a far more significant story. The deep background of this civic squabble lay in the urban elites' definitive shift in the early nineteenth century from an external, mediated, and corporate Catholicism to an interior piety, one that elevated the virtues of self-discipline and moderation and focused on a direct, personal relationship to God. Through their numerous procemetery tracts and sermons, New Spain's enlightened promoted a nominally egalitarian theology that attacked the spiritual vacuity of baroque display, the dominant language of Old Regime social hierarchies. At the same time, they advocated an individual spirituality, which helped to splinter the society of orders and estates into one of individuals. Unbeknown to themselves, in fact, those of *piedad ilustrada* (enlightened piety) had lost the battle but won the war.

Any argument concerned with the emergence of the modern, self-regulated individual owes much to Michel Foucault. Lurking below the eighteenth century's liberal and democratic rallying cry to protect the rights and freedoms of the individual from political tyranny, he explains, lay a new set of institutions and practices—asylums, prisons, and hospitals—that employed new techniques of surveillance. These new techniques of power were designed to produce individuals who would internalize morality and to remove from society those who would not. Foucauldian man could regulate and care for himself without supervision; in short, he was capable of this new liberation and political participation, and thus worthy of state protection. Here is an insidious, total form of power: not the power to quash already constituted political subjects, but to create them.

Elsewhere, I have argued that in late eighteenth-century Mexico City the internally regulated individual became an increasingly important index of elite status as corporate forms of identity lost their salience. This self-control was manifested by a heightened command of the body.² Patricia Seed, however, is the historian of Latin America who has provided the most thorough cultural examination of the birth of the modern individual, whose reason or interests dominated his passions. In particular, Seed echoed Albert Hirschmann's concern with charting the rise of a "homo economicus," who could be counted on to pursue ruthlessly his economic self-interest.³ Not Foucault's ubiquitous surveillance, she argues, but the rise of secular reason created this internally tempered self. Whereas late seventeenth-century Mexico City society considered the love felt by young couples to be a sure sign of God's approval of their eventual union in matrimony, by the late eighteenth century this same expression of love signaled the couple's irrational passions unbridled by reason. In the earlier scenario, the Church, the state, and the laity had mobilized against meddlesome parents to protect children's freedom to marry, seeing their passion as a legitimate indicator of their free will, and thus, she argues, of God's will.

By the late eighteenth century, however, a father who disapproved of a suitor's lowly economic or racial background now claimed that this same expression of love clouded his offspring's reason, and both Church and state united with the parents to prevent the union. The passions were no longer a road to God, a sure way of knowing His will, Seed demonstrates.

Rather, they represented a serious social threat that the Christian must overcome through the exercise of secular reason. Contemporaries increasingly defined this reason as economic aggrandizement; children should choose marriage partners whose fortunes matched or surpassed their own. With the economic quickening and increased world market participation of the late eighteenth century, once reviled economic self-interest became a stable and celebrated motivation for human behavior among the Mexico City elite. The reasonable male individual who could be counted on to pursue stable interests underlay New World merchants' desire to swap the restrictions of mercantilism for free trade—an economic system under which people could be relied on to act according to those interests.⁴

Seed, then, provides a deep cultural analysis for the birth of the self-interested economic man whose liberation from corporate shackles and market impediments would subsequently fuel the political utopias of an influential faction of elite Mexican liberals. In his work on José María Luis Mora (1794–1850), the major liberal theorist of the immediate post-Independence period, Charles Hale rightly insists that merely identifying Mora's intellectual influences will not suffice; we must also ask why he embraced certain theorists rather than others. Hale proposes that Mora found particular inspiration in French and especially Spanish writers grappling with the central problem he saw engulfing post-Independence Mexico: first the battle to create representative institutions, then the struggle against the corporate privileges that threatened those institutions.⁵ Seed's work bolsters Hale's, suggesting that the economically minded individual at the center of Mora's campaigns against corporate privileges and for free markets had a deep cultural genealogy in Mexico; his liberation was thus "possible because it was conceivable," to employ Roger Chartier's felicitous phrase summarizing the cultural origins of the French Revolution.⁶

But concerned as she is with relations among Church, state, and society, Seed misses that late eighteenth-century reformers within the Church suggested a more spiritual solution to the problem of harnessing these now unruly passions: rigid self-discipline enacted by the light of God's grace. It is the argument of this book that religious origins likewise generated the individual at the heart of the Bourbon assault on corporate privileges as well as these campaigns' intellectual heir, the elite liberal theory of the immediate post-Independence period. Seed is certainly right that her

urban elites called on reason to create self-control and moderation, but this reason was not entirely secular, not the “soulless intellect of later rationalism,” not inimical to piety. Rather, this moderating force was the divine part of men, God’s very presence in their hearts.⁷

Thus, while Mora and other elite liberals sought to free homo economicus from all market impediments to his free pursuit of self-interest, they also pursued the liberation of his spiritual twin: the godly and thus virtuous individual of enlightened Catholicism. The Church’s hierarchical mediation with the Divine, impediments to free speech, ascriptive social privileges—all were attacked in the name of freeing the godly conscience from all restraint on its workings and liberating those who displayed godly moderation from all legal fetters to social advancement, while simultaneously placing those who did not firmly under their guidance.

This book, then, explores the role of the new piety in Mexico’s shift from a corporate, hierarchical society ruled by a divine monarch during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to the independent republic of 1821, whose elite political discourse stressed the sovereignty of the people, the sanctity of private property, free speech, and representative government, and the exclusion of the demonstrably unvirtuous from enfranchisement or political office.⁸ It shares with Foucault, however, a deep distrust of this self-congratulatory liberal rhetoric, whether emanating from the Bourbon state, Veracruz merchants, or Mexico’s early elite liberals. I thus heed historian Florencia Mallon’s call to chart how such seemingly universalist discourses of individual equality and rights can in reality delegitimize other, more radical visions of citizenship and exclude some from the political process.⁹ In both Veracruz and Mexico City, enlightened Catholicism’s elite devotees would argue that the moderate—and thus the righteous—should rightly rule those who demonstrated an inability to toe the line drawn by their betters.

A few words of explanation of this shift from legal hierarchy to nominal equality are in order. Until the late eighteenth century, the King’s representatives in New Spain proffered no ideology of social equality. This was an ancien régime society whose fixed hierarchies operated with God’s approval; the King held sacral status, and society’s component parts formed juridically separate entities. The Indians paid tribute to the Crown, and royal laws forbade them to dress like Spaniards, ride horses, or bear arms. As a recognized group, however, they enjoyed access to special tribunals,

usufruct rights to village commons, and exemption from the Inquisition and various taxes. Even within this República de los Indios legal hierarchies persisted, for the pre-Conquest nobility were often exempted from the more onerous obligations, such as tribute, and allowed special prerogatives, such as Spanish dress. Spaniards, too, were classified by various political identities. Nobles, soldiers, lawyers, merchants, and priests all had their separate courts and economic prerogatives, and the trade guilds officially monopolized their craft. The racially mixed *castas* faced legal discrimination based on their group identity, being officially barred from most of the guilds and estates. Each person's relationship to the Crown, then, was mediated through his corporate group; New Spain was home to subjects, but no citizens.¹⁰

Although never static, in the late eighteenth century this hierarchical society began to crumble from pressure from above and below. Bourbon bureaucrats sought to extend state jurisdiction at the expense of the Church, attacked the Mexico City merchant monopoly with a 1789 declaration of free trade, and began to chip away at the artisan guilds' monopolies. At the same time, the carefully delineated República de los Indios and the República de los Españoles began to shade into each other, as the urban *casta* population grew. The economic quickening of the late eighteenth century led to a new faith in economic interest as a human motivator, and thus economic class began to overshadow ascriptive status as the basis for identity. After independence, the drive to remove the vestiges of this corporate society continued, with the privileges of the Church and army as the principal targets.¹¹ This book examines reformed piety's role in the battle against corporate privileges and the subsequent struggle to recreate new social distinctions on a different foundation.

At first glance, the cemetery campaign and reformers' efforts to curb the worst excesses of baroque funerals would seem an unlikely investigative pathway into the thorny question of the new piety's larger social and political ramifications. The late eighteenth-century attack on church burials and elaborate funerals, however, represented a strategic strike at the spiritual sanctification of social hierarchy. New Spain's church floors and chapels mapped the society's intricate caste and status categories, as the careful placement of the dead reiterated worldly honors and temporal distinctions. In addition to family privileges, each ethnic and many occupational groups in colonial society had their own economic prerogatives, tax

obligations, and even legal rights and court system, and these juridically fixed identities found expression in the careful carving up of church burial space. The clergy's sanctity and corporate status, for example, was demonstrated in their burial under the main altar, close to the Eucharist—a privilege legally denied to the laity. In death as in life, the churches added their blessing to the privileges of the Old Regime's group-based social structure, its floors and chapels fetid simulacra of distinctions among the living.

Funerals also provided the Church with an opportunity to sanctify elites' lofty social position. Elaborate funeral corteges were a common sight on Veracruz and Mexico City streets until the waning years of the colonial period. Although twelve was the usual number, hundreds and even thousands of clergy regularly escorted the dead to the church and prayed at burial ceremonies. With clergy clogging the streets, hundreds of flickering candles, bright cloths, ornate carriages, musical accompaniment, and paid mourners, these funerals stunned the senses of urban crowds, thereby heightening their awe at the power of the seducer and associating him with truly heavenly magnificence.

Resistance to these sensual dramas in particular and the "true piety" that gripped the Empire's self-styled enlightened in general, suggest that Octavio Paz's assertions about the origins of Mexican modernity need to be reassessed. Paz found Spain and her colonies lacking in a "modern moral consciousness," singularly bereft of the self-discipline required for democracy: in Protestant countries and in France, with its influential Jansenist faction, the individualist impulse took hold among the populace before its manifestation in liberalism. By contrast, Catholic Latin America imported modernity; rationalism was an acquired ideology. For Paz, the fundamental difference between Latin American democracy and its Anglo-Saxon version is attributable to the latter's religious origins. The "true piety" of Veracruz and Mexico City *sensatos*, however, suggests that Mexico's liberalism also had religious roots.¹²

The new piety acted as a solvent on the divinely sanctified social hierarchies of the *ancien régime*, splintering society into atomized male individuals who felt they owed their social position to their hard work, restraint, and self-control, their interiorization of morality: the very same atomized individuals who wrote and peopled the elite liberals' texts of the ensuing century.¹³ Crowded, dazzling funerals indexed a lack of godly

moderation. Furthermore, the reformed passed over the Pope and the hierarchy and referred instead to the early Christian councils as their fonts of truth. Reform Catholics justified their extensive participation in the lively public sphere that emerged in Mexico City in the early nineteenth century by underscoring their scriptural erudition and familiarity with Church history as well as their divinely illuminated consciences; thus, this new piety helped justify a new, more participatory politics.

Some of this argument has already found a place in the historiography. Although he focuses on the state's curbing of Church prerogatives and on the intellectual trajectory of a few reform luminaries, David A. Brading notes that the dismantling of the old godly defense of hierarchical society would have failed miserably without the efforts of the "Jansenist" upper clergy, who led the attack on what they regarded as the worst "excesses" of baroque Catholicism.¹⁴ Having asserted this argument, however, Brading does not demonstrate any interest in the fundamental tenets of enlightened Catholicism, in the process of corrosion itself, or in the broader constituency behind the intellectual champions of this new piety. This book attempts to answer some of the questions raised by Brading's provocative assertion that the simple interior piety possessed the capacity to transform larger spiritual and social arrangements.

Scholars of New Spain's Independence period have painted the Church as a conservative force that legitimated the Old Regime, at least until the enlightened and absolutist state provoked its ire. In particular, William B. Taylor, Nancy Farriss, and Francisco Morales have demonstrated that the Bourbon monarchy tightened the noose around its own neck by distancing itself from the divine purpose that had served as its primary justification for rule since the Conquest. In attacking the clergy's privileges and prerogatives, the new secular state cut out its own ideological heart; it alienated and angered the clergy who had served as its primary ideological state apparatus, who had promoted obedience to the King as a fundamental Christian virtue.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Serge Gruzinski argues that for the late eighteenth-century Bourbon state, "The imperatives of civilization progressively replaced those of Christianization" and that this shift fueled the assault on baroque piety.¹⁶ Implicit in their arguments is the notion that the clergy fought a secular state intent on trimming their traditional corporate privileges and dimming the exuberance of baroque Catholicism. This assertion may indeed be true, but it nevertheless considerably obscures the

enlightened clergy's own role in crumbling the ancien régime's primary idiom of distinction: baroque display. Likewise, it occludes the sincere Christianity of most reformers. These enlightened men of God sought to lead people down the right road to holiness, not discredit man's bond with the deity as a legitimate justification for political action; they were anything but secular.

Their efforts, then, do not constitute an attack on the Church by a secular state. And indeed, a closer look at the burial campaign reveals that it was not a top-down state imposition on a uniformly recalcitrant populace, as the traditional historiography has depicted the Bourbon reforms; rather, the movement was led by the upper clergy, enlightened bureaucrats, the press, doctors, and, in Veracruz at least, the city's merchants. Indeed, traditional elements within the state bureaucracy actively thwarted cemetery building, proclaiming their allegiance to the old order. At the same time, a portion of Mexico City testators filled their wills with requests for cemetery burials a good twenty years before the cemetery laws were effectively enforced in the 1830s. Most significant, the enlightened subjects who propelled the burial campaign forward during the colonial period did so under the leadership of the Church.

Although the enlightened piety that animated the cemetery campaign had a corrosive effect on the sacral social hierarchy created in part by church burials, it also formed part of a complex causal ecology that threw up new cultural authorities out of the rubble: the *gente sensata*, a culturally self-defined group that objected to both the traditional elite's rule by *razzmatazz* and the lower classes' immoderate habits. The result was a heightened sense of their social authority. For although in "true religion," pious acts did not necessarily alter one's postmortem fate, upright moral behavior and worldly success were interpreted as a result of one's interior moral transformation; to paraphrase R. H. Tawney's summary of Max Weber's famous thesis, what was rejected as a means to salvation was embraced as a consequence of it.¹⁷ Wealth lost its moral taint, and because the successful bore God's positive stigmata, the poor who fell by the wayside should be under their guidance; clearly, they had not taken God's message to heart, and therefore they might well wear their rags in Hell.

After Independence, certain liberals argued that only the economically successful had the moral fiber for enfranchised citizenship; poverty's etiology clearly lay in the individual's moral failings, not in structural inequali-

ties, and the poor should thus be banished from the political process. These enlightened Catholics also attacked the last vestiges of corporate privilege, which they felt stymied the social leadership of the truly virtuous. One such carefully protected redoubt for the unvirtuous was the Church, which reformers felt squandered its vast income on the sensual opulence and superfluous mediating hierarchy of baroque Catholicism, positively imperiling salvation. It must be reformed, they concluded, so that “true religion” could thrive in Mexico.

Like Gruzinski, Taylor, and Morales, both the distinguished literary critic Jean Franco and the esteemed historian Charles Hale have read these attempted Church reforms as signs of secularization, as evidence for the waning of union with God as an acceptable justification for public conduct and policy. But the reformed of the immediate post-Independence period had reconfigured their relationship with God, not abandoned it; if God illuminated all men from within, then the road to God was not through the Church hierarchy or through “vain and ostentatious” exterior displays of His majesty. The Church should not cloud men’s relation with the God in their hearts; it had no need of the excessive bureaucracy and vast sums squandered on liturgical pomp. The imperative was to liberate “true religion” from the Church, which would then exist in a godly and pared-down form. Unlike their French contemporaries, pre- and post-Independence reformers were not engaged in secularization but something more akin to a religious war. In Mexico, the enlightened did not remove themselves from divine sanctification, as Taylor, Farriss, Gruzinski, Hale, and Franco suggest; rather, they employed a different definition of it, and to different ends.

As one would expect from a religious movement, it was the clergy who initially promoted this more austere, individual piety, beginning roughly in the late 1760s. But because of the multilayered causality outlined above, the reformation produced consequences that clerical firebrands neither desired nor anticipated: the weakening of their own authority as the adjudication of political decisions increasingly became the provenance of physical specialists rather than spiritual ones. “True religion’s” reformation of the individual produced a cultural sea change that rendered the new empirical medicine credible to enlightened urban elites. This medicine based its claims not on the wisdom of ancient authority but on individual observation.¹⁸ The more critical attitude toward religious authority encouraged a

more skeptical attitude toward dogma in science. Furthermore, the new piety had helped to arm this society with a different technique of rule: observing the population rather than performing for it. The theatrical opulence of the baroque funeral indexed a lack of godly moderation; display was redefined as spiritually void. After Independence, doctors' testimony became synonymous with reason; physicians even entered the state mechanism as political leaders, effectively undercutting the clergy's intellectual leadership of Mexico's urban elite. At the same time, science and public health concerns edged out theology as the principal idiom of the burial debate. Years before the liberals completely secularized the cemeteries in 1859, the Church's loss was a foregone conclusion.

Numerous historians have championed Protestantism's paternity of various aspects of modernity, most particularly science, individualism, and capitalism.¹⁹ Catholic Reform piety's procreative powers have received considerably less attention, although their single proponent, Dale Van Kley, makes a spectacular case for the generative powers of Jansenism on the modern political sensibilities that erupted in the French Revolution, particularly the Jansenists' juxtaposition of individual conscience to the will of the absolute monarch and the attendant political decentralization that this helped to create.²⁰ It is the argument of this book that enlightened piety did have procreative powers and was indeed a factor in the erosion of the hierarchical social relations of the old order. By insinuating that the individual, not the divinely ordained monarch or his clerical hierarchy, was the source of wisdom, "true religion" helped institute a cultural shift that placed the individual at the starting point of knowledge. Reformers' stress on the "inner light" as the surest path to God proved to be an acid bath for a social order that had defined "truth" as the hierarchical authority sanctified by God.

Historians are entirely dependent on their sources, and all sources require critical assessment in their use. Much of this book relies on a statistical analysis of the pious proclivities expressed in 2,100 Mexico City wills. The use of wills as a historical source is replete with problems and pitfalls. These particular documents tell us little about the piety of the majority: the poor. They reveal even less of the religious sensibilities of the desperately impoverished. Furthermore, they illuminate pious gifts and burial preferences expressed by testators but reveal nothing of arrangements made at other times and places during an individual's life. And although the sub-

stance of the papers reflects individual initiative, their preambles tell us little beyond which formulaic expressions were favored by which notaries.

Despite these problems, wills read in conjunction with other sources can illuminate much about Mexicans wealthy enough to command respect for their burial choices and to make pious donations. I have supplemented the wills with an array of sermons, tracts, official government correspondence, petitions from the laity to religious and secular authorities, parish burial records, newspapers, legal codes, confraternity records, and evidence from medical institutions, to enumerate just a portion of the documentation.

I have grouped the wills into two databases. The first, and the most often referenced, consists of 350 wills for each of three periods: 1710 to 1720, 1810 to 1820, and 1850 to 1860.²¹ Male testators outnumbered females by almost two to one. Merchants, clerics, and state employees were the three largest occupational groups represented in the earlier two periods, with the military and the liberal professions—doctors, lawyers, scribes—replacing clerics and state employees in the top three occupations in the later period. Servants, artisans, and those with agricultural interests—owners of haciendas and smaller properties—rounded out the list of occupations, although roughly half of the wills remained mute on this question. Few testators were identified by their racial classification, although European-born Spaniards constituted 30 percent of the earliest testators sampled and roughly 20 percent of all testators in the middle period, and these testators can be presumed to be white. Indians, blacks, and those of mixed race often were identified as such in the wills in the earlier two periods, but constituted a statistically irrelevant number of the total testators sampled.

The second database of wills comprises fifty wills per decade, drawn from at least five notaries per decade, and beginning in 1620. Its data are thus less fine-grained, and I use it merely to locate the rough timing of large shifts in piety determined from the first database and as a guide to the rough outline of seventeenth-century pious proclivities. In short, the wills offer a window into the shifting pious sensibilities of Mexico City's wealthier residents. Graphs can be found on the Web at www.religiousorigins.org.

These qualifications of wealth and urbanity raise some interesting questions: Is urban elites' strong support for the new piety in the late eighteenth century merely the visible tip of a vast iceberg? Did the rural areas find this more interior Christianity compelling? Did the urban underclass, who left

few traces in the wills, embrace its tenets? The available evidence suggests the answer is no on all accounts, although this is the first book on this eighteenth-century “Catholic Reformation” in Latin America and no one has addressed this question directly. The extant evidence, however, suggests that Mexico City and Veracruz elites probably floated like large reefs atop an indifferent or hostile ocean; although influential, they were probably not the tips of a massive iceberg.

This is not surprising, given that both cities were demographic anomalies in a predominantly rural New Spain peopled overwhelmingly by Indians and mestizos. The largest city in the New World in 1811, Mexico City claimed whites as half its total of 168,000 residents, in a country where they made up only 18 percent of the overall population; Indians made up only 24 percent of the enormous city, whereas they were 60 percent of the country’s inhabitants. Equally anomalous was the economic condition of the capital. The enormous fortunes garnered in the rich silver mines and through merchant speculation found dazzling outlets in the city’s advanced school of mining, its Art Academy, Botanical Garden, and university, its twenty-three monasteries, fifteen convents, and twelve hospitals, not to mention its spectacular cathedral and royal palace located in the ample central square. The center of imperial government built on the ruins of the stunning Aztec capital, Mexico City was the architectural gem of the New World.²²

The port city of Veracruz, on the other hand, was a late eighteenth-century boomtown that grew in response to the 1789 declaration of free trade within the Empire; some scholars even estimate that the city’s 1791 population of 4,000 souls swelled to 16,000 by 1803, although more conservative figures show a doubling in the population from 1791 to 1818.²³ Where Mexico City’s long-term residents were most likely white or mestizo and relatively well-off, the 1791 Veracruz census demonstrates that most white and mestizo Veracruz males had been born outside the city, with the majority of the whites hailing from Spain. The city’s dominant mulatto and black population, by contrast, had much deeper roots: more than half of each group were Veracruz natives.²⁴ Furthermore, the city’s *casta* residents evidently outnumbered the more peripatetic whites.²⁵ Thus, Veracruz’s stable core population consisted of male and female *castas*, many of them of African descent.

That Veracruz and Mexico City were demographically unique in New

Spain provides no direct evidence that the new piety appealed uniquely to these cities' elite residents. We have to look for that suggestion elsewhere. Although the cemetery campaign is not a simple referendum on stripped-down Catholicism, it is worth noting that the new burial grounds met with unmitigated hostility in rural areas. More to the point, William B. Taylor's extensive examination of rural piety in the archdioceses of Guadalajara and Mexico City uncovered an Indian population whose religious practice showed no signs of the more individual faith that William B. Christian found challenging the more corporate, communal piety of rural Spain in the same period, the late eighteenth century.²⁶ Even with Taylor's superb work, however, we are far from the clear geographies of piety indicated by the forced oath to the French Civil Constitution of 1791, with its mandate for a streamlined Church.²⁷

If geography offers some suggestive distinctions, so does economic class. Some evidence indicates that the Veracruz poor relished the nominal egalitarianism of the city's new cemetery in the 1790s, or at least reveled in the humiliation of elites consigned to such undistinguished plots. Yet, other evidence points to the opposite conclusion. Juan Viquiera-Alban found that the Bourbon state increased its campaigns against popular forms of religion in Mexico City—processions, fireworks, saints' feasts—in the late eighteenth century, but cautions that a rise in their occurrence or popularity did not necessarily cause this crackdown. Rather, a more “rational” state found them increasingly distasteful and thus policed them more carefully.²⁸ That some among the popular classes eagerly embraced the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation should further urge us to caution. Perhaps the distinctive effects of reform piety on the poor of Mexico City and Veracruz simply awaits their historian.²⁹

If gauging the reformed piety's popularity outside the narrow confines of Mexico City and Veracruz elites is far from an exact science, then comparisons with other urban areas in the Empire are well-nigh impossible, as there are no extant case studies.³⁰ Luckily, however, this individual piety was far from an anomaly in the Catholic world of the eighteenth century. Rivers of ink have been spilled in the cause of French Jansenism, but although a few Spanish and Mexican reformers corresponded with their French fellow travelers, the two movements should not be conflated.³¹ As Dale Van Kley points out in his magisterial *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution*, Spanish reformers insinuated themselves into the state in the

late eighteenth century, employing it to promote their projects. French Jansenism, on the other hand, attacked the monarchy and the ancien régime's fixed social hierarchies from outside the state apparatus, as English Protestants had done in the mid-seventeenth century.³² Furthermore, French Jansenists competed with a truly secular cadre of enlightened thinkers, who were both anti-Catholic and anti-Christian. In Mexico, few such secular philosophes existed. Thus, "Jansenism" was perhaps a more influential force in New Spain than in France. This goes a long way toward explaining the thoroughly religious nature of Mexican Church reform after Independence, as well as enlightened Catholicism's significant contribution to Mexico's urban political culture at the turn of the century.

Tackling so large and vexing an intellectual problem as the social effects of the new piety requires clear limits, clearly defined. Because this is the first cultural study of this reformation in the Spanish Empire, the first two chapters carefully explain the theological logic of both baroque and enlightened Catholicism. Chapter 1 treats "baroque" burial practices; the term is meant not as a strict marker of a historical era, but as a descriptor referring to a style of worship and belief that dominated in Mexico City from this study's beginnings in 1620 through the eighteenth century, with some traditionalists persisting throughout the early nineteenth century. Baroque Catholicism was highly communal, stressed the need for priestly and saintly mediation with the Divine, and found in the sensual opulence of the cult a path to knowledge of the Creator. God was an external force who burst into the world through the object domain; Mexico City's numerous relics and images of saints were a concrete, literal channel for His miraculous mercy. Chapter 2 presents the case for the opposition, explaining the intellectual essentials of this Mexican reformation and sketching the general religious context of the late eighteenth century in Mexico City and among the high-ranking state bureaucrats whose reformed sensibilities so influenced the Empire's new burial and funeral laws. The reformed embraced a more direct individual relationship with a God who animated them from within; thus, they advocated a reduced mediatory apparatus, although they never cast the Church as irrelevant to salvation, as had Protestants. These reformers redefined funereal opulence as an index of the lack of moderation that God's presence in the heart provided, and they assiduously avoided it, filling their wills with requests for moderate funerals and humble cemetery burials. For those who saw an omnipresent

God always already present, the suggestion that He would confine His presence to discrete points seemed the grossest superstition, and they eschewed the formerly coveted chapel burials under a saint's protection in favor of common cemeteries. In both these chapters, the sample of 2,100 wills allows us to use death practices as a window into styles of faith.

Chapter 3 brings us to the specific dispute over reformers' pet project: public cemeteries. João Reis's splendid work describes resistance to new suburban cemeteries in Bahia, Brazil, in the early nineteenth century, and stresses reformers' sanitary and financial concerns and protestors' fervent desire for church burials as key to the conflicts. Although health concerns loomed large in Mexico, my research revealed a more fundamentally religious conflict that centered on reformers' desire to lead everyone down the right road to God by creating suburban burial sites far from the superfluous mediating presence of saints' images, clergy, and communicants.³³ Chapters 4 and 5 examine a notorious cemetery struggle in Veracruz as a means of demonstrating the new piety's larger political ramifications. These three chapters together explain why two particularly enthusiastic groups—Bourbon bureaucrats and Veracruz merchants—embraced the new piety. But they also examine the considerable opposition that the reformed faced, both from rural areas and from other urban elites. As Christopher Haigh cautions us in his study of the English Reformation, historical change can seem straightforward only when the opposition is omitted from the story or “treated as silly old fogeys ripe for defeat”; reformations are the work of both “those who grumbled and those who greeted,” and we shall see some passionate grumblers in these chapters.³⁴ Chapter 6 returns to Mexico City, where the simple piety helped birth a lively public sphere of political commentary and critique from roughly 1808 to 1834. Reformers fought to free the godly individual from all restraints on his conscience, including the Church hierarchy, and sought to exclude the immoderate from political participation. They thus launched a thoroughly religious critique of the Church's corporate privileges and prerogatives, seeking to create a truly godly commonwealth.

But if the reform was not a secularizing movement, it did offer aid and comfort to a more secular approach to death. The final two chapters chronicle the transfer of funerals and burials from the provenance of priests to that of licensed doctors as the nineteenth century wore on. Through its reformation of the individual, enlightened Catholicism fertil-

ized the cultural soil for the growth of medical observation as a technique of rule. The new medicine grew alongside the new piety in the tangled garden of the late eighteenth century; therefore, to assign religion a causal role in the former's genesis seems perhaps disingenuous. Surely their mutual distrust of received wisdom conspired to place the individual as the starting place of knowledge, and no doubt it did. But religion, not science, was man's greatest concern; salvation loomed largest, and to impose our own scientific, secular assumptions on theirs is simply anachronistic.

Thus, by this route I argue that the religiously inspired, nominally egalitarian, and individualistic vision of community suggested by enlightened Catholicism provided the cultural matrix for certain elite liberals' post-Independence vision of a nation characterized by claims to the sovereignty and legal equality of all "virtuous" citizens.

chapter 1

The Baroque Backdrop

In the mid-thirteenth century, Spanish King Alfonso the Wise adduced four reasons for preferring church burials over any other final resting place. First, Christians were closer to God than were other sects, and thus their tombs should be closer to churches. Second, church burials provided a salutary reminder to pray for the souls of departed relatives and friends. Third, the dead buried in churches received the aggressive advocacy of the saints in whose honor churches were built. And, finally, bodies placed close to the faithful and protected by their prayers escaped the many devils that plagued suburban burial sites.¹

Alfonso's concerns would continue to inform Spanish burial laws until the late eighteenth century. A trio of themes clearly underlie the brief list. Most strikingly, physical proximity to designated holy spaces or features is assumed to imply a spiritual advantage, and, conversely, distance from those sanctified points invites danger. Furthermore, spiritual devotion is understood as a collective affair: believers are expected to pray on one another's behalf, and a pantheon of heavenly intercessors processes the requests and transmits them to the Almighty. Finally, believers are assumed to approach God through mediators, who rank above common, fallen man but below the Deity. The concrete, communal, and mediated nature of the sacred was beyond dispute; the question for Alfonso, as for us here, was how to apply these principles to death and burial.

During the seventeenth century and even long after the reform challenge, the Church in New Spain offered its adherents multiple points of access to the sacred. The Catholic world teemed with holy places; the faithful expected—and received—miracles. God erupted into this-worldly life with dogged regularity, and the sacred could flourish within the profane. Humble objects—a shred of cloth, a wafer of unleavened bread, a mason's stone—could be transformed into conduits for heavenly power and could be caressed, ingested, addressed by very mortal men and women. In a

world of coarse, immediate pain and few physical comforts, a splinter of the True Cross offered tangible succor for body and soul.

Physical objects contributed to observance in other ways, too. The Church had long recognized the difficulty of communing with God, of concentrating one's full attention on the contemplation of the Divine. Baroque ornamentation was intended to aid in this formidable labor by tantalizing the senses and thereby bending them to the task at hand. If a breathtaking representation of the *pieta* or a soaring choral Mass wrenched the eyes and ears into a state of adoration, perhaps the heart could follow.

Then, too, the Christian of baroque Catholicism never faced the terrible absolutes of spiritual life unaccompanied. Religious orders and, for the laity, confraternities dedicated to specific saints offered a religious group identity entirely in keeping with the corporate self-conception of seventeenth-century Europe and New Spain; many confraternities organized themselves into these spiritual societies on the basis of their occupations. Moreover, worship itself demanded mass participation. Pilgrimages, holy feasts and festivals, the Mass itself, even ecclesiastically mandated periods of deprivation and mourning—all would have been rendered nonsensical as individual observances. Human company, of course, suffered from severe limitations, but Christians could turn increasingly to the cults of the saints for supernatural advocacy and aid for even such earth-bound concerns as scurvy, impotence, and lost money. Weak, fallen, beset by sin and temptation the Christian might well be, but alone? Neither in this world nor the next.

Both trends in Alfonso's formulation, then, reveal the abundance and fragmentation of spiritual power in the Church. The eternal was approached through the external, in ample company and through appropriately ordered channels. Let us turn to the baroque spiritual world of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico City, using death as our point of entry into New Spain.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Popular Reverence for Relics and Images

The baroque Church in New Spain encountered God's miraculous mercy channeled through a multiplicity of particular places and objects and could point to ample precedence for its beliefs. Europeans had venerated

miracle-working bodies or bones of saints and holy people long before the eleventh-century rise in the cult of saints' images, which subsequently grew alongside it.² Relics' miraculous healing powers could even point to scriptural authority. The Apostle Paul cures by the laying on of hands, but also by objects he touches: "From his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:12). As Marina Warner argues convincingly, the association of an article with the essence of its former owner can hardly be called exotic; anyone who has ever caressed a beloved's photo or article of clothing, or pestered a celebrity for an autograph, can easily attest to the "simple humanity" of this urge.³

But it was the Council of Trent in particular, and the Counterreformation Church in general, that officially endorsed the veneration of sacred relics. Convened between 1545 and 1563, the Council represented a circling of the wagons for the Church; confronted by Protestant attacks and growing defections to the rival camps, the learned Church fathers gathered to elucidate and confirm doctrine. The broader movement to clean up the Church's reputation, the Counterreformation, similarly delved into matters of belief and official observance in defense of the true faith.⁴ Consequently, many matters that previously had been left murky and open to individual interpretation became formalized into rigid dogma for the first time.

Relics, then, came in for scrutiny in their turn, and the Church formalized the process for obtaining approval through a bishop. Additional routes for legitimization of relics were provided by the Congregation of Rites and later through the Congregation of Relics and Indulgences. Although the Church now struggled with the laity over whose imprimatur conferred authenticity on holy relics, it did not deny their miraculous powers; rather, it actively encouraged the faithful to seek their powerful aid for their worldly afflictions. Displayed in impressive cases, newly approved relics boasted an official wax seal and red cord.⁵ In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Castile, these relics protected towns from inclement weather, warded off the frequent threats of locusts and drought, and miraculously cured the halt and lame who frequented their ubiquitous shrines.⁶

Despite the stricter authentication process, the traffic in relics stepped up in the late sixteenth century. Alarmed Catholics now rescued these miraculous conduits of divine power from marauding Protestant icono-

clasts, spiriting them to safety in Spain and Rome. Cologne's Eleven Thousand Virgins proved a particular boon to the supply, and they and other invaluable treasures received official papal authentication before being sent out to comfort the faithful and bolster the spiritual patronage powers of princes like Spain's Philip IV; Madrid alone boasted the heads of 109 virgins in 1629.⁷ The Jesuits joined the Pope and the Spanish Crown as major owners and distributors of these powerful conduits of sacred power, and in 1577 Pope Gregory regaled New Spain with remnants of the apostles and of the doctors of the Church and a thorn taken from Christ's crown. Again in 1584, the Pope showed his generosity to New Spain's Jesuits: in a munificent gesture, he bestowed on them the most prized of all relics, a sliver of the True Cross, as well as a fragment of the Virgin Mary's veil. The latter may not have been exotic; during the High Middle Ages Christians venerated Our Lady's milk, nail parings, and even her hair, in quantities that would have suggested an alarming hirsuteness for the Queen of Heaven could they all have been authenticated!⁸

These artifacts of Christendom's holy heritage naturally traversed oceans to reach the far-flung faithful of the Spanish Empire. And even en route to New Spain these holy relics demonstrated their efficacy: the Cross saved the ship from a tempest, and during a subsequent storm the chest guarding the veil refused to budge as desperate sailors jettisoned cargo to save the imperiled vessel; it later whipped up the wind as the ship bobbed helplessly in interminable doldrums. The arrival of these relics occasioned much joy and celebration in the star of Spain's imperial firmament, Mexico City, and their miraculous powers offered hope to those beset with sickness and natural calamity; not long after their arrival, the Jesuits reported, tongues began to tell of the veil's healing powers.⁹

Mexico City, however, was not dependent on imported relics for access to the sacred. With the new guidelines for sainthood, considerable lobbying efforts on behalf of candidates became the rule. In New Spain, from roughly 1740 to 1806, all testators paid a mandatory tax to send advocates to Rome to fight for the canonization of Mexican martyr Felipe de Jesús, who had received beatification in the late sixteenth century.¹⁰ A native son, Felipe worked as a silversmith's apprentice until he entered Puebla's convent of Santa Barbara, which he later fled to travel to Manila as a soldier. After dissipating his small savings, he again took the habit and, now seized with religious fervor, engaged in the fasting and mortification that would

bring him closer to God. During his return trip to New Spain in 1600, his boat capsized off the coast of Japan; the Japanese infidels imprisoned the survivors and cut off Felipe's ear. A fellow Christian secreted the grisly souvenir to the Jesuits, who treated it as a holy relic. After a torturous overland march, Felipe and twenty-five others died nailed to crosses, and the faithful collected the martyrs' blood in their hats. Every Friday, they reported, columns of fire and stars of varying colors appeared above the crucifixion site.

In Mexico City, Felipe's body parts graced many churches and convents. The cathedral chapel dedicated to the martyr housed one large and one small bone, the latter resting in an expensive glass case. The chapel of Santa Rosa in the convent of Santo Domingo displayed a cross built from the wood of San Felipe's death cross. The Mexico City Franciscans even boasted a bone shaped in the holy man's image. The Colegio de San Buenaventura, the convent of San Gerónimo, and a Franciscan priory near Toluca all had fingers or small bones from Felipe, and Puebla's convent of Santa Barbara displayed his skin. Mexico City's convent of San Diego had an altar dedicated to all of the twenty-five martyrs who died in Japan, complete with bones.¹¹

The beatification of Gregorio López was another seventeenth-century cause supported by mandatory taxes. Asking rhetorically "Who was Gregorio López?" in 1686, chronicler Juan Antonio Rivera explained, "Some say he was Prince Charles, son of Philip II, who had been secretly whisked to Mexico when someone gave the order to hang him."¹² Writing in 1763, Capuchin friar Francisco de Ajofrín noted that López came from Madrid to America, where he "lived as an angel" until he died in his hermit's cave near Mexico City in 1596. The cave continued to attract the faithful, he reported, and López's body rested in a cathedral chapel awaiting his beatification.¹³ Franciscan Friar Agustín de Vetancourt raved about the sanctity of López's relics housed in the cathedral's sacristy in 1698, as did observer Juan de Viera in 1777, who noted that it was widely held that the hermit's remains emitted "the smell of saintliness [*olor de santidad*]."¹⁴ In the late eighteenth century, however, King Charles III ordered the *mandas* for López's beatification suspended, and Viceroy Matías de Galvez (1783–1784) reissued the order in New Spain.¹⁵

Official sanctification was one thing; the popular belief in the relics' miraculous powers was quite another. Historian Rosalva Loreto López

followed the beatification campaign of one seventeenth-century nun from New Spain's city of Puebla de los Angeles, Mother María de Jesús Tomellin (1582–1637), through three centuries, outlining the miracles the faithful attributed to her. Like Gregorio López, the holy woman emitted an “olor de santidad.” Loreto López elaborates on the holy odor: at her death, the nun had been bathed in a thick, sweet-smelling sweat unlike any worldly fragrance, with beads the shape and size of pearls. Pearls had long symbolized sexual purity in Catholic thought, and the sweet fragrance was taken as a sure sign of her saintliness. Bodily putrefaction is the penalty for the Fall, the Church taught; the stench of death often signaled evil in Christian writings. By contrast, the hagiography of saints bursts with fragrant odors and miraculous preservations. Typical of these descriptions, a text from Ecclesiasticus portrays a richly aromatic Virgin Mary: “I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aspalathus, and I yielded a pleasant odor like the best myrrh, as galbanum, and onyx, and sweet storax, and as the fume of frankincense in the tabernacle” (Ecclesiasticus 24:15).¹⁶

Mother María's sweet fragrance, then, signaled her likeness to Our Lady, whose incorrupt body had been borne to heaven in its entirety. The nun's victory over decomposition and death was thus a miracle, a literal infusion of God's saving power into the world. This power leached into physical objects that the holy woman had touched. In particular, earth from her tomb as well as her bodily fluid and other parts had curative powers, a fact not lost on Puebla's faithful. When her body was displayed for the funeral, clerics scrambled to grab the flowers that surrounded her, tore her veil and most of her habit to shreds, and even ripped pieces of skin from her hand. The laity, too, had access to the miraculous cures her relics performed, as nuns from her convent sold relics to the faithful in the form of cloths moistened in the miraculous sweat that the body continued to exude. Here indeed was fervent desire for thaumaturgical channeling of God through objects charged with His sacred essence.

And none could deny the desperate need for such material aid. Racked by frequent plagues, gangrenous sores, and the sudden death of children through illness and accident, Mexico City residents sought God's mercy through direct physical contact with the surfeit of the sacred contained in holy relics—both those officially blessed and those with only the imprimatur of popularity. At his death in roughly 1599, Franciscan Sebastián de Aparicio sweated the familiar aromatic liquid which the faithful, like Ver-

onica wiping Christ's humid brow, mopped up with their handkerchiefs.¹⁷ Like many saints, Aparicio was credited with the cure of particular ailments or problems, his specialty being dead children. One man placed a cloth moistened with the holy man's sweat on the head of his recently deceased child, who immediately revived; bereft parents understandably mobbed his tomb to entreat similar miracles. One child two hours drowned came back to life, and his grateful mother publicized the miracle, as she had promised Aparicio himself.¹⁸

With ample evidence of these relics' curative powers, Mexico City had become a veritable ossuary by the eighteenth century. The relics of saints and secular dignitaries attracted those who sought succor from sickness or merely a powerful intercessor, and the city's churches and convents competed to have the most holy body parts on display. His namesake confraternity in the Convent of La Enseñanza Antigua tended the index finger and image of San Juan Nepomuceno in the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ In 1722 the cathedral boasted the body of the Carmelite martyr Saint Anastasio, available for public viewing in a silver-trimmed glass coffin.²⁰ City Councilman Juan Manuel de Aguirre came to rest in the convent of San Francisco in 1729, but the Hospital of la Concepción got his heart.²¹ Early in the century the city's churches placed these "inestimable treasures" on display every November 2 for the Feast of All Souls; the *Gacetas de México* noted that so popular had the custom become that even church doors were festooned with body parts.²²

Images, like relics, offered the faithful direct, tangible conduits to God's mercy, and their caretakers often whisked them through the streets to homes of those stricken with disease so the afflicted could touch them. The Church certainly evinced concern that relics and saints' images acquire official validation, but the theological soundness of their miraculous powers was rarely questioned, and stories of miraculous images abounded in New Spain.²³ One of the most prodigious of these icons in late eighteenth-century Mexico City was a child Jesus bequeathed by an Indian artisan to the convent of San Juan de la Penitencia. During a particularly jarring earthquake, the arch above the image creaked and threatened to collapse, but the diminutive baby Jesus propped it up with two of his small fingers. In 1768, chronicler Juan Manuel de San Vicente, an administrator of the city's comedy coliseum, noted that the feat impressed the faithful, who frequently requested he be brought from his altar to their sick beds.²⁴

He was not alone in these missions of mercy. A painting of San Francisco Xavier, famed for having dripped saintly sweat from the canvas, never rested even two days on its altar before being summoned to a sickbed.²⁵

Believers contracted for many of these miraculous cures, exchanging gifts, devotion, and promises of publicity for divine attention to their plight. Those who reneged on a vow to a saint risked falling into mortal sin. In 1778, the Mexico City parish of Santa Veracruz had to be amplified to make more room for a life-size image of Our Lady of Soledad regularly showered with gratitude for her miraculous cures. Her devotees adorned her in finery, including a gold crown embedded with the precious stones that symbolized eternity. Indeed, so popular had her cult become that the church expanded to hold the *ex voto* offerings (that is, offerings made in fulfillment of a vow) and paintings that depicted the lame who now walked and the diseased who had recovered from their afflictions through her channeling of God's mercy.²⁶

Miraculous images that sweated or wept blood as Christ had in His Passion, curing relics that exuded a saintly odor—here indeed was ample evidence of God's powers at work in the world. God acted through His saints, those who “oozed precious dribblets from the great sea of God's mercy” into the world, in historian Peter Brown's felicitous phrase.²⁷ Protestants had attempted to erase God's eruptions from the physical world. As if in self-defense, images and relics throughout the Catholic world awoke from their Renaissance slumber in the seventeenth century, sweating, weeping, and proffering miraculous cures. Here was baroque religiosity at its height in a pitched battle with austere Protestantism.

From the External to the Eternal: The Sensual Road to Salvation

The Council of Trent had affirmed that, given man's weak nature, visible reminders of God's majesty enhanced our understanding of the Divine.²⁸ Earlier, I hinted at the ability of these signposts to lead the mind from the terrestrial and mundane upward to an appreciation of God. During the mid-seventeenth century three successive popes confronted the Protestants' sensually ineffable God with the entire splendor at their disposal, funding an architectural extravaganza in Rome that rejected frozen, logical Renaissance designs in favor of soaring columns, swirling movement, and dazzling light.²⁹ In silver-rich New Spain, the interiors of baroque

churches radiated God's majesty.³⁰ In art, too, God became more physically accessible, more human, more approachable: in Spanish court painter Velazquez's depiction of Vulcan's forge stand figures dressed as Castilian peasants; Caravaggio's religious paintings beckon to the observer; Bernini's Saint Teresa swoons in a quite earthy-looking ecstasy.

Indeed, this theology of external magnificence as a road to the eternal seems to have resonated with particular force in New Spain, where Indian conversion was the principal task at hand. Theatrical renditions of God's majesty provided a bridge of communication across the language and cultural chasm between the neophytes and the proselytizers. Paraliturgies such as dances and theater often proved more effective pedagogical instruments than the catechism, or so many clerics believed. Faced with the daunting task of converting the Pueblo Indians in the early seventeenth century, for example, Franciscan Friar Alonso de Molina paraphrased Trent's theology almost word for word, noting that incense, candles, vestments, and music were essential to "uplift the souls of the Indians and move them toward the things of God because they are by nature lukewarm and forgetful of internal matters and must be helped by means of external displays."³¹ In a similar vein, when in 1793 a reformed bishop banned the parade of holy images during Silao's Holy Week, calling their adornment "indecent" and the parade itself an example of the Indians' desire for "uproar, puerile ostentation, and pernicious meetings," Indian confraternity leaders retorted with a theological defense worthy of Trent: without the stimulus of sight, the country folk's faith would wane; their understanding of doctrine came not from simple sermons or the catechism, but from their senses.³²

Uproar, ostentation, and pernicious meetings, however, seem to have been the order of the day, if the funerals of wealthy Mexicans can be taken as indicative. The populace of Mexico City played frequent audience to innumerable processions and interments that dazzled the senses to the greater glory of God—and the deceased.

Inquisition Judge José Fierro Torres's 1768 funeral provides an example of this unbridled ostentation. Torres's body lay on a polished bed made of West Indian redwood dripping with gold braid and illuminated by candles and torches in ornate silver holders.³³ In a similar case from 1818, another Inquisition judge ordered his heart excised from his body to join other holy relics in the Convent of Santa Teresa la Antigua, where he had served as

chaplain for thirty years. The Inquisition placed the remains of his body at the foot of the entrance stairs of their principal gallery, recumbent on silk pillows on an extravagant bier draped with damask and brilliantly illuminated. Nearby tables held a glittering display of silver chalices, gold and silver cloth, and figures of Christ.³⁴

Although the cathedral chapter's prestigious clerics favored sober black caskets in the late eighteenth century, they nevertheless demonstrated the sort of unrestrained ostentation in keeping with an epistemology that privileged the external as a road to the eternal. Placed on an elaborate bier draped with bright cloth, the casket was crowned with a black velvet lid enlivened with gold braid; inside, one cleric's final rest was eased with velvet cushions sprouting gold tassels and covered with a gilt-encrusted drape.³⁵ Bright-colored coffins and flashy funeral attire also characterized the funerals of less distinguished subjects well into the nineteenth century, thanks to the burial insurance offered through confraternity dues. In 1776, a tailors confraternity dedicated to the cult of San Homobono accompanied its dead members to the church after providing a casket, a bright red cloth to cover the body, pillows, silver candle holders, and numerous candles for the trip.³⁶ Typical of the burial accoutrements offered by most confraternities, the San Sebastián parish brotherhood of Our Lady of Sorrows provided members with an embroidered silk funeral pall, a casket, cushions, and candles with elaborate holders, as well as the group's processional banner for the transportation of the body from the deceased's home to the church.³⁷

This splendor reached its apogee, however, in the elaborate funeral beds commissioned by the mighty. Beginning in the early seventeenth century, historian Francisco de la Maza reports, these enormous catafalques shed their former Renaissance austerity and classical style to become sensual extravaganzas. In 1724, for example, King Felipe V's dead son symbolically occupied the central plaza with an enormous trilevel catafalque, its soaring Corinthian columns surmounted by the prince in an open carriage pulled by rearing horses. Paintings, richly adorned images of the saints, thousands of flickering candles, bright cloth, and elaborate baroque sonnets decorated most of these enormous structures, which were prominently displayed in churches.³⁸

The sensate splendor of elite funerals also served a social function. Historian José Antonio Maravall makes a strong case that the wildly opu-