Mission and Ecstasy

Contemplative Women and Salvation in Colonial Spanish America and the Philippines

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The idea to write this book was conceived about a decade ago when reading Stephen Haliczer’s *Between Exaltation and Infamy*, a book about early modern Spanish mystics. Haliczer analyses both women who were considered saintly and those whose experiences were deemed false by the Inquisition. Among many other things, he writes that little over a quarter of all women in his sample nourished dreams about becoming missionaries. Haliczer studies women from peninsular Spain, and I thought that missionary themes would be even more common in texts by and about contemplative women from the Spanish Indies, and that it would be worthwhile to dedicate a major investigation to them. Though concentrating on other research projects, in following years I made a couple of case studies to see if I was on the right track, and it seemed that way. The pilot studies helped me to formulate a concrete project.

This book could not have been written without a generous grant from Riksbankens jubileumsfond (The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation), which enabled me to dedicate much time to research between 2010 and early 2014. Another grant from the foundation made the printing of the book possible. The research work as such has been carried out at the Faculty of Theology at Uppsala University, where the Seminar in World Christianity and Interreligious Studies, led by Professor Kajsa Ahlstrand has been a particularly important intellectual milieu for me. On several occasions, parts of the project have been discussed in the Forum for Latin American Studies at Uppsala University and at Swedish Americanist workshops. At those occasions I have received valuable comments. I have also presented my project at international conferences in Warsaw and Lisbon. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Professor Asunción Lavrin, a leading authority in the field of colonial nuns, who read the entire
manuscript, made important suggestions and encouraged me. I also want to thank PhD candidate Zanne Lyttle for proof-reading the text.

To gather my primary sources, I have visited Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Spain. In the Chilean and Spanish national libraries I had the chance to peruse many important and sometimes unique imprints and I would like to acknowledge the people who have helped me. A particular word of acknowledgement is due to the kind people in the Harry Potteresque Sala Medina at the Chilean national library, who assisted me during an extended stay in 2011. I have also been able to use material from three institutions in the United States: John Carter Brown Library, Lilly Library and Bancroft Library, and I am grateful for their kind assistance. Furthermore, a warm word of thanks is due to the often anonymous people, who through their work have made colonial imprints available on-line, something which is of utmost value to the researcher living far away from the collections.

Finally, but also first in the row, I would like to express my immense gratitude to Towe and Naomi Wandelgren, whose lives I am fortunate enough to share. I dedicate this book to them.
Introduction

In 1716, Antonio de Siria published a book about Anna Guerra de Jesús, a devout woman born in present-day El Salvador, who for a long time had lived in Guatemala, and died three years before in an “odour of sanctity”. During her last decades in life she was very close to the author’s own religious order, the Society of Jesus, even wearing a Jesuit garb. Her own spirituality was inspired by their ministry and she was engaged in their evangelizing activities. According to the Siria’s work, the desire for the salvation of all humankind was a major driving force in her piety. In fact, he wrote that a fire of charity burnt within her when thinking about how many people throughout the world, had risked eternal perdition because they had not converted.

Siria claimed that God himself had taught Anna Guerra de Jesús how to pray efficiently and suffer vicariously for the non-Christians and sinners, and for the missions and missionaries. When in Guatemala, she was approached by indigenous people, whom she counselled and consoled. She constantly prayed for the souls in purgatory and allegedly made spiritual journeys there and to mission fields, overlooking the state of things. In short, she was thought to contribute to the salvation of others through “the most efficient means that were permitted to her state and sex”, as her hagiographer put it.¹

Despite the constrictions of space and agency that were related to their female gender, many women in the Spanish colonial empire, whether nuns or other contemplatives, were said to have similar functions in the missionary enterprise to Ana Guerra de Jesús. As a consequence of their love of God and neighbour, they felt a vocation for missionary work, they prayed and suffered for the salvation of others, they taught and counselled people who came to them with their religious and moral queries, and some claimed

¹ Siria 1716; citation on p. 178.
that they were transported in spirit to the mission frontiers where they carried out similar work as the male missionaries, albeit in a supernatural way.

This book is about religious women’s contribution to others’ salvation in mid- and late colonial Spanish America and the Philippines, a subject that has been little studied in previous research. In this investigation, special emphasis is put on aspects of the colonial gender relations that have bearing on the intricate relationships between the apostolic and contemplative forms of religious life as presented in colonial texts by and about these women. The majority of them were nuns, who lived a life in enclosure, a fact that in a most concrete way constrained the physical mobility normally seen as a presupposition for apostolic endeavours.

**Religious Institutions and Contemplative Women**

The Spanish colonization of the Americas and the Philippines included the transfer of various religious institutions. One of these was the convent. The first nunnery on the continent was founded in Mexico City in 1540. About ten years later the first Caribbean foundation, in Santo Domingo, saw the light of day and in the early 1560s the first convent was built in Lima, while Manila had to wait until the 1620s and Buenos Aires even to the mid-eighteenth-century. During the three centuries of Spanish colonialism over 160 convents were established throughout the Indies. Many of them belonged to Conceptionists, Poor Clares, Augustinians, Dominicans, Discalced Carmelites, and Capuchins, but there were individual Hieronymite, Bridgettine, Cistercian, Trinitarian, and Mercedarian convents, too. In the late colonial era the Company of Mary Our Lady, a teaching order of French origin opened up a few houses and in the 1810s the Ursulines established themselves in Cuba.

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2 In this study, I will often use the expression “Spanish Indies” when referring to the totality of the Spanish areas in America and the Philippines.
3 For global perspectives on the early modern convent, see Evangelisti 2007. For the Spanish development, see Sánchez Lora 1988.
4 The most complete inventory of colonial convents is found in Martínez Cuesta 1995: 622-626. By the year 1600 there were 48 convents in Hispanic America and by 1700 the number had increased to 105. See also Lavrin 1986a and Loreto López 2010.
Some institutions housed several hundred or even a thousand women, including not only nuns and novices, but young girls, maids and slaves, too. These conventos grandes were like cities within the city and could fill several centrally located blocks. Due to their population density, they have aptly been called “human beehives”. Particularly during the eighteenth century, church authorities accused the so-called calced—shod—nuns of living mundane and relaxed lives, and wanted to reform the big convents. More strict—discalced or recollect—convents, founded from the early seventeenth century onwards were much more modest in size, inhabited by just a few dozen religious, and a limited number of servants and other non-professed women. Basically an urban phenomenon, nunneries were generally confined to cities with a sizeable Hispanic population, and the foundation of a convent was a source of local pride, a sign of civic maturity, and indeed a reminder of the “spiritual conquest” of the erstwhile “pagan” lands.

Most convents were founded by local elites, both ecclesiastics and lay people, among them many women. Apart from being a sign of piety, the founding and funding of such institutions was a way to improve one’s social status and possibly contribute to one’s eternal well-being through the nuns’ intercessory prayers. Nunneries were obviously centres for religious cult and manly came to play a role in the education of girls, but they also became powerful economical actors, not least as loan givers and proprietors of landed estates, but on a smaller scale too, as purveyors of products such as candy and embroideries. Convents thus played important spiritual and cultural, as well as social and financial roles in the colonial society.

By the seventeenth century it was estimated that a quarter of the women in Lima lived within the walls of different kinds of religious houses. This number included more than a thousand nuns, but also large groups of slaves, maids and other females. At the same time there were some 3,000

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6 Martínez Cuesta 1995.
8 See, for example, Loreto López 2000a.
nuns in the cities of New Spain, almost all of them Hispanics.\textsuperscript{11} For women of other ethnic origins, profession was normally not an option, as convents demanded \textit{limpieza de sangre} (purity of blood) from their prospective members. To take the veil, the young women had to prove that they were descendants of “Old Christians”, without any Muslim, Jewish, indigenous or African ancestry. Other requirements for admission included legitimate birth. Apart from being a canonical irregularity, in the colonial context, being born outside of wedlock could be a sign of “mixed blood”. Nevertheless, illegitimacy could be dispensed of by the diocesan bishop, so it did not constitute an absolute obstacle.\textsuperscript{12}

The General Council of Trent (1545-1563) decreed that women should only take the vows by free will; they should not be forced into convent by relatives or others.\textsuperscript{13} Before profession, the entrant therefore had to certify that this was the case. However, from formulaic historical records it is difficult to ascertain how free the choices really were in all cases, and even harder to know anything about the individual woman’s vocation to consecrated life. While there certainly were cases in which the family pressured a young woman, there were others who entered convent against their parents’ explicit wishes. Still, there seems to be few legal processes, where nuns later claimed that they had been coerced and consequently wanted to be released from their vows. One might, however, suppose that there were many unrecorded cases too.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Trent, the minimum age for profession was sixteen and it should be preceded by a one-year novitiate, after which the nuns voted for or against the novice’s incorporation into the community.\textsuperscript{15} Although there were older entrants, most women professed in or before their twenties. Notwithstanding, with a special license from the ordinary, girls as young as twelve could be accepted as novices. Still, they could not profess until they

\textsuperscript{11} Ramos Medina 1997: xx.

\textsuperscript{12} Lavrin 2008a: 18-22. Swain 1993:146-156, however, notes that as many as 93.5 percent of the nuns who professed in the Dominican convent in Guadalajara during the colonial era were of legitimate birth.

\textsuperscript{13} Council of Trent, sess. 25, decree De regularibus et monialibus, chapter 18 (Decrees 1990, vol. 2: 781-782).


\textsuperscript{15} Council of Trent, sess. 25, decree De regularibus et monialibus, chapters 15 and 17 (Decrees 1990, vol. 2: 777-782).
turned sixteen.\textsuperscript{16} Good health and absence of physical impediments was another requirement for the professant, who as a sign of her new status as a Bride of Christ took a new name, most often a combination of saints’ names and concepts related to Christ or the Virgin, such as Incarnation or Conception.\textsuperscript{17} At profession she was often adorned with flowery headgear and other insignia, such as painted breast plaques and a ring. After all it was a wedding that was celebrated.\textsuperscript{18}

There were two types of nuns in the colonial convents: black-veiled and white-veiled. The former, also known as choir nuns, should be literate, and their main occupations were to chant the Divine Office in Latin, devote themselves to individual prayer and assist at conventual mass. To profess as a black-veiled nun, a substantial dowry was normally needed. That meant that most of them belonged to rather affluent families with high social status, though poorer women could sometimes enter with the help of benefactors, and if the woman was a good musician or singer whose skills were needed in the convent, she could get a dowry reduction. Moreover, many discalced convents did not require a dowry at all, but there the places were very limited, and entrants might have to wait for a vacancy, that is, the death of a nun.\textsuperscript{19}

The cloistral—white-veiled—nuns did not have to be literate, though often they could read, or at least learnt how to during the novitiate. They were mainly occupied with practical work, but devoted much time to prayer, too, and took part in the conventual mass on a daily basis. A lesser dowry of normally half the full amount or less was demanded of them, and their social background was therefore somewhat broader. They had, however, no part in the government of the institution and did not vote on convent matters such as the election of an abbess or prioress. Their number should be much smaller than the choir nuns.\textsuperscript{20} Taken together, most colonial nuns were of Hispanic

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{16} Through a quantitative study of the nuns in Santa María de la Gracia in Guadalajara, Swain 1993:185 computes that the average age for profession was 18.5 years during the sixteenth century, 20.9 during the seventeenth and 22 during the eighteenth century, cf. Montero Alarcón 2002: 131-142. For the Carmelite convent in Puebla Loreto López 2004: 53-54 concludes that the average age at confession there was 16 years in the seventeenth and 18 years in the eighteenth century.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{17} See Swain 1993:161-162, 216 and 233.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{18} See Montero Alarcón 2002 and Córdova 2014 for studies of profession paintings in colonial New Spain.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{19} Ibsen 1999: 6 and Lavrin 2008a: 24-25 and 116-117.}

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{20} Lavrin 2008a: 24-25, 35, 52 and 122, Swain 1993:169 and Burns 1999: 119.}
extraction and belonged to quite wealthy lineages. They were often members of lower nobility or merchant and landowning families, but few of them came from the higher nobility.\textsuperscript{21}

As regards the nuns’ ethnicity, in the last century of Spanish colonial presence, things began to change a little. From the 1720s onwards, three convents for upper-class indigenous women (\textit{cacicas} and \textit{principales}) were founded in New Spain, and just before independence, in 1811 a school for indigenous girls outside Mexico City was transformed into a convent under the auspices of the Company of Mary Our Lady. The latter institution admitted indigenous commoners too. In these convents the entrants had to prove pure indigenous descent, though in practice a few Hispanic women lived there too, often assuming leading positions. The politics of ethnic segregation between Indians and others, a leading principle in Spanish colonial law, was thus not completely realized.\textsuperscript{22}

Still, even in the sixteenth and seventeenth century individual indigenous and mestiza women were admitted as nuns in Novohispanic convents designed for Hispanic women.\textsuperscript{23} In Peru, especially in Cuzco, a somewhat larger group of indigenous and mestiza nuns were admitted in the sixteenth century. With few exceptions they were white-veiled.\textsuperscript{24} A Clarisse convent for indigenous women was founded in Quito already by the 1590s, but due to the alleged lack of indigenous vocations, Hispanics would dominate there also.\textsuperscript{25} At the time of the establishment of Santa Clara in Manila in the 1620s, the founding mothers wanted to allow the ingress of native Filipinas, or create a separate institution for them, but due to the opposition from church authorities just a handful of indigenous women were admitted as nuns before the end of Spanish colonialism.\textsuperscript{26}

Apart from these formal convents, there were many Hispanic American and Philippine \textit{beaterios} (lay religious communities) that were generally smaller and poorer institutions. They also housed women from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibsen 1999: 6.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Olaechea Labayen 1970 and Ramírez Montes 2005:52-61.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Burns 1999: 25, 89-90 and 124.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Martínez Cuesta 1995: 586-587.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Martínez Cuesta 1993:513, Brewer 2004:119 and Cruz 2009: 223-227 and 234-236.
\end{itemize}
more humble circumstances and to a certain extent from other ethnic backgrounds. In Peru, there were institutions specially designed for indigenous women and in the Philippines there existed a beaterio housing exiled Japanese women and others for native Filipinas. The beatas (lay women religious), who lived there, did not take permanent vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure, but still wore a habit and led a life according to such norms, often taking simple—temporal—vows, which was still regarded as a serious matter. Others took the vows in articulo mortis: on their deathbed.27

The term beata was, however, not only used to denote women living in community (collegiater), but employed more broadly for very pious single women, widows and less commonly married females who basically were retired to their own homes (seorsum). They were often tertiaries, members of a third order.28 In many convents and beaterios, there were donadas (religious servants), usually women of indigenous or African ancestry, mainly occupying themselves with menial tasks. Some of them were posthumously famed for their ardent piety, and a few were allowed to profess on their deathbed.29

Still another type of female religious institution was the recogimiento. The concept was very complex and had several meanings, including a spiritual praxis (inner recollection), a central female virtue (reclusion) and a type of institution (house of spiritual retreat), similar to, or in practice almost identical with, a beaterio. Its inhabitants were generically known as recogidas but could sometimes be referred to as beatas. The group included women who had chosen to “leave the world” in search of spiritual perfection—a life of inner recollection. The institutions also housed orphans, school girls, unmarried women, former prostitutes, women who had fled from abusive relationships seeking asylum or divorce, and even some who were confined there while their husbands were away from town. Their retirement was not least looked upon as a means to guard, or restore honour. Women could thus enter the recogimiento more or less voluntarily and stay

27 See, for example, Van Deusen 2001: 135-148, Rubial García 2006: 30-38 and Burns 2007: 81-83. For the Philippines see Cruz 2009. For a thorough canonical analysis of the concepts beaterio and beatas through the centuries, see Sastre Santos 1997.
28 Rubial García 2006: 30-38. For the terminology, see Sastre Santos 1997.
for longer or shorter periods of time. Yet, the disciplinary and spiritual aspects were often intertwined within the same institute.\textsuperscript{30}

Based on a thorough study of religious institutions in colonial Lima, Nancy E. Van Deusen concludes that “most recogimientos served simultaneously to punish and discipline, and to protect or provide an atmosphere propitious to spiritual development“.\textsuperscript{31} Jacqueline Holler reaches a similar conclusion about the recogimientos in sixteenth-century Mexico City: they “were seen as quasi-convents”, but the distinction between punitive and spiritual dimensions was not all that clear.\textsuperscript{32} As for the recogimientos in colonial Philippines, Reginald D. Cruz states that these institutions housed poor and orphaned girls, who prepared for marriage, but also rectoras and maestras, women who “practised the spiritual method of recogimiento”.\textsuperscript{33}

During the colonial era, there existed a number of different religious institutions housing women: convents, beaterios and recogimientos. Apart from that, beatas could live in private homes. Consequently, several specialized religious roles were available to women, though prayer and reclusion had a central place in all cases.\textsuperscript{34} When not discussing a particular category of women, such as nuns or beatas, in this study I will generically refer to them as religious women or contemplative women.

**The Aim and Scope**

It is the missionary roles of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Hispanic American and Filipina religious women that are of interest to me. This theme needs some clarification. The early modern Roman Catholic Church was focused on defending and strengthening its position in Europe, which was threatened by the Protestant reform movements. After the Council of Trent these consolidating efforts took the form of the teaching of doctrine, the enforcement of the moral code of the church, and the combat against heterodox beliefs. But the church also engaged in extending its boundaries

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\textsuperscript{30} Van Deusen 2001.

\textsuperscript{31} Van Deusen 2001:9; the italics are mine.

\textsuperscript{32} Holler 2005: 128-149; citation on p. 149. Cf. Muriel 1974, which, however, clearly stresses the distinction made between different kinds of institutions, some focusing on punishment and shelter, and others on contemplative activities.

\textsuperscript{33} Cruz 2009: 111-113; citation on p. 111.

\textsuperscript{34} The expression “specialized religious roles” is used by Bynum 1987.
through mission to non-Catholic peoples, though terms such as propagation and indoctrination were more commonly used at the time.

In early modern Catholic discourse the Roman Church, headed by the pope, was regarded as the only true church, founded by Christ, with the pontiff as his vicar on earth. The classic dictum *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*—outside the church there is no salvation—was central to this position, and the motto was understood in a very concrete way. It was the salvific grace, mediated through the church’s sacraments that opened up the possibility for salvation. The Roman Catholic evangelization was primarily made possible through the Portuguese, Spanish and French colonial expansion in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. From a canonical point of view, the duty and privilege to missionize was ultimately entrusted to the pope, as the Vicar of Christ. He could—directly or through a Catholic monarch—delegate missionary authority to bishops and priests. In short, mission was primarily regarded as a task for male specialists.35

The gender roles of colonial Hispanic male missionaries are an understudied subject, but recently Asunción Lavrin has done some pioneering work on Novohispanic models of missionary masculinity. She observes that the “task of evangelization was political as well as religious and regarded as a masculine endeavor requiring valor, boldness, and stamina, all qualifications that did not usually apply to women but were commonly assumed to belong to all men.”36 Still, it was only celibate ecclesiastics who were allowed to preach and administer the sacraments. In chronicles of the male religious orders in colonial Mexico, military metaphors were commonly used to describe their evangelizing efforts; the missionaries were involved in spiritual warfare that might affect their health and even cost them their lives. The power to withstand the harsh conditions on the mission field was thus thought to require both bodily and spiritual strength, and the necessary translation work demanded intellectual qualities that women were generally not assumed to possess.37

37 Lavrin 2008b: 3-18. For a comparative study of artistic depictions of colonial nuns and male clergy, see Donahue-Wallace 2005.
In works about Spanish American and Filipina religious women, it is often stated that they did not have, and were not allowed to assume, a missionary role. If we understand mission as the preaching and teaching on a mission frontier, this assertion is generally correct, though lay women in such settings could sometimes teach indigenous girls and women. In this study, however, I understand mission much more inclusively as acts made by a person perceived to be in favour of the salvation of others. Using such a definition, religious women could and did, have a missionary role: they were contemplative missionaries or active in a contemplative apostolate. As regards the Spanish Indies, this is a little explored area. Nevertheless, the potential source material is abundant. There are autobiographies and other spiritual texts that women wrote at the request of their confessors, as well as biographical texts which ecclesiastics or other nuns wrote about them. In these works, missionary themes commonly appear. Most of the women covered in my source material were nuns, but there are works by and about other types of religious women, most of them tertiaries.

The main goal of this study is to discern and analyse missionary themes that can be traced in writings by and about seventeenth and eighteenth century religious women. I substantiate my conclusions with cases studies using examples from most parts of the Spanish Indies, including both America and the Philippines. Nevertheless, due to the unequal distribution of relevant source material, most examples emanate from either Mexico or Peru, the two main colonial centres. To delimit my source material, I will just include confessional writings by women (spiritual autobiographies, letters and journals) and biographical texts written by church men or other nuns. I will not take into account devotional treatises, poetry or theatrical pieces written by nuns, nor will I include Inquisition documentation about women.

In my colonial source material, there appears a female religious ideal based on silence, humility, obedience and reclusion. At the same time, there were often far-reaching claims of spiritual knowledge and charismatic authority, including frequent communications and interactions with God and other celestial beings, as well as assertions about the efficiency of prayer and penance for the salvation of others, and stories about spiritual flights to the mission fields where women, in spirit took an active part in the evangelization. My study seeks to further problematize the dichotomous relationship between apostolic and contemplative religious life, while taking
into account the analytical categories of gender, agency and space. The subject therefore has bearing on the study of the religious roles of females in church and mission history not only in the Spanish Indies, but more generally too.

A Research Field

Until quite recently, there were few scholarly works about Spanish American and Filipina female religious institutions, nuns and other contemplative women. Some works on individual convents and holy women were indeed published during the first half of the twentieth century and earlier. Not surprisingly, these were pious texts written primarily by ecclesiastics, and they had more or less the same hagiographical tone as the authors’ colonial sources. Still, they often included valuable transcriptions of documents zealously guarded in convent archives. 38 Notwithstanding, on the whole interest for religious women was low.

In 1946, Mexican historian Josefina Muriel published her Conventos de monjas en la Nueva España, a work that in a sense opened up a research field. The book, based on records in convent archives mainly focuses on colonial Mexico City. Other pioneers, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, were Asunción Lavrin and Ann Miriam Gallagher, who both studied eighteenth-century Mexico, focusing on social and economic aspects of the convent. Both Muriel and Lavrin have published numerous later works on nuns and convents. 39 Another early contribution was Michael Thomas Destefano’s thesis on miracles in colonial Puebla, which includes a pioneering study of hagiographical texts about religious women from Mexico’s second city. Finally, in the early 1980s, Pilár Foz y Foz published a substantial work on the teaching activities of the Company of Mary Our Lady in late-colonial Mexico. 40 As can be seen, all five researchers used Novohispanic material,

38 Among many other examples, see Perpétuo Socorro & Martínez Delgado 1950? on the Discalced Carmelite convents in Colombia. The traditional general histories of the Roman Catholic Church in individual Latin American countries, published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often include some notes on convents, but it is normally no salient theme.
and until the 1990s there were few attempts to write similar works on other parts of the Spanish Indies, though notes do appear in more general works.\textsuperscript{41}

During the last two decades, the number of investigations on Spanish American convent life and nuns has grown exponentially, though the expansion rate seems to have slowed down a little in the last couple of years.\textsuperscript{42} Most of the authors are either historians or literary analysts from Latin America, the United States or Spain. Very few are religious studies scholars, theologians or church historians \textit{stricto sensu}.\textsuperscript{43} In the following paragraphs, I will make a brief overview of recent scholarship in order to situate my own research. The overview is initially divided into two, somewhat overlapping, parts: studies on religious orders, convents and other female religious institutions; and investigations on contemplative women’s writings and church men’s texts about them. Thereafter follows a brief note about earlier research on contemplative women and mission.

As regards convents and other female religious institutions, New Spain is still the area that attracts most researchers.\textsuperscript{44} Few concentrate on the sixteenth century, which is not that well served with sources, and though some works focus on the seventeenth century, most authors analyse the late colonial era. Although fine syntheses exist, most books and articles investigate convents within an order, in a city, or provide information on individual religious institutions. The majority concentrate on the colonial centres of Mexico City and Puebla, though there are several works on other cities.\textsuperscript{45} While New Spain is the best known province in the Spanish Indies a

\textsuperscript{41} Martín 1983 is a general study on women in the Viceroyalty of Peru and Gibbs 1979 analyses many records about nuns and nunneries in his PhD dissertation on colonial Cuzco. For convents and nuns in colonial Chile, see Cano Roldán 1980. Also worth mentioning in this context is the wide-ranging study by Boxer 1975.

\textsuperscript{42} For a succinct overview of recent research on convents and nuns in colonial Spanish America, see Fraschina 2008.

\textsuperscript{43} It is, for example, noteworthy that a recent very comprehensive work on the history of Latin American theology hardly contains any notes about nuns and other contemplative women; see Saranyana 1999-2008, vols. I and II/1. Nor does the Spanish standard two-volume work on Hispanic American and Philippine church history include much data on women religious and regrettably it contains many errors (Borges 1992).

\textsuperscript{44} For an overview of recent research on the Novohispanic convent, see Chowning 2008.

\textsuperscript{45} Apart from numerous articles, there are several books and PhD dissertations that should be mentioned here. For the whole of New Spain, see Amerlick de Corsi & Ramos Medina 1995, Loreto López 2004 and in particular Lavrin 2008a. For
number of studies are devoted to convents in South America, mostly individual institutions in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile and Argentina.\textsuperscript{46}

Very few scholars have investigated Central American convents, most of which were concentrated to Santiago de Guatemala, one reason being the relative lack of relevant sources known to exist in part due to the earthquake that destroyed the city in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{47} The colonial Caribbean nunneries are little investigated, too, and it is unknown how much local material remains.\textsuperscript{48} The Philippines, which only had one convent during the colonial era, but several \textit{beaterios} and \textit{casas de recogimiento}, have attracted researchers though the documents found in local archives are few, due both to colonial earthquakes and to the bombings of Manila during World War II which destroyed the Santa Clara nunnery.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, on the whole, there is


\textsuperscript{47} See, however, Ciudad Suárez 1994, for an overview of the colonial convents in Guatemala and Ciudad Suárez 1990 for the Conceptionists in the same area.

\textsuperscript{48} See, however, the brief discussion on colonial convents in Santo Domingo, Cuba and Puerto Rico in Meier 1991:197-204 and Clune 2008 on eighteenth-century Cuban convents.

\textsuperscript{49} See Martínez Cuesta 1993, García de los Arcos 1995, Manchado López 1999a, Manchado López 1999b, Santiago 2005 and in particular Cruz 2009. In this context, I would like to thank Dr. Cruz for kindly providing me with a copy of his PhD dissertation.
just a handful of comparative works that take into account different parts of the Spanish Indies.\textsuperscript{50} Still, several anthologies and conference volumes gather articles about convents in distinct regions of the Hispanic overseas empire.\textsuperscript{51}

Parallel to the research on the Spanish American convent and convent life, there is a great scholarly interest in writings by and about religious women. Before the 1980s, the interest in such texts was minimal. There were at least two reasons for the limited attention: the authors were females and the works had a religious content and were therefore not considered (good) literature or relevant as historical sources.\textsuperscript{52} The exception to the rule was the “Mexican tenth muse” Juana Inés de la Cruz, the seventeenth-century Hieronymite nun, whose literary oeuvre has long been considered part of the Latin American literary canon and subject of a wide range of studies.\textsuperscript{53}

A widened and deepened interest in the writings of Spanish American religious women began to develop in the 1980s, but grew stronger from the mid-1990s onwards. As in the case with women’s history in other parts of the world, the scholars’ first step was to locate forgotten or little known texts in libraries and archives, thus trying to expand the canon. Another step was to study, edit or translate such works and put them in their literary, intellectual and historical contexts, analysing the material from a variety of methodological, theoretical and interpretative angles. In this field, too, Josefina Muriel was a pioneer. Particularly important was her \textit{Cultura feminina novohispana}, originally published in 1982. It is a broad study of different literary genres written by Mexican religious women, including samples of their texts. \textit{Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in their Own Works} by Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau was published in 1989 and contains

\textsuperscript{50} See, however, the succinct and excellent overview of the history of convents and nuns in colonial Spanish and Portuguese America by Martínez Cuesta 1995. Although focused on portraits of nuns, Montero Alarcón 2002 includes a very valuable general study of convent life in many places in Spanish America.


\textsuperscript{52} See the discussion in Myers 1997: 480-481.

\textsuperscript{53} See Pérez-Amador Adam 2007 for a bibliography of the twentieth-century research on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, which includes more than 2,500 items.
selections of early modern Spanish and Spanish American women’s writings preceded by brief studies. Both works were invitations to further research.\textsuperscript{54}

In the 1990s and 2000s, a number of individual Mexican nuns’ and beatas’ texts have become the subject for articles and monographs, and samples of their authorship have been transcribed and/or translated into English.\textsuperscript{55} Similar writings from Central America, the Caribbean and the Philippines have hardly been researched, and there seems to be few of them.\textsuperscript{56} As for the South American area, however, there exist a number of comprehensive studies on writings by and about individual religious women from Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile.\textsuperscript{57} In this field, too, there are some

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} The very voluminous spiritual works by María de San José is the subject of several works by Kathleen Ann Myers, see in particular Myers 1993 and Myers & Powell 1999; together with the spiritual journals of María Magdalena Lorravaquio Múñoz her writings are also studied by Cloud 2006. On Madre María Magdalena, see also Lavrin 2005 and in particular Báez Rivera 2014, cf. Routt 1998 for several Mexican case studies. For María Anna Agueda de San Ignacio, see Eich 2004; for Francisca de los Ángeles, see Gunnarsdóttir 2004; for María de Jesús Felipa, see Lavrin 2000 and Oliver 2010; for Isabel Rosa de Jesús, see Loreto López 2012, and for María Ignacia del Niño Jesús, see Lavrin 2012 and Lavrin 2013. See also Sampson Vera Tudela 2000, Lavrin & Loreto López 2002, Lavrin & Loreto 2006 and Lavrin 2008a. Díaz 2010 includes a study of texts by and about indigenous nuns and Ross 1993 analyses Carlos Sigüenza y Gongóra’s seventeenth-century chronicles on the Jesús María convent in Mexico City that to a large extent built on nuns’ writings.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Exceptions are brief studies on Leonor de Ovando in Santo Domingo and Juana de Maldonado y Paz from Guatemala, who both wrote poetry, see Rossi de Fiori et al. 2008: 73-105 and 139-159.
\item \textsuperscript{57} For Colombia in general see Robledo 1991, cf. Robledo 1994 on Jerónima Nava y Saavedra and McKnight 1997, Robledo 2007 and Steffanell 2012 on Francisca Josefa de Castillo. For a study of them and the Carmelite María de Jesús, see Herrera 2013. For Peru, see Armacanqui-Tipacti 1999 on María Manuela de Santa Ana; Itúrburu Rivadeneira 2000 on Antonia Lucía de Maldonado and the Nazarenas of Lima; and Van Deusen 2004 on Úrsula de Jesús. For present-day Ecuador, see Morgan 1998 on Mariana de Jesús; Stolley 2000 and Astudillo Figueroa 2010 on Catalina de Jesús María Herrera; and Rossi de Fiori et al. 2008: 175-205 on Gertrudis de San Ildefonso. As for Chile, Úrsula Suárez and her autobiography has become the object of several studies (Ramón 1984, Lagos 1995 and Quispe Agnoli 2001) and scholars have devoted themselves to the voluminous epistolary of Dolores Peña y Lillo (Invernizzi Santa Cruz 2003, Araya Espinosa 2003 and Kordić Riquelme 2008). For the Argentinean beata, María Antonia de San José, see Fraschina 2006.
\end{itemize}
comparative studies including women from several parts of the double continent.\textsuperscript{58}

The colonial concepts of sainthood and religious deviation have become the subject of a rising number of scholarly works, some of them devoted particularly to nuns and \textit{beatas}. Many point to the relatively fluid lines between sanctity and heterodoxy and discuss the factors that contributed to whether a woman ended up on one side of the border or the other. These types of investigations are normally built upon women’s own texts, hagiographies, canonization records and Inquisition processes.\textsuperscript{59}

Not many investigators explicitly analyse contemplative women’s missionary role in the Spanish Indies. If the issue is addressed at all, it is often implied that nuns and other contemplative women had no active role in the colonial missionary enterprise.\textsuperscript{60} However, as we have seen, that statement has much to do with a more exclusive definition of mission than mine. Nevertheless, some studies do succinctly refer to the spiritual missions of contemplative women either through prayer and suffering or through spiritual flights.\textsuperscript{61}

In short, despite the abundance and quality of the scholarly production on convents and religious women in the Spanish Indies, there is no comprehensive work centred specifically on the missionary role of


\textsuperscript{61} See, for example, Ibsen 1999: 110-111, Sampson Vera Tudela 2000: 1-13, Jaffary 2004: 109-110, Lavrin 2008a: 181-182, and Lavrin 2008b: 198-199. There are also some studies on two flying Mexican \textit{beatas}. The bibliography on Catarina de San Juan is vast. Of the works that focus on her spiritual journeys Strasser 2007 and Strasser & Molina 2009 could be mentioned. On the case of Francisca de los Ángeles, see Owens 2003 and Gunnarsdóttir 2004.
contemplative women in the Spanish overseas empire, which is the aim of the present investigation.

**Sources**

This study is primarily based on texts by and about contemplative women in Spanish America and the Philippines, authored during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The lion’s share of my primary sources are texts about female religious written by male ecclesiastics, which were printed during the colonial era, and above all funeral sermons and hagiographical *vidas*. I have, however, also made use of modern editions of works written by women, including autobiographical *vidas*, spiritual diaries and letters. The reason for only using printed material is mainly practical; I have wanted to peruse as large a textual corpus as possible, covering most parts of the Spanish Indies. Each of these main groups includes a number of often overlapping genres, which will be discussed in detail in chapter two of the present work.

The vast majority of Spanish American colonial books were published in Mexico City, where the printing press was introduced in the late 1530s, and where a growing number of texts about pious women were printed from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, books also appeared in New Spain’s second city, Puebla, and in the 1720s a very limited number of imprints were published in Oaxaca, while other Mexican cities had to wait until the very end of the colonial period or even into the national era before the inauguration of the printing press, and then the golden age of sacred biography was over.

In the mid-seventeenth century the art of printing made its entrance into Guatemala, but only a couple of works about religious women were printed there. Until the national era, no other place in Middle America had any printing office. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, printers in Lima issued a long series of works about contemplative women from the city, and also from Cuzco, Arequipa and Quito. Apart from Lima, the rest of South America lacked printing presses until the late colonial era, when other cities such as Quito, Santa Fe de Bogotá, Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile opened up such facilities. However, a few *vidas* about Colombian nuns were published in Spain, and though there were several printers in colonial
Manila, the only known major hagiographies about Philippine religious women were made public either in Mexico or Spain.⁶²

To encounter relevant sources for my work, I first perused the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century bibliographies by José Toribio Medina that include all colonial imprints known to him.⁶³ Medina’s works were then supplied with data from other bibliographies and library catalogues, including works that were printed on both sides of the Atlantic.⁶⁴ Thereafter, I tried to locate these texts in Latin American, European and North American libraries. Most of these sometimes exceedingly rare publications are found in the national libraries of Spain and Chile. The latter institution should be mentioned specifically as it houses Medina’s vast collection of colonial imprints, several of which do not exist in any other research library. As a complement, I have consulted works from some repositories in the United States, above all the John Carter Brown Library, which possesses an important collection of Peruvian colonial books, many of which have been digitized.⁶⁵ I have also been able to find some very rare books in the Bancroft and Lilly Libraries. A few Spanish and Mexican repositories have also been recently digitized, including many books relevant to my investigation.⁶⁶

While my corpus of texts is quite abundant and includes forty printed monograph *vidas* and twenty-five funeral sermons plus a large number of other colonial works, I certainly have no pretensions about presenting a “complete” source material, though I have strived towards employing many different kinds of sources from distinct parts of the Spanish empire. I have also used texts written by twenty colonial contemplative women, most of them edited in modern times.

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⁶⁵ The digitized works from John Carter Brown Library are downloadable from Internet Archive (www.archive.org).
⁶⁶ Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Acervo Antiguo Biblioteca Franciscana of the Universidad de las Américas of Puebla, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México CARSO, Colección Digital UANL of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, and Google Books.
Source criticism is of great importance for all historical studies. In fact, I would argue, that it is the *sine qua non* of such scholarly endeavours. In this case, it includes the identification of different types of texts, their authors, the time of composition, the relations between church men and contemplative women in the writing process, and, when applicable, the relationship between different texts about the same person. The goal of my study of the sources is not to establish facts about historical events, but to analyse different narrations about women’s spiritual life, written within the borders of the defined hagiographical genres. It is not my purpose to explain the causes of the described supernatural experiences from, say, a psycho-historical perspective, or discuss whether the textual descriptions were coherent with the possible religious experiences that women claimed to have had. This we simply do not know, and it is not interesting for a study like mine. What we have access to are texts about such experiences included in life stories by and about colonial contemplative women, based on ideals and models of hagiography, and my main interest in this study are themes related to their perceived role for the salvation of others.

**Gender, Agency and Space**

Three intertwined analytical concepts will inform my study of the works by and about Hispanic American and Filipina religious women: gender, agency and space. Though used earlier, in historical studies the term gender became much more employed after the publication of Joan W. Scott’s article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in 1986. According to Scott, when studying the past, the historian must refrain from accepting a static binary opposition of femininity and masculinity, but instead strive to historicize and deconstruct the concepts of sexual difference. Consequently, gender is understood as a social and cultural construct, and as such, subject to historical change. The article received a canonical status and in response to that development, more than two decades later, the author asserts that her first contribution "is about asking historical questions; it is not a programmatic or methodological treatise. It is above all an invitation to think critically about how the meanings of sexed bodies are produced, deployed,

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67 See the discussion on authorship in Myers 2000:156-157
and changed”. In my study, I will try to follow her advice, and be inspired by it rather than applying its directions by the letter of the law.

Scott’s understanding of the concept of gender has thus become very influential. It has two interconnected parts. Her first main proposition is that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes”. Gender thus permeates all social interactions and is not only relevant for, or limited to, kinship relations and the like, but has bearing on a much wider historical scene, including religious institutions. From this perspective Scott asserts that gender, female and male, is comprised by several interconnected elements that could be addressed by the historian. One has to do with symbols. In this context, she refers to Eve and Virgin Mary in Christian traditions, but to other kinds of myths as well. Another element is “normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities”.

These norms may include legal and religious doctrines that define the meaning of male and female, while at the same time suppressing alternative views, so that the outcome appears to be consensual. However, Scott also points out that “real men and women do not always or literally fulfill the terms of their society’s prescriptions”. Therefore, historians have to relate to a wide array of historical sources in order to complicate matters. Scott’s second main proposition is that “[g]ender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. According to this view, the socially constructed perceived differences between the sexes build up, and are used to legitimate power relations, including religious hierarchies.

In my own study it is crucial to investigate some aspects of the gender system in the Spanish Indies that have bearing on the roles that defined contemplative women. Most of the primary sources I use are prescriptive and exemplary in nature and present images of what constituted and should constitute the virtuous, pious or even saintly women, underlining subordination, obedience, silence, reclusion, chastity and humility. However, it should be emphasized that most, but not all, of the women in my sample belonged to higher and “whiter” societal strata; and class and ethnicity

68 Scott 2008: 1423.
69 Scott 1986: 1067.
70 Scott 1986: 1067.
72 Scott 1986: 1069.
interacts with gender. Another central issue is to examine how some religious women, at least posthumously, were regarded to have transcended the dichotomous division between the sexes.

The concept of agency is closely connected to that of gender. The notion of agency, much discussed in recent gender and post-colonial theory, has to do with the possibilities for an individual or a group to act in a given context, characterized by structures of over- and subordination. Like gender, agency has a clear connection to power relations. Even if women were assigned a clearly subordinated place in the early modern gender system, they might be able to act in spite of these constrictions. Even so, women could sometimes defy the governing discourses.

An important aspect related to early modern female agency is the distinction made in the early modern era between the ideals of the active man and the passive woman. Although different contexts presented different understandings, according to Judith Kegan Gardiner, in trying to counteract anomalies dominant ideologies assigned “agency and passivity with differential moral valuation according to gender: male activity was good and passivity bad; female passivity was good and activity bad, and deviations from this model were ‘perverse’”. A passive man could, for example be called womanish or effeminate, while an active female could be dubbed immoral or aggressive, or be made into a virtuous virile woman, according to the circumstances. The important thing to consider in my study is to what degree and how the Hispanic American and Filipina contemplative women had or were given agency within the constrictions of the colonial-ecclesiastical gender system.

Gender and agency are closely connected to space. In a book on gender and space in early modern England, Amanda Flather writes that “[a] space is more than, and different from, a physical location or place. A space is an arena of social action”. According to this view, space is a social construction, which has to do with gender, agency and power relations. The division between the public and private arenas—the separate spheres—has been much investigated, in particular as regards eighteenth and nineteenth-century bourgeois Europe. These researchers have sometimes argued that the division of the public and the private became stricter with the advent of the

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73 For a post-colonial discussion on agency, see Loomba 2005.
74 Gardiner 1995:3.
modern era and was less so in early modern times. In this line of research, a distinction is generally made between the domestic (female) and the public (male). Much recent research, however, has shown that though this division was clear on the prescriptive level, it was not necessarily so in concrete circumstances, though there was a connection between discourse and practice. That goes for both the modern and the early modern era.\textsuperscript{76}

The spatial dichotomy has been more or less strict in different time periods and cultural and social groups. At times and in some contexts, a high degree of female seclusion was an ideal, not least among higher societal strata. In early modern prescriptive literature, female mobility was often regarded as undesirable and indeed morally questionable as it was connected to licentiousness and an aberrant and disorderly life. In accordance with this view, spatially there were some places in which the woman should be in order to keep her—and her family’s—honour, while other locations put it at risk.\textsuperscript{77} In early modern Catholicism, the safest and most honourable places for women, at least for among those on the higher societal echelons, were the home and the religious institutions, places where to a higher or lesser degree, they lived in retirement. In my study, the discussion of space can be related to the physical limitations for the contemplative women who lived their life within the spatial constraints of a convent or beaterio, or who had basically withdrawn to their own home, though a few of the women in my corpus were somewhat more mobile.

Gender, agency and space are thus understood as socially and culturally constructed concepts related to power. All three are intertwined and each one influences the others and is influenced by them. For the contemplative women in my investigation, the gendered role, the agency and the space were curtailed, but in special circumstances, whether physically or spiritually, an individual could transcend the limitations.

**Contemplative and Apostolic**

Apart from the three analytical concepts of gender, agency and space, I will analyse the material on the basis of the two general Catholic varieties of religious life: contemplative and apostolic, concepts that unlike the others are used in early modern sources. The word “apostolic” is derived from the

\textsuperscript{76} Flather 2007: 5-8.
\textsuperscript{77} Flather 2007: 22-24.
Greek *apostellein* which means “to send forth” or “to dispatch”. *Vita apostolica* can be understood as a life for those who are entrusted with a mission to teach and preach. In early modern Catholicism, females were generally barred from this active, apostolic function. To justify their views on these matters, male ecclesiastics often referred to New Testament texts such as 1 Cor. 14:34-37, 1 Tim. 2:11-14 and 2 Tim. 3:6-7, which underlined the subjugation of women to male authority and their silencing. In accordance with such texts, theologians asserted that women could not have spiritual authority to administer the sacraments, produce theology, and preach or teach in a public setting.

Apart from that, in early modern Catholic discourse, women were considered both intellectually and corporeally unfit for apostolic endeavours. Consequently, they were not thought to have any true calling for apostolic life as it was against their “nature”. In brief, religious women should not assume the special role that was conceded to male clerics. Active apostolic life was thus above all a male, clerical way, whereas contemplative life in the cloister was the state preferred for religious women.

During its last session in 1563, the Council of Trent established enclosure for all nuns in no uncertain terms. This was, however, not a new idea. The conciliar text made reference to Pope Boniface VII’s *Periculoso* (1298), according to which all nuns, of whatever rule, should live a life of radical separation from the outside world. Enclosure should only be broken under extraordinary circumstances. The decrees regulated both the active and passive aspects of enclosure: nuns’ egress from the cloister and outsiders’ possibility to enter it, even for a short while. According to both Trent and the *Periculoso*, it was the bishops who should see to it that the decrees were obeyed, and to establish enclosure where it was not observed. If necessary, they had recourse to state authorities to force observance on communities. The tone of the conciliar text was harsh, and Marguerite Vacher observes that “[n]owhere does the decree use equally strong

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80 Lux-Sterrit 2005: 45-51.
81 General Council of Trent, sess. 25, decree De regularibus et monialibus, chapter 5. (Decrees 1990, vol. 2: 778). For a study of the *Periculoso*, see Makowski 1997, who also edits and translates this central document.
language in regard to monasteries of men; strict enclosure for them was exceptional in the western world.”

A couple of years after the termination of the Council, in 1566, Pope Pius V took a step further by decreeing that enclosure was a requirement not only for nuns, but for female tertiaries, who entered community life. This requisite was reiterated in several subsequent papal letters. Enclosure thus became a necessity for legitimate beatas. In 1572, however, Pope Gregory XIII gave special permission for Spanish beatas who had taken simple vows, allowing them to live without strict enclosure.

In his general history of early modern Catholicism, R. Po-Chia Hsia claims that “[t]he spirit of missions that fired so many men in Catholic Europe burned with equal flame in many women”. However, as females were generally not allowed to take active part in the foreign missions (or local missions for that matter), contemplative women mainly had to assume a role as spiritual co-operators and supporters of the male clergy. Still, their spiritual activities were regarded as powerful, and few early modern Catholics questioned the efficiency of prayers, especially not those of the Brides of Christ.

The sixteenth-century Carmelite reformer Teresa of Avila, who was a source of inspiration for many Hispanic American religious women, made some important directions on the apostolate of contemplatives. She thought that the world was in a state of emergency prompted by the Protestant reformation, and that enemies, whether heretics or pagans, seriously threatened the Roman Catholic Church. In this situation, she argued, contemplative women should also act for the salvation of humanity. Discussing this matter, Alison Weber concludes that these new circumstances drove Teresa of Avila to “transform women’s traditional apostolate to the dead (a life dedicated to prayer for souls in purgatory) to an apostolate for an endangered church.” In her *Sisters in Arms*, Jo Ann Kay McNamara also examines Teresa of Avila’s understanding of the

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82 Vacher 2010: xviii.
85 Hsia 1998: 144.
contemplative apostolate, asserting that she “sought to transform the cloister into a mission field, using the image of the mystical body of Christ. As organs of the same body, she deployed her Carmelite sisters to support the more mundane labors of men for the salvation of endangered souls in France and Flanders, the Indies and the Orient with their prayers and sacrifices.”

Though the Council of Trent limited female religious life to a contemplative and enclosed form, its decrees were not implemented everywhere. In some contexts, more active forms of female religious life continued and even thrived after the Council. In Catholic Europe, there appeared different groups that can be seen as exponents of what Anne Conrad calls an “ursulinisch-jesuitische Frauenbewegung”. The Jesuits specialized in education and mission, had no female branch, but there were groups of women who were deeply influenced by their methods, goals and way of life. Central among them were the Ursulines, active in teaching in several countries, and Mary Ward’s English Ladies, who worked with the formation of girls in the Spanish Netherlands, Germany and Italy, and among recusants in Protestant England. The latter institute clearly emulated the Jesuits’ mission, and was criticized and ridiculed for that. Eventually, in 1631 the English Ladies were branded a sect by the Pope.

In France, the assembly of the clergy did not ratify the Tridentine decrees until 1615. Therefore, there existed groups of women religious, many of them Ursulines, who dedicated themselves to teaching without taking solemn vows, including enclosure, a fact that was considered something of a legal limbo from a canonical point of view. These women saw themselves as participants in the reforming mission, helping the cause of the church by catechizing and teaching in public and semi-public settings. In an article about teaching and preaching among French Ursulines, Linda Lierhamer states that while they did not openly assert that they were preaching, a male clerical prerogative, “in practice their activities amounted to the same thing”. This situation, however, did not remain for long and in the 1610s French Ursuline communities opted—or had to opt—for the cloister, while continuing to teach girls inside enclosure.

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88 McNamara 1996: 493.
89 Diefendorf 2009: 34.
91 Vacher 2010: xxii-xxiii.
Still, in 1639, a group of Ursulines led by Marie de L’Incarnation arrived in New France—Canada. There they got a much more active missionary role than in the mother country, instructing French and indigenous girls and women in church doctrine. The Ursulines in New France were able to continue their work for several decades without much criticism. In a study on these teaching nuns, Leslie Choquette concludes that “[t]he missionary efforts of women had achieved a remarkable degree of acceptance in Canada. Women’s right to catechize, which was questioned in France … was taken for granted in Canada as soon as missionary women appeared in the colony.”94

Through a reading of material by French Ursulines and the English Ladies, Laurence Lux-Sterritt argues that they did not present their educational work as a voluntary choice. It was an answer to a divine vocation which entailed great suffering. Apostolic activity was, in fact, presented as the greatest degree of self-abnegation and not as self-empowerment, but of course they wrote in a context where such ways of expression were almost mandatory. We cannot, however, presuppose that external agency and a life outside the convent walls were obvious goals for early modern women with a religious vocation, as contemplative life was considered the most perfect way.95

In an article on active and contemplative female religious in the medieval and early modern Low Countries, Craig Harline makes an important point, stating that “modern sensibilities about practicality and utility can lead one to sympathize more with actives than with contemplatives”.96 Still, it is important to once more underline that women were generally not given much choice when it came to religious vocation; contemplative life in the cloister was most often the only option for early modern Catholic women, who sought a specialized religious role. This was not least the case in Spain and its empire.97

96 Harline 1995: 564.
The Chapters

Including this introduction, the book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter two contains a thorough discussion on the different genres used as source material, including both texts authored by women and church men. Chapter three treats general ideals for contemplative women, with special emphasis on nuns. It begins with a study of the ultimate goal of this type of retired life—individual salvation—and continues with an analysis of colonial discourses on chastity, poverty, obedience, enclosure and humility. Retirement from the world, and in particular strict enclosure, might seem an obstacle for any kind of apostolic work, but, as has been indicated throughout this introduction, the subsequent chapters will challenge this view.

Chapters four through eight are comprised by studies on five mission related themes: love, prayer, suffering, teaching and flights. All these themes have bearing on the contribution to the salvation of other human beings. These chapters build on women’s own texts as well as sermons and *vidas* written by ecclesiastics. They follow a similar outline. First, I include an analysis of relevant concepts in medieval and early modern Catholic theology and history. In the second section, I turn to the colonial religious women and include case studies of individuals, which are organized chronologically. The third, and last, section of every chapter contains an analysis of sub-themes that have been distilled in the second section, but in this part other texts by and about other religious women are also included. Here, I relate the findings to the three main analytical concepts of my own study: gender, agency and space.

In chapter four the focus is on love, considered the most important Christian virtue and the foundation for the work in favour of others’ salvation. Charity had two intertwined parts: the love of God and the love of neighbour. Many of the authors described the women’s love as burning and claimed that they felt devastated when realizing that many people risked eternal damnation as they were not baptized or were bad Catholics. It is a story of frustrated vocation. Many women wanted to become missionaries and therefore wished that they had been born males, so that they could have channelled their apostolic zeal.

Chapter five deals with the theme most central to contemplative women: prayer. There, special emphasis is put on intercessions for the
spiritual benefit of others. The prayer objects could be both people on earth and souls in purgatory. These aspects constituted a contemplative apostolate for the living and the dead respectively. The chapter also takes into account prayers for the sake of the missionary enterprise and missionaries.

Chapter six is intertwined with the previous one. There, I study suffering for the benefit of others, whether living human beings or those in purgatory. The stoic endurance of suffering, self-inflicted or otherwise, was looked upon as *imitatio Christi*. As Christ had suffered for the sins of humanity, by emulating his torments, contemplative women were thought to partake of his redemptive mission. In a sense, they became co-redeemers. Moreover, through their steadfast endurance of pain these women ceased in a way to be female; they became manly.

Chapter seven is on contemplative women’s role as spiritual advisors, through teaching and counselling. It includes stories about their attempts to advise and convert people, and communicate knowledge in Christian doctrine considered to be necessary for salvation. Still, women did not have any formal teaching offices; their authority was charismatic.

The last of the thematic parts, chapter eight, is about spiritual missionary journeys. Some women in my textual corpus gave testimony of having made flights in spirit to far-away mission fields, observing and taking an active, though spiritual, part in missionary endeavours.

In the concluding chapter, I summarize my findings and relate them in more detail to the analytical concepts of gender, agency and space as well as the contemplative and apostolic ways of life. Taken together the chapters of this book contribute to the understanding of contemplative missionary work as seen in sources by and about seventeenth and eighteenth century women in Hispanic America and the Philippines.
Texts

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the golden age of spiritual autobiography and sacred biography in the Spanish Indies. Few funeral sermons and hagiographical books were printed before the mid-seventeenth century and the number of works that were published in the last four decades of the eighteenth century was much lower, while autobiographical manuscripts written by women were more evenly spread throughout the two centuries.

The sources used in this study can be divided into two main groups: texts written by ecclesiastics and texts written by women. This chapter includes a discussion on the different textual genres. It begins with the types of texts that were authored by contemplative women. Thereafter, I examine ecclesiastics’ works about religious women. The chapter ends with a description of other texts that play an important role for parts of this study: convent rules, constitutions and didactic manuals destined to nuns and other contemplatives.

Contemplative Women’s Texts

Spanish American and Filipina religious women wrote texts of many kinds including poetry, theatrical pieces, devotional literature and records of administrative and economical character.\(^1\) For me, however, their confessional writings have been of much greater interest. This group of texts includes genres such as spiritual journals, letters, autobiographies, as well as biographies and chronicles. We do not really know how common it was for nuns and beatas to author such literature. What may be assumed is that most did not, and that many manuscripts have not survived due to natural disasters and the dispersion of convent property in the nineteenth century. Moreover,

\(^1\) For a discussion of different genres, see Muriel 1994.
some convent archives are still closed for researchers, especially so for males, and documental treasures might still be hidden in such places.

Religious women most often wrote on the instigation of a confessor or spiritual advisor. They were *escritoras por obediencia* or *escritoras por mandato*. To write was to fulfil the obedience owed to a spiritual superior. To write without being ordered to do so would constitute a sin towards the virtue of humility which, according to the norms of the time, should permeate all aspects of a contemplative woman’s life. On the other hand, not complying with the writing-order was an act of insubordination.\(^2\) Referring to early modern Spanish nuns’ writing, Sonja Herpoel notes this apparent paradox: “Por una parte, su condición de mujer le impide el acceso a la escritura, y, por otra, su función de religiosa impone una escritura de sometimiento incondicional”.\(^3\) Based on her studies on the relationship between contemplative women and their confessors, Jodi Bilinkoff offers a more positive interpretation, asserting that “obedience” in this context should not be understood as “blind acquiescence to demands”, but rather as “authorization or affirmation” of religious experiences.\(^4\)

To describe the writing process as suffering was a recurrent theme in early modern confessional literature. Many women described how they agonized both spiritually and physically, finding that it was virtually impossible for them to write, and therefore they procrastinated.\(^5\) They frequently referred to their wretchedness, ignorance and sinfulness, but could still claim that divine providence helped them to overcome their writer’s cramp and anxiety. Such assertions followed well-established rhetorical models, but the individual woman could certainly fear the commission. The writing process involved a clear element of control as the confessor or spiritual advisor would examine the contents and had the right to interpret and censor it. Therefore, Arenal and Schlau mean that such writing must have been characterized by “trepidation, self-censorship, avoidance, and encoding”.\(^6\) Without any doubt, the confessional texts were a way for church men to gain control over women in order to assess their supernatural experiences and devotional practices. Or expressed in a more positive way: to guide them on their path towards greater perfection. The clerical

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\(^2\) Durán López 2007: 66-68.

\(^3\) Herpoel 1999: 87.


\(^5\) An unusually explicit case from Spain is found in Velasco 1996.

addressee should “discern the spirits” to judge whether particular spiritual
experiences were caused by the divine, if they were feigned, instigated by
the devil, or if they were signs of an illness, such as “melancholy”.7

In the longer term, other nuns, priests, bishops and possibly the Holy
Office could take part of the writings, though the making of manuscripts
copies for circulation seems to be quite uncommon.8 Fernando Durán López,
who has dedicated several works to early modern Spanish autobiography,
asserts that the texts written by religious women were “always open to
revision, denunciation [and] validation”.9 Sometimes, a confessor would
order a woman to burn what she had written and simultaneously order her to
author a new version. This was certainly a test of her humility and
obedience, but probably a precaution, too. Furthermore, to be cautious and to
demonstrate their humility at the same time, women sometimes asked their
confessors to destroy their texts so that they did not fall into wrong hands.
Claiming that their writings were useless, they argued that it was better to
annihilate them than to keep them.

The overarching concept cuentas de conciencia (accounts of one’s
conscience), could be manifested in journal, letter or vida form.10 The
diarios espirituales—diary-like notebooks—were developments of, and
preparations for, auricular confession and sent to the confessor or spiritual
advisor. In these journals, women wrote about their tribulations,
mortification, illnesses, dreams, devotional practices and spiritual
experiences, such as visions and locutions. The events were rarely dated
though the author could make references to the ecclesiastical year, without
mentioning the calendric year.

Cartas espirituales was a similar genre; there were no strict
boundaries between the two, though letters were often dated. Like the
journals, the addressee was a confessor or spiritual advisor. From the extant
documents, we know that such a correspondence could last for many years,
particularly if the spiritual advisor left town, but much briefer series exist.
Ordinarily, we only have access to the woman’s letters. Consequently, we
have little direct knowledge of the confessor’s communications, apart from

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7 Sluhovsky 2007.
8 For manuscript circulation, see Vollendorf 2009: 85 and Leturio & Marín Pina
2014: 14-17.
9 Durán López 2010: 34.
10 Ibsen 1999: 10.
her allusions to letters she had received and questions that he had asked.\textsuperscript{11} Both epistles and journals could include autobiographical features, but they were basically a kind of diary with flashbacks, where the woman related her ongoing spiritual life.\textsuperscript{12} Like diaries, letters were, in the words of Durán López, signs of “spiritual restlessness”, a constant anxiety and fear of condemnation, although periods of calmness and experiences of divine love and bliss played an important part, too.

A third genre of female confessional writing was \textit{vidas espirituales}—spiritual autobiographies. Such texts existed in medieval Europe, but the genre gained momentum during the second half of the sixteenth century and peaked in the following century (though prevailing long thereafter). It was particularly popular in Spain and its empire. As for the Spanish Indies, there are no known \textit{vidas} from the sixteenth century, but we have access to several seventeenth and eighteenth century manuscripts, nearly all written by nuns. However, autobiographies \textit{stricto sensu} were relatively few, and some of the works that have been published under this title in modern times are indeed \textit{diarios espirituales}.\textsuperscript{13}

The spiritual autobiographies were relatively uniform as they built on canonical forms for hagiography and above all Teresa of Avila’s \textit{Libro de la vida}, published for the first time in 1588.\textsuperscript{14} Following the established models, they routinely included a number of themes. There was a description of the woman’s childhood and youth, most often including her premature vocation to the religious state. In these sections, there was a clear teleological component; everything led toward the convent even if the road might be long and complicated.\textsuperscript{15} Thereafter, the texts contained a relation of the novitiate and its hardships, as well as the profession. Prayer life, visions and other supernatural experiences—favours of God—were often, but not always, given a prominent place, as were spiritual setbacks, tribulations and illnesses, ways in which God tested her fidelity.

When writing her \textit{vida}, the woman should strive not to be too individual. The text should not be characterized by \textit{individualidad} or

\textsuperscript{11} Durán López 2010: 15.
\textsuperscript{12} For letters by Hispanic American nuns, see Lavrin 1995b, Molina 2008, Lavrin 2012 and Lavrin 2013.
\textsuperscript{14} Herpoel 1999 and Myers 2003.
\textsuperscript{15} For a study of the construction of childhood in hagiographical works, see Lavrin 2007c.
singularidad, which once again could be seen as a sign of hubris. Originality was therefore not a goal, but *imitatio*. The autobiographies should basically be accounts of what divine mercy had worked in a life of a sinful person. Nevertheless, the *vidas* were influenced by the author’s literary capabilities and do contain variations that reflect individual experiences and situations. In this sense, they often show individuality. Building further on this line of thought, Fernando Durán López pertinently points out that spiritual autobiography “confers a narrative dimension to spirituality simultaneously humanizing it by embodying it in individual peripateia”.¹⁶ In the autobiographies, there was no clear distinction between the physical course of life and the spiritual experiences; all took place in and through the woman’s body. Referring to an early modern Spanish corpus, Isabelle Poutrin declares in a similar way that “la démarcation entre narration autobiographique proprement dite et recite d’expériences spirituelles ne peut être tracée, sinon au prix d’un découpage artificiel des textes.”¹⁷

A *vida* of a particular woman religious could also be written by other nuns, either during her life or after. Such works generally remained unpublished in colonial times, but some documents have been edited in modern times. During the late colonial era, however, some texts of this kind were published in the form of *cartas de edificación*, that is, briefer works of edification, destined mainly to an ecclesiastical audience informing them of the life of a woman, who recently had died in an odour of sanctity. Yet another type of text that nuns sometimes wrote was *crónicas* about the foundation and history of a particular convent. The convent chronicles often included series of brief or somewhat more extensive biographies about the founding mothers and other notable nuns.¹⁸

**Church Men’s Writings**

As we have seen, religious women authored many kinds of texts, but few were published in colonial times. Males composed the lion’s share of the printed works. The authors were either secular or regular priests; laymen did not write sacred biography. In Spain, the majority of the ecclesiastics who wrote about religious women were members of the same order as their

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¹⁶ Durán López 2010: 15.
¹⁸ On Novohispanic convent chronicles, see Muriel 1994: 44-120.
subjects, but in the New World that was relatively uncommon. Augustinian friars could, for example, write about Poor Clares, and secular clerics about Dominican nuns.

The Spanish American imprints that are of interest to me can initially be divided into two main groups: sermones and vidas. Sermons were a copious literary genre. In Mexico alone, some 2,000 sermons of different kinds were published during the colonial era. Most of them were panegyric and funeral ones, though other types existed. They were hardly verbatim replicas of the sermons orally preached, but a further exposition of their contents. In an article about seventeenth-century Novohispanic preaching, Carlos Herrejón Peredo points out that “el sermón escrito era objeto de pulimento y del añadido de las notas que daban cuenta de las citas”.20

Almost all the sermons dedicated to religious women were published after their death. The sole exception were orations at a woman’s solemn profession (sermón en la profesión; oración en la profesión). This type of text included few, if any, biographical notes or stories about spiritual experiences. Instead, they were allegorical exegeses of biblical texts and an exaltation of the religious state, thus functioning as normative texts for the convent life and sources of edification.

A more common genre were sermons held in connection with the exequies of a pious woman (sermón funebre; sermón funeral, elogio funebre, sermón en las honras fúnebres). The size of the published funeral sermons varied greatly, but usually they were between 20 and 40 pages in length. As other works of the era, the printed orations included a number of preliminaries written by censors and other clerics. In the Baroque era such preludes—paratexts—frequently swelled out to become more copious than the sermon itself. The oration as such was introduced by an epigraph, normally a citation from the Old Testament, which was interpreted allegorically in order to expose the virtues of the deceased woman. Frequently, the text was interspersed with Latin citations from the Vulgate and works by church fathers and classical authors, which were either translated into Spanish or paraphrased.21

According to an influential treatise on funeral sermons written by Bishop Agostínio Valier of Verona towards the end of the sixteenth century,

such a homily should consist of three parts: remarks on the origin of the dead person, notes on her life and virtues, and a description of her death.\textsuperscript{22} The funeral sermons on Hispanic American religious women generally included these themes, while the emphasis was on virtues. The sermon had multiple functions: to bewail the loss of the community—\textit{deploratio}—and to eulogize the defunct woman—\textit{laudatio}, but also to present her as a model that could be emulated, or at least admired.

The funeral sermon was often the only posthumous eulogy that was written about a saintly woman, but sometimes an ecclesiastic authored a much more detailed text about her—\textit{vida}; \textit{vida y virtudes}; \textit{vida admirable}—texts that can be referred to as spiritual biographies or hagiographies. A printed funeral sermon was not an indispensable step towards a hagiographical \textit{vida}, though the former could be an inspiration for the latter. In cases where a \textit{vida} was published shortly after her death, the author was normally her confessor or spiritual director. If published long after her passing away, it could be part of an attempt to promote a beatification process, and written by a person who had no personal knowledge of the subject. Even if not part of a formal canonical process, it is pertinent to underline that \textit{vidas} were only written about women who were regarded as particularly virtuous and saintly. Based on her early modern Spanish material, Isabelle Poutrin appositely writes: “nous n’y lirons pas le quotidien, mais l’exception”.\textsuperscript{23} Or to use the expression coined by Peter Brown, they were “very special dead people”.\textsuperscript{24}

If the author had been a confessor or spiritual director of the woman, he could build his narrative on recollections of auricular confessions and personal notes. The seal of confession did not apply after death. Nuns who were thought to have died in an odour of sanctity were hidden treasures, which were posthumously brought to light.\textsuperscript{25} Nevertheless, many of them were known for their virtues and charismatic gifts even before death. They had been transformed into “living saints”, who were indeed “prophets in their own country”.\textsuperscript{26}

Apart from confessional experience, the priestly author could sometimes build on texts that the woman had written: journals, letters and

\textsuperscript{22} For a classic study on funeral sermons, see Saulnier 1948, cf. Cerdan 1985.
\textsuperscript{23} Poutrin 1995: 7.
\textsuperscript{24} Brown 1981: 4.
\textsuperscript{25} Bilinkoff 2005: 2 and 35.
\textsuperscript{26} Kleinberg 1992.
autobiographies as well as more general records in the convent archives. He could rely on verbal testimonies made by other nuns, or texts written by them about their deceased sister. Sometimes the male author made clear reference to the sources employed, but generally we do not have access to these texts. Reading a published *vida* we hardly ever know how much and in what way the priest reworked the original sources.\(^{27}\) Even if a hagiographer claimed that he cited the deceased women, sometimes even using quotation marks, Kathleen Ann Myers reminds us that there is a great difference between a citation and an edited citation, which was constructed by the ecclesiastic.\(^{28}\)

In many ways, hagiographical texts were similar to the autobiographies, but there were some important differences. The printed biographies began with a more or less chronological narration of the nun’s life from birth to profession. Thereafter the biographical *vida* usually contained a thematic treatment of the woman’s virtues, a trait that obviously was not part of the autobiographical texts. In this section, much emphasis was put on mortification, illnesses, devotional practices and disciplines. Other virtues normally included were her perfect application of the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure, as well as the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Underlying them all was the virtue of humility. Frequently the author emphasizes *favores de la gracia* such as visions and prophesies. At last, he gave a detailed description of the woman’s final illness, her death in an odour of sanctity, and the burial, something that obviously was not part of the autobiographies. More rarely, accounts of post mortem miracles were included. The hagiographical texts thus comprised three main parts: life, virtues and death.

This outline followed the formalized canonization process that had been developed from the end of the twelfth century. Pope Innocent III meant that there were two signs of holiness: *virtus morum* and *virtus signorum*, virtuous acts during life and post-mortem miracles, taken together a *fama sanctitatis*.\(^{29}\) Also for male hagiographers imitation was very common. Ariel Kleinberg remarks that “[t]he biographer of a new saint had to produce just enough hagiographical commonplaces to convince the reader of his subject’s

\(^{27}\) Ross 1993.


\(^{29}\) Kleinberg 1992: 27.
sanctity and enough neutral and unconventional material to convince the reader of the writer’s sincerity.”

The canonization process became even stricter after the Council of Trent and the subsequent foundation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. The eventual making of a saint should be preceded by diocesan and apostolic investigations, where witnesses testified to the virtues and miracles related to the dead person. The documentation was then forwarded to Rome for assessment. Ultimately, it was the Holy See who decided whether to beatify or canonize a person, and formal beatifications and canonizations were few and far between, despite decades, or even centuries, of lobbying. For example, none of the Novohispanic candidates for sainthood were raised to the altars during the colonial era, while a few Peruvians were canonized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the Dominican tertiary Rosa de Santa María—Rosa of Lima.

In the 1630s, Pope Urban VIII sought to counteract the public veneration of non-canonized people, which was denounced in no uncertain terms. In fact, public veneration of a dead person who had lived a virtuous life could thwart a possible canonization process. To overcome this prohibition and still be able to publish *vidas* about persons considered saintly by the local church, writers included a *protesta*, an author’s disclaimer, which attested that concepts such as saintly life and miracles used in the book ultimately had to be assessed by the Holy See.

The *vidas* about contemplative women published in Spanish America varied greatly in length. Sometimes they comprised about a hundred pages, but others were voluminous works, including 400 or 500 pages, an extreme case being a three-volume book of almost a thousand folio-sized pages. Even if many *vidas* were made public, the editions were quite limited and expensive, and the readers probably well-to-do ecclesiastics and lay people, while the funeral sermons were approachable for a somewhat broader readership, though the complex nature of the texts would certainly discourage many a potential reader.

From the late sixteenth century onwards, series of brief biographies of nuns and other contemplative women appeared in chronicles of male

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30 Kleinberg 1992: 54.
31 See Rubial García 1999 for the thwarted Novohispanic cases; cf. Burke 1999 for early modern canonizations in general.
religious orders, as well as in panegyrics of a particular convent and remarkable nuns who had lived there. These works could build on nuns’ writings, but were considerably reformulated by the church man who published them under his name, while sometimes giving credit to nuns’ writings or interviews with religious women.34

Rules, Constitutions and Manuals

Rules and constitutions were normative codes that presented models of conduct for the individual nun and the religious community as a whole. To read, or listen to the reading of, the rule and constitutions was an integrated part of convent life.35 Though a number of monastic rules were developed during the history of the Catholic Church, for female orders the most important were those of St. Augustine and St. Clare. Different versions of St. Augustine’s rule were used not only by the nuns who bore his name, but by Dominicans, Bridgettines, Mercedarians and Hieronymites, too. Capuchins and some Poor Clares followed the first rule of St. Clare (1253), while the so-called Urbanist Clares followed the somewhat less strict second rule, promulgated by Pope Urban IV a decade later. The Conceptionist order, which had many convents in New Spain, followed their own modified version of the Poor Clare’s rule, promulgated by the Pope in 1511.36

In contrast to the rules, the constitutions were of a more contextualized and specialized nature and could be compiled by nuns themselves, though they needed male ecclesiastical authorization in the end. They treated issues regarding the administration of the convent, the obligations of the community, the different office holders and the individual nuns, and indicated the penalties for non-compliance. During the first century of female monasticism in the New World, printed rules and constitutions were brought from Spain or remained in manuscript form, but from the seventeenth century such works were printed in the Indies. Still, even in the later colonial era not all orders and convents had printed versions of their governing documents, and many constitutions existed in manuscript

34 Ross 1993.
35 Loreto López 2000b: 68 and 75-83.
36 For a general discussion, see McNamara 1996: 398-399.
form for internal use in the respective nunnery, as Rosalva Loreto López shows in her studies on conventual reading in Puebla.\textsuperscript{37}

Apart from monastic rules and constitutions, in this study I use some colonial commentaries on rules, vows and female religious life in general. These books were written by male ecclesiastics, who had long-time experience of the confession of nuns. Some were designed in dialogue-form with a hypothetical nun asking questions to an omniscient confessor.

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A wide array of documents thus forms the basis of this study: some written by religious women, but most by church men. All textual genres were in a way prescriptive. Autobiographies and other spiritual texts written by women were based on canonical models that were modified by the author. Hagiographical \textit{vidas} and funeral sermons alike presented a life considered particularly virtuous and saintly, closely following older examples of hagiography. The authors’ intention was to move and edify readers, to present a model for others to emulate or further a beatification process. Finally, rules, constitutions and handbooks stipulated what a perfect religious life should be like and what was the \textit{sine qua non} of such an existence.

\textsuperscript{37} Loreto López 2000b: 69-75.
Ideals

In his mid-seventeenth century chronicle of the Mexican Dominican province, Alonso Franco wrote that the convent should not be considered a prison or a location primarily constructed to preserve women’s honour, but a place they entered to serve God and become more perfect in their relationship with the divine without being contaminated by the sinful world.¹ However according to many other authors of the time, the cloister’s role in the preservation of honour and chastity was of the greatest importance, though the quest for individual sanctity was always an underlying reason.²

Strict convent life was a means towards spiritual perfection available for a limited few. In a 1686 sermon preached at the inauguration of the Santa Ana Discalced Carmelite convent in Lima, Jesuit Francisco López used a simile about four concentric circles to illustrate four different ways of Christian life. The circle farthest from the centre, and thus from perfection, was inhabited by morally corrupt people, the second contained those living in the world without seeking perfection, the third included those who resided in less strict religious houses, while the fourth, and most central, consisted of people who lived a penitent life in observant convents, like the discalced Carmelite nuns, whom the preacher lauded. López wrote that this fourth circle “appears to be the smallest, but is the core of the four circles that comprise the great circle of the New World”.³

Religious life, particularly in its stricter forms meant closer connection with the divine and less, if any, contact with the wicked world that kept human beings from unity with God. It was understood that the circle closest

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¹ Franco [1645] 1900: 74.
² On convents and honour, see, for example, Burns 1999: 92-93 and 116-118, Loreto López 2004: 31 and Lavrin 2008a: 18-19
to the centre contained only a diminutive part of the Catholics. Still, it was of importance for those who inhabited the other realms. In this chapter, I will refer to normative and exemplary sources such as rules, manuals, sermons and hagiographies that prescribed and described such a way of life. It should thus be underlined that the focus it not on actual practices in colonial convents, but on strict ideals.⁴

**Perfection**

In his early-eighteenth-century manual for confessors of nuns, Andrés de Borda wrote that the individual nun was not obliged to be a “perfect religious”; that was a thing for the chosen few. Nevertheless, she was called to strive towards that end, complying with the Decalogue, and the rule and constitutions of the order. In that way, she could wander the road towards spiritual perfection—the *camino de perfección*—and ultimately reach salvation, though diabolic forces constantly tried to lead her astray.⁵

Following the teachings of Teresa of Avila, the way of perfection went from activity to a growing degree of passivity, so that God could dominate the soul of the individual. Following a similar argumentation as Borda, Mexican Jesuit Antonio Núñez de Miranda, the uncompromising confessor of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, stated that the most important goal for a woman religious did not consist of doing extraordinary things or having exceptional spiritual experiences, as those could lead to pride, the cardinal sin *par preference*. Instead, she should perfectly comply with the ordinary requirements of her state.⁶

To profess meant to leave the corrupt world behind. The choice implied not only a *contemptus mundi* but a *fuga mundi*—to flee from it for a safer way to heaven. It was to die away from the life in the century to live wholeheartedly for God, having been tested through a harsh novitiate, which was a gradual process of dying away from the things that kept her in the world.⁷ It was a common theme in the teleologically oriented hagiographical writings that even before the entering the convent, the woman had withdrawn to a retired space in her home, away from the rest of the family,

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⁴ For the relation between the discourses of the real and ideal nun, see Lavrin 1999.
⁵ Borda 1708: 1r.
⁶ Núñez 1712: 8.
⁷ See, for example, García 1733: 1 and María Teresa 1734: 47-48.
wanting to lead an eremitical life. She thus prepared herself for leaving the world, but this retirement at home was not considered enough. In a 1707 funeral sermon dedicated to Capuchin Teresa María de Guzmán, the author claimed that through visions, God had shown her the entire created world. That, however, was not sufficient. She wanted to serve the creator of everything and had no longings for the things of the world. In order to serve God unconditionally, she entered the convent. The preacher Rodrigo García Flores concluded that she had realized what her vocation was and come home.

In one of his many books directed to nuns, Antonio Núñez de Miranda stated that to profess was to die away from oneself and from all created things, including family and friends, in order to live entirely in the service of their divine spouse, Christ. The theme of profession as death was prevalent in Núñez’s works and particularly in his *Plática doctrinal*, originally printed in 1679. There, he did not mince matters when stating

> Profesar, es morir al mundo, y al amor propio y a todas las cosas criadas, para vivir sólo a su Esposo. Para todo ha de estar muerta y sepultada sin padres, parientes, amigas, dependencias, cumplimientos, visitas, y en una palabra a todo amor de criatura, respondiendo de todo: los muertos ni visitan ni son visitados; no saben de cortesanía ni de cumplimientos. ¿Quién regala a un muerto, o quiere que le regale?

To die from the world should be an active and free choice and to leave family and friends behind and be buried alive within the walls of a convent was a presupposition for becoming a true Bride of Christ, to spiritually marry him and live faithfully with him. According to this discourse, death and marriage went hand in hand. Just as the professed woman was transformed into a dead and obedient body, the convent which she entered was likened to a sealed tomb, where she would be hidden from outsiders. At the death of Mexican Capuchin María Francisca, José de la Vega claimed that she had been born blind, but that her eyes were opened at baptism.

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8 Among many examples, see Genovesi 1753: 5 and Bellido 1758.
9 García Flores de Valdés 1707: 4-5.
10 *Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Antonio Núñez de la Compañía de Jesús en la profesión de una señora religiosa del convento de San Lorenzo* [1679], cited in Kirk 2007: 43 after the 1831 edition.
11 Villalobos 1728: 10-12.
Nevertheless, at profession, he asserted they had been closed again: “se encierra para no veer, ni ser visto”. She was in the convent not to see, nor to be seen.\textsuperscript{12}

In one of the earliest printed funeral sermons, dedicated to the colonial nun Augustinian prioress Ana de la Presentación, the author wrote about women who had professed in her convent, San Lorenzo in Mexico City: “Quando una de aquestas señoras entra en este paraýso, o en otro, no me parece que la dote es sólo para el sustento sino para comprar desde luego sepulchro, no sólo de quatro paredes amortajándose en ellas, sino señalada sepultura que a todos instantes se le viene a los ojos, dándoles con la tierra.”\textsuperscript{13}

In a much later text about María Josefa Lino de la Santísima Trinidad, founder of the Conceptionist convent in what today is San Miguel Allende, Mexico, the author compared convent life to “an early death, but a death full of immortality.”\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, according to Bartolomé Letona, though dead, nuns did not become ashes, but gold.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, to become golden, or shining with virtue, much prayer and mortification was needed. Death included a constant war against oneself. It was not enough to die; the new life as a living dead meant a prolonged martyrdom and a continuous and dolorous sacrifice.\textsuperscript{16} To many colonial authors religious life implied nothing less than a holocaust to God, a total immolation of self. To actively and freely offer oneself to God and to live for him was ultimately to fight human nature and give up one’s own will.\textsuperscript{17} In this way, profession was not a natural step in human life, but demanded an active choice and a constant battle.

In his sermon at the 1748 profession of Catarina de San Pedro in Mérida, Yucatán, José de Paredes compared religious life to a cross, a common trope in early modern Catholic texts. To enter convent was to become crucified through mortification and penitence, but according to Paredes, the cross of religion was anointed with the oil of divine providence, which soothed and made it bearable. In the convent, he claimed, a woman proceeded with greater caution and fell less often than she would have done

\textsuperscript{12} Vega 1691: without pagination.
\textsuperscript{13} Sánchez 1636: 8v-9r.
\textsuperscript{14} Díaz y Gamarra [pre-1783] 1831: 22-26.
\textsuperscript{15} Letona 1662: 6r.
\textsuperscript{16} García Flores de Valdés 1707: 1, cf. García de Zurita 1733: 1 and Taboada 1720: 7.
\textsuperscript{17} Mendoza Ayala 1686: 2v-3v.
otherwise. In another profession sermon from the late-seventeenth century, it was stated that the cross of religious life was just as heavy as Christ’s, but that the nun carried it for a much longer time, a statement that evidently passed the theological censors of the work. To be able to bear the cross during the entire professed life, the nun must have a “celestial Simon of Cyrene”, a cross-bearer in the form of the Holy Ghost, who helped her throughout. To carry it alone would have been humanly impossible.

Part of conventual death was solitude. In a 1710 sermon at the profession of Capuchin Joaquina Josefa, the orator noted that though centrally placed in a city, the convent was first and foremost a place for loneliness, a place that was not part of the world of the outsiders. Not being able to live a desert life like the eremitic and coenobitic men and women of the Early Church, colonial nuns could have a similar existence in the town centre. Separation from the outside world was not considered enough. “Holy solitude” should mark the life within the convent. According to the constitutions of the Augustinian recollects in Lima, printed in 1672, one of the most important steps towards perfection was individual prayer and inner recollection. The nun should spend as much time as possible alone in her cell in order to communicate with her divine husband through vocal and mental prayer. She should not leave it unless there was a necessity, such as going to the choir or the refectory, and if she were afraid of being alone, she should constantly fight her fear.

To walk the way towards spiritual perfection was demanding. According to ecclesiastical texts of the colonial era, the professed woman should die from the world and be buried in the convent, where she should pray in communal solitude in order to proceed safely on the road to salvation and suffer at least part of purgatory already in the vale of tears that was life. To profess was to actively choose death and the closely regulated life as a living dead. Central to the way of perfection were the four vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure that were the sine qua non of religious life. Merging the themes of sacrifice, spiritual marriage and profession, Sor María Teresa, the eighteenth-century biographer of Capuchin Maria Leocardia, claimed that “los votos religiosos son aquellas puntas tan dulces

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19 Ramírez y Aguilar 1692: 6-7.
20 Almendariz 1710: 2.
21 Regla 1672: 42-45.
que escarpían a la esposa en el madero de la religion”, comparing the vows to Christ’s wounds.22

Poverty

In his commentary to the First rule of St. Clare, Nicolás Quiñones pointed out that without poverty, there was no religious life. Poverty was the beginning and root of perfection, just as avarice was the origin of evil.23 Following a similar argument, it was sometimes claimed that poverty gave rise to chastity and all other virtues.24 Other writers asserted that it was the other way around. In any case, in ecclesiastical discourse the four vows were intertwined. In short, the vow of poverty implied a free and voluntary renunciation of private belongings. Profession and funeral sermons alike underline that an affluent woman, which many of the nuns were, had to deny herself of many earthly possessions to win God and the spiritual goods found in the close relationship with him.25 Drawing this point to the extreme, in a very flowery profession sermon from 1686, Juan de Mendoza Ayala wrote that the professed woman should not own “la menor finca en la tierra, ni una macolla, ni una espiga, ni una flor, ni un fruto”.26

Consequently, in rules and constitutions, private property was prohibited, but there was an important addendum. The nun’s superiors could give her an express license to own certain things for her own use. Poverty was thus clearly connected to obedience. According to the stricter rules, without permission, the nun was not allowed to have, give, receive, spend, buy or sell anything to outsiders or other nuns, but with the consent of the superior she could do just that. Even if a nun had a habit or a breviary for her own use, according to Nicolás Quiñones, she should not even call it “mine”, but “ours”, thus underlining the communal nature of the property.27 Still, poverty was not reduced to the ban against material possessions. In fact, it meant not wishing for anything, not wanting anything.28 It should be constituted by an absolute mortification of the will.

22 María Teresa 1734: 45.
23 Quiñones 1736: 30.
24 Mendoza Ayala 1686: 6v.
25 See, for example, Aguinaga 1671: without pagination.
26 Mendoza Ayala 1686: 6r.
27 Quiñones 1736: 30-35.
28 Ramírez y Aguilar 1692: 12.
Perfect poverty was often thought to include the denial of both unnecessary and necessary things.\textsuperscript{29} The constitution of the Augustinian recollects in Lima explained that even few earthly possessions could disturb the relationship with God, and in that case such items should be taken away. The recollects’ abodes should be very humble. The cells were to be small and unadorned, with a simple bed, a printed holy image, a candlestick, some devotional books and a shelf to put them on.\textsuperscript{30} In his manual, Borda made an even stricter interpretation of the vow of poverty. The nuns should not even possess their own desk or their own images.\textsuperscript{31} There were to be measures to control the usage of things. According to less strict Conceptionist constitutions from the late eighteenth-century, twice a year the prioress should search through the things that the individual nun used, and if something superfluous was encountered, it should be confiscated.\textsuperscript{32}

The nun’s habit was the subject for much attention in the ecclesiastical texts. The late eighteenth-century constitutions of the Santa Catarina de Siena convent in Puebla stated that the nuns’ habit should be modest, humble, poor and uniform, without any adornments, specifying different kinds of prohibited embellishments.\textsuperscript{33} In another contemporary set of constitution, the nuns were reminded that their habit was nothing more than a shroud, thus clearly underlining that they were dead to the world and therefore in a state where no temporal possessions were needed.\textsuperscript{34}

**Chastity**

Since the Early Church, chastity and permanent celibacy have been treasured religious virtues, especially for women.\textsuperscript{35} As Brides of Christ, nuns should be faithful to their divine husband and needed to be intact virgins to consummate the marriage with him, though, at times, widows were allowed to profess. The nun’s veil was understood as a symbol for chastity. It was no adornment but a sign of mortification that in a concrete way hindered her

\textsuperscript{29} Letona 1662: 273.
\textsuperscript{30} Regla 1672: 53-57.
\textsuperscript{31} Borda 1708: 19r.
\textsuperscript{32} Regla 1789: 56-63.
\textsuperscript{33} Regla 1789: 56-63.
\textsuperscript{34} Regla 1773: 45.
\textsuperscript{35} Brown 1989.
from seeing anything else than her bride-groom.\textsuperscript{36} Nuns should be like the sex-less angels and counteract every urge to sin against the vow. Chastity was a virtue that required a strong will and a constant battle.\textsuperscript{37} In his mid-seventeenth century chronicle, Agustín de la Madre de Dios wrote that the discalced Carmelite nuns of Puebla “parece no son humanas y que aunque son mujeres se adelantan a ser mujeres divinas, haciendo que las juzgan de otra especie que son ángeles en carne los que tratan su interior”. In their chastity, they were more angelic than human.\textsuperscript{38}

Certain aspects of chastity were sensitive and most texts did not delve very deeply into them. Quiñones even stated that it was “self-evident” what chastity meant.\textsuperscript{39} Still, he and others did say something about the matter. The sins against the vow included thoughts, words and acts. In short it implied to “abstenerse de todo acto venereo, aunque sean pensamientos, o delectaciones morosas, lícitos y permitidos en el contracto matrimonial”.\textsuperscript{40} Chastity was not limited to sexual continence. In fact, the ideal was that every sense should be governed by it. Quiñones referred to Basil of Caesarea, who understood chastity as constituted by chaste eyes, ears, lips, smell and sense of touch.\textsuperscript{41} Thus there existed a clear relation between chastity and the mortification of the senses. There was, for example, thought to be a clear connection between fasting and chastity, just as there was an association between eating and lust.\textsuperscript{42} To smell fragrant objects, such as flowers and fruits, or to touch soft things were potential threats that should be avoided in order to reach perfection.\textsuperscript{43} To look at “indecent paintings”, though of a religious nature, while taking pleasure in them also constituted a threat to the chaste way of life.\textsuperscript{44}

It was, of course, taken for granted that all sexual relations were banned for nuns. Very rarely the ecclesiastical writers referred to concrete sexual practices. Nevertheless, in his manual Borda entered the sensitive area of masturbation. The perceived sensitivity of the subject was underlined

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{36} Ramírez y Aguilar 1692: 8-10.
  \item\textsuperscript{37} Quiñones 1736: 51-52.
  \item\textsuperscript{38} Agustín de la Madre de Dios \textsuperscript{[1646-1653]} 1986: 310.
  \item\textsuperscript{39} Quiñones 1736: 51 and 54.
  \item\textsuperscript{40} Borda 1708: 44v.
  \item\textsuperscript{41} Quiñones 1736: 55.
  \item\textsuperscript{42} Bynum 1987: 215.
  \item\textsuperscript{43} Quiñones 1736: 55.
  \item\textsuperscript{44} Borda 1708: 46r.
\end{itemize}
by the fact that the author, when discussing these matters, switched from his usual Spanish to Latin, while denouncing the acts as sodomy or even sacrilege, depending on the method used to reach climax.\textsuperscript{45} The vow also had bearing on friendship. \textit{Amistades particulares}, deeper and potentially homoerotic relations between individual co-sisters were singled out as pernicious, as was contact with \textit{devociones}, males—clerics or laymen—who sought out nuns in the parlour to talk to them, give them gifts and possibly court them. Both practices were considered very grave transgressions. Deep friendship between nuns and servants was banned, too, if not in such harsh words as the first-mentioned cases.\textsuperscript{46}

Other activities put in connection with chastity were the arrangement of musical performances, dances and masquerades, though Borda did not regard them as intrinsically sinful. If they were made for recreational purposes and if only the community was present he considered them harmless. On the other hand, if music and dances were performed in the convent parlour with outsiders present, it was clearly a transgression of the rule.\textsuperscript{47}

To write, read or say dishonest words were banned for nuns.\textsuperscript{48} Another threat against the vow was thoughts, and the goal for the nun should be total “purity of the mind”. In his commentary, Quiñones stated that thoughts could be sinful if they included suggestion—when a woman sought certain impure thoughts—if she enjoyed them or actively consented to them. She should, for example, not think about how it would be if she were not a nun, but married. However, if steadfastly withstanding the temptations, she was considered virtuous. Furthermore it was not a sin \textit{per se} to have impure dreams, but it was indeed considered sinful to wilfully ponder their contents while awake, instead of counteracting the memories. The solution and arms to meet indecent thoughts were the will and active combat, including penance and mortification of the senses.\textsuperscript{49}

Given the perceived fragility of women, their chastity was often compared to a delicate vase.\textsuperscript{50} In other texts, chastity was likened to a crystal

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Borda 1708: 47v-48r.
\item[47] Borda 1708: 46r-46v.
\item[48] Borda 1708: 45v, cf. Quiñones 1736: 52.
\end{footnotes}
that could easily be broken.\textsuperscript{51} Chaste women were often compared to flowers. They were beautiful, small, delicate and easily broken, but still managed to grow strong among thorns.\textsuperscript{52} The Madonna lily, the \textit{azucena}, was a favourite symbol.\textsuperscript{53} But the iris and the rose were also prevalent images, the latter particularly after the canonization of Rosa of Lima.\textsuperscript{54} In this floriated language, the collected virtues of a nun became a bouquet of flowers and convents became bloom-filled and closed gardens or even a paradise. On the other hand, in texts about individual nuns who had reached a state of perfection, their chastity could be described as something much stronger. About Melchora de Jesús, a discalced Mercedarian in Lima it was said that her chastity was like an impenetrable wall strengthened by humility, prayer and penitence.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Obedience}

Obedience meant the subordination of the will to the superior’s. For a woman religious, such a superior could be male—a bishop, superior of the order or confessor—or female—an abbess, prioress or novice mistress. The deliberate submission of the will should foster, and be nurtured by, humility, self-denial and mortification, and could in its turn lead towards greater perfection. Following Bernard of Clairvaux, obedience towards a male superior was often described in maritime terms. The confessor was a pilot who led the nun through stormy waters in order to avoid a shipwreck that was otherwise unavoidable. The nun should see her male superior as a stand-in for Christ (\textit{alter Christus}), to whom she had vowed obedience at profession.

In his sermon on Luisa de Santa Catarina, a Dominican from Mexican Valladolid, Juan López Aguado told a story about a vision of hers. She had seen a staircase leading up to heaven. Standing on the lowest step, God called her to proceed upwards. Sor Luisa understood the stairs as the firmness that the human being had to show in order to reach eternal salvation. In her view, the road to God was a road of obedience and the nun

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{51} Quiñones 1736: 53.
\textsuperscript{52} Castillo y Bolívar 1733: without pagination and Genovesi 1753: 28.
\textsuperscript{53} Agustín de la Madre de Dios [1646-1653] 1986: 223, Morán de Butrón 1724 and Ponce de León 1756.
\textsuperscript{54} Picazo 1739:18 and Castillo y Bolívar 1733: without pagination.
\textsuperscript{55} María Antonia de la Natividad 1781:15.
\end{flushright}
must be governed by confessors, in order not to fall into the abyss of hell
that threatened below.\textsuperscript{56} Spiritual guidance by a male ecclesiastic was thus
considered indispensable. A similar line of thought was found in José María
Genovesi’s edifying letter about Mexican Conceptionist abbess María Josefa
de la Encarnación. There he stated that she did not want any will of her own,
but desired to be brought to heaven on the shoulders of others, referring
primarily to male superiors.\textsuperscript{57}

According to early modern Catholic teaching, women were incapable
of spiritual jurisdiction. Still, abbesses and prioresses had internal authority
over the community and nuns should obey them in order to reach a more
perfect compliance with the rule.\textsuperscript{58} Using the same expression as in the case
of male confessors, the constitutions of the Augustinian recollects in Lima
stated that nuns should obey the prioress, as if she were Christ. To obey her
was ultimately to fear God.\textsuperscript{59} And just as a male confessor could be a “skilful
pilot”, so could an abbess or a novice mistress be, as she was responsible for
bringing the nuns to the safe harbour of perfection and salvation.\textsuperscript{60}

Seeing Christ in the confessor or abbess demanded nothing less than
exact execution of his or her will. According to Núñez de Miranda, nuns
should obey the demands of their superiors exactly, without delay and
without thinking about it.\textsuperscript{61} In a much used expression, obedience should be
blind and simple.\textsuperscript{62} There were several biblical models for this kind of
obedience: Abraham obeyed God and was willing to sacrifice his son, Christ
was obedient until his death on the cross, and Virgin Mary accepted to bear
the son of God.\textsuperscript{63} In her \textit{vida} of the Capuchin María Leocardia, María Teresa
wrote that perfect obedience had three facets: prompt execution with joy,
negation of one’s own will and blind subjection to the judgment of the
superior, without asking for reasons or explanations. The professed nun
should be like a cat, which its owner called for.\textsuperscript{64} In a brief biography on the

\textsuperscript{56} López Aguado 1738: 5-7.
\textsuperscript{57} Genovesi 1753: 26.
\textsuperscript{58} Borda 1708: 10v.
\textsuperscript{59} Regla 1672.
\textsuperscript{60} Genovesi 1753: 8.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Antonio Núñez en la profesión de una
señora religiosa del Convento de San Lorenzo} [1679], cited in Kirk 2007: 32 after
the 1831 edition.
\textsuperscript{62} López Aguado 1738: 16.
\textsuperscript{63} Cabrera 1762: 17, cf. Lavrán 2008: 86.
\textsuperscript{64} María Teresa 1734: 55 and 106-108.
Mexican Bridgettine Juana Petronila del Patrocinio, who died in 1750, this type of obedience was elaborated upon: “en la de su obediéncia podemos desir, que era tan siega como pronta, sin que se le viera jamás ni la mas leve señal de repugnánzia, a lo que conosía ser del gusto de la prelada aún en las cosas mas contrarias a su genio.”

She obeyed the superior, even if her own inclination was quite another. In his 1662 commentary on the Second rule of St. Clare and the constitutions used by the Poor Clares in Manila, Bartolomé de Letona wrote that the nun’s greatest offering to God was the surrender of her own will, and her obeying body should be like a corpse treated however the superior wanted. Still, to disobey a superior was not always considered a deadly sin. If, for example, a superior demanded something that was in blatant contradiction of the rule, non-compliance was not sinful. The constitution of the Santa Clara convent in Manila read: “[t]ienen todas las religiosas obligación de obedecer a la abadesa, como a su prelada en todo aquello, que no fuere contra la salud del alma, y profesión de la regla.”

Borda wrote that there were other limits to the vow of obedience. A nun was, for example, not required to obey if the abbess ordered her to wear cilices, as that was not part of the rule. Likewise, the nuns were not forced to break a fast, if the female superior gave no particular reason. However, a distinction was sometimes made between two types of obedience: perfect and obligatory. The former meant to obey the superior in any case if it did not contradict the rule, while the latter was only to obey what was directly or indirectly stated in the rule.

Enclosure

In his chronicle about the Puebla Carmelites Agustín de la Madre de Dios wrote about the nuns’ perfect enclosure: “La de su recogimiento y estrechísima clausura ha sido siempre admirable porque sólo por fe se sabe haber religiosas, no permitiendo jamás que les registra la vista.” According to the Carmelite chronicler, their detachment from the world was so great that nobody had ever seen the nuns, but still they believed that they existed.

66 Letona 1662: 269-270.
67 Las constituciones 1835.
68 Borda 1708: 10v.
69 See, for example, Letona 1662: 271.
There is almost a parallel to the faith in God, who was invisible, too.\textsuperscript{70} Antonio Núñez de Miranda described the situation from the other side of the grilles. At profession they should “encerrándose en vida entre quatro paredes, para no ver más mundo en toda su vida, como si no ubiera para su vista y gozo”. They should live in the convent as if the world outside did not exist at all.\textsuperscript{71}

The rules, constitutions and manuals published in the Indies decreed both active and passive enclosure. According to such works, and following general church law, nuns should only be allowed to leave enclosure under very special circumstances. Otherwise they should live, die and be buried within the convent they had entered at profession. One of few reasons for breaking enclosure was serious and contagious disease. In that case it was argued that the breach of enclosure was for the community’s good. At such an event, a communal good would supersede an individual good. Without prior license from the ordinary, nuns could only leave enclosure in the case of fire, earthquake, inundation or enemy attack. In such cases they should leave the convent in an orderly manner and find a “decent” place to stay, and if and when it was safe to return to the cloister, they should do so immediately.\textsuperscript{72}

Nuns could and should leave the cloister if ordered to found a new convent inside or outside the city, or if their own convent was moved from one place to another. Likewise, a nun could depart if she was ordered to govern another convent. Apart from cases of emergency, nuns were strictly forbidden to leave without written permission of the bishop or a regular superior, and it was clearly understood that such a license should only be given in extraordinary cases.\textsuperscript{73} Still, Borda mentioned that there were some liminal acts that did not constitute a breaking of the vow. If a nun was on the convent’s roof and leaned out, this did not constitute a sin, and if she mistakenly fell down, she was not guilty of anything.\textsuperscript{74} There were some other liminal places, too: the turn-box and the parlour, where they could meet visitors, though such meetings should be kept to a minimum. The rule

\textsuperscript{70} Agustín de la Madre de Dios [1646-1653] 1986: 313.
\textsuperscript{71} Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Antonio Núñez de la Compañía de Jesús en la profesión de una señora religiosa del convento de San Lorenzo [1679], cited in Bravo Arriaga 2001: 24.
\textsuperscript{72} Borda 1708: 48r-54v.
\textsuperscript{73} Quiñones 1736: 61-63.
\textsuperscript{74} Borda 1708: 48r.
of the Mexican Conceptionists, originally printed in 1635, decreed that the turn-box should be “muy bien hecho y recio” and that convent parlour should be guarded by “txonas de hierro de dentro y fuera”, to avoid close contact between the inner and outer world. Moreover, nuns should only take communion through the craticula, a small opening in the grille.\(^\text{75}\)

As regards passive enclosure, there were some legitimate reasons for the ingress of outsiders. The basic rule was that the visit should be necessary, such as medical doctors who had to attend a nun. Licensed priests were allowed to enter to administer communion and the last rites to infirm nuns, or to bury the dead. Workers, who built or repaired edifices or did other things, which the nuns could not do themselves, could enter, but had to be monitored at all times, and the ringing of the bells preceded them so that the nuns could hide in their cells, not to see nor be seen.\(^\text{76}\)

In the mid-seventeenth century funeral sermon on the Peruvian abbess Lucía de la Santísima Trinidad, the preacher stated that the convent was a castle with Christ as the foundation stone and that the convent’s separation from the world was accomplished through fasting, vigils and discipline. In this context, the abbess was likened to a wall that stood against external threats.\(^\text{77}\) In a sermon preached at the profession of Juana Teresa de Cristo in 1686, Juan Mendoza de Ayala stated that enclosure had two sides, regarding both body and soul. To live in strict enclosure not only meant to physically remain there. The goal was not to think about what was going on in the outside world. To the preacher, enclosure was not a means to protect chastity. It was the other way around. Nuns kept perpetual enclosure because they were chaste. He compared the nun to a fish, which entered into the net never to be set free again. But there was a difference between nun and fish. If enclosure was a net the nun remained even if it was broken due to external events.\(^\text{78}\)

Referring to such external events, nuns’ behaviour during earthquakes was a rather common theme in colonial hagiographical writings, as they were incidents that, in a very concrete way, shook the foundations of the convent. It was considered particularly virtuous to remain cloistered even under such circumstances. According to a funeral sermon, Ana de los

\(^{75}\) *Llave de oro* 1815: 66-67.
\(^{76}\) Quiñones 1736: 63-80 and Borda 1708: 55r-69v.
\(^{77}\) Medina 1649: 2-3.
\(^{78}\) Mendoza Ayala 1686: 2v and 8v-10r.
Ángeles remained in Santa Catalina in Peruvian Arequipa even during a large quake. She preferred to die than to flee.\textsuperscript{79} During the earthquake that severely hit Lima in 1746, the Mercedarian convent was severely damaged and the nuns had to live in the garden, where builders worked. According to the biography of Melchora de Jesús, gobernadora of the convent, she worked ceaselessly and rapidly to rebuild the convent and re-establish enclosure: “cortando el trato de el siglo, y recuperado aquel bello orden con que embelesa al Esposo”\textsuperscript{80}

Even when nuns travelled to found another convent, they were said to guard enclosure. In general, female religious should travel by night or very early in the morning to escape the sight of others.\textsuperscript{81} Jerónima de la Asunción and her co-sisters from Toledo who travelled from Spain to the Philippines allegedly kept enclosure the entire time. During the journey, they did not look at anything and afterwards they did not remember anything of it, generally hiding behind the thick curtains of their carriage.\textsuperscript{82} A similar story was found in the funeral sermon about Teresa María de Guzmán, who in 1666 went from Toledo to Mexico City to found a Capuchin convent. During the travel, others asked if she wanted to see the beautiful meadows they passed by, but she answered that she only wanted to see heaven and nothing of the world. Thus, she was thought to have kept absolute enclosure, even when travelling the world.\textsuperscript{83}

\section*{Humility}

Humility was the opposite of pride, the sin that was thought to have caused Lucifer’s fall from grace. Authors of colonial hagiographies sometimes claimed that poverty, chastity or obedience was the foundation of the other vows. Still, many others claimed that humility indeed was the groundwork for perfection and sanctity. Humility was a “sister of patience and mortification”, the basis of love and the “salt of virtues”, to make use of expressions from Augustine of Hippo. A biblical inspiration for this way of reasoning was Matt. 7:23-27, where Jesus told the simile about the wise man

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{79} Cereceda 1686: 5r.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{80} Azero y Lamadriz 1781: without pagination.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{81} Borda 1708: 52r.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{82} Letona 1662: 1v and 32r.  
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{83} García Flores de Valdés 1707: 12.
who built his house on the rock and not on sand. Following this allegory, humility was described as a solid rock that would withstand tempests.

The examples in my textual corpus are many. In a letter of edification about María Josefa de la Encarnación, it was stated that her humility and low self-image was the basis for all her virtues and her perfect implementation of the vows.84 In the chronicle of the Corpus Christi convent in Mexico City, there was a longer biography on Sor Rosa de Loreto, an india cacique, in which mortification was related to humility. The author stated that she always looked down at the ground so that her eyes seemed closed, and that she felt ardent self-hatred, but loved God and her fellow human beings.85

As part of the descriptions of self-abasement and abjection, the hagiographical authors commonly mentioned that saintly religious women referred to themselves as animals or filth. In his work on Capuchin Teresa María de Guzmán, García Flores de Valdés asserted that she often compared herself to a dead dog.86 In the chronicle of the Discalced Trinitarians in Lima, María Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad wrote that one of the saintly nuns in the convent, Inés de la Madre de Dios del Rosario often called herself “Madre Inés de la basura” or “Madre Inés del muladar”, thus underling that she considered herself nothing than a heap of garbage.87

Alonso Ramos, author of a late-seventeenth-century three-volume hagiography on the Poblana beata Catarina de San Juan devoted much space to her humility, a virtue she kept and perfected despite her frequent supernatural experiences. When she went on the streets on her way to church, her eyes were always lowered and she did not look at anything. According to Ramos, Catarina de San Juan was born in India and was only baptized as a young girl. She often referred to herself as an animal: viper, dog, vile and disgusting worm, beast, ass, but also as a heap of dung, garbage, ignorant and barbarous descendent of pagans, unworthy of living amongst Christians.88

Place was an important aspect of humility. In a brief letter of edification that was a by Sor María Ángela informing other religious about the death of her Capuchin co-sister, María Catalina, it was underlined that

84 Genovesi 1753: 23.
86 García Flores de Valdés 1707: 14.
87 María Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad [1783] 1957: 142. On this work, see Mélendez 2006.
88 Ramos 1689: 88v-94v and Ramos 1690: 1r-4r.
she never sat on a chair, but always stood on her feet or was seated directly on the floor.\textsuperscript{89} To remain on the floor below everybody else was a common way of showing deep humility. María Catalina was a white veiled nun, and as such had a lower status than the choir nuns, but the latter, too, should show humility and not be proud of their rank. In the sermon at the profession of Catarina de San Pedro as a Conceptionist nun in Mérida, Yucatan, the preacher wrote that her black veil, in fact, symbolized humility. In that context, he quoted a passage from the first chapter of the Song of Songs, \textit{nigra sum sed formosa}, “I am black, but I am beautiful”, thus combining humility with dignity.\textsuperscript{90} As part of humility, a black veiled nun should not actively search for offices and not defend her seniority in the community hierarchy, which in its turn was related to place.

In Letona’s hagiography there was a chapter devoted to the humility of Jerónima de la Asunción, the abbess of the Manila convent. The fundament of her humility was built already in her childhood, when she carried out the most humble tasks in the household, and according to the writer she had continued to develop this virtue throughout her life despite filling high conventual positions. When still in Toledo, she often performed labours normally reserved for the most recent members of the community or the servants. Letona claimed that Sor Jerónima never sat on the chair in the choir, but always directly on the floor.\textsuperscript{91} In Villamor’s extensive \textit{vida} about Colombian Carmelite Francisca Maria del Niño Jesús, he emphasized that even as \textit{prelada} she carried firewood and took the least important seat, referring to herself as a vile and useless donkey.\textsuperscript{92}

Extraordinary experiences of the divine were potential threats to humility and should not be talked about. A rather uneventful life in search of perfection was sometimes presented as an ideal. Jesuit Antonio de Paredes wrote a letter of edification about three Carmelite \textit{beatas} from Querétaro, which was printed in 1763. According to him, the main virtue of Zephyrina de Jesús, Rosalía del Sacramento and María Ana del Padre Eterno was their humility. Nothing was mentioned about any extraordinary spiritual experiences or heroic deeds.\textsuperscript{93} In his lengthy biography on the Franciscan tertiary Juana de Jesús from Quito, the author discussed Bonaventure’s

\textsuperscript{89} María Ángela 1767: 2.
\textsuperscript{90} Paredes 1748: 15.
\textsuperscript{91} Letona 1662: 26v-28v.
\textsuperscript{92} Villamor 1723: 293-295.
\textsuperscript{93} Paredes 1763.
distinction of three levels of humility. The first was to belittle oneself. The second was to wish for others to scorn one. The third and highest was to remain humble if God gave gifts in form of visions and revelations. Not surprisingly, the author claimed that Juana de Jesús fulfilled all these requirements. Despite her extraordinary experiences she claimed that she was nothing more than rubbish and her right place was on a dung heap.⁹⁴ Everything good came from God and everything bad from herself.

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For nuns, the road to spiritual perfection went through the perfect enactment of the four vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure in a spirit of humility. Other contemplative women were influenced by these aspects, though not in the form of perpetual, formal vows. The possession of temporal goods was thought to hinder a woman from walking on the path of spiritual perfection and impede her relationship with the divine. Poverty was thus an important vow. Still, even in the rules and constitutions, the ban against private property was not absolute. Superiors could make dispensations. Nevertheless, the ideal was that property should be owned by the community, and that community life should be kept simple.

Chastity was a main asset of the Bride of Christ. Her sexual purity was a presupposition for her becoming totally united with the divine bridegroom, whom she had married at profession. It was described as a virtue that needed constant combat through the mortification of the senses. In fact, the goal was a woman who did not see, hear, talk, smell or touch anything else than what was indispensable for her walk on the road to perfection. To obey was to mortify one’s own will and submit oneself to the rule, the constitutions and the superiors. The nun had professed fidelity and obedience to Christ and he was to be seen in the superiors. To actively choose to profess was to abnegate one’s possibility to choose. To humiliate oneself, not to wanting anything, was a necessary condition to be able to live a more perfect life.

In a very concrete way, enclosure limited the space in which the professed woman lived and moved. Apart from specific reasons, stabilitas loci should govern the nun’s life. Through profession in a particular convent, she was bound to it until she died and even when dead she stayed, buried

⁹⁴ Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 285.
within its confines. Not even her thoughts should wander away from the convent; they should stay on the road to perfection that went from this location.

Still it is important to once more underline the prescriptive nature of all the types of documents I have used in this chapter. The writers’ intention was to hold models for imitation and they knew that real nuns were seldom as good as the models they presented. Sermons, vidas, rules and manuals all conferred ideals for other contemplative women to search for in their own life, but in actuality there could be a chasm between ideals and realities.
Love

Following a number of biblical texts, love has been considered the foremost virtue in Christian traditions throughout history. In most colonial hagiographies, there were thematic chapters on the women’s love of God and neighbour respectively. Taken together, these aspects constituted the theological virtue of charity. Although divided into two or more separate parts, authors always indicated that the two sides of charity were closely interwoven. The love of one’s fellow human being was deemed impossible without the love of God, and vice versa.

José Bellido used a common simile when writing that Mexican Dominican María Anna Agueda de San Ignacio’s charity had two wings: the love of God and the love of neighbour. With only one of them she would not be able to fly, but with both she could reach high spiritual altitudes. Still, neither of the wings would move without the infused love of God, and the more humans loved God, the more they could love other people.¹ Though not explicitly presented as a virtue, depictions of acts of charity were frequently included in women’s confessional writings, too.

The love of one’s neighbour could take material forms, for example through acts of mercy towards the sick and poor, but it also included contributions to the spiritual welfare of others. According to texts in my corpus, at an early age many of the women realized the existence of people in the world who risked eternal damnation as they were not Catholics or, though church members, did not live a morally upright life. As a consequence, they felt a strong calling to contribute to their salvation in any way available.

A woman’s vocation to contribute to others’ salvation was normally presented as a direct consequence of her love of God. It was often described as a fire burning inside her that, if not channelled, would virtually destroy

¹ Bellido 1758: 245-254.
her and burn her out. At times, it was stated that she felt a strong urge to go out preaching and teaching, if she only could. In some cases, the authors recounted concrete childhood plans to undertake missionary journeys. Such narratives focused on the young women’s desire to convert the “heathens”, and their wish to die the death of a martyr, in such a way showing their burning love for Christ. According to the texts, however, they were often hindered and discovered that this sought-after goal was not in accordance with the religious roles conceded to them as females. Realizing this, they felt devastated and did not know how to proceed. Still, this early apostolic vocation influenced their subsequent contemplative life.

The Primacy of Love

Love is a central concept in the New Testament; in the Vulgate version translated as *dilectio* or *caritas*. According to Matt. 22:37 and its synoptic parallel Luke 10:27, and as an answer to the disciples’ question about which was the greatest commandment of the Law, Christ answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”, thus referring back to Deut. 6:5. In the gospel text, however, the author claimed that Christ continued stating: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:39), which has an Old Testament parallel in Lev. 19:18.2

Several Pauline texts emphasized the primacy of love, including the well-known passage in 1 Cor. 13:8-13, where love was presented as a virtue more important than everything else. There Paul wrote: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”. Other Pauline texts connected love with the belief that the sum of all faithful constituted the body of Christ, where all members were intertwined and contributed to the whole (for example Rom. 12:4-5). A famous passage in the Gospel of John (3:16) underlined that the basis for human’s love of God was that he loved them first: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”, relating love and salvation. In other pericopes in the gospel, Christ said that his disciples should love each other as he loved them. In these latter texts, there was thus amorous reciprocity between Christ and humans, and love was presented as a duty for all who wanted to follow him.

2 All biblical quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).
For true disciples, the ultimate consequence of this love was the will to give their life for those whom they loved (John 13:33-35; 15:12-14).

Another biblical story that had bearing on the division of different kinds of love was Jesus’s visit at the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany (Luke 10:38-42). Martha provided for the visitor, while her sister sat at his feet. When Martha asked Jesus to tell her sister to help her, he answered “Martha, Martha … you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” The sisters’ different approaches to Jesus later became an illustration of the contemplative and active paths of religious life.

Augustine of Hippo was arguably the most influential theologian in the early Western Church. Through biblical exegesis, he claimed that only God was intrinsically loveable as he was, in fact, love itself. Human beings’ love of God had a supernatural origin. It was a gift (gratia) from the Trinitarian God, but especially related to the Holy Ghost, acting in the individual. To Augustine, charity was an infused quality, a qualitas infusa menti, though he stated that a person also had a “natural” inclination towards this end. He further claimed that spiritual life began with faith but was perfected by love. The primacy of love became clear when the bishop of Hippo asserted that if the virtue of charity was absent, other virtues would have no value whatsoever. Charity was the "life of virtues" (vita virtutum), the motor of other virtues. Following New Testament texts, he stated that it was impossible to love God without loving one’s fellow human being. On an inter-personal level love should be directed to all people, and the virtuous life was constituted by feeling compassion for the neighbour. Still, it was God who should be loved above everything else. God was the only thing that could be “enjoyed” (frui).

It might be useful to briefly consider the most influential scholastic—Thomas Aquinas—who included a quite lengthy discussion on love in his Summa Theologiae. For him, charity meant the friendship (amicitia) between God and humans, or between humans: to love is to wish for another person’s good for his or her own sake. To Aquinas love was not a state, but a permanent quality or habit of the will, and as such active. As in Augustine,

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3 A more than hundred-page examination of the concept of love in Catholic tradition is found in Dictionnaire de spiritualité 1932-1995, vol. 3, s.v. “charité”.
4 Summa Theologiae 2a 2ae qq. 23-27 (Aquinas 1920-1942, vol. 9).
God was the reason for loving one’s neighbour: *ratio diligendi proximum Deus est*; and charity was the “form of virtue” (*forma virtutum*). An explanation of this latter concept is found in the early twentieth-century *Catholic Encyclopedia*: “the other virtues, while possessing a real value of their own, derive a fresh and greater excellence from their union with charity, which, reaching out directly to God, ordains all our virtuous actions to Him.”

According to scholastic discourse, the origin and first object of charity was God, but love should also be directed to all humans: people on earth, souls in purgatory and members of the church triumphant in heaven. The angels should be the object of human love too. Charity should, however, not be shown towards the condemned souls in hell, demons, animals or inanimate objects. There was an order of charity (*ordo caritatis*), an internal hierarchy of virtue. The first and highest level included acts related to spiritual benefits and the salvation of souls. The second was constituted by goods of the soul and body such as life, health and liberty, while the third and lowest, comprised extrinsic goods such as reputation and wealth. Thus, the contribution to other peoples’ eternal well-being held the highest position in the *ordo caritatis*. Even if the goal was to love every human being to the same degree, Aquinas thought this would hardly be possible in this life. In this life it was natural to love one’s kin or other people who was nearer to oneself.

Without any doubt, the sixteenth century was the golden age of Hispanic mysticism, and many of the mystics of the time are widely read even today. This is certainly the case of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, but there were a number of other influential mystical authors such as Francisco de Osuna and Luis de Granada. In their prescriptions for the individual’s road to perfection and union with the divine, love was a very central theme. It was God’s love of the human that called her to enter into the “centre of her soul” or “the heart”, where God was present. The perfect union between God and the soul was often described in nuptial terms. In this way of thinking, the love of God and the love of one’s fellow were results of

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6 *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1907-1922, vol. 9, s.v. “love”.

7 *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1907-1922, vol. 9, s.v. “love”.

God’s amorous invitation, which ultimately could lead to a human being’s direct experience of the divine and her true self. Still, the road to perfection was a co-operation between God and the individual.9

Due to her canonical status and great influence on contemplative women in colonial Spanish America, the case of Teresa of Avila should be treated in more detail. Her understanding of the road towards divine union was developed in a number of works from the early 1560s onwards, including the Libro de la Vida and the Camino de Perfección, but appeared in its most complex and elaborate form in Las Moradas or Castillo Interior, written in 1577 and published for the first time about a decade later.10

In the Castillo Interior, Teresa of Avila described how the human being’s itinerary towards God began with her realizing that God was present deep within her, and ended with the soul’s union with God. The text, filled with symbolic language, was a descriptive and prescriptive roadmap based on Teresa of Avila’s own experiences and her anagogical biblical exegesis. The human soul was likened to a crystalline or diamond-like castle, which was divided into seven concentric circles, each made up by several dwelling places (moradas). The method for even entering the first level was to recollect oneself from the world, and its external appetites, and in humility find one’s true self in the centre of the soul through an appetite for God. Attentive prayer was the motor of the process. Through his love of the human being, God called her, and through love she should answer the call. Still, according to Teresa the devil was a constant threat, particularly in the outer dwelling places, as he tried to cool down her love. He tried to darken the road to the ultimate light that was God, and make the individual soul regress into lower stages.11 In her perceptive study of the Castillo Interior, Gillian T. W. Ahlgren explains the nature of love in Teresa’s work: “If God is love, then aligning one’s will with that of God entails making daily, conscious choices to love and act out of love. Here we must speak of love as not a feeling, but a choice or decision to act lovingly.”12

According to Teresa of Avila, acts of love should be performed not by duty, but unconditionally and with joy. The goal was that love should guide all human actions, intentions and desires. She stated that in the fourth

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10 A critical edition of her complete works is found in Teresa de Jesús 1982.
12 Ahlgren 2005: 44-45; citation on p. 44.
dwellings, the heart, understood as the centre of the soul, became enlarged as it was increasingly filled with the love of God and neighbour.\textsuperscript{13} The theme of growing love was introduced in the chapter devoted to the fourth dwellings, but developed on in the subsequent parts, where Teresa started to use nuptial metaphors to relate the soul with God. Still, according to her, the marriage would not be permanently consummated until the centre was reached. In the fifth dwellings, the soul realized that God was insulted by the acts of sinners and therefore felt an urge to contribute to their salvation as a means to end these offenses against the divine.\textsuperscript{14} In the sixth and penultimate dwellings locutions, raptures and ecstasies were common. Teresa’s description of this stage was the most extensive and complex part of the \textit{Castillo Interior}. During this phase, the person had temporal unitary experiences with God, followed by periods of loss. A betrothal between God and the soul took place, but the marriage still had to be consummated.\textsuperscript{15} Her views on the relation between the individual, God and the fellow human being became particularly clear in these passages. Ahlgren pertinently explains that according to Teresa

\begin{quote}
 in addition to serving as a medium for the outpouring of God, the soul also invites other people toward the celebration of unitive possibility. The community that develops as a result of this soul’s interactions in the world can be understood as a kind of affective circle, where loving affection is passed from one member to another in an agapic celebration; prayer, loving concern, empathic commitment, honesty, and integrity are the hallmarks of this communion.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

According to Teresa, the centre of the seventh dwelling places was characterized not by ecstasy, but by a calm and lasting experience of oneness with the Trinitarian God.\textsuperscript{17} This unitary experience had bearing on the person’s interactions with the divine and other human beings. Towards the very end of the \textit{Castillo Interior}, she wrote that “toda la memoria se le va en contentarle [Dios], y en qué o por dónde mostrará el amor que le tiene. Para esto es la oración, hijas mías; de esto sirve este matrimonio espiritual: de que

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Ahlgren 2005: 113-120.
\end{footnotes}
nazcan siempre obras, obras.”

To Teresa of Avila, this new way of life in unity with God was thus characterized by both contemplation and action, as charity had both a divine and human direction.

**Brought by Love to the Philippines**

Jerónima de la Asunción (1556-1630) was a Poor Clare in Toledo before she made the long journey to the Philippines to found the Santa Clara convent in Manila, where she became the first abbess. A process to have her beatified started soon after her death, but it was aborted in early modern times, and not re-opened until the 1990s. There are several hagiographical sources to her life. Shortly before her death, her co-sister Ana de Cristo wrote a *vida* about her, which remained in manuscript form. It was at least partly based on an autobiographical account written by Madre Jerónima, which seems to have been lost.

Two hagiographies about Jerónima de la Asunción were indeed printed in the colonial era. Both authors were Franciscans. Ginés de Quesada’s work was written before his death in 1643, but remained unpublished until 1715, when it was rediscovered and printed in Mexico City. Two years later a second edition was issued in Madrid. Written after Quesada’s work, and based on it, but printed as early as 1662, Bartolomé Letona’s *Perfecta religiosa* included a quite typical description of life, virtues and death. The volume also contained two extensive commentaries on Clarisse pious exercises and the Second Rule of St. Clare respectively, both of which the author thought that Madre Jerónima had implemented to a heroic degree.

Letona asserted that Jerónima de la Asunción loved God even when she was in her mother’s womb, and claimed she never committed a single mortal sin during her long life. In his view, her perfect love of God was the basis for all her other virtues. In the thematic part on her zeal, closely related to those on her charity, the biographer likened her heart to a love-

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18 Teresa de Jesús 1982: 1033.
19 See Ruano 1993, Sánchez 1994 and Cruz 2009:174-229. These works include studies on the *vida* written by Ana de Cristo, which is guarded in the Santa Isabel de los Reyes convent in Toledo and beatification documentation found in the Vatican archives and the Archivo Ibero-Oriental in Madrid.
20 Letona 1662 and Quesada 1717.
21 Letona 1662: 32r-33r.
filled, erupting volcano. This love was transformed into apostolic zeal. For two decades before eventually going there, she felt a vocation to leave for the Philippines contributing to the missions, and from Manila she wanted to continue to other, less Christian parts of Asia. Letona wrote: “Sus conversaciones en Toledo y en Manila eran de Japón y China, a cuyos infieles deseava llevar la luz del evangélio y enseñarles la verdadera fe, y dar su vida y sangre en esta demanda. A los religiosos, que pasavan a Japón tenía notable envidia, y los ayudava espiritual y corporalmente en quanto podía.”22

Jerónima de la Asunción wanted to evangelize people in Japan and China and was willing to give her life in pursuit of that goal. She felt envious of the male ecclesiastics who could go there to actively work on the mission-fields, teaching, preaching and administering the sacraments. By that time, Japan had become an important symbol for the suffering church, as the rulers had outlawed Christianity. As an effect of the ban, many missionaries and native Christians were executed from the last years of the sixteenth century onwards. It was Japan that was Jerónima de la Asunción’s ultimate goal, as the chances of martyrdom were greatest there. Given her great interest in the eternal well-being of the Chinese and Japanese, she corresponded with missionaries who were or had been there. Realizing that she would not be able to suffer and die there herself, through letters, she animated friars to go there or stay in order to do just that.23

According to Letona, Jerónima de la Asunción had a great devotion for St. Paul, whom she wanted to emulate in the conversion of “gentiles” and the hagiographer wrote that there were striking similarities between the two: “en cierto modo la hizo el Señor muy parecida al apostol; porque si a él le hizo vaso de elección, en que fuesse llevado su santo nombre por todo el mundo, a esta santa religiosa, apostólica muger le hizo el señor vaso de elección, en que a lo más remoto del mundo fuese llevada la planta de la virginidad.”24

She was a divinely elect apostolic woman, and though she would not be able to suffer martyrdom on the mission frontier herself, she wanted to contribute to the diffusion of the virtue of chastity by founding convents

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22 Letona 1662: 36v.
23 Letona 1662: 37r.
24 Letona 1662: 16r-v.
there, as virginity was considered a life-long martyrdom.\textsuperscript{25} In his biography, Ginés de Quesada cited a text written by the nun shortly before her death, which summarized her missionary vocation: “quisiera darle a Dios infinitos mundos todos convertidos y en gran perfección de virtud por su mayor honra y gloria. Todas las criaturas la den y alaben a su magestad por todas las eternidades.”\textsuperscript{26} Based on her love of him, the ultimate goal of her apostolate was the greater glory of God, wanting everybody in the world to believe and keep his precepts.

**Excessive Love and Longings for Martyrdom**

Rosa de Santa María (1586-1617), better known as Rosa of Lima, was a Dominican tertiary. She wrote an autobiography, but it disappeared early on and the only of her own manuscripts that remain are two iconolexic collages that explain her soul’s way to union with God. Some texts about her holiness were written almost directly after her death.\textsuperscript{27} However, the most substantial and extensive biography was authored by German Dominican Leonard Hansen. Originally written in Latin, the book was translated into Spanish in 1668 and soon appeared in a number of other European languages as well.\textsuperscript{28}

Hansen’s work was made public just before Rosa de Santa María’s beatification and subsequent canonization, thus contributing to her popularization in both Europe and the Indies. The investigations into Rosa de Santa María’s holiness began on the diocese level shortly after her death and the subsequent apostolic investigation was remitted to Rome in the early 1630s, and she was eventually canonized about four decades later, in 1671. It was an unusually rapid process for the time, when it was decreed that fifty years should have passed since the death of the individual before she could be elevated to the altars.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{25} Letona 1662: 32r and 36v.
\textsuperscript{26} Quesada 1717: 194.
\textsuperscript{27} In the year of her death, 1617, an anonymous Dominican wrote a brief biography and two years later another Dominican Pedro de Loaysa wrote a more extensive one. Important scholarly studies on Rosa of Lima include Morgan 2002: 67-97, Myers 2003: 23-43, Mujica Pinilla 2005, Millar Cavacho 2009: 19-54 and Báez Rivera 2013, but the number of works dedicated to her is very large, though most are hagiographical accounts.
\textsuperscript{28} Hansen 1668, cf. González de Acuña 1671.
\textsuperscript{29} Myers 2003: 23-43.
The hagiographical texts written in the seventeenth century gave a prominent place to Rosa’s severe mortifications, illness and self-inflicted pains. She was seen as a Catherine of Siena of the New World, who acted as an intercessor for Lima and the viceroyalty at large. During her life, Rosa of Lima was thought to have practiced Christian virtues to a heroic degree and therefore died in an “odour of sanctity”. After her death large groups of people came to see her cadaver and attain contact relics. To protect the dead body from the multitudes, guards were put in her home. She had lived retired, but with death she became a public figure.30

Love, martyrdom, missionary vocation and gender were intertwined themes in the hagiographies about Rosa. In his *La bienaventurada Rosa peruana de Santa Maria*, Hansen asserted that she often cried for being born a woman, and therefore did not have the possibility of suffering martyrdom at the hands of non-Christians: “[l]orava en varias ocasiones amargamente su infeliz suerte, considerando que el estado de ser mujer la impedía no poder ir a buscarle [el martirio] en las regiones más remotas y más bárbaras, logrando esta dicha a manos de infieles, dando mil vidas si las tuviera a mayor gloria de Dios.”31 If only possible, she hoped that the “barbarians” would torture her cruelly before killing her, so that she could prove her love of Christ in an extreme way.

Hansen compared her quest for martyrdom with the martyrs of the Early Church, who died for their faith, and though she was not able to die the death of a martyr in this way, the will to do so was proof of her great virtuousness. According to Hansen, Rosa wept for the fact that so many “barbarians”, even in areas close to Lima, risked eternal condemnation as they were not baptized, or though nominally Christians continued to practice their idolatry. In fact, she likened these “idolaters” to innumerable ants crawling on the mountain slopes, and in her view, the missionary task was therefore nothing but immense. Moreover, the number of ecclesiastics actively devoted to the missions was far too limited.32

Not being able to go to the “barbarians” herself, Rosa of Lima tried to convince and animate one of her confessors and other priests to become missionaries. In this context, she displayed a quite straight-forward criticism against the Dominican order in the Indies. According to her, the friars should

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31 Hansen 1668: 241-245; citation on p. 245.
32 Hansen 1668: 246.
concentrate on conversion work and not devote too much time to scholastic subtleties. Their education should be put in the service of the most important task in the New World: to contribute to the salvation of non-Christians.\textsuperscript{33} If not a woman, Rosa de Santa María said that she would have studied to become a missionary in order to be sent to the most inhospitable regions in South America, where she thought that people were cannibals. There she would have wanted to preach and teach catechism.\textsuperscript{34} In this passage, her frustrated missionary vocation was not limited to a yearning for martyrdom; it included a desire to teach the faith to non-Christians. Once again, however, she realized that her female gender made it impossible and therefore sought other ways to contribute to the Catholic missions.

As a way to become a missionary-by-proxy, she wanted to adopt a little boy, whom she would raise to become a priest active in the evangelizing task. According to her hagiographer, to some degree that would have channelled her “excessive” love of God and neighbour, which otherwise threatened to crush her heart. Nevertheless, this dream was not realized during her short life. Hansen claimed that, if only possible she also wanted to go out on the streets of Lima, crucifix around the neck, preaching conversion. Thus her missionary dreams were not restricted to non-Christians, but also to sinful Catholics in the centre of the viceroyalty. The hagiographer claimed that if her dreams had come true, she would have preached to them: “Arrepentíos (o pecadores!) arrepentíos, apartaos de los caminos de perversión que segues ciego por donde el demonio os guía para despedazoros, como llevan las insensatas ovejas al matadero.”\textsuperscript{35} She would try to convince them to leave the road of sin and unfaithfulness, open their eyes and realize that they were destined to death as lambs about to get slaughtered.

A Mother of Charity

The case of Catarina de San Juan (c. 1605-1688), a beata in Puebla was remarkable. In the hagiographic literature of the Spanish Indies she was a rara avis. According to her hagiographers she was of royal descent from India—el Gran Mogor—probably born a Muslim. Abducted from her

\textsuperscript{33} Hansen 1668: 247-248.
\textsuperscript{34} Hansen 1668: 249.
\textsuperscript{35} Hansen 1668: 249-250.
homeland at an early age, she was brought as a slave to Mexico via the Philippines, and during that voyage, she was baptized by Jesuits. In the latter part of her life, when in Puebla, Catarina de San Juan became well-known for her visions and miraculous intercessions, and was close to the Society of Jesus. After her death she became the subject of several hagiographical texts: one funeral sermon, one minor biography, but above all an enormous three-volume work (1689-1692), authored by her Jesuit confessor Alonso Ramos. It totalled almost 1,000 folio-sized pages, being one of the most extensive imprints of the colonial era.

Ramos’s book met an unusual fate. The first volume was condemned in toto by the Spanish Inquisition in 1692 and so was Francisco Aguilera’s funeral sermon, appended to it. This was one of the very few cases where a book printed in the Indies was put on the Index of Forbidden Books. Yet, four more years would pass until the Mexican tribunal of the Holy Office denounced it. Later the other two volumes were included in the condemnation as was the public display of images of Catarina de San Juan, where she sometimes appeared together with the controversial former bishop of Puebla, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza. The Inquisition also decreed that the small oratory devoted to her should be closed. All of these were clear signs of a rather developed local cult. The Holy Office’s edict did not mince matters when stating the reasons for censoring Ramos’s works: “por contenerse en él, revelaciones, visiones y apariciones inútiles, inverosímiles, llenas de contradicciones y compariciones impropias, indecentes y temerarias, que sapiunt blasphemias.” The main reason was the abundant descriptions of questionable visions and miracles, which they thought smacked of blasphemy. Likewise, the edict accused the authors of vain credulity, not having been able to “discern the spirits”. Due to the Inquisition’s censure and the subsequent confiscation of the books, Ramos’s work, and particularly the complete three-volume set, is exceedingly rare today.

Yet another hagiography on Catarina de San Juan was printed in 1692. It was authored by secular priest José del Castillo Grajeda, who had been

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very close to Catarina de San Juan and one of her many confessors, sometimes talking to her thrice a day. She obviously made a deep impression on him, a fact that was reflected in an autobiographical manuscript he compiled later in life, where much space was devoted to their interactions. Castillo Grajeda’s work is very different from Ramos’s. It is brief, called a *Compendio*, without the verbosity and flowery Baroque rhetoric that characterized the three-volume biography. The author claimed to have reproduced her way of speaking in a very strange Spanish. Having rendered these passages, he interpreted them in a sermon-like style. It is quite clear that the book was an indirect criticism of Ramos’s verbose treatment and it escaped inquisitorial censure altogether. With three works in altogether five volumes, Catarina de San Juan became one of the most biographed people in colonial Spanish America. This was an unlikely fate for a woman who had arrived in Mexico as a slave.40

Mission related themes played a very significant role in Ramos’s work. In the third volume several chapters were devoted to the theological virtue of charity and the author noted that this was an underlying argument of his whole biography. As usual, he made a distinction between the love of God and the love of one’s neighbour. According to Ramos, it was Catarina de San Juan’s love of God that had made her leave her homeland, just as Abraham had done, and this virtue had grown during her entire life, finally reaching perfection. Her love was described as a burning sensation or a fire in her heart. The flames threatened to break the body, and she constantly complained that her heart was too small to harbour the love she felt for God. She had a deep friendship with her “lover”, Christ, who had redeemed the sinful humanity and invited them to eternal bliss, and wanted to die to see God face to face. During life, she claimed to have had a vision of the trinity, though in a veiled manner. Still, according to Ramos, she always described herself as a “beast” and a “worm”, not worthy of any of these divine favours. Love was combined with humility.41

As in other works, Ramos connected the love of God and the love of neighbour, and the latter theme was elaborated on in three long chapters. The first of them was devoted to her compassion with the poor and sick. According to the author, she donated clothes and food to poor people in

41 Ramos 1692: 11v-26r.
Puebla, and through alms collected by her, several slaves were manumitted. Ramos underlined that her compassion for the sick was not restricted to humans, but included animals, which she miraculously cured. The other two chapters were devoted to her urges for the salvation of others, whether living or dead. According to Ramos, her zeal was based on her knowledge about what eternal perdition meant, as she had travelled through hell. This redemptive mission influenced her daily life: “se augmentó tanto el ardiente deseo de salvación de los próximos, que la obligaba a andar continuamente suspirando y clamando al cielo porque todos se salvassen, y ninguno ofendiesse a su criador y amado redemptor.”

Her zeal for the fellow human being had two reasons: she wished that all people should be saved, and she wanted them to stop offending their redeemer through their sinful acts, realizing what he gratuitously had done for them. In a passage, Ramos claimed that through her increasing love, her blood volume had decreased to such a level that, when hurt, she did only bleed a single drop. After many theological excursions, Ramos ended his reflection on Catarina de San Juan’s love for other people by stating “Catharina era escudo, torre, muralla bien fortificada, y madre de la charidad con que abrasaba todo el universo”. She had nothing less than a universal importance for the salvation of the souls.

A Bonfire of Love

Mariana de Jesús de Paredes Flores (1618-1645) was a Franciscan tertiary in Quito, particularly known for her sufferings and harsh penance, including miraculous inedia. She allegedly survived on communion bread alone during her last seven years in life. Mariana de Jesús was described as a younger version of Rosa of Lima and the stories about her bear a striking resemblance to those of her Peruvian role model. A series of hagiographies were written about her. The oldest of them was a funeral sermon preached by Jesuit Alonso de Rojas, and printed the year after her death. It became the main source for Diego de Córdova Salinas’s brief biography that was

42 Ramos 1692: 26v-34v.
43 Ramos 1692: 33r.
44 Ramos 1692: 35r-35v.
45 Ramos 1692: 51r.
46 For recent scholarly studies, see Morgan 1998, Larco Chacón 2000 and Morgan 2002: 99-117.
included in his chronicle of the Peruvian Franciscans, published in 1651.\textsuperscript{47} Both the Franciscans and the Society of Jesus claimed to be closely connected to her and her holiness. She had been a member of the Franciscan third order, but she had had Jesuit confessors and was considerably influenced by their spirituality.

Although some texts about Mariana de Jesús were printed shortly after her demise, the first book-length hagiography did not appear until more than five decades later. In the last years of the seventeenth century, Jesuit Jacinto Morán de Butrón completed a \textit{vida}, which first appeared in a brief version, printed in Lima in 1702. Later, in 1724, a complete 500-page version was published in Madrid. Both were called \textit{La Azucena de Quito}, the Lily of Quito, an epithet which is still associated with Mariana de Jesús. Three decades later, in 1754, Thomás de Gijón y León published a new, book-length, hagiography, printed in Madrid, which built on the earlier works. Published in Spain, these two latter works were clearly part of a process to further her beatification.\textsuperscript{48} Still, her elevation to the altars came much later; she was beatified in 1853 and canonized in 1950.

In the works on Mariana de Jesús, her “burning” love of God, and as a direct effect of it, the love of her neighbour was a prominent theme. Morán de Butrón wrote: “Hoguera del amor divino era el corazón de esta venerable niña, pues sólo buscaba material para alimentar su amor, y leña para abrasase en llamas de caridad”. Following a common trope, her love was associated with a fire that burned within her, and this love only increased as the years passed.\textsuperscript{49}

According to the hagiographers, as a young girl Mariana de Jesús cried and fainted when she heard her relatives say that many people on earth people did not believe in Christ and did not realize that he had died for their sake. She claimed that there was a particularly great spiritual need in the “land of the Moors” (Morisma) and various parts of Asia, but in many parts of the Spanish Indies, too, including areas close to her home-town. She thought that many of the latter lived in deepest ignorance and worshipped the devil. Mariana de Jesús must have heard stories about the campaigns that tried to “extirpate idolatry” amongst the indigenous population, beginning in

\textsuperscript{47} Rojas 1646 and Córdova Salinas 1651: 528-534.
\textsuperscript{48} Morán de Butrón 1702, Morán de Butrón 1724 and Gijón y León 1754. Morán de Butrón’s books have since been published numerous times and translated into English and German.
\textsuperscript{49} Morán de Butrón 1724: 49.
the early seventeenth century. What especially influenced her were stories about the fate of the indigenous peoples in Amazonian Maynas which were “llenas de gentiles, abastacidas de idolatrías”. The Jesuits were active there, but the number of missionaries was not enough given the large and dispersed population who lived there and in the other parts of the Americas.50

In his 1724 book, Morán de Butrón described Mariana de Jesús’s vocational frustration in the form of a dialogue that she reportedly had had with herself at the age of twelve. She asked what the value of her love was, if she did not show it in practice. Though a Bride of Christ she did not go out in order to stop the offenses “idolaters” made against her bride-groom. She said that Christ was hated in many places, but that she did nothing to alleviate the situation. Even if it was impossible to save all, she thought that she would be able to save at least one person from eternal punishment, if only she could instruct him or her in the Catholic faith. Her missionary zeal was nurtured by stories about the martyrdom of Paulo Miki, a Jesuit novice, who was crucified in Japan in 1597 together with several other Christians.51

As an effect of these feelings, she convinced three other girls, two nieces and a friend that they should go out preaching to the “infidels” in Maynas and die for their faith. Morán de Butrón exclaimed that their resolution could be described as a “mute sermon”. However, their missionary endeavour was aborted. The night they would depart, they overslept and were hindered by her parents.52 The story bears a striking resemblance to a narrative in Teresa of Avila’s Libro de la Vida. Together with her brother, the young Teresa de Ahumada planned a missionary journey to convert “Moors” in northern Africa and there suffer martyrdom, but they were hindered by their family shortly after outset.53 As in many other cases, the stories about the formally canonized Teresa influenced the hagiographical writings in Spanish America. Even if the wish that non-Christians should be saved was present in the stories about Mariana de Jesús, it is the theme of martyrdom that was the most salient.

50 Morán de Butrón 1724.
52 Morán de Butrón 1724: 54-55.
Charity and Weeping

María de San José (1656-1719) was an Augustinian recollect nun living in Puebla, who later became one of the founders of the sister-convent in Oaxaca. Among colonial nuns she was quite unusual as she took the habit when she was over thirty years old, due in part to economic constraints and the opposition of her family. She was unusual, too, by the fact that she was such a prolific author. Her spiritual journals are made up of twelve volumes, written for different confessors and spiritual advisors, and amount to more than 2,000 pages, including cuentas de conciencia, a convent chronicle, an autobiographical vida, and biographical notes. In the 1980s, the documents were discovered by Kathleen Ann Myers in the John Carter Brown Library, and since, she and others have dedicated several scholarly studies to this unique piece of work. Selections of the manuscripts have been published both in the original Spanish and in English translation. Apart from María de San José’s own writings, we have access to one funeral sermon and one hagiographical vida about her, both written by Dominican Sebastián de Santander y Torres.

In the second volume of her spiritual journals, María de San José recounted a story of a vision that she received during her first years in the Santa Mónica convent in Puebla. Virgin Mary appeared to her with the Christ child in her womb and just thereafter she saw a crucified Christ. Seeing this she realized how much Christ had suffered during his life and through his death at the cross. In a locution, Christ told her that many people were lost as they did not believe in him and did not realize that he had redeemed their transgressions. Thereafter, Christ showed her the whole world “just as it is”, that is, that a large part of the population were “in mortal sin and in God’s disgrace, [and] live as if for them there were no God”. Afterwards, she described it as her heart broke in half and she wept so much that the brick-floor below her was wetted.

After this series of visions, María de San José would have similar experiences on a number of occasions. In some, she saw a multitude of

54 Her spiritual autobiography is edited in María de San José [1703-1705] 1993. Selections from all volumes are found in María de San José [1691?-1717] 1999. Scholarly studies on the text material include Myers 1993, Myers 2003 and Myers & Powell 1999.
55 Santander y Torres 1719 and Santander y Torres 1723.
sleeping and head-less people. Christ explained that the first ones were unbelievers, who did not understand that he had died for their sins. The latter were Christians who lived a worldly life and therefore risked eternal damnation. According to María de San José’s own texts, these experiences caused her such pain that she was unable to sleep. What hurt her the most was the fact that she did not know how to contribute to those who risked condemnation: “I am nothing and can do nothing to remedy these trials”. Following a trope from Teresa of Avila, she declared that if she could save only one soul she would not only give her life “but a thousand lives if I had them”.57

Not long after these experiences, María de San José had another vision, which was much more concrete than the previous ones. She wrote “I saw a fountain of water as beautiful as glass. There I saw many naked Indians, both men and women, all together in some of those baths they use, where they were all bathing. And I saw a demon among them who was urging them to do indecent things, things against God.”58 The scene represented nakedness in the communal bath, a common symbol of indigenous sin in colonial documents. Christ explained that these Indians had not confessed their sins; the fountain was the symbol for confession. Again she wept for the souls and claimed that all the time that had passed since she had the experience, she had prayed for the souls of these Indians. Compassion with the fate of sinners and non-believers was the central theme in these texts. Some of the visions were general: she saw the headless and the blurred people, some were much more contextualized. The main effect they had on her was that she continuously wept for them. According to the journals she felt sad and frustrated about not being able to do more for them.

Painful Passion

María Inés de los Dolores (1659-1728) became blind at an early age, but still entered the Augustinian convent of San Lorenzo in Mexico City. She became the object of a funeral sermon by Jesuit Juan Antonio de Oviedo, and already in 1729 another Jesuit, Juan Antonio de Mora published a biography of over 300-pages on her. The latter work built on her own notes, but also on testimonies from her last confessor and other people who had

known her well. It included a separate chapter dedicated to her zeal for the salvation of the souls.\textsuperscript{59}

According to Mora, the inability to actively contribute to others’ salvation greatly pained María Inés de los Dolores. Her heart burnt with a fire of charity, which was very painful. She realized that male missionaries could get an outlet of the zeal for the salvation of souls through sermons, the teaching of doctrine and confessions. All these possibilities meant that they could do something for the salvation of their neighbour. For others, who felt this love and zeal for the salvation of humanity: “es mayor el dolor, y pena en aquellas almas verdaderamente seráficas que abrasadas del amor de Dios, o por su estado ó por su sexo, no pueden desahogar con las encendidos afectos de el corazón.”\textsuperscript{60}

Those who felt their hearts bursting with love without being able to do much did not only include women, but also laymen. In a colloquy with Christ, María Inés de los Dolores told him that she felt an ardent wish to win souls for him and compared her frustration to a living hell, or that she lived a life in greatest pain for not being able to find a channel for her ardent zeal: “Es tanto, Esposo mío, lo que desseo llevar, y ganar para ti las almas: y es mi pena tan grave, de no poder conseguirlo, que ella sola es para si fuera un infierno”.\textsuperscript{61}

A Phoenix of Love

As an infant, Juana de Jesús (1662-1703) was left in the Santa Clara convent in Quito, where she stayed for seventeen years. In the end, she did not become a professed nun, but a Franciscan tertiary, who lived retired in a relative’s home. Shortly after her death, she became the subject of an extensive hagiography written by Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María, which was published in Lima in 1756.\textsuperscript{62} The author told that on one occasion, in 1690, Juana de Jesús dreamt about a hand, from which three blood-coloured “rivers of fire” ran out over “three parts of the world”: the occident and the orient, and another place, which she did not recognize, but which seemed to be in the middle. She realized that the hand was a symbol

\textsuperscript{59} Oviedo 1728 and Mora 1729.
\textsuperscript{60} Mora 1729: 308.
\textsuperscript{61} Mora 1729: 308.
\textsuperscript{62} Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756. To my knowledge there are no detailed studies on Juana de Jesús.
for Divine Justice and she cried for mercy. Waking up trembling, she became aware of the poor state of humanity and felt that she had to do something in order to placate the wrath of God, and therefore prayed and made penance for the sinners in the world.63

In his treatment of the virtue of charity in Juana de Jesús, her biographer claimed that she was like the Phoenix bird, who burned up, but was reborn from the ashes. According to him, the fire of charity burnt in this way within her, and it was directed to all people in the world and the souls of purgatory. To make her even more loving, Christ hid himself on occasions, and like a widow she cried for the loss of her husband, realizing how much she loved him. She felt great urges to tell others about her love and wanted to go far away to tell people about it:

Y pareciendo corto ámbito para su desahogo los claustros y aún los barrios y plazas deseaba salir a los desiertos y campos a ensanchar los fervores que se ahogaban en su pecho. Miraba como imposible este alivio por el voto de la clausura y buscaba con quien hablar del amor y finezas de su amado para divertir su pena y crecía mas, porque era avivar la llama.64

To channel her love she wanted to spread the good news. She wished to walk around, but her gender and state made it impossible. Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María included a number of testimonies of other nuns that authenticated his version. One of the witnesses, Josefa de San Felipe testified that she had experienced an “arrow of fire” filled with the love of God that had come from Juana de Jesús’s heart and pierced her own. Others testified that they felt the love of God burning when they approached her.65 Her love for God and humans made her strong enough to fight the devil, who, according to the hagiographer, was amazed by her strength. She was a true athlete of Christ. “Una delicada niña haciendo frente al infierno con la leche a los labios, y espada en la mano jugando con lances con la destreza de un campeón veterano. Qué gloria sería para el señor de los exércitos, ver a una niña sin pechos, tan terrible para el infierno como un esquadrón bien ordenado.”66

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64 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 268-269; citation on p. 269.
65 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 270-271.
66 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 15-16.
The themes of her female humility were combined with testimonials of her spiritual strength. A common subject in the biography about Juan de Jesús was that she was a “fisher of men”, just as the apostles, who were common people, too.67

Zeal as a Dowry at her Betrothal with Christ

María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio (1695-1756) entered the beaterio of Santa Rosa de Santa María in Puebla when she was nineteen years old. Later, the institution was transformed into a Dominican convent and she became its first prioress. She was one of the few nuns in the colonial Spanish empire who wrote theological treatises, many of them related to the soteriological effects of Virgin Mary’s breast milk. These works were published shortly after her death, bound together with a funeral sermon preached by Juan de Villa Sánchez and a monograph vida by Jesuit José Bellido.68

According to Bellido, María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio reached the highest degree of love, mystically marrying Christ, and their union was symbolized by a diamond ring her husband put on her finger, which only she saw. Following the story about Teresa of Avila’s transverberation, the hagiographer claimed that an arrow of divine love had pierced her heart, and he also asserted that the newlyweds had exchanged hearts.69 The dowry Christ gave her at their betrothal was a great zeal for the salvation of humanity. Bellido wrote that “[m]iraba a los próximos, como que eran la hacienda de su amado esposo; y assí se deshacia, y desvelaba por cuidársela … y no sólo la cuidaba, sino que hacía toda diligécia para dar nuevas creces a la capital.”70

She invested the dowry so that its value increased. Inspired by Rosa of Lima, María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio used the net as a fundamental symbol for her missionary work. She wanted to place a net at the entrance to hell, so that people did not fall into it. In dreams and visions, the net was made of blood with light coming from the wounds of Christ. And just like the apostles, Christ gave her permission to cast it out over the world, to

67 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 129-133.
68 Bellido 1758. The most complete study on María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio is Eich 2004.
69 Bellido 1758: 245-254.
70 Bellido 1758: 257.
gather souls and become a fisher of men. Bellido included a passage, which he claimed were Anna María Águeda de San Ignacio’s own words:

assí que comulgo le pido licencia a nuestro Señor, y en su nombre la echó, llamando a la Santíssima Virgen, a todos los santos, y ángeles, para que me ayuden, y detengan a las almas en ella - - - rodeo por todo el mundo, cogiendo en ellas las almas. Empiezo por los señores sacerdotes; por las monjas, y no dexo reyno, ni nación, captivos, pobres, afligidos, encarcelados, desterrados, criados, y criadas, los infieles, gentiles, moros, hereges, todos los voy metiendo; los enfermos, y hasta las almas del purgatorio.

When taking communion, with divine permission and heavenly intercession, she cast the net to gather the souls of all kinds of people, Catholics as well as non-Catholics. Through Christ and their love of him, she and the other nuns who lived in her convent had a power of attraction that drew the souls towards the centre that was the belief in God. Some of the people that were caught in the net stayed, while others escaped and returned to their earlier ways of life. According to Bellido, Madre María Anna had wanted to do other things to spread the faith of the church, but her gender hindered her from doing much: “No se dio todavía por satisfecha su charidad con los próximos, sino que clamaba repitidas vezes a Dios, que pues por ser muger y tan inútil, no podía hacer bien a las almas, mientras vivía, sino era con rogar por ellas.” According to José Bellido’s biography it was clear that María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio was frustrated as Christ had given her the zeal for the salvation of humanity, but that the means available to her, as a cloistered woman, were few, basically reduced to prayer.

A Heart as Big as the World

María de Jesús (1690s-1776) was a white veiled Carmelite, who in 1714 professed in the San José convent in Santa Fe de Bogotá. Very little is known about her life. She has, however, left a dense spiritual journal. It is not dated but at least parts of it must have been written after 1767, as she mentioned the expulsion of the Jesuits. The journal remained in manuscript form until the 1940s, when it was printed in a chronicle about the convent.

71 Bellido 1758: 256-257.
72 Bellido 1758: 258.
73 Bellido 1758: 258.
Most of the entries in the text began with her praying, and during prayer she received some kind of vision. The love of God and prayers for the salvation of other human beings permeated María de Jesús’s writings and most of her visions of the Trinity, Christ and Virgin Mary were related to that theme. Over and over again she stated that she prayed for the salvation of all people, both those currently living and those who would walk the earth until the end of time.\footnote{María de Jesús [mid-18th c.]1950?: The only major study on María de Jesús is found in Herrera 2013.}

The blood and heart of Christ played pivotal roles in the journal, and on many occasions María de Jesús wrote that Christ had united his heart with hers. She even described a vision of the Holy Family, where she told Mary and Joseph that the Infant Jesus was not really theirs but hers. She explained that the union of their hearts was the very foundation of her missionary zeal.\footnote{María de Jesús [mid-18th c.]1950?: 269-271.} At one occasion María de Jesús received a vision that represented her heart as big as the world, a symbol of her great love of God and neighbour. Following the usual rhetorical model, she wrote that she wanted to escape the visions as they caused her much harm and made her feel even more unworthy. Still, her conversations with Christ were rendered in a quite informal manner. She seldom referred to him as Lord, Father or Bridegroom, but used the much more colloquial taita, dad, or taita de mi alma, dad of my soul, and in her text God was invariably described as love.\footnote{María de Jesús [mid-18th c.]1950?: 215 and 219.}

If not for her gender and the restriction of physical space in the cloister, she would have embarked on a universal mission, preaching and trying to convert everybody, in order for them to realize that Christ was their redeemer who loved them, and that they should cease offending him with their sins and unbelief. Though there were passages in which she prayed for the salvation of individuals, most had a more universal scope:

Unas veces me dán unos deseos tan vivos de que todos se salven y que se logre la sangre y méritos de mi Señor Jesucristo, que si en mi mano estuviere, iría por todo el mundo dicéndoles cuán bueno es Dios y que por su bondad se le apegaran todos y lo amaran y lo quisieran y lo abrazaran y vieran cuán suave, cuán dulce, cuán benigno, cuán amoroso, que es lástima que todos no queramos.\footnote{María de Jesús [mid-18th c.]1950?: 225.}
On one occasion, she had a vision of Virgin Mary sprinkling the blood of Christ over the entire world, thus pointing to the universal effects of redemption, if only people changed their hearts and converted. With the help of the Virgin this could become a reality, and María de Jesús oversaw and cooperated with her in her mission. Several times the Colombian Carmelite saw the Trinity, and realized its role in the economy of salvation:

In this vision, she vicariously drank Christ’s blood for all types of people, as all were invited by God, the source of everything good. On other occasions when María de Jesús prayed for humanity’s salvation, she saw the heart of Christ and realized that innumerable, very small people came out from there. Trying to explain this experience, she underlined that no distinction should be made between people, no matter their ethnicity or social status. Before God there were no differences, and María de Jesús purposefully singled out groups with a lower status than Hispanics: blacks, mulattoes and Indians, and emphasized that Christ had died for all of them.

Love, Zeal, Martyrdom and Frustration

The connection between love and apostolic zeal, and the desire for martyrdom was a theme in many texts. According to the standard account, at an early age women often realized that lots of humans risked eternal damnation, as they were either not Catholics, or were Catholics living in mortal sin. When struck by this insight, they became devastated, not knowing how to improve the soteriological probabilities of these people. The

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78 María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950?: 244.
79 María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950?: 250.
80 María de Jesús [mid-18th c.] 1950?: 250-251.
young Mariana de Jesús from Quito supposedly fainted when relatives told her of the fate of non-Christians and sinners. María de San José was made conscious of peoples’ needs when, in visions, Christ showed her the sorry state of humanity, and Juana de Jesús had similar experiences.

As a result of one of the two “wings of charity”, the love of neighbour, they wanted all humans to be saved and to make them understand that Christ, through his death and resurrection, had redeemed them. If they only converted and mended their ways, they had the chance to escape hell. The other wing of charity, the love of God, made them realize that God was offended by the unfaithfulness and sinful behaviour of humanity, and they wanted to put an end to this situation and in such a way glorify God. In these passages, God was presented both as love itself and as an offended, yet merciful, judge. The women’s charity was often described as excessive, burning, growing, expanding and painful. Images such as fire, bonfire, volcano and flames were frequent. The heart was the centre, love and blood was the medium, particularly prominent in María de Jesús’s texts, focusing on the union between her heart and Christ’s. Generally, the heart was described as too small to harbour their charity and, through the cultivation of the virtue, still expanding to the degree of bursting or burning up.

Jerónima de la Madre de Dios professed as an Augustinian recollect in Lima in 1644 and a brief hagiographical text about her was included in the chronicles on the Peruvian Augustinian province by Calancha and Torres. They claimed that her love was so strong that flames came from her eyes, nostrils and mouth:

Su encendida caridad, en orden a Dios y a los prójimos, sobresalía entre todas las virtudes como la palma entre los árboles menores. Su abrasado pecho era como el altar del temp[l]o de Salomón, donde siempre ardía y nunca se apagaba el fuego del amor divino. Su viva llama estaba siempre centelleando y despidiendo ardientes aspiraciones, afectuosos jaculatorias, ternísimas lágrimas con que desahogaba el incendio de su corazón.81

Love led to frustration, as the women did not really know how to channel it for the benefit of others. In their view, male missionaries were lucky as they had a religious role that actively and concretely contributed to the salvation of humanity.

In hagiographical and autobiographical texts, it was not uncommon to assert that they felt envious of churchmen, who could move much more freely, teaching, preaching and administering the sacraments, something which their female gender impeded. Clearly, male agency and space were much greater. Biographers stated that some of the contemplative women explicitly deplored the fact that they had not been born males, as that would have enabled them to travel to the mission fields and preach conversion on the streets. Being women, they thought that they could not do nothing, or at least, not enough. Mariana de Jesús could not go out and preach but still felt guilty for not doing enough for God and neighbour. Similar expressions were found in a text by Mexican Capuchin María Marcela Soria. She was “insatiable” and felt “violent” desires that all people should believe and love God and she wanted to go out in the city to spread the word.82

María Felipa de Jesús, the first indigenous prioress in the Corpus Christi convent had read the stories about the Spanish Conceptionist María de Ágreda’s spiritual flights to New Mexico and ardently wanted the salvation of the indigenous people there.

Desde que leyó en las cartas de la Madre Ágreda [de] los pueblos de indios mecos que están por el Nuevo México y que no se han descubierto se le excitó en su corazón un vivísimo deseo que se internarán los operarios evangélicos en aquellas partes, para que aquellos miserables recibiesen la luz del evangélio, y como en las mismas cartas expresa la misma venerable madre las buenas disposiciones que tienen aquellos infelices para ser reducidos, fue su deseo acompañado de congoja y santa impaciencia.83

She was frustrated, anxiety ridden and impatient as nothing seemed to have happened with the so-called Chichimecs, groups of Indians considered wild and violent.

The missionary ideal that was presented in Leonardo Hansen’s hagiographical work about Rosa of Lima was decidedly male. Words such as force, sweat and blood were related to this manly, missionary enterprise. Rosa was thought to be extraordinarily spiritually strong and certainly did not lack the engagement. In her view many people, both close to Lima and in far-away places, offended God with their “idolatry”. The Indians whom she wanted to convert were consistently described in very dark colours. They were

82 María Marcela Soria [1757-1767?] 2006: 112.
ferocious, beastly and barbarous. Interestingly enough, being a Dominican tertiary, she included quite a straightforward criticism of the male members of the order, implying that they should set their priorities right and devote more work to the conversion of non-Christians, as she would do if only she could become one of them. Similar themes were present in other texts, too. Though contemplative women could laud the work of male missionaries, they thought that the number of those involved in apostolic work was too low. The task was nothing but immense, and many priests did not realize that mission was the most important endeavour in the Indies.

The wish for martyrdom was integrated in the passages on the two “wings of charity”. Many women wanted to give their life for the Catholic faith and prove their love of God. In a standard expression, they wished to die a thousand times, proving their love in the most excellent way. Still, they could not die the death of a martyr in the hands of non-Christians, as they were not able to travel to the mission fields where this would have been a possibility. Jerónima de la Asunción wanted to go to Japan, the very symbol of Christian suffering in the seventeenth century. Though she did not have the possibility to do so, she went on one of the longest colonial journeys for a group of women, from central Spain to the Philippines, founding a convent in Manila. Her love and zeal was described as the motor of the journey.

In his hagiography about Jerónima de la Asunción, Bartolomé de Letona included an account about another of the nuns in the expedition: María Magdalena de la Cruz, who originated from a convent near Illescas. The author claimed that, just as Madre Jerónima, she practiced the virtue of charity in a perfect manner. Everything she did was for the good of the fellow human being, a charity that had grown from her religious experiences in childhood, when she was spiritually brought to mission fields. This meant that she wanted to contribute to the expansion of Catholicism and, if possible, suffer martyrdom. Therefore she made the six thousand league journey to the Philippines.84

Probably in the 1610s, when reports about the persecution and killing of Christians in Japan abounded, María Magdalena de la Cruz talked to a Franciscan friar about her wishes to travel there in order to spread the faith and hopefully die the death of a martyr, and the friar promised that he should try to obtain a papal license to reach this goal. However, shortly thereafter she heard about Jerónima de la Asunción’s plans to go to the Philippines and

84 Letona 1662: 16r-16v and 36v.
in 1621 María Magdalena de la Cruz became one of the founding mothers of Santa Clara in Manila. When, in 1634, the Poor Clares decided to open a convent in Macao, she travelled there, but due to the Spanish Crown’s conflict with Portugal, she had to return to Manila a decade later.\footnote{Letona 1662: 83-88.}

The wish for martyrdom was thus a central theme in the hagiographical sources and the realization that there were no possibility to die led to frustration and sorrow. In his \textit{Parayso Occidental}, the meandering chronicle of the Conceptionist convent of Jesús María and the subsequent foundation of the Carmelite convent of San José in Mexico City, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora included a brief autobiographical text by Inés de la Cruz (1570-1633), though he most certainly revised it rather thoroughly. As Jerónima de la Asunción and many other religious women who travelled to the Indies in the early seventeenth-century, Inés de la Cruz was a native of Toledo. A young girl, she wanted to become an anchoress in the “desert” outside the city, but comprehending the impossibility, she lived retired in her home. In her own words, at this time her universe was small and she did not grasp that there was a world outside her hometown.\footnote{Sigüenza y Góngora 1684: 129r-151r, cf. Inés de la Cruz [1625] 2014 for her chronicle of the foundation of the Carmelite Santa Teresa Convent in 1616.}

Still, when her family later decided to move to Mexico, she grasped that the earth was much bigger than she had imagined and that there were many non-Christians living there. Thus through the journey to New Spain, she saw the opportunity of dying for Christ and the church, and felt happy about this prospect: “alégreme tanto como si me truxeron para reyna, porque con mis ignorancias, y bobería se me figure havía pocos christianos acá y muchos gentiles, y que en llegando me huiría, y me iría a padecer martýrio y con esto estaba tan alegre dando cada día traza de los martýrios que me havía de dar.”\footnote{Sigüenza y Góngora 1684: 131v.}

She looked forward to the voyage as she thought martyrdom awaited her and when in Mexico, she planned to flee from her family to die a painful death in the hands of non-Christians. Arriving there, however, she understood that there was a slim chance as most of the inhabitants in central Mexico where baptized and martyrdoms were almost unheard of. She had to find another type of martyrdom instead. Her wish to enter a strict Carmelite convent was frustrated, too, as no such institution was yet to be found in
New Spain. While emphasizing her willingness to die the death of a martyr, at the same time she referred to her “ignorance and foolishness”, as she did not know what to expect on the other side of the Atlantic. Humility and strength went hand in hand.88

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Love of God and other human beings were considered the most eminent virtues in texts about colonial contemplative women, as well as in Christian theology at large. Both the contemplative women and their hagiographers asserted that their hearts were so love-filled that they threatened to burst without an outlet. Many wanted to suffer martyrdom, dying for Christ and the faith of the church, and their love reached far beyond enclosure. They felt sorry for the non-Catholics as well as the bad Catholics who risked eternal damnation if they did not convert. Therefore, they wished to be able to go to the less Christianized parts of the Indies, and also to Asia. There was hardly any possibility to die at the hands of “infidels” in urban convents or the homes that they retired to, though for peninsulars the travel to the Indies involved a risk of dying on the way, and a penitent life was a prolonged martyrdom.

From the texts it is clear that many felt a missionary vocation, though they understood or soon would understand that, being women, it was impossible to go out on the mission fields converting people in the way male missionaries could. Several of them explicitly stated that they deplored the fact that they were not born male. In particular, they wanted this because there was a severe lack of missionaries and people continued to die without knowledge of Christ and his church, which was considered the only vehicle of salvation. The women felt apostolic zeal, but since there were very limited options to channel their love, their vocation was frustrated as they felt that they could not live a life in perfect charity, which would have contributed to both their own and others’ salvation.

88 Sigüenza y Góngora 1684: 132r.
Not surprisingly, prayer played a most central role in the lives of contemplative women. According to Teresa of Avila and others in the same mystical tradition, prayer was the motor of the human journey towards union with God, the goal of the contemplative way of life. In different modes prayer followed the nun during her day, through the chanting of the Divine Office and several hours dedicated especially to individual prayer and meditation. In fact, prayer should affect the whole life, day as well as night. For example when cooking or embroidering, she should remain in a meditative state. But to have an organized prayer life was not only for nuns. Non-professed contemplatives often had rigorous plans, too. In a 1734 edificatory letter about Mexican Capuchin María Leocardia, Abbess María Teresa wrote that prayer was the single most important thing and claimed that while one could survive without food for several days, without an active prayer-life a person would soon die. Prayer was the true food and drink of the human being.¹

Nuns and other contemplative women prayed to praise God, to find divine guidance and solace, to ask Virgin Mary and the saints for intercession, to resist temptation and to grow in virtue. They also prayed for their own and others’ salvation. The ability to pray was considered a divine grace, and the ultimate destination for prayers was the triune God. According to early modern manuals for female religious, those praying should do so in humility and with absolute attention. Without these conditions, the prayers’ value diminished considerably and they could, in fact, even be detriment to one’s spiritual growth. Attentive prayer was regarded a necessity for salvation, while the opposite, spiritual sloth, was one of the root sins.²

There were two main types of prayer: vocal and mental. According to

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¹ María Teresa 1734.
² Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 12, s.v. “prayer”.
Catholic Encyclopedia vocal prayer includes “some outward action, usually verbal expression, [that] accompanies the internal act implied in every form of prayer”. Examples were the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Apostle’s Creed. Vocal prayers could, however, be more personalized and include brief jaculations. Meditation was a common form of mental prayer, where a person used her memory, imagination, intellect and will to consider theological mysteries or principles, or events in Christ’s life in order to employ the insights to her own life and hopefully reach union with the divine in the end. Edificatory books, rosaries and images were used to further meditation.³

**Spiritual Solidarity**

In Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, the church was likened to a body with Christ as its head (1 Cor. 12:12-31), and variants of this imagery were found elsewhere in the Pauline epistles. This body was made up by all baptized, where each member had a function for the whole organism. The Communion of Saints was another term used to describe this unity and sum of the faithful. The concept did not imply that all church members were saintly. To early modern Catholic theologians it referred to the faith, sacraments and other gifts of divine origin. They were available to individuals, and made them potential saints.⁴

In the early thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III used a tripartite division, which had bearing of the Catholic idea of the church as one body. According to this view, the one church was comprised by the *ecclesia militans*, the faithful on earth, the *ecclesia purgans*, the suffering souls in purgatory, and the *ecclesia triumphans*, those already in heaven.⁵ These constituent body parts and their members were interconnected with each other and with Christ. Using another type of terminology, the parts can be said to have made up a web of spiritual solidarity or be parts of a spiritual economy, including both the living and the dead. Within the church militant there was a mutual exchange of prayers, merits, indulgences and

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³ Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 12, s.v. “prayer”.
⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 4, s.v. “(The) Communion of Saints”.
⁵ Le Goff 1990: 175
satisfactions, and between the church militant and the souls in purgatory and 
heaven suffrages, invocations and intercession played important roles.6

Following these ideas Augustine of Hippo claimed that Christians on 
earth and souls in heaven were interconnected in a unitas caritatis—a 
loving unity. In his theology, there was no clear place for purgatory and the 
word was not used, though he counted with some form of temporary 
purgation after death. According to Augustine there was an interrelatedness 
between the saints and angels in heaven, and “the just on earth and in a lower 
degree, the sinners, the putrida membrea [the rotten members] of the mystic 
body; only the declared heretics, schismatics, and apostates are excluded from 
the society, though not from the prayers, of the saints.”7

In several works, including his Summa Theologiae, Thomas Aquinas 
referred to the interconnections between the church’s constituent parts and 
the members who made them up. In his view, the merits of Christ were 
communicated to all. This mediation was realized not only through the 
sacraments, but through the superabundant merits of Christ and the saints, 
that formed the treasure of the church (thesaurus ecclesia) and benefitted 
those in need. Thus, the members of the ecclesia militans exchanged merits 
and satisfactions, the souls in purgatory benefitted from suffrages of the 
living and the saints’ intercession, and the saints themselves should be 
venerated by those on earth. For Aquinas as for Augustine, the angels were 
related to this spiritual economy as well, as intercessors and objects of 
veneration. This way of thinking became a standard ingredient in Catholic 
theological discourse from the high middle ages onwards. The Catechism of 
the Council of Trent (1566), for example, described this spiritual solidarity 
claiming that “every pious and holy action done by one … is profitable to 
all, through charity which seeketh not her own”.8

Prayers for the Living

Medieval and early modern prayers for other living human beings is a little 
studied subject, in particular compared to the wealth of scholarship on the 
intercessions for the souls in purgatory. Thomas Aquinas devoted one

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6 Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 4, s.v. “(The) Communion of Saints”.
7 Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 4, s.v. “(The) Communion of Saints”, cf. 
8 Catholic Encyclopedia 1907-1922, vol. 4, s.v. “(The) Communion of Saints”.

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chapter in his *Summa Theologiae* to prayer. Among other distinctions he asked whether a human being should pray for others. He started his argumentation with a passage from the Book of James (5:16): “Pray one for another, that you may be saved.” Referring back to his analysis of love, Aquinas claimed that to desire good things for others was a crucial aspect of the virtue of charity. Citing Cyprian, he noticed that the Lord’s Prayer begins with the second person plural *Our* Father, and that it included the petition “Give us our daily bread”, pointing to collective aspects of prayer. A Christian should pray for all people, just as Christ had taken everybody’s sins on him, and redeemed them all.⁹

According to Aquinas one should pray for both the just and the sinners. The latter so that they would convert. The former so that they could remain faithful and be sanctified. Still, prayer for the salvation of others only had effect for the predestined, not the reprobate, but as humans did not know who was predestined and who was not, they should pray for every human being. Though not stated explicitly, this universal scope included non-Catholics too. In the following section, Aquinas moved on to the question of whether or not a human should pray for her enemies, too. To him, this was a part of the same virtue of charity. To love one’s enemies at a general level was considered a precept, but to love them individually at all times was considered an act of perfection.¹⁰

**Purgatory and Suffrages**

In medieval and early modern Catholic teaching, the fate of the souls in purgatory was clearly related to the understanding of the church as the body of Christ. Their punishments might be shortened and alleviated by suffrages of the living faithful and the intercession of the saints. The Western church’s development of the idea of a third post-mortem destination, apart from heaven and hell, was gradual. According to French historian Jacques Le Goff, author of the most influential book on the subject, the actual word *purgatorium* was not coined until the late twelfth century.¹¹ Some later research has questioned the high importance Le Goff gives to the appearance

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⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 83, art. 7 (Aquinas 1920-1942, vol. 11).
¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 83, art. 7-8 (Aquinas 1920-1942, vol. 11). An impressive study on medieval prayer is Aldrin 2011.
¹¹ Le Goff 1990.
of the particular noun, and claim that he puts too great an emphasis on academic theological discourse. Nevertheless, by the twelfth century theologians began to argue that purgatory was a place, a locus purgatorius. Earlier, some had claimed that sins were cleansed at the very place where they were committed. Official church doctrine, such as the Council of Trent, decreed the existence of purgatory, but did not explicitly refer to it as a special location. Still, according to Le Goff by late medieval times “[i]n one form or another, concretely or in varying degrees of abstraction, it was accepted as a place”. That stood true for the early modern era as well.

The earliest known systematic treatment of purgatory was found in the Summa de Sacramentis et Animae Consiliis by Peter the Chanter († 1197). There the author stated that the souls of the dead could pass purgatory on the road to heaven, but that no souls went in the other direction: from purgatory to hell. The purgatorial suffering was temporal, though it could be long. It did not imply the everlasting pains of hell or the eternal bliss of heaven. Still, as centuries passed, the sufferings in purgatory were rendered in increasingly “infernalised” terms. The torments became more atrocious and worse than any miseries on earth. Images of fire, snakes, meat hooks and demons abounded in the verbal and pictorial descriptions of the third place, and it was believed that purgation could continue for hundreds of years, though “purgatorial time” was sometimes regarded as different from earth time. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, in the high-middle ages the souls of purgatory were regarded as somatomorphic. Their soul-body was not the same as the living physical body, but a mere shadow. Still, they were passible and experienced pain through the five senses.

It was understood that it was remaining venial sins that were cleansed in purgatory, but also transgressions that had been confessed, but for which no penance had been made at the hour of death. A good death with confession, viaticum and the anointment of the sick was therefore a sought-after goal that could help the individual in her transfer to the world hereafter. It was thought that most non-condemned people would pass through purgatory. Consequently, few would make the journey directly to

12 See, for example, Thiel 2008.
13 Le Goff 1990: 154-165; citation on p. 289.
14 Le Goff 1990: 165-166.
heaven. Purgatory was thus a way for less-than-perfect humans to reach paradise; the latter was not only a thing for martyrs and celibate ascetics. The Franciscan scholastic Bonaventure, among many others, stated that suffrages were ineffective for the damned in hell, but very beneficial to those undergoing purgation. It was a later idea, however, that the souls in purgatory should be venerated, and that they, in their turn, had the power to transfer merits to the living, not being able to sin while undergoing purgation.18

In medieval and early modern Catholicism, the three types of suffrages considered most efficient were alms, prayers and masses, but fasting and indulgences also played an important role in the web of spiritual solidarity.19 It was a well-spread belief that souls could appear to the living asking for suffrages that would improve their fate. On such occasions, they were normally individually recognizable by the recipient of the vision, even if he or she had not known them during life. In the typical case, the soul later returned to recount that the suffrages had been efficient and that she was now on the road to heaven. Stories about living persons’ journeys through purgatory, heaven and hell became common in the high-middle age, the most famous literary depiction of course being Dante’s Divina Commedia.20 An important outcome of the accounts were the increasingly colourful descriptions of the “geography of the places of the hereafter” and the stories became powerful sources for moral prescriptions: how to escape hell or prolonged stays in purgatory.21

As belief in purgatory became popular and the fear of punishments increased, priests and nuns became important actors in the web of spiritual solidarity; the former through the celebration of masses, the latter mainly through prayer. Important medieval specialists in the intercession for souls in purgatory were contemplative women such as Lutgardis of Anwières, Gertrude of Helfta, Birgitta of Sweden, Lidwina of Schiedam and Catherine of Siena.22 The highly productive twelfth-century scholar Hildegard of Bingen wrote a whole treatise on purgatory—avant la lettre—and later Catherine of Genoa did the same. Barbara Newman uses the term “apostles of the dead” to refer to medieval women actively involved in the liberation

18 Le Goff 1990: 248 and 255.
of souls and writes that prayer for the souls in purgatory “constituted a safe, invisible, contemplative mission that could put women’s devotion and compassion to work without violating any gender taboos.”

**Advocate of the Souls in Purgatory**

In 1619, Ana de los Ángeles Monteagudo (c.1602-1686) professed as a Dominican nun in the Santa Catalina de Siena convent in Peruvian Arequipa, where she later held the offices of novice mistress and prioress. By that time this *convento grande*, still kept unusually intact, housed some 300 women, which included about a hundred nuns and novices. Later on it would grow considerably, thus constituting a veritable city within the city. The abode of Ana de los Ángeles is kept as a place of veneration.

At her death, Jesuit Juan Alonso de Cereceda preached a funeral sermon which was soon printed at the instigation of the local bishop. Apart from that work, there are some manuscript hagiographies. An unpublished 500-page biography by Alonso de Cabrera y Sosa, the *Vida y milagros de la venerable sor Ana de los Ángeles*, written in the 1690s, is guarded in her home convent, and in the early eighteenth century another biography was written by an anonymous Dominican friar: *Verdadero retrato de la venerable sor Ana de los Ángeles Monteagudo*. Moreover, as part of the beatification process, many testimonies about her virtues and miraculous intercessions were collected, beginning very shortly after her death. In 1693, these declarations were sent to Rome for further investigation. Still, the apostolic process was not initiated until the 1920s, and Ana de los Ángeles was eventually beatified in 1985, while the canonization process continues.

The apostolate of the dead was a specialty of Ana de los Ángeles’s, and her intercessions for the souls in purgatory was the most central theme in the hagiographies. Her companion in this intercessory mission was Saint

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24 Cereceda 1686.
25 Peña n.d is a quite detailed study on Ana de los Ángeles. It is, however, clearly hagiographical and so are many earlier nineteenth and twentieth century studies devoted to her. See, however, Zegarra López 1995, which is a general study of the Santa Catalina de Siena convent, but includes a special study of its most famous inhabitant. A brief study of the beatification process of Ana de los Ángeles is Málaga-Núñez Zebellos 2011, which include references to documents in Arequipa archives, including the Santa Catalina collections.
Nicholas of Tolentino, a thirteenth century Augustinian who was the patron of the suffering souls, and to whom Ana de los Ángeles was particularly devoted. Continuously, the saint appeared helping her to discern which infirm people would die and which would survive their illnesses. Through her knowledge of the future, those who would end their days soon could prepare themselves for eternity, asking for the last rites and thus improving their post-mortem prospects.26

In his funeral sermon, Cereceda wrote that Ana de los Ángeles had travelled through purgatory on a number of occasions, experiences that strengthened her in her intercessory mission.27 One of the witnesses in the beatification process, Juana de Santo Domingo, claimed that during one of her visits to purgatory, Ana de los Ángeles came to a big room where many souls were suffering. She saw friars, clerics and nuns standing in a circle, and lay people lying on the floor. As she prayed for them, a multitude were released and she saw them as stars rising to heaven. According to the preacher her power to release souls was exceptionally strong.28

In a ceremony described by witnesses, souls of purgatory once placed a choir cape on Ana de los Ángeles, declaring her their patroness and advocate. As a result, she dedicated all her prayers and works to them. Individual souls appeared asking for her intercession. Sometimes, they were so abundant that they filled the air before her. She recognized many individuals, though some had died many decades ago. Still, others had to introduce themselves to her, as she did not recognize them at once. Often the souls appearing to her were male or female religious, who had lived excessively mundane lives and therefore had to endure lengthy and harsh purgatorial sufferings. Even popes, archbishops and bishops came to her to ask for suffrages to alleviate their pains and shorten their stays.29 On one occasion, King Philip IV appeared to her. She did not recognize him, but an angel told her and asked her to pray for the monarch undergoing purgation.

Este monarca le inclinó la cabeza, como pidiéndole humilde su favor, que de la otra vanda del vivir, ya no ay reyes, ni emperadores, sino almas, méritos y obras ... Y los que fueron reyes veneran el valimiento que da la virtud en una probrecita monja túlida y ciega y arrinconada al retiro de una celda. ... [Ana

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26 Cereceda 1686 and Peña n.d.
27 Cereceda 1686: 10r-v.
28 Peña n.d.: 53.
de los Ángeles] rogó, instó, ofreció sus dolores e hizo otros sufragios, y mostrale Dios que [el rey] subía a la gloria en una escala, que subía de la tierra al cielo, y en cuya sumbre estaba María Santíssima, esperándole, subía llena de luces y resplandores significando, le avía alcanzado tanta gloria por la devoción de María, que es la escala, que sube a sus devotos al cielo.30

The king showed great reverence for the Dominican nun as she was the only person in the world who could help him. As a precaution, God had promised Ana de los Ángeles that no soul from hell would appear to her, but only souls of the purgatory, which she would be able to help. In the sources there was an unusually clear reciprocity between her and the souls, especially during her last decade in life, when she became crippled and blind, confined to her bed and haunted by demons. Cereceda claimed that during this period, souls of purgatory took care of her and gave her remedies. In this way, she survived. Otherwise it would have been humanely impossible given her many illnesses. Therefore she could continue with her intercessory mission for them.31

A Slave and Prominent Intercessor

Úrsula de Jesús (1604-1666) was a Peruvian mulata slave, manumitted in 1645. Two years later, she became a donada in the Santa Clara convent in Lima, which by then housed no less than 700 women, including almost 300 nuns of the black veil and about 50 donadas. Known for her humility and penitence, between 1650 and 1661 she kept a spiritual diary on the instigation of her confessors, where she narrated her visionary experiences. It is, however, hard to know if she penned parts of it herself or whether she dictated everything to one or several nuns in the convent, but it is clear that several scribes were involved in the project. The original diary of about fifty folios is still guarded in her home convent in Lima. In 2004, it was edited and translated into English by Nancy E. Van Deusen.32

30 Cereceda 1686: 9v-10r.
32 The English translation is found in Úrsula de Jesús [1650-1661] 2004a, extracts from the original Spanish text are included in the same book (Úrsula de Jesús 2004b), while the transcription of the whole original manuscript is found on-line: Úrsula de Jesús 2004c. For her biography, see Van Deusen 2004.
Purgatorial intercessions played a crucial role in the diaries. Just as in many other similar texts, a recurrent theme was that individual souls came to her asking for help. Some of them were nuns and friars, and in that context, she included blatant criticism against wayward religious who did not live according to their state and vows. They had not fulfilled the requirements of their rules and constitutions. They had not taken communion frequently enough, or had done so without the necessary reverence. In this way, her descriptions were similar to those of Ana de los Ángeles. Nevertheless, most of the souls who appeared to Úrsula de Jesús were blacks, whether slaves or not, and she recognized many of them, as she had known them in life. At least forty individual rescue cases were recorded throughout the pages of her diary. Apart from the souls she saw personally, she knew that monarchs, viceroys and other powerful people were in purgatory, but she did not note that they appeared individually to her, except for a “queen of Spain”.33

Apart from the visions and locutions of individual souls, Úrsula de Jesús travelled through purgatory on a number of occasions. There she realized that the third place was divided into many areas, “cavities”, where penalties of different kinds were carried out. Purgatory had a hierarchy of its own. Divisions were made between different types of people. Male religious were in one place, nuns in another, and blacks, Indians and lay Spaniards had their respective locations. Though the lion’s share of her visions showed purgatory as a place set apart, on a few occasions she claimed to have observed another form of purgation: that souls suffered at the location where they had committed their sins. She mentioned the case of a priest, who during life had been involved in “useless diversions” and was therefore punished near the convent grille, where he had committed most of his transgressions.34

Úrsula de Jesús had visions of hell, too. There, she saw large groups of people, both non-Christians and Christians, including ecclesiastics. Hell was far more painful than purgatory, as it was eternal, and punishments were much more atrocious as the souls never got consolation from seeing God. Such experiences strengthened her zeal for the salvation of souls, though she was well aware of the official ecclesiastical position: that there was no use praying for the condemned as their eternal fate was sealed.35

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34 Úrsula de Jesús [1650-1661] 2004a; in particular 84, 95 and 108.
locutions were regarded as a serious matter and potentially dangerous. There was a possibility that they were diabolically induced or at least difficult to interpret correctly. Probably as a precaution, Úrsula de Jesús often pointed out that she did not remember more than “bits and pieces” of what she had experienced, and that the visions and locutions were so terrible that she did not want to receive them anymore. She was afraid that the devil, often referred to as the big-footed one, tricked her and caused or influenced the experiences.³⁶

Úrsula de Jesús’s basic response to pleading from the souls of purgatory was prayer. Throughout the text she stated that she “commended” them to God, placing them under his protection and care. Sometimes it was specified that she prayed the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary or decades of the rosary for their benefit. She often saw the suffering Christ before or within her and these visions were connected to the redemption of the souls, and she asserted that one tiny drop of the blood of Christ was enough to save the entire world. Thus, there was hope for sinners to repent, but Úrsula de Jesús clearly underlined the danger of waiting to convert until the very end of one’s life, as that might imply hell or at least long periods in the third post-mortem location.³⁷

Prayers for the Jesuit Missions

Ana Guerra de Jesús (1639-1713) was born in present-day El Salvador, at the time a very peripheral part of the Spanish Indies. Her father was a native of the Canaries, while her mother came from Honduras. Orphaned at the age of ten, she lived with her uncle and aunt until she married a very abusive man. In fact, her hagiographer described her conjugal life as “continuous death”. At the age of thirty, Ana Guerra de Jesús received a divine message that she should leave for Guatemala and shortly thereafter she went there in the company of her husband and the two children who had survived infancy. Once in the city of Guatemala, her spouse disappeared, and at the same time Ana Guerra de Jesús had a conversion experience, beginning to receive visions and locutions on a steady basis. She started to confess and communicate frequently and devoted much time to contemplation. When her

husband returned many years later, allegedly he was changed and became a lay friar, and her daughter and son both professed. However, Ana Guerra de Jesús herself did not enter convent, but lived in her home as a beata, soon becoming well-known for her sanctity.\(^{38}\)

In 1689, her confessor, Jesuit Juan Cerón ordered her to write a vida and she worked on it for eight years, until she lost her sight. Fragments of the original text still exist in the archiepiscopal archives in Guatemala City. After her death, her last confessor, Jesuit Antonio de Siria wrote a biography based on her accounts and his own recollections from the confessional. The book originally appeared in a Guatemalan edition in 1716 and has been re-published twice in modern times.\(^{39}\) A comparison between Ana Guerra de Jesús’s own writings and the relevant passages of the published text tells that though basically founded on her own narratives, Siria was much more verbose and used a more elaborate and flowery style.\(^{40}\)

While in Guatemala, Ana Guerra de Jesús became very close to the Jesuits, whom she wanted to emulate in any way possible, though, as a woman she was not able to join the order as it had no female branch. According to Siria, her zeal for the salvation of souls was modelled upon the founder of the Society, Ignatius of Loyola, and the author lauded her as a “true daughter of the Society of Jesus”. Given her Jesuit inspired spirituality, mission related subjects played a prominent part in the hagiographical text.\(^{41}\)

Siria recounted that Ana Guerra de Jesús continuously prayed for the salvation of mankind as prayers and supplications were the most efficient media she, as a woman, had at her disposal. Particularly, she prayed for the Jesuit missionary endeavours and felt happy when she heard about the conversions they made. Once she heard angelic music from heaven and asking for the reason, angels told her: “Es el Padre Juan Cerón que viene de las missiones, retornando así con tan plausibles júbilos el cielo, la alegría que tuvo en veer las muchas almas que por su fervoroso zelo en aquellas

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\(^{38}\) Siria 1716.

\(^{39}\) Siria 1716. A second edition was printed in Santiago de Chile in 1925 and a third in 1962 in San Salvador. For a lengthy study on Ana Guerra de Jesús, though certainly not a critical one, see Platero 1969. He also offers transcriptions of some of her manuscript texts on pp. 529-559 and 575-581.

\(^{40}\) See Platero 1969: 55-61.

\(^{41}\) Siria 1716: 178 and 194.
Hunger and thirst for souls were important symbols in the imagery of Anna Guerra de Jesús. Her hagiographer claimed that on one occasion she had a vision of her eating together with Christ, but even if she had had enough to devour, she remained hungry for the souls. Her love for her neighbours was constant and ever-growing, and could not be filled as the task was immense. Fire was another multifaceted symbol present in Siria’s hagiography. The love of Christ was burning within her and her zeal set the heart on fire. But there were many more negative connotations of fire too. Once Christ showed her a load of burning logs, which represented souls who lived in mortal sin and risked eternal perdition, but together with Christ she fetched them from the bonfire.

To further increase her zeal, on a number of occasions, Christ showed her the sinful status of the world. She observed one of the hemispheres covered in darkness and smoke with people crawling in mud. The image represented sin and the lives sinners led. This half also included people who had converted, but who later had reverted and therefore were destined to perdition. Following a common trope, these people were described as blind. Another, similar vision had a strong impact on her. She saw a very gloomy place where a monster lived and realized that it was sin. The monster was as big as half the world and wanted to grow even bigger. Just as Christ and Ana Guerra de Jesús felt thirst and hunger for souls, the monster was insatiable. Yet, the monster could not eat all souls it wanted, as Christ and Ana snatched them away from him. Afterwards, her reaction to this experience was to shake, moan, cry, and pray. Christ gave her the possibility to feel the pain of the lost souls, so that she knew what she was fighting against. From that time “acostrumbró el pedir con fervorososos ruegos a Dios que socorra a tales almas con el auxilio eficaz que sólo puede con su virtud restituirles los alientos de la gracia.”

It was only through the grace of God that humans could repent, but Ana Guerra de Jesús was presented as a main assistant in Christ’s redemptive mission. According to Siria, she often had visions of the wound

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42 Siria 1716: 290.
43 Siria 1716: 179.
44 Siria 1716: 179-180.
45 Siria 1716: 184-188; citation on p. 188.
in the side of Christ’s chest. There, she saw all people in the world, who had been redeemed through his death, and in this vision she could distinguish Christians from non-Christians. Christ deplored the fact that so few people helped him to teach humans about the redemption and Ana offered to assist him in any way she could, basically through prayer. On yet another occasion, when seeing the crucified Christ, she realized that the pains he had suffered on the Cross were much greater than the labour pains of all women who had ever lived in the world. Therefore, every time she took communion, she prayed for the salvation of the souls. On one of these occasions, she received an unusual locution for Christ. She claimed to have heard that on one particular Saturday, nobody who had died had been condemned.46

In Siria’s text, God was presented a loving father rather than an offended judge. He was sad that people did not understand that he had died for their sins. If they only confessed, he would burn the sins on “the bonfire of his life” and make them pure. When hearing that a soul was at risk Christ and Ana went to searching for it as loving hunters:

andaba en seguimiento y busca suya como un enamorado, que sin comer, ni reposar bebe los vientos y no dexe piedra que no mueve para conquistar la prenda pretendida no teniendo numero las almas que dexando por sus ferverosas sollicitudes la esclavitud infame de la culpa recobraron la libertad dichosa de hijos de Dios por la gracia, siendo este el más sabroso despique que tuvu su charidad de las tentaciones y acometimientos de la invidia con que tanto la avía molestado el infierno en lo passado.47

In Siria’s biography, much space was also given to Ana Guerra de Jesús’s intercessions for souls in purgatory. Following the hagiographical standard, he asserted that many souls appeared to her, both in daylight and during night, both at home and in church. Sometimes, she recognized the souls who appeared, but on other occasions a multitude came before her and she was unable to name them all. Still, she claimed that they indeed had individual features. She helped them through prayer, but also offered masses and indulgences for their salvation. Many of the souls who appeared to her were priests, and she saw it as a main duty to alleviate their purgatorial suffering. In these passages of his hagiography, Siria recounted the misdeeds and

46 Siria 1716: 182-183, 190, 210-211 and 233-234.
47 Siria 1716: 194-195.
omissions of these clerics, which had brought such suffering on them. 48 It was, however, not only priests that appeared to her. Dead children, Indians and other lay people searched her out, too.

Acudían también a millares y con mucha frecuencia las almas de los párvulos que avían muerto abiertos ya los ojos a la razón y malicia, pero con mayor continuación que todas las otras venían a buscarla las almas de los pobres indios y otros semejantes, que como los mas olvidados de todos acudían para alivio de sus penas a Doña Anna que era como un refugio de todos los necesitados. 49

In Siria’s hagiography, Ana Guerra de Jesús’s rescue missions were described as very far-reaching and she was presented as a universal protector of the souls in purgatory.

Placating Divine Ire

One of the most sizeable spiritual works written by a colonial nun was authored by Gertrudis de San Ildefonso (1652-1709), who lived in the Santa Clara convent in Quito. The work was composed in cooperation with her confessor, Carmelite Martín de la Cruz and bears the name La perla mística escondida en la concha de la humildad. The manuscript, dated in 1700, is still kept in her home convent, bound in three volumes altogether consisting of some 2,000 pages. Only fragments of it have been published in modern times, but it seems to have been prepared for publication already in the colonial era, as the confessor supplied Sor Gertrudis’s text with theological elaborations, abundant references, indices and illustrations. However, to print such an extensive work was probably too costly. 50 According to modern editors, it is often possible to conclude what parts of the work were written by the nun and which were supplied by the confessor, though he could very well have revised the portions presented as Sor Gertrudis’s. In other instances, the divisions between the two authors are not that evident. In

48 Siria 1716: 202-212
49 Siria 1716: 204.
50 Brief portions of the text are published as Gertrudis de San Ildefonso & Martín de la Cruz [1700] 2006 and other selections in Gertrudis de San Ildefonso & Martín de la Cruz [1700] 2008. The latter work only includes portions of the text attributed to the nun and not the elaborations written by the Carmelite confessor. For a study on the manuscript, see Rossi de Fiori et al. 2008: 177-198.
any case, the extant manuscript is not a holograph by Gertrudis de San Ildefonso, but a copy.51

Given its size, the contents of the manuscript is diverse, but some of the published portions include Sor Gertrudis’s prayers for humanity. On one occasion, Christ appeared to her showing the wound on his side, and she drank from the blood that poured out from it. Having imbibed Christ’s blood, her heart became like an oven and she prayed feverously for the salvation of mankind, so that everybody could drink it and wash away their sins. Finishing her prayers, she saw innumerable people, who she thought resembled bees searching for sweet nectar: "[T]odas las almas se llegaban a su costado y sangre preciosa, como abejitas al colmenar, a gozar de aquella dulcedumbre que su cuerpo y sangre causava las almas que dignamente lo reciben."52

A much longer passage in the text was devoted to the ire of God and the many vices of Quito and on several occasions Gertrudis de San Ildefonso interceded so the just punishment was not carried out. She prayed for the conversion of the city’s sinners, so that they did not continue offending God. According to God, the gravest sins that people in Quito committed were rancour, sensuousness and idolatry. God had shown her a large black stick that he carried in his hand and with which he would carry out his punishment, but stated that her prayers had tied up his hands so that he could not act out his rage. Still Quito suffered earthquakes, volcano eruptions and floods in which many people perished. However according to the manuscript it could have been much worse had she not intervened; her intervention meant that there was still time for people to mend their ways in order to escape divine ire and reach eternal salvation.53

Intercessor for the Vice-Gods

As for Ana Guerra de Jesús, intercession for missions and missionaries played an important part in the life of María Inés de los Dolores (1651-1728), a Mexican Augustinian nun. In his biography, Jesuit Juan Antonio de Mora wrote about her virtues, as did another Jesuit, Juan Antonio Oviedo in

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52 Gertrudis de San Ildefonso & Martín de la Cruz [1700] 2008: 409-410; citation on p. 410.
53 Gertrudis de San Ildefonso & Martín de la Cruz [1700] 2008: 414-419.
his funeral sermon devoted to her. During her life, she had contact with many members of the Society of Jesus and was deeply influenced by their spirituality and missionary work, and from 1686 until her death she even wore a Jesuit garb under her habit.  

According to Mora, María Inés de los Dolores was devastated when she understood that many people risked damnation because of their sins and unbelief, and her only consolation was that Jesuits worked in many parts of the world, trying to convert people. She saw them as true successors of Christ’s apostles. In various ways she took part in their work. Mora mentioned that the Jesuit general Tirso González had issued a *patente de hermandad*, also known as *carta de hermandad*, which was given to individuals and made them a kind of honorary member of the order. Indirectly the concession enabled them to become participants in the missionary work and the sufferings involved. María Inés de Dolores had such a letter. Mora claimed that she constantly and fervently prayed for the Society and its missionaries and welcomed good notices from their mission fields. The parallels to Ana Guerra de Jesús were obvious. María Inés asked God to make all Jesuits even more zealous in their missionary work and extend their activities throughout the world:

> repetió a Dios sus clamores para que exitasse en sus ministros ardiente zelo de su gloria, y nuevo fervor para trabajar por ganarlas, y convertirlas: como por sí no podía otra cosa, que clamar con sus ruegos multiplicaba las peticiones à Dios por los sacerdotes destinados para este altísimo ministerio.  

She thought that she as a recluse women could do nothing else than pray for missions and the greater glory of God, the motto of the Society of Jesus. Even if the Jesuits had a special place in her prayers, she interceded for other orders too, and held them all in great reverence. Mora wrote that she looked upon missionaries as “vice-Gods” and “vicars of Christ”, whom she regarded as especially elect to further the Reign of God in the current era, that is, the church militant. In the hagiographical works about María Inés de los  

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54 Mora 1729: 309-312.  
55 Mora 1729: 309.  
56 Mora 1729: 310.  
57 Mora 1729: 311-312.
Dolores, prayers for missions and missionaries was thus an unusually salient theme.

As many other contemplative missionaries in the Spanish Indies, María Inés de los Dolores was involved in the apostolate of the dead, too. She meditated over the pains of purgatory, trying to help the souls in various ways, not only with intercessory prayers, but through vicarious communions, masses and disciplines. Many of those whom she interceded for were dead co-sisters, but other people of many different states appeared in her dreams to ask for help. Mora emphasized that she did not trust the dreams’ contents, as they could be tricks of the devil, but to be on the safe side, she prayed for them anyway.58

**Contemplative Assistant to Male Missionaries**

The love of neighbour was a central theme in Francisco Javier de Santa María’s hagiography on the Quito tertiary Juana de Jesús. Her main way to get an outlet for this love was prayer. She prayed for the conversion of “infidels, heretics and schismatics”. More concretely, she prayed for the spiritual wellbeing of indigenous people near her hometown, and especially for those who lived “retirados por los campos y desiertos [que] carecen de pasto espiritual y quien tenía presentes las chozas y cabaña más remotas, ya se ve el cuidado y caridad con que encomendaría a Dios.”59

Thus, the author saw her intercession for indigenous people as a clear sign of her charity. However, she also prayed for the missions and the missionaries, asking for the intercessions of the twelve apostles for all missionaries, apostolic preachers and for all priests so that they, in union with the pope, would spread the Catholic faith to non-Catholics: “que mire por su propagación en la conversión de los infieles y reducción de los hereges y cismáticos”. She often devoted her prayers to God asking him to strengthen the missionaries in their fights against their enemies so that they would win and the “darkness of heresies” would disappear from earth.60

She included the souls in purgatory in her prayers, too. The hagiographer claimed that every Monday she descended there, seeing the pains and hearing the souls asking for help and on a weekly basis she

58 Mora 1729: 300-303.
59 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 274 and 280; citation on p. 280.
60 Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 275-278.
travelled to hell. These experiences increased her zeal for the salvation of the souls.\textsuperscript{61}

**Prayers for the Unification of the Body of Christ**

María Gertrudis Theresa de Santa Inés (1668-1730) was born in Pamplona in present-day Colombia. Her parents placed her in the Poor Clares’ convent in her hometown when she was seven, but aged fifteen she chose to enter the Dominican Santa Inés de Montepulciano convent in Santa Fe de Bogotá instead. Altogether, she would pass around five decades behind convent walls. Seven years after her death, secular cleric Pedro Andrés Calvo de la Riba finished a lengthy hagiography about her, partly based on her own writings. For some reason, however, the book was not published until 1752, when it appeared in a Madrid edition.\textsuperscript{62}

Following the standard account, the author of her \textit{vida} claimed that from an early age Sor María Gertrudis Theresa realized that not all people in the world were Christians. She felt compassion for them and ardently wished to contribute to their salvation, as she loved God and wanted everybody to know him: “se llenaba de zelo y fervor y sentía muy de corazón estuvieron privados la luz de la fe los gentiles y bárbaros y el que vivieran en la obscura noche de sus errores”. The people who were referred to as pagans and barbarians lived in darkness and could only be spiritually resuscitated through explicit faith in God. To further their case, she prayed for their conversion, but also asked God to enlighten them by means of (male) missionaries.\textsuperscript{63} The hagiographer especially underlined that day and night, she offered numerous Hail Marys in benefit of the salvation of the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{64}

In a longer passage in his \textit{Vida}, Calvo de Riba wrote about a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer, which the Dominican nun used to make. When reading the passage “your kingdom come”, she related it to the church militant, and asked God to keep it faithful, make it grow stronger and protect it from its enemies, so that all the members of the mystical body of Christ remained intact and were strengthened: “Pedíale fervorosa al Señor visitara,

\textsuperscript{61} Francisco Javier Antonio de Santa María 1756: 168-170.
\textsuperscript{62} Calvo de la Riba 1752.
\textsuperscript{63} Calvo de la Riba 1752: 175, cf. p. 207.
\textsuperscript{64} Calvo de la Riba 1752: 302 and 537.
defendiera y dilatára su militante iglesia, apartando a sus perseguidores tyranos, hereges y falsos heranos, para que sirviéndole en verdadera paz y tranquilidad, reynará en todos sus místicos miembros gloriosos.”65 In this context, the author returned to her zeal for the conversion of non-Christians and recounted that she deplored the difficulties in reaching this goal, so that they too would become members of the church militant. In his text the author had her exclaim:

O, y cómo deseaba la exaltación de la fe y conversión de los infieles! Quién pudiera, decía fervorosa, hacerlos a todos christianos! Quién pudiera enseñarles la Doctrina Christiana y hacer la creyessen y guardassen su santíssima ley! Y quién pudiera hacer que todos los que la professan no la quebrantaran!”66

This section testified to her frustration of not being able to contribute by teaching Christian doctrine to the “infidels” and make them stay in the church’s fold, complying with its decrees.

**Salvation through the Interior Chapels**

For no less than 76 years, Maria Manuela de Santa Ana (1695-1793) was a nun in the Dominican convent of Santa Rosa de Santa María in Lima. In 1780 and on the instigation of her confessor she wrote a very brief *vida*, thus summarizing her long life so far. The text included few autobiographical dates and the focus was on her spectacular spiritual experiences, presented in no evident order, though some internal chronology existed. Though Sor María Manuela included the usual self-degrading phrases, for example calling herself a worm and a foolish old woman, the text was an unusually straight-forward description of a multitude of revelations, illustrations and interactions with the divine and other celestial beings.67

A basic idea in María Manuela de Santa Ana’s spirituality was that Christ had constructed a number of “chapels” (*capillas*) within her. She lived with the first chapel for many years before a second was built, and then a third and fourth followed, the latter found in the innermost part of the soul.

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65 Calvo de la Riba 1752: 470.
66 Calvo de la Riba 1752: 470.
67 María Manuela de Santa Ana [1780] 1999. For a study on her texts, see Armacanqui-Tipacti 1999.
Through the constructions, she was gradually united with Christ, eventually betrothing and marrying him. Sor María Manuela believed that Christ was sacramentally present in all the chapels and that she received multiple spiritual communions every day. In fact, she was present in these chapels together with Christ and different saints when celebrating mass, and stated that she could pass from there to heaven, which she did on a daily basis, and on four occasions, she was present in purgatory. Through her revelations and colloquies with Christ, she claimed to have received divine knowledge which she felt obligated to communicate to others; Christians as well as non-Christians. This was made in a spiritual way and she prayed for humanity at large, both the living and the dead, so that they would contribute to the greater glory of God and be saved.68

The *Vida* as such was supplemented by transcriptions of a number of “papers” containing brief descriptions of supernatural experiences. These texts were compiled by an ecclesiastic and unlike the autobiography written in the third person singular. One of these documents was a description of an intellectual vision Sor María Manuela had had:

el Señor la llenó de misericordias, que entró a la bodega de los vinos, que la escondió en lo íntimo de su divinidad; que le mostró sus grandezas, todo espiritual, que no lo puede explicar; que no le costó este favor mediación, ni las consideraciones ordinarias, que quedó con intención de buscar la mayor gloria de Dios, y que desea que todos lo conozcan, que le pidió al Señor veinte mil misas, y que le pareció se las concedía, poniéndolas en un canto muy hermoso entre judíos, herejes, negros y caribes.69

She asked Christ to celebrate 20,000 masses for the benefit of different population groups, non-Catholics included. This number and the same groups were also included in one of the spiritual letters that María Manuela de Santa Ana sent to her confessor Pedro Loayza. The documents, which included poems, were compiled in the 1770s under the title *Esquelas originales de correspondencia spiritual y poesías místicas*. The letters were brief and their contents were similar to the other texts’, but the tone was more anguished and she showed much more insecurity than in her *Vida*. They included prayers for the salvation of all people and testimonies that she “Le pedí saliese beinte mil almas i me paresió me las apartaba

metiéndomelas en un carro mui ermoso de entre los judios, herejes i caribes i negros.” 70 Here it was not 20,000 masses that should be celebrated for the good of Jews, heretics and black people, but according to her testimony this number of people was converted through her prayers on a sole occasion.

Finally, there was a brief biographical note on Sor María Manuela, written shortly after her death by one of her last spiritual directors, Manuel Sánchez. It was basically a version of her autobiography, but included explanations of its often difficult contents, and it presented her life in very virtuous terms. The author underlined the efficiency of her prayer and emphasised that she carried out a contemplative apostolate throughout her religious life.71

A Salvific Channel for the Blood of Christ

Love of humankind and prayers for its salvation were the central themes in the mid-eighteenth-century writings of Colombian Carmelite María de Jesús. In her spiritual diary, she constantly referred to her hope that everybody would come to faith in Christ, so that they would stop offending him with their sins and eventually be saved. Throughout the text, there were stories about how, when in church praying and crying for the salvation of everyone, she received visions and locutions from Christ.

Otro día estando en maitines pidiendo por la salvación de todas las almas que hay en todo el mundo y las que ha de haber hasta el fin del mundo; con tal ahinco que parecía que se me arrancaba el corazón porque se lograra en todas la sangre de mi Señor Jesucristo que lloraba y clamaba, hasta que le dije: Taita mío dame como hacer bien a todos: Padre eterno, dame como hacer bien a los desta vida y a los de la otra, esto es a las del purgatorio.72

This passage included her standard way of expressing the global scope of her intercessions: the living, those in purgatory, and those who had not been born yet. On one occasion, she stood before the “throne of the most holy trinity” and saw blood flooding from it: “[Y]o abrí la boca y empecé beber por el sumo pontífice, por los sacerdotes y por la reducción de los infieles,

72 María de Jesús [mid-17th c.] 1950?: 254.
por todos los deste mundo y los que ha de haber hasta el fin del; ya por las
ánimas, ya por la priora ya por toda mi comunidad.”

As an effect of her prayers, she was brought before the Trinity and
was overflowed by blood. Her prayers could not have had a more universal
scope. Particularly in the passage on the steady stream of the blood of Christ
that she drank, it is clear that she thought that she had intercessory powers
for all humans, whether non-Christians or Christians, no matter what place
or position they had, including the pope, bishops, priests and laypeople. In
these visions she interceded not only for the living and those in purgatory,
but for all people who would live on earth until the end of time. Having
imbibed the blood of Christ vicariously for the church hierarchy and all
believers and non-believers, including her own cloister community, she
thanked Christ for her ability to contribute to the salvation of other people.

[D]i gracias porque me daba conque hacer bien a a [sic!] todos mis prójimos.
Bendito seas Vida de mi alma, que tengo que dar a todos mis hermanos los
desta vida y los de la otra. Se alegró mi corazón y se alegra cada vez que me
acuerdo que tengo con que hacer bien. Oh, Suma Bondad y misericórdia, seas
bendito para siempre.

On another occasion, once again while she was praying for the salvation of
mankind, she saw the Trinity and was again kneeling before it, and God the
Father thanked her for her prayers that complimented those of Christ and the
Virgin.

Aquí entendí lo mucho que se agrada esta Suma Bondad de que pidan por la
salvación de todas las almas y que se logre la sangre y pasión de esta suma
deidad en todas las almas y que ninguna perezca; ah sí yo fuera capaz de
hacerles este bien! pero se lo pido con lágrimas en el corazón, y por el
corazón de mi dulcísimo Jesús y por el de María Santísima, que todos a una
se salven y vean esta belleza increada y lo alaben para siempre, ojalá Vida de
mi alma! … ojalá.

Through this colloquy with God, she understood how important it was to
him that the souls were saved, though she realized that it was a difficult

73 María de Jesús [mid-17th c.] 1950?: 254. A similar vision was described on p.
265
74 María de Jesús [mid-17th c.] 1950?: 254.
75 María de Jesús [mid-17th c.] 1950?: 262-263.
mission. However, she joined her heart with those of Christ and the Virgin and hoped that it would help her reach the goal.

**Prayers for the Living and the Dead**

Contemplative women in the Spanish Indies interceded both for the living and the dead, both for humans on earth and souls in purgatory. The prayers for the living could be devoted to humanity at large, groups or individuals, whether identified in the texts or not. Capuchin María Teresa professed in Mexico City, but in 1704 she became one of the founding mothers of San Joaquín in Puebla, in total spending seventy years within enclosure. The edificatory letter dedicated to her focused on her harsh penitence, but included notes on her prayer life, too, underlining that she always prayed that all humanity should realize that Christ had redeemed them, that they should accept the teachings of the Catholic church and thus be able to attain salvation through it, as it was equivalent with the body of Christ. “Estimaba tanto las almas de los redimidos, que no tenía oración sin acordarse de ellos: deseaba, y pedía intensamente, que conocieran la única verdad de Dios los que están fuera de la Santa Iglesia. Quería tan de veras que todos se salvaran, que por cada uno de ellos diera la sangre mil veces.”76

In his hagiography on Bárbara Josef a de San Francisco, a nun in the Santísma Trinidad convent in Puebla, Miguel de Torres claimed that all her prayers and works were dedicated to the spiritual welfare of others, so that they would not forget that Christ had redeemed them at the cross. “No hazía oración la Madre Bárbara, ni exercicio alguno, en que no piedesse al Señor con ardientes lágrimas por todas las almas redimidos con la sangre preciosíssima de su costado, para que no se malograssen tan incomparable thesoro.”77

In his 1707 funeral sermon on Teresa María de Guzmán, the abbess of the San Felipe de Jesús convent in Mexico City, Rodrigo García Flores wrote that she lived and breathed through prayer and emphasized her intercessions for individuals in the city. He asserted that her continuous prayers spiritually resuscitated many who lived in deep sin, ignorance and sloth. Still, the author claimed that she never named names when telling him about her contemplative apostolate, and that people did not know that she

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76 María Teresa 1734: 80.
77 Torres 1725: 420.
had helped them. Teresa María also prayed for people during earthquakes and insurrections.78

A very different story about how a nun’s prayer ultimately contributed to the conversion of a “pagan” Indian from Chile is found in Diego de Córdova Salinas’s mid-seventeenth-century chronicle. The scene was the 1602 Mapuche uprising. Gregoria Ramírez was a Poor Clare in the convent of Osorno. According to the author an indigenous man abducted her and planned to rape her. She prayed to Christ and asked for the intercession of St. Clare. A Franciscan friar then appeared to the Indian and whipped him with his cordon. Experiencing this, the Indian gave up his plans and instead showed reverence to the nun. As a result he followed her to the convent, where he was baptized and later served the nuns as a slave.79

In his hagiography on Jerónima de la Asunción, Ginés de Quesada devoted much space to her prayer life, including her intercessions for non-Catholics. According to him, shortly before her death, she received a locution from John the Baptist requesting her to pray fervently for the salvation of the native inhabitants in the Philippines and other Pacific islands, as there was a great possibility that they would convert soon. At the same time, she prayed for Protestants in England and the Netherlands, so that they would re-join the Catholic Church.80 Related to this theme, Quesada included a very unusual account, claiming that Jerónima de la Asunción prayed for the salvation of humanity “through” the decapitated heads of John the Baptist and the apostle Paul. On the feast day of the conversion of Saint Paul in 1628, she was bestowed with the head and the rest of the apostle’s body. Earlier she had been presented with the beheaded John the Baptist and was requested to pray to God “through the two heads” for the conversion of China and Japan. Both heads remained with her for a long time, so that she could pray not only for these nations, but for the salvation of all other peoples throughout the globe.81

In one of the volumes of her spiritual journals, written between 1705 and 1706, Augustinian recollect María de San José recounted a number of inner visions that included specific people who risked eternal damnation due to their disbelief and wicked life. On one occasion, she saw a village where

79 Córdova Salinas 1651: 485-486.
80 Quesada 1717: 428-432.
81 Quesada 1717: 443-444.
all the inhabitants were blacks. She stressed their African descent even further by noting that they had “very dark faces, the faces of blacks”. In her view they lived depraved lives, and in a locution Christ told her that she should pray and weep for them. Later she was able to identify the village as San Lorenzo, a place near Córdoba in the diocese of Puebla, and informed the bishop of Oaxaca about this situation, so that he could take measures to alleviate their situation.82

Though the prayers of an individual woman could be regarded as very beneficial for other humans, the prayers of a whole cloistered community were even more so. In his chronicle about the Carmelites in Puebla, Gómez de la Parra wrote that they prayed for all who lived in mortal sin and for the whole city, claiming that this contributed to the salvation of “innumerable souls”.83 In one of her many letters from the 1760s, Chilean Dominican Dolores Peña y Lillo wrote that she had asked the prioress for the whole community to pray together so that humanity could be saved and would not continue to offend God.84

Some contemplative women not only prayed directly for the salvation of others, whether groups or individuals, but for priests involved in the missionary work. Intercessions for Jesuits were particularly common among the women in my textual corpus. Ana Guerra de Jesús offered prayers for the Jesuit missions, missionaries and for their increased zeal in the evangelization. María Inés de Dolores did the same. Also in the texts about Catarina de San Juan, the Asian-born beata from Puebla, prayers for male missionaries had a prominent place. Most of them were for the benefit of the members of the Society of Jesus and she believed that due to all their good works, every Jesuit who remained in the Society until his death would be saved. Though she saw members of the order in purgatory, she was convinced that they only stayed there for a brief period of time as they were purified during life, though demons tried to persuade her that the Jesuits were, in fact, false prophets. Not knowing if all of them would indeed be saved, she asked Virgin Mary to intercede for them before God. Without any doubt this was a questionable thesis and explains why her biographer Alonso

83 Gómez de la Parra 1732: 110-111.
Ramos, a Jesuit himself, devoted no less than ten folio sized pages to the matter.\textsuperscript{85}

Writing after the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Spanish Indies, Dolores Peña y Lillo prayed that the Jesuits should be allowed to return, referring to collective prayers for that end in both her own convent and in others. She asked God to make the Spanish regent change his mind and revoke

\begin{quote}
estas injustas disposiciones y providencias de nuestro rey y señor; y el mundo se empeña a irritar más y más la justicia de un Dios poderoso sobre todo, que los puede consumir: Dios tenga piedad de nosotros y no mire nuestros deméritos para obstentar de sus misericordias, por quien es, y nos conseda cuanto antes lo que tanto le suplicamos, por el establesimientos de nuestra venerada madre, la Compañía de Jesús, y que se dilate y estienda a todos los reinos del mundo para su mayor gloria y bien nuestro a pesar de todo el infierno que brama y raba de furor por este asunto.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Accounts of travels to and through purgatory were not unusual. Women who went there could observe the location, describing the geography of the afterlife and witness, or even personally experience, the pains the souls felt. On such occasions, souls could approach the visitor, telling her how long they had been there and why they suffered, asking for help to alleviate the pains and shorten the stay. Some of the women, such as Ana de los Ángeles and Úrsula de Jesús, also made travels to hell and saw the eternally punished souls, but were convinced that they could not help them in any way. The experiences of the world hereafter strengthened their zeal to contribute to the salvation of humanity, in all ways available to them.

However, women did not only meet the souls when visiting purgatory. Individual souls or groups of souls appeared to them, generally while in their cells or in a church building. Most of them they had known in life, others they at least recognized, or were introduced to. Many texts included accounts of meetings with female religious and male ecclesiastics, whether popes, bishops or members of the regular and secular clergy, but monarchs could appear to them, too. These descriptions included an obvious critique of the current ecclesiastical status and even the state politics of the kings. The church criticism was most clear in Úrsula de Jesús’s diary. Travelling

\textsuperscript{85} Ramos 1690: 14r-19v.
\textsuperscript{86} Dolores Peña y Lillo [1763-1769] 2008: 449.
through hell, she saw ecclesiastics there, too. Nevertheless, most of the souls who appeared to her were Afro-Peruvians, including both slaves and manumitted, and Ana Guerra de Jesús in Guatemala mentioned that in particular, she prayed for the souls of children, Indians and laypeople.

In his menologies on Franciscans in the Province of the Holy Gospel in Mexico, Agustín de Vetancourt included a large number of brief biographical notes on nuns. One of these was Leonor de la Asunción, who lived for more than six decades in the convent of San Juan de la Penitencia. According to the hagiographer, during this period

\[\text{gastaba toda la noche en oración fervorosa, rogando por las necesidades que se le encomendaban, en especial por las ánimas de los difuntos, que frecuentemente se le aparecían y visiblemente le hablaban, pidiendo los sufragios que para acervo de sus penas necissitaban; esta devoción con la memoria de dolores y tormentos que las almas padecían le servía de recuerdo para emplearse con ardentíssima charidad en quantas obras pudieran ser satisfactorias de las culpas de que se purifican las almas; hallabalas promptas para el socorro de algunas aflicciones quien lo truxesse.}\] {\textsuperscript{87}}

In Gómez de la Parra’s chronicle of the Puebla Carmelites, there was quite a specific story about the nuns’ communal prayers. In a vision to Isabel de la Encarnación, Bishop Alonso de la Mota y Escobar, who had died in 1625, appeared telling her that he had spent seven years in purgatory, as he had applied the masses read posthumously for his soul to indigenous faithful in the diocese. Therefore, he had had to spend much time in purgatory. To alleviate his sufferings the nuns prayed for him and asked him take part in the chanting of the Divine Office together with them. Thereafter, the bishop appeared to Isabel de la Encarnación emerging from a lake clad in full episcopal ornate. In the vision he approached the twelve apostles, who were in the paradise and the nuns understood that he had been saved with the help of their prayers.\textsuperscript{88}

In a 1753 edificatory letter, Jesuit Juan María Genovesi wrote about the virtues of the recently deceased María Josefa de la Encarnación, abbess of a Conceptionist convent in Mexico City. In his work, based on her own notes and other nuns’ testimonies, Genovesi emphasized her perfect charity, the continuous attacks she suffered from demons and her holy anorexia, but

\[\text{87 Vetancourt 1697: 30.}\]
\[\text{88 Gómez de la Parra 1732: 125-130.}\]
he also devoted some space to various “favours of God”, including prophesies and appearances of souls from purgatory. According to him, souls undergoing purgation asked for her prayers, as they knew that, as divinely elect, she had great intercessory powers. On other occasions, she prayed the Hail Mary for souls in purgatory, particularly those of young girls and poor people, and asked others to do the same.  

Though stories about intercessions for humanity and souls in purgatory abounded in the texts, the descriptions of the exact ways and means were seldom explained; they rarely stated what and how they prayed. It was sometimes mentioned that women prayed directly to God or to one of the persons in the Trinity. They commended souls to God, but could ask for intercession through Virgin Mary or a saint, too. The clearest case of a close cooperation between a contemplative woman and a saint was Ana de los Ángeles and St. Nicholas of Toletino, her constant co-worker in the apostolate of the dead. In her spiritual diary, Úrsula de Jesús specifically mentioned that she used to pray Hail Mary, Our Father or the Rosary for them. But in most cases, authors did not provide any details on the prayers.

Given the interconnectedness between the three parts of the church—in heaven, on earth and in purgatory—all members could contribute to the others’ eternal wellbeing. One of the methods used was prayer, the activity that defined contemplative religious life. Swain notes that “constant heaven-bound invocation [was] their main tool for apostolic mission.”  

There was no clear distinction between the souls in purgatory and the people walking the earth. Both groups could be objects of intercessory prayer, either directly before God or through Virgin Mary and various saints. But prayers could also be devoted to those who did not form part of the mystical Body of Christ—understood as the Roman Catholic church—whether “pagans” or heretics. Prayer for missions and missionaries also played a part in the material written by or about contemplative women in the Spanish Indies, but the theme was not very prevalent.

The colonial contemplatives met souls in purgatory while visiting the third place, or were approached by them in their convent or home. The souls

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89 Genovesi 1753: 22-25 and 33-37.
90 Swain 1993: 248.
asked for intercession to reduce their suffering and the time they had to spend in purgatory. Prayers were part of a contemplative apostolate to the living and the dead. Their goal was filling heaven with souls and strengthening the church triumphant. Asunción Lavrin notes that “[l]as oraciones y los actos caritativos para redimir a esas almas eran considerados una de los labores más nobles que podía dedicarse un ser humano, en especial las religiosas.”91 Prayer was an unproblematic missionary method, being the *sine qua non* of female contemplative existence. It implied no physical transfer, though spiritual journeys to purgatory existed. Thus it was considered a most suitable female missionary engagement.

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Suffering

Suffering was an important theme in many colonial hagiographies. Although descriptions of various types of afflictions had a place in accounts about medieval and early modern saintly males, the subject was particularly dominant in texts on and by holy women. Suffering was described as one of the most important ways through which women could reach perfection. The web of charitable solidarity within the Communion of Saints was not restricted to prayer, suffering played an important role too. A person could endure pain for her own eternal good, but also suffer on behalf of others, either the living or the dead, and Catholics as well as non-Catholics. In that way, there was an interchange of merits of soteriological importance. Still though, those already in heaven interceded for others through their surplus of merits. They were impassible in their eternal bliss and therefore could not suffer for others. Moreover, a human being should not try to suffer vicariously for souls in hell, as their eternal fate was sealed and the atrocious pains they experienced could not be assuaged in any way. There was no hope for them.

The close relationship between stoic female suffering and manliness was underlined in a number of funeral sermons and biographies about contemplative women in the Hispanic world. In his 1783 biography about María Antonia de San José Larrea Arispe de los Reyes, a discalced Trinitarian in Lima, Calatayud y Borda wrote that she was an extraordinary person, who united the best of the male and female genders: “Esta mujer peregrina, que uniendo en sí de un modo maravilloso las ventajas de ambos sexos, brilla con todo esplendor de la belleza más singular y más delicada, y sostiene con fortaleza varonil los ardores del sol en el verano, y los rigores del hielo en el invierno.”¹ In this context, much emphasis was put on penitence, stoicism and austerity and its vicarious importance for others’

¹ Calatayud y Borda 1783: 11.
spiritual benefit. By divine grace a frail woman could be transformed into a strong man, the preacher claimed.

**Female Bodies and Pain**

In his modern classic *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur argues that until the eighteenth century many Western philosophers and natural scientists regarded the male and female sexes as “variations on a single physiological structure”. According to this view, the basis for the medieval and early modern male-female division was a one-sex model, based on Aristotle and Galen, which after some time developed into sexual dimorphism, a two-sex model. Earlier, women were normally looked upon as inverted and non-perfect males.²

For medieval and early modern Catholic theologians, there was no doubt that the male gender was the superior one. They based their argument on the passage in Genesis about Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib, on other Old and New Testament texts regarding gender hierarchies, and on works by church fathers and classical philosophers, not least “The Philosopher”, Aristotle.³ For these theologians, women were more associated with their bodies than males and thus more prone to the temptations and tricks of the devil. Expressing this gender system in another way, it was understood that “spirit is to flesh as male is to female” and “male is to female as divinity is to humanity”. These expressions clearly pointed to the perceived inferiority of women, and their subjugation to male authority.⁴ It was only *sub specie aeternitatis* in relation to salvation, that males and females were regarded as equivalent. In the words of Kari Elisabeth Børresen there was “salvational equality in the redemptive order”. Otherwise, their roles were distinct and unequally valued.⁵

Historian Caroline Walker Bynum has done much to increase our knowledge of the understanding of the body in medieval Europe. In several works, she analyses the “female somatic spirituality” that grew stronger in the Western church from the thirteenth century onwards. This current of piety emphasized the special relation between the suffering Christ and

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² Laqueur 1994.
agonizing women, who, as we have seen, were regarded as being more bodily creatures than males.⁶ Food and its absence played an essential role in this kind of spirituality, both in the form of Eucharistic piety and through strict fasting including miraculous inedia, *anorexia mirabilis*, that is, that some women allegedly survived on communion bread alone for extended periods of time.⁷ Bynum argues that food was one of the few things medieval women could control, and that abstention was looked upon as a pious act, particularly if food was given to the poor instead. Especially for females, fasting was considered an important means towards perfection, a significant form of mortification. French twelfth-century theologian Alain of Lille articulated a common view when stating that “fast macerates the flesh, elevates the soul, restrains the spark of concupiscence, and excites reason”.⁸ Consequently, through abstinence, women were able to surmount at least some of the frailties normally associated with their gender.

Other means of penance and mortification available for women included self-inflicted physical pain. The wearing of cilices in the form of undergarments made of sackcloth or animal hair, metal wires with inwardly-pointing spikes or tight ropes were common for medieval and early modern pious women, as was self-flagellation with scourges made of leather or metal.⁹ According to her hagiographers, Catherine of Siena whipped herself thrice a day: for the benefit of her own soul, and the eternal good of the living and the dead in purgatory respectively.¹⁰ Still, a standard ingredient in the hagiographical literature was that such harsh penitence should not be noted by others, as it otherwise could become a source of pride. Bynum writes that authors of sacred biography commonly “described their holy subjects as rosy and beautiful despite flagellation and self-starvation, excruciating disease and death itself.” This was only possible through divine intervention.¹¹

Pain, self-inflicted or otherwise, was an integral part of the early modern Catholic path to spiritual perfection. Carmelites Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene of Pazzi and John of the Cross were but a few of the

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⁸ Alan of Lille’s *Summa*, chapter 34, cited in Bynum 1987: 44.
⁹ *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1907-1922, vol. 6, s.v. “flagellation” and vol. 7 s.v. “hairshirt”.
¹⁰ Bell 1985: 42.
writers who emphasized that to live virtuously, was to suffer.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, sixteenth-century Catholic authors, among them Teresa of Ávila, often called for some restraint in self-punishment, not least as suicide was considered a grievous sin. In his influential \textit{Ejercicios espirituales}, Ignatius of Loyola pointed to the limits of self-inflicted external penitence, writing that

\begin{quote}
the most appropriate and least dangerous method is that the pain should be felt only in the flesh but not go so far as the bones so that penitence causes pain and some infirmity. It therefore seems more apt to use disciplines which employ small ropes that cause pain externally, thus avoiding everything that could cause any serious internal infirmity.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

Descriptions of different types of maladies were a hagiographical trope too, underscored in both women’s own writings and in ecclesiastics’ texts about them. Illness was interpreted both as an effect of divine wrath and as a mark of special election that made it possible for a human being to suffer at least part of purgatory in life. A basic idea was that holy women’s “illness was to be endured, not cured”, as it was God’s way of assessing and strengthening their fidelity and patience.\textsuperscript{14} Many works of sacred biography, however, did include stories about medical treatments and that confessors forced women to undergo therapies by virtue of obedience. Still, the cures could, in fact, be described as just as painful, or even more painful, than the illness itself, given the lack of sufficient anaesthetics.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet another form of suffering was diabolical assaults. If a holy woman was attacked by demons, it was with divine permission. In medieval and early modern Catholicism, diabolical affliction could, in fact, be looked upon as a supreme sign of holiness, as the devil tried to counteract people who strove towards perfection. Still, as God, but not the devil, was omnipotent, with divine help and by steadfast will and training there were ways to withstand such temptations and pains, and transform them into virtues, becoming a vigorous athlete of Christ.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{12} Flynn 1996: 274-276.  \\
\textsuperscript{13} Cited in Rey 1995: 55.  \\
\textsuperscript{15} Rey 1995: 45-47.  \\
\textsuperscript{16} Loreto López 2002a.
\end{flushright}
Pain and Manliness

In early modern Hispanic hagiographies, the concept *mujer varonil*—manly or virile woman—was commonly used to label especially virtuous females. It became a recurrent trope from the late sixteenth century onwards, but the term was certainly not coined in the early modern Hispanic world. It had a long history. In Early Christianity, a woman who acted virtuously, distinguished herself religiously or suffered martyrdom was not praised as a woman, but as manly, a *femina virilis*. Referring to early Christian asceticism, Jo Ann Kay McNamara writes that “If women ceased to live and act as women, many believed, they could move along the sexual continuum and begin functioning as men”.

Based on early modern Spanish hagiographical material, Stephen Haliczer provides a good definition of the concept. He writes that the *mujer varonil* “was a woman whose behavior and personality differed significantly from the societal norm and who displayed a ‘manly’ degree of moral and mental fortitude”. In Spanish, “manly” could be understood in several ways. The *editio princeps* of the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (1726-1739) had two entries for *varonil*. The first was closely related to masculinity: “lo que pertenece al varón, o es propio de él”, while the other pointed to a broader understanding of the word, underlining strength and courage: “vale también esforzado, valeroso y fuerte”.

As has been indicated, the trope of the virile woman was salient in the early modern literature on women religious, who were deemed honorary males due to their work towards spiritual perfection, not least through asceticism and stoic endurance of pain. While females were regarded as the weak sex, thanks to their virtues some of them were seen as stronger than at least most males. In his late sixteenth-century *Aviso de gente recogida*, Spanish ecclesiastic Diego Pérez de Valdivia took this thought to an unusual level, writing that becoming a penitent nun “makes a weak young woman or woman of whatever sort stronger than many men, and than the whole world, and than all hell; and when men see such extreme energy and force, they are

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20 *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* 1726-1739, vol. 6, s.v. “varonil”.

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afraid and jump back dismayed.” 21 Behind such expressions were the thought that holy women were “real” men, nothing like the “effeminate” men thought to be common in the era.

**Vicarious Suffering**

According to medieval Western theologians, pain had a central place in the history of salvation. Human suffering was an outcome of the fall, and through Christ’s suffering and death on the cross, the debt to God was vicariously paid as substitution for human transgression. This atonement model became especially important with Anselm of Canterbury’s late eleventh-century treatise *Cur Deus homo* and is often referred to as the satisfaction theory. Just as in prayer, an individual’s suffering could profit others, too. In their emulation of Christ’s suffering, human agonizing had a role to play. 22

In *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, Barbara Newman writes that a suffering woman through a kind of “alchemy of pain became a co-redeemer with Christ”. 23 Although Christ was seen as the unquestionable redeemer who had vicariously suffered and died in order to restore mankind, a human being could become a kind of co-redeemer, actively working together with Christ for human salvation. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that there was a close relationship between suffering and female agency. To suffer was to live the *imitatio Christi* and thus concretely experience the agonies of crucifixion. Scrutinizing medieval texts by and about religious women, she claims that it was believed that “[s]uch suffering was fertile and generative, as it was the source of salvation”. 24 In a similar way, Roselyne Rey concludes that from the late middle ages onwards, pain was either “something to be endured as a divine gift or as a sacrificial offering which brought faithful believers closer to Christ, or as a means of redemption”. 25 In the economy of salvation suffering could thus be understood as productive, nothing like the meaningless and everlasting agonies of hell.

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Historian Esther Cohen has coined the word philopassionism to describe a religious ideal in the Latin Church from the later middle ages onwards. She understands the concept as “the deliberate, conscious attempt to feel as much physical anguish as possible.”

Philopassionism, however, did not solely include physical pain, but mental anguish and grief, too, emulating the Virgin of Sorrows and Mary Magdalene standing at the foot of the cross. Likewise, copious tears and crying were considered a gift of God, through which a person could feel empathy with sinners and infidels.

The term “victim soul” was not used in Catholic discourse until the late nineteenth century, but the basic idea was present in both medieval and early modern thinking. The concept meant a person (most commonly a woman) whose life was filled with pain in different modes, and who was thought to be divinely elect could suffer vicariously for others. Writing in the 1930s, German Benedictine Joseph Kreuter explains that such a woman was “ever ready to expiate, repair, and suffer for the conversion of sinners, for missions, and for the whole of the church”. In the stories about modern victim souls, descriptions of various physical illnesses were often combined with reports of miraculous inedia and stigmatization. The reparation of the broken relationship between God and the human beings was made possible through the expiatory death of Christ, and saintly humans could further contribute to this compensation.

A Penitent Clare and an Offended God

Suffering for others was an essential topic in the biographies about Jerónima de la Asunción, the founder of Santa Clara in Manila. There, God was presented as a severe yet merciful, judge, who was offended by humanity’s sins and unbelief. The methods the abbess used to placate divine ire was to pray for the conversion of sinners and non-Christians, but she also cried and fasted for this end, and deprived herself of sleep, slumbering for only a couple of hours every night on a hard bench.

As part of her missionary work, Jerónima de la Asunción scourged herself and wore different kinds of cilices. According to Letona, the abbess

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26 Cohen 1995: 51 and 60.
29 Kane 2002; text by Kreuter on p. 92.
30 Letona 1662: 36r-36v.
chose to suffer vicariously for non-Christians, sinners and the souls of purgatory by whipping herself bloody. In his view, she offered her pain and blood before Virgin Mary, so that she, in turn, would intercede for their conversion and salvation. Salvation had a price and Jerónima de la Asunción paid it with her agonies.\footnote{Letona 1662: 36v, cf. Quesada 1717: 192-198.} When arriving in Manila, she was already old and infirm, but Ginés de Quesada asserted that this did not hinder her from imposing self-inflicted pains for the benefit of the world: “deseando la salvación de las almas y la conversión de todos los infieles, sin que para esto le fuese de impedimento su mucha edad y poco salud, ni le hiziesen aflojar un punto en la solicitud de su pretensión las dificultades que se le ofrecían trabajos que se le representaban.”\footnote{Quesada 1717: 198.}

As in many other works, Quesada made no clear demarcation line between her work for the salvation of the living and the dead. There was a continuum and the methods were the same in both cases. By taking upon herself some of the suffering of those in purgatory, Jerónima de la Asunción asked God to liberate souls. In a vision, Christ presented a special method that she should use to shorten their miseries. If she fasted on bread and water four days a week, he promised that he would release one soul from purgatory on a weekly basis. They made a kind of unusually explicit contract, a\textit{ do ut des} agreement.\footnote{Quesada 1717: 199-200.}

In Quesada’s biography, Jerónima de la Asunción’s suffering was related to manliness. He wrote that God had chosen soldiers who fought for him “under the banner of charity”. They could be both male and female and in their spiritual warrior role they had equal strength and importance. The elect women were like very strong, valiant men. Quesada made a parallel comparison with the Women of the Apocalypse, in Catholic tradition interpreted as Virgin Mary, referring to her strength in fighting the devil and eventually crushing his head, thus implying that a woman could do such things (Rev. 12:1-18). Jerónima de la Asunción and others of her type fought the devil in order to snatch souls from his hands.\footnote{Quesada 1717: 195.} According to Letona, she annoyed the devil by her firm resolution to suffer for others’ salvation as he found himself defeated by an old woman, who had learnt how to suffer vicariously.\footnote{Letona 1662: 6v-9v.}
Suffering the Pains of Hell

In seventeenth-century Quito, there were two women religious called Mariana de Jesús, who were both considered saintly. One was the Franciscan tertiary Mariana de Jesús de Paredes y Flores, the Lily of Quito. The other was Mariana de Jesús Torres y Berriochoa (1563-1635). Born in Biscay, she became a nun in the Conceptionist convent in Quito serving four times as its abbess. Known for her prophesies - many of which had to do with a future crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century - she has become popular among current-day Catholic traditionalists. In 1610, Mariana de Jesús allegedly received a vision of Virgin Mary with the Christ-child in her arms. The Virgin asked her to have a statue made of them just as they looked. The image became known as Nuestra Señora del Buen Suceso and was thought to be miraculous and is still venerated in the Quito convent.36

As late as 1790, more than 150 years after her death, Mariana de Jesús became the object of an almost 600-page long manuscript biography written by Portuguese-born Franciscan Manuel Sousa Pereira. He, however, stated that he built upon her autobiographical notes and earlier biographical sources, including texts by Martín Ochoa, Francisco Anguita, Ángel Francisco Pérez and Bartolomé de Ochoa. Reportedly, these works were once kept in the Conceptionist convent, but now seem to be lost, and no comparisons between the texts can be made. Sousa Pereira’s work was printed for the first time as late as 2005, and then in an English translation. A couple of years later, the text appeared in the original Spanish. Still, the manuscript used in these editions is not an original, but a much later copy. This makes the manuscript problematic from a source-critical perspective, as it might have been substantially revised, particularly as regards prophesies.37

Suffering of various kinds was a salient theme in Sousa Pereira’s book. Before Mariana de Jesús professed in 1579, she had a vision of Christ telling her that her life would be one of “continuous martyrdom”. Part of her ailment was self-inflicted. She wore cilices on many parts of her body, including “small iron tacks even on her tongue and in her ears”. She

37 Sousa Pereira [1790] 2005-2006. The Spanish edition, Vida admirable de la Madre Mariana de Jesús Torres y Berriochoa, was published in Quito in 2008, but unfortunately I have not been able to consult it.
disciplined herself with scourges and asked other nuns to whip her. On Fridays, she carried a heavy wooden cross on her back, wore a crown of thorns, and in her cell, she hanged herself upon a cross for long periods of time.\(^{38}\)

Sousa Pereira asserted that Mariana de Jesús died on several occasions during life. She was then given the choice between going straight to heaven or returning to earth, continuing to suffer for the salvation of others. Choosing the latter option, Christ resuscitated her. The author thus clearly stressed the vicarious nature of her suffering. According to him, she continuously interceded for souls in purgatory and offered her disciplines for the spiritual good of others and especially for sinful Quito, which would otherwise be punished by God.\(^{39}\) Sousa Pereria wrote that Mariana de Jesús was “hidden behind those four walls [of the convent] like a humble violet” and from there she “perfumed with her sufferings the corrupt ambience of the colony”.\(^{40}\)

Summarizing these aspects of her spiritual life, the author called Mariana de Jesús and her co-sisters in Quito “apostles in the silence of the cloister”, involved in a “hidden apostolate” as “active, fervent apostles with their prayers and penance in the monastic life”.\(^{41}\) According to him, they had: “the rigorous obligation not only to pray for the conversion and salvation of the souls of these poor sinners, our brothers, but also to make sacrifices and offer [their] lives for them. This is the obligation of conscience that weighs over the cloistered spouses of Jesus Christ.”\(^{42}\)

In the hagiography there were long and detailed descriptions of intra-convent conflicts. The story was that a group of “non-observant nuns” counteracted the reform attempts of Mariana de Jesús, and that they persecuted her, putting her in jail on several occasions.\(^{43}\) Directly related to these accounts, there was a lengthy and detailed story of Mariana de Jesús’s vicarious suffering for one particular person’s salvation. She had a vision of a group of monkeys with fire coming out of their mouths, eyes and noses reaching the hearts of her adversaries among the nuns. She interpreted it as presage of their eternal condemnation and therefore told Christ that she

wished to suffer for her main foe, in the text referred to as “the captain”, in order to save her from hell. In answer Christ replied:

I ask you suffer for the period of five consecutive years the punishments of hell that the soul of this poor sister would have suffered for all eternity. I have chosen five years in memory of the five wounds impressed on my body during my sorrowful passion. Understand, my daughter, that during those five years, I will absent myself from your earthly eyes and deprive your spirit from every consolation and relief amid your suffering."\(^{44}\)

Shortly thereafter her feeling of divine presence faded away and the five years of God’s silence began. The suffering during these years was described in some detail by Sousa Pereira. She felt despair, emptiness, hopelessness and hatred towards God, and was sure that she was condemned, thinking that the afflictions would last for eternity, not only five years. During the period, she was continuously attacked by demons, who tormented her senses. They made her body temperature oscillate between boiling hot and freezing cold. She heard blasphemies shouted in her ears, smelled repugnant odours and had a horrible taste in her mouth. Demons hit her and blew sulphur into her mouth, driving her to the verge of insanity. According to Sousa Pereira, after five consecutive years, she had taken upon herself all the sins of the other nun, who was not predestined to eternal condemnation any more, and Mariana de Jesús felt divine presence again.\(^{45}\)

A Job for our Time

Though suffering was a prevalent theme in many of the colonial hagiographies, it was the central ingredient in the texts about Isabel de la Encarnación (1594-1633). Born in Puebla, she came to pass almost two decades in the Discalced Carmelite convent there. According to her biographers, her main virtue was the ability to withstand and patiently suffer severe illnesses and constant attacks from demons. To these sufferings, she added self-inflicted pain. What impressed her confessors and biographers was that despite all demonical assaults she never committed a deadly sin. In their words, she was a “second Job” or “a Job for our times”, who perhaps had suffered even more and for longer than him.

Isabel de la Encarnación became the object of several hagiographical works. Towards the end of her life, her Carmelite co-sisters Melchora de la Asunción and Francisca de la Natividad wrote biographical notes, and her confessor Miguel Godínez, the Irish-born Jesuit originally called Michael Wadding, wrote a larger *vida* which remained in manuscript form, too.\(^46\) Towards the mid-seventeenth century, Agustín de la Madre de Dios included quite a substantial hagiography on her in his chronicle of the Novohispanian province of the Discalced Carmelites. The manuscript was prepared for publication, but was not printed until modern times.\(^47\) One work about Sor Isabel, however, was indeed printed during the colonial era. It was written by Pedro Salmerón, chaplain of the convent and built on the earlier hagiographies, basically being a compilation.\(^48\)

According to Salmerón and the other biographers, Isabel de la Encarnación’s way to perfection went through suffering, but her anguish also had a role to play for the spiritual benefit of others, not least souls in purgatory. Salmerón asserted that Christ gave her the option to experience the purgatorial fire while alive, and she reached the conclusion that it was much worse than any tribulations on earth. During visits to purgatory, she observed souls suffering there. Feeling compassion for them, she asked God to send her even more ordeals, so that she could take their pain upon her and suffer vicariously.\(^49\)

Individual souls often appeared to Isabel de la Encarnación asking for her help and intercession. However, according to Salmerón demons always tried to hinder her liberating mission in a very physical way, “dándole tan crueles golpes que quebrantaban y molían los huesos, ya abrazándola con fuego, ya ahogándola y usando otras crueldades propias de tan impíos tiranos”. They increased their assaults even more when a soul was just about to leave the purgatorial prison. Still, he claimed that she was successful in her endeavours and often saw when souls escaped to enter heaven. Yet the suffering almost killed her. Though Salmerón did not name the many souls she had helped, he stated that Madre Isabel kept detailed records of them all. Summarizing the nature and importance of her apostolate of the dead, the

\(^{46}\) For studies on Godínez’s text, see Loreto López 2002a and Loreto López 2006. For a sample of the text, see Godínez [c. 1630] 2006.


\(^{48}\) Salmerón 1675 and Salmerón [1675] 2013.

hagiographer affirmed that at her death, those in purgatory suffered even more as they had lost one of their great benefactors.\textsuperscript{50}

In his chronicle, Agustín de la Madre de Dios emphasized Isabel de la Encarnación’s role as a martyr for her neighbours. She was “mártir por el grande afecto que a sus prójimos tenía. Mártir por ayudar con oraciones, sufrágios y penitencias a las ánimas benditas que están en el purgatorio”.\textsuperscript{51}

**Sixty Years of Martyrdom**

Francisca de San José (1655-1725) was a Dominican tertiary born in Mexico City. As such she did not profess solemn vows, but privately made temporal ones when she turned fifteen. During life, her confessor ordered her to document her spiritual life and experiences in writing, and after her death these texts became an important source for an approximately 300-page long hagiography written by Jesuit Domingo Quiroga printed four years after her passing.\textsuperscript{52} According to him, as a child Francisca wanted all people to know that Christ had redeemed them on the cross and taught Christian doctrine to other children, but also to adults. But teaching was not her only missionary method. Suffering became the technique par preference.\textsuperscript{53} The hagiographer quoted her as saying:

\begin{quote}
Ofrezco todos los dolores, penas, enfermedades, angustias, congojas, tentaciones, martírios, afrentas y falsos testimonios, que hasta aora se han padecido y padecerán en el mundo y purgatorio, como si yo lo padeciera todo por tu amor: teniendo preparado el corazón para padecerlo, con tu gracia, si essa fuere voluntad y gloria tuya.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

She wanted to suffer not only for her own sins, but for the sins that all humans had committed or would commit from the fall to the doomsday. She wanted to take upon her all martyrdoms and all the pains of purgatory. The latter she regarded as the most painful as that would mean that she would temporarily lose the sight of her “lover”, Christ. The biographer described her pains as a holocaust before God, and asserted that she constantly asked

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Salmerón [1675] 2013: 170-177; citation on p. 171.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Agustín de la Madre de Dios [1646-1653] 1986: 339.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Quiroga 1729.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Quiroga 1729: 18.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Quiroga 1729: 39.
\end{itemize}
for the intercession of the Virgin and Saints Joseph, Joachim, Anne, Paul, Ignatius of Loyola and Michael the Archangel as well as her custodian angel, so that her mission would be successful.\textsuperscript{55}

When feeling that death was approaching, Francisca de San José prayed that she would be able to suffer even more years, but her time was counted and instead the pains that otherwise would have been spread out over several years were condensed to her last six months in life. Recapitulating her life, Quiroga wrote that she, in fact, had lived a continuous martyrdom for almost sixty years.\textsuperscript{56}

\section*{A Constantly Crucified Body}

Michaela Josefa de la Purificación (1681-1754) was a Discalced Carmelite nun, born in Puebla, who belonged to a family where several women had entered convent. The year after her death, Mercedarian Agustín de Miqueorena published a rather brief \textit{Vida} about her. Like many other works of this kind, the author wrote about her early religious vocation. As a young girl she used to dress up as a Carmelite nun telling her family that her destiny was to become one. At sixteen, she entered the San José convent in her hometown, where she stayed until her death and during her 55 years in the convent, she was novice mistress four times and prioress no less than five.\textsuperscript{57}

Suffering was a prevalent theme in Miqueorena’s description of Michaela Josefa de la Purificación’s spiritual life. Severe penitence had followed her from her early youth with continuous fasting, floggings and wearing of cilices. The author claimed that she felt the offenses against God in her own body as if they were her own, and cried, whipped herself and made penitence in other ways for the benefit of others, so that they would be saved and would stop insulting God, realizing what Christ had done for them.\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{quote}
Clamaba incessantemente a Dios nuestro señor por la salvación de las almas, lloraba amargamente la infidelidad de los gentiles, el herror de los hereges, los pecados de los cathólicos y la ciega obstinación de los judíos. Derramaria
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{55} Quiroga 1729: 40-42
\footnote{56} Quiroga 1729: 185 and 300.
\footnote{57} Miqueorena 1755.
\footnote{58} Miqueorena 1755: 1-15.
\end{footnotes}
In the passage, she had a broad group in mind: “pagans”, heretics, Jews and sinful Catholics. Not content with only praying and suffering for these groups, Miqueorena wrote that she also suffered in order to further Catholic missionary activities throughout the earth. Apart from the self-inflicted pains, for five decades she was plagued by fierce demonical attacks and serious illness, which, according to the standard hagiographical account, she met with patience and resignation. This anguish too was presented as an offer for others.60

The hagiographer stated that Sor Michaela Josefa repeatedly meditated upon the Stations of the Cross and on these occasions she received divine revelations. Once, she felt Christ hide in her heart for hours to escape the offenses made by humanity and she saw herself crucified together with him. When meditating upon the passion of Christ, she cried for the fact that very few Catholics lived an upright life. In that way they showed ingratitude towards Christ who had died for them. When thinking about the flogging of Christ, she felt the intense pain of the souls in purgatory and the harm that unbelievers and sinners caused.61 The imitatio Christi motif related to the salvation of others was a prominent theme in the hagiography about Sor Michaela Josefa.

Weeping on the Way of Affliction

In 1692, Francisca Josefa de la Concepción de Castillo (1671-1742) became a novice in the convent of Santa Clara in Tunja, her home-town in present-day Colombia. Two years later, she made her profession and during the five decades she lived there she filled many conventual offices, including three terms as the abbess.62 Madre Castillo, as she is most often called today, was a productive author. As most of the women in this study, she wrote on the instigation of her confessor. The works she produced were an autobiography

59 Miqueorena 1755: 16.
60 Miqueorena 1755: 16-17 and 24-30.
61 Miqueorena 1755: 62-78.
62 Important recent works on Madre Castillo are McKnight 1997, Robledo 2007, Steffanell 2012 and Herrera 2013. For a study on the concept of love in her writings, see Osorio Soto 2006.
and a long array of journals. Madre Castillo’s *Vida*, written between 1713 and 1724, was published for the first time in 1817, and since then it has appeared in a number of modern critical editions. Part of the *Afectos espirituales*, her substantial spiritual journals, written over a period of almost three decades, were published in 1843, while the complete text eventually appeared in printing in the 1960s. A third work, a collection of poems and devotional texts known as the *Cuaderno de Encisco*, was printed for the first time in the 1968 edition of her *Obras completas*.63

Madre Castillo’s *Vida*, undoubtedly her most read work, was much inspired by the writings of Teresa of Avila and Mary Magalene of Pazzi, who both underlined living as suffering. Her own life story included many of the usual traits of the genre. There were narrations about early asceticism, as well as descriptions of periods of a more mundane life when she wore elegant clothes and read romances, but according to her there was a clear point of conversion, when she left such behaviour behind. The parallels to Teresa of Avila were evident. Suffering was Madre Castillo’s path to greater perfection, and dreams, visions and locutions both prompted and alleviated her anguish.

The subjects in her visions were Christ, Virgin Mary, angels and various saints. In her life, as described in the autobiography, suffering often took the form of illness and anxiety, and there were constant shifts between despair and exaltation. There was no lasting solace. The *imitatio Christi* motif was recurrent; to suffer some of the pains of Christ was her ardent wish. Another desire was to patiently suffer as Job had done, when tested by God.64 On many occasions in her *Vida*, the author dealt with her conflicts with other nuns, accusing her of being sanctimonious or even possessed. These conflicts and accusations were part of her suffering, too. For an autobiography, Madre Castillo’s text included an unusually detailed treatment of self-inflicted pains in the form of fasting and the wearing of cicles and flagellations, which were either carried out by herself or by a servant woman.65

In Madre Castillo’s *Vida* it is possible to find portrayals of suffering as expiatory sacrifice, but it was certainly not a leitmotif. Agony was most

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often seen as part of the purgation of her own soul, but intercessory prayer and vicarious suffering had its part in her spiritual life as had the insight that the church had many enemies who offended God. Another aspect of her suffering were attacks by the devil, who most often appeared to her as a black man. Once, when she was kneeling in prayer, God permitted the devil to torment her through locutions: “parece que cuantos herejes o los que los enseñaron, que son los enemigos malos, daban voces en mis oídos relatando sus sectas, herejías y maldades; y aquello me parece sonaba en los oídos del cuerpo y dejaba así aturdida la cabeza como atormentada el alma.”66

These experiences continued for a year and her faith was thoroughly tested. She described it as a horrible period as God seemed absent, and she cried for not being able to do anything for God, and for not being able to preach the way of suffering as the road to salvation for the world.67 On the whole, crying was a recurrent response of Madre Castillo. Indirectly, she deplored the fact that she was born a woman, feeling a vocation for apostolic endeavours as the spiritual state of the world was gloomy. In her text, she exclaimed “¡Oh, si yo fuera predicador o confesor, cómo los dijera a las almas que desean el camino de Dios y su Divina Majestad, el bien que les hace que en este mundo sean humilladas y despreciadas!”68

The message she wanted to convey was that the road to salvation for all went through humility and putting up with the bad deeds made towards them. Souls of purgatory often appeared to Madre Castillo asking for help, but they also blamed her for lukewarmness, not being sufficiently active in the apostolate of the dead. In these passages of the text, she criticised herself for misspending her time when she could have worked for the salvation of her neighbour. She wrote “cuánto he malogrado el tiempo y los preciosos tesoros que nos dejó Nuestro Señor Jesucristo en su sangre y tesoro de la iglesia, perdiéndolo en cosas vanas”.69

Once, she had a vision of the whole globe, and though it was big, she realized how tiny it was in comparison to eternity. Therefore she understood that the agonies suffered during a human being’s life on earth were miniscule in comparison to those which humans could experience after death, either in purgatory or in hell. Madre Castillo also extended her

vicarious suffering to the living. Her methods as an intercessor were humility and mortification that she regarded as beneficial to sinners who did not contribute to the greater glory of God.70

**Vicarious Agonies**

Sebastiana Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad (1709-1757) was a Poor Clare in the San Juan de Penitencia convent in Mexico City. During her life she wrote a long series of spiritual letters to her confessor that today are guarded in the Mexican National Library. Apart from her own texts, there are two hagiographic works dedicated to her. The earliest was a sermon preached at her funeral by Ignacio Saldaña and printed shortly thereafter as *Penitente paloma o gemebunda Maya*. Seven years later, Franciscan José Antonio Valdés could finally publish a 400-page monograph about the nun, whom he considered a saint. In his book, Valdés made use of lengthy passages from the nun’s own letters, which remained quite unaltered.71

Sor Sebastiana Josefa’s way to the Poor Clares was quite complicated as her parents lacked the means to pay the necessary dowry. Therefore she entered the Corpus Christi convent, which did not require payment, but soon had to leave as she was not an Indian, for whom the convent was founded. Thereafter, she professed in San Juan de Penitencia, as late as 1746, when she was 37 years old.72 A central subject in Valdés’s biography was her harsh mortification and self-inflicted pain. He excelled in providing detailed descriptions of the methods and devices used for self-punishment, which were extreme even in comparison to similar texts. According to him, she scourged herself on a daily basis, blood splattering on the floor and walls of her cell. She wore a barbed cross on her chest, put nettles and thistles in her underwear, carried a heavy stone attached to a rope around her neck and almost starved herself to death. To Valdés, these practices were admirable, but almost impossible to emulate.73

These self-afflicted pains constituted a mortification of the senses, but they were regarded as beneficial for others, too. Valdés wrote about her

71 Specialized studies are found in Ibsen 1998 and Ibsen 1999: 85-120 that use the two hagiographies, but also the unpublished letters.
72 Valdés 1765: 67-70.
73 See, for example, Valdés 1765: 181 and 331.
redeeming missions to save individuals from hell. On one occasion, she got to know about a person who lived a very sinful life. Feeling compassion, she whipped herself over the course of three days, and as result of her intercession he eventually confessed his sins. On a more general level, she asked God to enable her to suffer the pains of hell while in life, taking upon her the sufferings that other human beings deserved and thus enable them to escape eternal punishment. She prayed that humanity should not be condemned but that she would suffer vicariously to expiate some of their sins.\textsuperscript{74}

**Divine Colloquies and Severe Pains**

Catalina de Jesús María Herrera (1717-1795) was born in Guayaquil in present-day Ecuador, but as no convent existed in her home town she went to Quito, professing in the Dominican convent of Santa Catalina de Siena in 1741. Her comparatively high age when becoming a nun, 24 years, was caused by her family’s relative poverty, but eventually she was able to find a benefactor who paid the dowry. During half a century in the convent, Catalina de Jesús María became both novice mistress and prioress, and was much committed to writing.

In her thirties, she authored a *vida*, but later burnt it on her confessor’s order. Between 1758 and 1760, however, she wrote a new similar text, the *Secretos entre el alma y Dios*. It is a sizeable manuscript, allegedly composed in response to a divine command. In modern times, the text has been described as an autobiography and though it included some notes on her life, it was basically an extensive spiritual journal, presenting a steady stream of dreams, visions and locutions in the form of colloquies. Her main interlocutors in the mystic encounters were Christ, Virgin Mary and saints, such as Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Rosa of Lima. Writing the text, Catalina de Jesús María sent the manuscript in portions to her Dominican confessor Tomás del Rosario de Corrales, who revised it. Still, the extant manuscript shows a very limited degree of clerical intervention and to an unusual degree she claimed she was able to interpret the contents of the visions. It was basically her own text, consequently using the dialogue

\textsuperscript{74} Valdés 1765: 99 and 230.
form uncommon in Hispanic confessional literature. The manuscript is still kept in her home convent in Quito, and was printed in 1950.75

According to the *Secretos*, Catalina de Jesús María’s suffering began early in life. She was severely maltreated by her father, who at one point even crushed her skull. She regarded the fact that she survived as a clear sign of divine providence and therefore withdrew to lead a life of prayer and mortification. However it is noteworthy that she mentioned that she hardly ever used such common methods of self-inflicted suffering as the wearing of cilices. Nevertheless, illnesses, afflictions and feelings of emptiness had a constant presence in the text. Catalina de Jesús María interpreted pain as a means for the purgation of her soul in order to eventually reach union with God.

Through visions and locutions, she concluded that the religious state of Quito was abysmal and that many people risked eternal damnation. According to her, faulty clerics and religious of both sexes were a main cause for this dismal status and she asserted that many ecclesiastics showed little zeal for the conversion of the souls with whom they were entrusted, including many of her own confessors. Moreover, a large number of the women who entered convents lacked any serious vocation, thus wanting to continue living a mundane life even within its walls. In one vision, she saw male and female religious building up a black monster, once again underlining the great responsibility of these groups for the sorry state of Christendom.76

Through the narration of another vision, Catalina de Jesús María accused the local bishop of not trying to remedy the situation in her own convent. She saw him in a state of purgation, where large numbers of nuns plagued him, gnawing on his inner organs:

me hallé dentro de una montaña muy obscura y espesa, en donde me encontré con el alma del señor obispo. Que aquel lugar era el de sus penas. Estaba desproporcionadamente grueso. Y el estómago y vientre muy crecido. Yo me paré a mirarlo, espantada de tan desproporcionada figura. Y me dijo: ¿Qué te admiras? Estoy lleno de monjas, y éste es mi mayor tormento, porque me roen las entrañas sin cesar. Fui largo en darles licencias. Y no cuidando de la clausura, permití muchas y largas entradas. Por eso, me tengo ahora en pena.76

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Not surprisingly, the *imitatio Christi* was a leitmotif in the *Secretos*. In one of the many colloquies with the nun, Christ said “Hija, camina ya al calvario. Sigueme. Que ya es tiempo de que vamos a padecer”. To this invitation to follow him through suffering she answered: “aunque sea a morir contigo clavada en esa cruz, ya te sigo, a la hora que quisieres”. The sinful state of the world was thus made clear to her in many visions. On one occasion, she saw a house with many mansions where people committed different kinds of sins, which deeply offended God. The house was the world and the sinners appeared in the form of clerics, nuns and lay people.

Because of the many visions of sins and sinners, Catalina María de Jesús felt compassion for humanity and wanted to suffer vicariously. She told Christ that her desire was to endure illness and persecution, so that the souls stopped offending God and in the end reached salvation: “porque estas almas no se pierdan quiero padecer, y renuncio todo consuelo espiritual y temporal, con tanto por tu misericordia me mantengais, Dios mío, en tu gracia”. As a consequence of these decisions, there were long periods she did not receive any divine favours, and felt no consolation.

Purgatory too, had a place in her spiritual notes. She had previsions of the death of others, most often a relative, another nun or a priest, who could prepare themselves to die a good death thanks to her help. In visions, souls from purgatory appeared to her, asking for intercession. Still, according to her writings, Catalina de Jesús María never felt that she suffered enough to contribute to the conversion of sinners or the alleviation of the agonies of those suffering in the third place.

**Salvation to the Cost of my Blood**

The extensive epistolary of Dolores Peña y Lillo (1739-1822) has only been the subject of scholarly studies in the last few years. As a young girl she entered the *beaterio* of Santa Rosa de Lima in Santiago de Chile. In 1754,
the institution was transformed into a Dominican convent and two years later she professed as a whiteveiled nun. Between 1763 and 1769, Sor Dolores maintained a correspondence with her Jesuit confessor Manuel Álvarez. In all, 65 letters of hers are known. In 2008, Raïssa Kordić Riquelme published a fine critical edition of the epistolary. While centred on linguistic particularities, the editor also points out the clear connections between the ideas in the texts and works by Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Luis de Grenada.81

Suffering was a very central theme in the letters. They were certainly anguish-ridden. For a work written by a nun, it included unusually lengthy and detailed descriptions of extreme penitential practices, asking her confessor for permission to perform them or make them even more elaborate. Often she wore a metal crown of thorns on her head and a cross with 72 spikes on her chest together with numerous cilices and ropes. For long periods of time, she only ate bitter herbs. Sometimes she carried a heavy wooden cross through the convent. On a daily basis she whipped herself bloody and at times asked other inhabitants of Santa Rosa de Lima to carry out the punishment, whipping her, standing on her and slapping her on her face.82

As a rule, penitence was connected not only to her own salvation but to her wish to intercede for others, whether living or dead. She wanted to suffer all the pains of hell and purgatory, so that the souls were liberated. In this passage she seemed to think it was possible to intercede for the condemned.83 In other letters, she claimed that she wanted that everything she did would be applied for the spiritual good of her neighbour, even though it was a goal impossible to achieve given her own sinful status.84 Having had a profound mystical experience she realized the greatness of God’s compassion with humanity

deseaba él que todos los mortales le amasen y sirviesen, que los gentiles le conosisesen y le rindiesen adoración; me dolía de todo lo que no le habían amado, temido y reverensiado, de las injurias y blasfemias que en inferno le

As in many other cases, her wish to contribute to others’ salvation was intertwined with a desire that sinners and “heathens” would stop offending God and realize what he had done for them. Her penitentiary mission was universal; all should be included. In a letter from 1765 she wrote

ojalá que a costa de mi sangre y aún de mi misma vida, y millares que tuviera las diera gustosa, a fin de poder redusir a todo el mundo de las almas que en él han vivido, hay y habrán, y aun a los presitos y demás enemigos, que se estendiera en todos estas ansias y deseos junto con muchas obras heroicas, todo a fin de su mayor gloria; sólo así quedara satisfecha, y, aunque yo fuera a padecer por todos a los profundos abismos, que sabiendo que Dios, mi Señor, era amado y servido de todas sus criaturas, sin espetuar ninguna, fueran gloria para mí los tormentos, pues sólo la pena que padesco es no conseguirlo del modo que merese ser mi Dios amado.86

The intercessory mission was thus extended through time and space, but she felt that she would die soon and not be able to carry out any of these projects. Sor Dolores continued her reflections on this theme in other letters. On one occasion, when she prayed for the conversion of humanity she received a vision of a city

me representó allá en lo interior una ciudad sin principio ni fin: ella era redonda y muy dilatada, no habían casas ni cosa alguna más que la tierra llana, en la cual estaban innumerables gentes de todas naciones; entendí que el estar sentadas y tan despacio y sin lus alguna era porque estaban metidas en las tinieblas de sus culpas, y que estaban sentadas y no en pie, porque el Enemigo las tenían tan siegas en sus visios y maldades, que permanecían muy de asiento en ellas; era tan copiosa la multitud de almas que habían, que, siendo tan dilatado este campo, estaban casi unas sobre otras sin haber holgura alguna para ellas; vi con los ojos del alma, de principio al fin, estas infelices almas con más claridad que lo que se persibe por los ojos del cuerpo.87

The number of unfaithful was enormous and the devil was present among them, doing what he could to keep them in that state. The passage was once again connected with her ardent wishes to contribute to the salvation of everybody, so that they would stop offending God with their bad deeds. After this experience, Sor Dolores felt like her body had been crushed, and offered her pains to God for the benefit of the souls. In other cases, her intercessory suffering was destined to somewhat more specified beneficiaries. In an undated letter, probably written in 1765, she wrote that she wanted to suffer in a special way for people who died in places where no Catholic clergy was present. Dolores Peña y Lillo was thus a missionary of pain, who, despite her mid-eighteenth century thoughts that she would soon die, would live until 1822.

**Pain, Manliness and Salvation**

In colonial texts, illness and demonical attacks were presented as ways by which God tested the fidelity of saintly women. In that context, the authors’ obvious parallel was Job, who according to the Old Testament book that bears his name, patiently suffered a long row of miseries, which God subjected him to. The *imitatio Christi*-motif was another apparent model, suitable for the Brides of Christ. In the texts about colonial contemplative women, as those about their predecessors in medieval and early modern Europe, self-afflicted pain was part of the mortification of the senses, but could also be put in the service of others. Saintly women were believed to be able to suffer vicariously for the salvation of living human beings as well as souls in purgatory, and through their patient agonizing, they paid ransom to God, who was offended by humanity’s sins, ungratefulness and apathy.

Explicitly or not, the contemplatives often made contracts with God for the benefit of others following the formula *do ut des*: if she did something, God would give spiritual benefits to other people. In life, women could actively suffer the pains of purgatory or hell to help others, opting to feel emptiness and damnation, without consolation from God. Though these colonial religious women could not die martyrs on the mission field, as some of them ardently wished, their penitent life was portrayed as continuous martyrdom, by which they could prove their love of God and neighbour in

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concrete and corporeal ways. Everything of soteriological importance took place in and through their bodies.

The spiritual diary of Mexican Hieronymite nun María Magdalena Lorravaquío, who died about 1635, is an early example of confessional writing in Spanish America. It included three parts: a brief history of her life before and after profession, a relation of how she organized her days in convent, and above all descriptions of visions of, and interactions with, the crucified Christ and Virgin Mary. Not surprisingly, suffering had a very central place in the text, as María Magdalena was very ill and bed-ridden during her last 44 years. According to the text, her painful experiences were made productive. She testified that she had joined her agony with Christ’s and that their blood was mixed. Therefore, María Magdalena believed that her suffering became part of redemption and conceded intercessory abilities to her. She felt an obligation to help others as she had received this gratuitous grace. Through prayers and suffering, she interceded for both individuals and for all the inhabitants of Mexico City, who otherwise would have been punished by God.89

Rosa of Lima, arguably the most revered of the colonial Spanish American women, practiced mortification and self-punishment in an extreme way, and became an important role model for other religious women. According to the many hagiographies devoted to her, she slept on bare wood with a brick as her pillow, mixed ashes and bitter herbs in her food, and drank putrid blood and water that had been used to clean lepers. She whipped herself with chains and experienced miraculous inedia. In the hagiographies, her suffering body symbolized the struggle against idolatry and the sins of Lima, interceding vicariously for the inhabitants.90

The seventeenth-century Quito beata, Mariana de Jesús emulated Rosa of Lima, showing great inventiveness when it came to self-punishment. Her role as the intercessor of her home town was much like Rosa’s role for the capital of the viceroyalty. Her blood was an important topic in Morán de Butrón’s hagiography. When whipping herself in her retirement at home, the blood flooded all over, and after her flagellation sessions a servant girl washed it away, discharging the blood in a well. In this pond of blood, which smelled like perfume, a white flower grew, thus giving her the name she was

89 The manuscript has recently been published, see María Magdalena Lorravaquío 2013. For studies of her text, see Lavrin 2005, Cloud 2006 and Báez Rivera 2013.
known under—the Lily of Quito. On Fridays, Mariana de Jesús hanged herself upon a cross and wept for the sins of humanity. The author testified that she hated her body, and treated it as an enemy. Still, she did not want to die but continue suffering as it was what God wanted. In 1645, she died at the age of 26, having allegedly survived on communion bread alone for the last seven years.91

In 1685, Jesuit Juan de Robles published a funeral sermon on Antonia de San Jacinto, a nun in the Santa Clara convent in Mexican Querétaro. At some length he exposed her work for the liberation of souls in purgatory and the conversion of sinful people. Self-imposed suffering had a major role in these intercessions as a way to placate divine ire. The preacher wrote that during her periods of intense intercession “ni comía, ni dormía, ni permitía el meno descanso a su fatigado cuerpo, dedicada al ayuno, al cilicio, a la disciplina, a la oración, al llanto, al desvelo, passando días y noches en esse coro pidiendo a Dios misericordia por los pecadores de su próximos.”92

In her hagiography about María Leocadía, a Capuchin from Puebla, Sor María Teresa wrote that those who lived saintly lives and did not commit deadly sins themselves, could devote all their pains as expiation for the sins of others, and thus contribute to the “treasure of the church”, which benefited other parts of the body of Christ. According to the author, as a little child María Leocadía learnt how to suffer propitiously, and used illness and self-inflicted pains to contribute to “the greater glory of God and the salvation of her neighbour”. Her methods of penance were harsh, including constant genuflections and the making of multiple signs of the cross on the brick floor with her tongue, and she often scourged herself. Through her mortification, her body became filled with wounds, so that she was on the verge of dying. Illness, too, played an important role in her intercessory suffering, being plagued by constant headaches and fevers, and excruciating carbuncles appeared on her skin. Still, the hagiographer claimed that she was unaltered, suffering quietly and patiently, and she compared her to “a statue of pain”. To show her love of God and neighbour, María Leocadía even wished to suffer hell on earth, hoping that by these means, nobody would be condemned.93

91 Morán de Butrón 1724.
92 Robles 1685: 3.
93 María Teresa 1734: 17-18, 39, 66-69 and 81.
In one of her many spiritual journals, written approximately between 1703 and 1706, Augustinian recollect María de San José described a vision received when she and the other four founders of the Oaxaca convent were on their way there. In this vision, she saw five fountains with blood-coloured water and in his explanatory locution, Christ said that the fountains represented the five nuns and that with their help many people in all parts of the world would convert. The red water was a premonition that they had to suffer to the range of sweating blood for the salvation of others.94 In Santander y Torres’s biography on María de San José there was a story about her work for a person who lived in mortal sin. During one year, she repeatedly applied her disciplines for his conversion. Later, God revealed that the soul was not eternally lost anymore, and after his death she continued her intercessions.95

Just as the prayers of a whole community of contemplatives were considered particularly powerful, so was the collective penitence of such a group of women. In his chronicle on the Discalced Carmelite convent in Puebla, Gómez de la Parra devoted space to the collective sufferings of the convent as a means to spiritually benefit others. He stated that just as the homonym mother house in Avila was reformed to counteract the Protestant reformation, so was the Mexican San José founded to help the inhabitants in the Indies, who risked eternal damnation. In his view, the Carmelite nuns in Puebla had helped “innumerable souls”, who otherwise would have spent eternity in hell. When focusing on the salvation of an individual, the professed women only increased their mortification and did not cease until they had reached their goal.96

In many of the texts, the contemplative women’s ability to stoically bear suffering was related to manliness following a theme present in sacred biography since the Early Church. In a mid-eighteenth-century funeral sermon, preached about Agustina Nicolasa María de los Dolores, who had been a Capuchin for almost half a century, her harsh penitence was connected to spiritual virility. She was born wealthy, but actively chose a life of mortification, and through her “manly resolution” she became a corner stone of her home convent. The orator Juan José de Eguiara y Eguren built his sermon on a verse from the Book of Proverbs (14:1): “The wise woman

95 Santander y Torres 1723: 375.
builds her house”, a scriptural passage not uncommon in texts about deceased abbesses or prioresses. He described her as wise and prudent, and “manly in her deeds”. In order to become like a strong man, she suffered through hard fasts, eating and drinking very little. 97 In the same year, 1755, one of her co-sisters, Joaquina María de Zavaleta wrote an edificatory letter about her, reserving much space to Agustina Nicolasa María de los Dolores’s mortifications and disciplines, but the author did not make her an honorary male. That was up to a male cleric to assign a woman thus. 98

In the texts about contemplative women in the Spanish Indies, there were thus many allusions to female manliness, strength, vigour and hardness, and the authors sometimes used military metaphors to describe their work. According to Figueroa’s 1759 funeral sermon on María Ignacia de la Cruz y Bareda, a nun in the Santa Catalina convent in Arequipa, her fervent prayer and rigorous mortification contributed to the development of a “manly spirit” that supported her virile resolution and her love of God and neighbours. 99 The sermon at the funeral Querétaro Capuchin Petra Francisca María in 1738 gave much attention to her first name, and it was her stone-like spiritual strength and solidity that was in focus. This vigour had developed through 56 years of penitent convent life and during all this time she had “treated her body as an enemy” through disciplines, mortifications and fasts. In that way, she became a “bulwark of the convent”. 100

A similar way of argumentation was a recurrent idea in Siria’s biography on Ana Guerra de Jesús, the beata of Guatemala, referring to her militant family name. In his view, she was a “Christian amazon” and claimed that “she was only a woman according to her sex, but her soul was very virile”. In a vision, Christ said to her that she should be a truly virile woman and “not as those effeminate males”, whom he thought had become too common. Saintly women were considered manlier than many males. 101

Illnesses, attacks by demons and self-punishment; every kind of suffering could prove to be efficient to promote the others’ salvation. Just as in the

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97 Eguira y Eguren 1755.
98 Zavaleta 1755.
99 Figueroa 1759.
100 Heras 1738. For another example, see López 1727 on Petra de San Francisco.
101 Siria 1716.
case of prayer, there was an interchange within the church, looked upon as the mystical Body of Christ. At least the chosen ones walking on the path of perfection had the possibility to suffer vicariously, and thus imitate Christ and in some way take part in his redemption of humankind. Pain was a sign of election and the answer was to withstand the ordeals and transform them into something productive within the system of spiritual solidarity.

In an article about suffering and religious life in colonial Colombia, Juan Pablo Aranguren Romero emphasizes the relation between the individual nun and the surrounding world. The nuns were not detached from the outside world, but had an important role in the expiation of the local social body.\textsuperscript{102} In a related study, Jaime Humberto Borja Gómez observes, just as I have done, that living and dead were integrated and the borders between the realms were not clear-cut. Therefore, women religious were an important asset for the colonial society. It was important for a society to have someone praying and suffering for both the living and the dead, expiating their sins in order to placate divine anger.\textsuperscript{103} Kristin Ibsen argues that the colonial convent constituted a reliquary, not made up by body parts of dead saintly people, but by whole bodies of nuns. Relics of official saints were more common in the Old World, while holy bodies of living nuns had a clear place in the hagiographies about nuns in the New World.\textsuperscript{104}

A contemplative woman should accept and withstand the suffering illness meant, showing patience, which was another treasured virtue. She should patiently suffer attacks from demons, counteracting the temptations that they sought to implant in her. She ought to actively search for pain through fasting, the wearing of clices, whipping and other forms of disciplines. Self-inflicted pain was an accepted form of female agency. This torture of the body was regarded as especially important for women, because their identity was based on their bodies. According to Ibsen, saintly women often “elevated penitence to a tortuous art”, that should be admired rather than imitated by most readers of the texts.\textsuperscript{105} Through stoic suffering, certain females were elevated to honorific males, spiritually stronger than many of them.

\textsuperscript{102} Aranguren Romero 2007.
\textsuperscript{103} Borja Gómez 2007a.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibsen 1998: 254 and Ibsen 1999: 12, 73 and 84.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibsen 1998: 261
Despite the fact that they could not be ordained priests and were formally prohibited from teaching in public settings, many contemplative women, whether *beatas* or nuns, had roles as teachers of Christian doctrine and as spiritual advisors. In some hagiographical sources, authors extolled individual women as singularly prudent, and a few were singled out as well-versed theologians, even surpassing most male ecclesiastics. Through mortification, penance and knowledge, holy women could become regarded as *mujeres varoniles*, setting them apart from others of their sex. Their learning, however, was generally not described as fruits of study, but as supernaturally infused.

In his chronicle about the Carmelites in Puebla, José Gómez de la Parra lauded the counselling activities of one of the nuns, Leonor de San José. According to the chronicler, throughout the years many people came to the convent turn-box seeking solace and advice from her. In this context, he emphasized “su ardiente zelo en los consejos, y persuaciones, con que apartaba de la culpa a los mal venidos, juntaba a los mal casados, fervorizaba a los tibios, alentaba a los virtuosos, instruía a los menos entendidos, consolaba a tribulados, y en todas difundía los afectos de su gran caridad.”

Her counselling activities were grounded in her love of God and neighbour. Albeit without the sacramental power of a male confessor, there was no doubt that the biographer thought that Leonor de San José acted as a spiritual advisor, comforting, fortifying and instructing people who approached her with different queries. Being able to see into people’s souls, she had the ability to adapt her message to the individual visitor. Her authority was charismatic, not formally part of an ecclesiastic office, and in Gómez’s view her enclosed apostolate was very proficient.

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1 Gómez de la Parra 1732: 487-488.
Formal and Infused Knowledge

Almost without exception, medieval and early modern Catholic theologians regarded women as weak, curious and driven by whim. They were not as rational as males. Their formal learning should not be encouraged, while reading was always considered less dangerous than active text production. Writing included a creative process, and was thus regarded as particularly risky for women, especially when not closely monitored by male ecclesiastics. Still, of course, medieval and early modern women read and wrote. It is difficult to ascertain the degree of female literacy in the early modern Spanish world, but unsurprisingly the level was considerably higher in upper social strata, especially among nuns.2

In early modern Spain there were women, often members of the high nobility, who possessed sizable libraries or, at least, had ready access to such facilities through male relatives.3 Though in some respects one of the few centres of female learning, convents rarely possessed voluminous book collections and few, if any, academic works. Still, reading had a central place behind the walls. At profession, at least nuns of the black veil should be able to read. Apart from the daily chanting of the Divine Office, reading was done individually in the cells as well as communally, particularly in the refectory during meals. The normal reading material was, not surprisingly, edificatory works such as hagiographies and prayer books.4

It was believed that in some cases, female acquisition of literacy was an effect of direct divine intervention. In an article, Darcy R. Donahue writes about sixteenth and seventeenth-century miraculous literacy, including a famous case concerning Ana de San Bartolomé, one of Teresa of Avila’s main disciples, who became a prolific author over time. Apart from learning how to read and write in Spanish, there were stories about xenoglossia. Allegedly some religious women suddenly understood Latin texts, without ever having studied the language.5

A distinction was often made between formally acquired knowledge and infused knowledge. Scholastic theology was systematic discourse, which required prolonged education and good knowledge in Latin and Philosophy.

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2 See, for example, Bouza 2005.
3 Lavrin 2008a: 311 and Cruz 2011.
4 Donahue 2011.
5 Donahue 2011.
The production and reading of such texts was a male preoccupation at seminaries and universities. Another, quite different, form of learning was *scientia infusa*, or infused knowledge. Based on direct experience of the divine through revelations, visions or locutions, it implied a supernaturally caused ability to interpret biblical texts or theological doctrines.\(^6\) In such a way, an individual could become a mouth-piece of God, when explaining the correct meaning of a sacred text. Though males were thought to be able to acquire such abilities, it was a much more common theme in texts about saintly women. Based on their religious experiences women could compose different types of texts, but hardly ever wrote formal, systematic treatises of mystic theology.

The belief in the existence of infused knowledge rejected, or at least played down, women’s agency and wishes to access literacy and learning. Knowledge was given to them gratuitously, without any effort of their own; it was a type of *docta ignorantia*, or learned ignorance. Thus it could be readily combined with the *topos humilitatis*, presenting them as unworthy and simple minded persons who were directly enlightened by God. In Christian theology, the concept “charismata” has had several meanings, including extraordinary graces given by God to an individual for the benefit of others. 1 Cor. 12 is a central biblical text on the gifts of the spirit. There, Paul connected the charismata with the image of the Body of Christ, which constituted all baptized, with Christ as the head. The different body parts had distinctive functions and some of them received extraordinary gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, prophesy, the ability to discern spirits or miraculously speak and understand foreign languages.\(^7\)

In scholasticism, distinctions were made between different kinds of graces. While the *gratia gratum faciens*, sanctifying and actual grace, was given for the soteriological benefit of a person, the type of charismatic gifts mentioned in 1 Cor. 12 were collectively known as *gratiae gratis datae*, or gratuitous graces. The latter included infused knowledge and abilities contributing to others’ salvation.\(^8\) In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas examined the matter, arguing that “To one indeed by the Spirit is given the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy;

\(^7\) *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1907-1922, vol. 3 s.v. “charismata”.
\(^8\) *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1907-1922, vol. 3 s.v. “charismata”.
to another, the discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another interpretation of speeches.\textsuperscript{9}

Prophesy included knowledge of things normally known solely by God, such as future events. The discerning of spirits implied the ability to distinguish between divine, demonical and natural causes for supernatural experiences. The discernment was a formal task for male spiritual advisors, but without the divinely conceded knowledge, their attempts were thought to be fallible. The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, mentioned by Aquinas, included the understanding of the Christian mysteries, such as the Trinity, the incarnation, and Christ’s redemptive death and resurrection. Likewise, it encompassed the ability to bring doctrinal and moral messages to others in an effective and persuasive way.\textsuperscript{10}

**Preaching, Teaching and Counselling**

That women could not be ordained priests was taken for granted in medieval and early modern Catholic theology. A number of scholastics dealt with this so-called impediment of gender (\textit{impedimentum sexus}). One of their main arguments was that Christ instituted Holy Orders as one of the seven sacraments, and that he solely conferred it to males. Not even his mother, Virgin Mary, considered the most excellent of women, was ordained. Scholastics further claimed that Christ chose to be incarnated in a male body as it was the most dignified sex. In fact, he was the perfect male (\textit{vir perfectus}) and the ordained priest represented him in a physical way. Through his office, the ecclesiastic was \textit{alter Christus}, another Christ. Consequently, they maintained that a bishop could not validly ordain any woman, as that would be a blatant contradiction of Christ’s will at the foundation of the church. In fact, they asserted that nothing would happen to her if she was ordained, as she was “not material (\textit{materia}) capable of receiving this sacrament”. The rite would not imprint the indelible sacramental character on her, as only males could be the “sign” (\textit{signum}) of the sacrament of Holy Orders.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Summa Theologiae}, 1a 2ae, q. 111 (Aquinas 1920-1942, vol. 8).
\textsuperscript{11} Minnis 1997: 113-122; citation on p. 119.
Other arguments against the ordination of women were related to perceived female frailties and deficient rationality. As women were considered ritually impure, for example by menstruating, according to church law they were forbidden to handle sacred vessels, let alone touch the Eucharistic species. Arguing about their alleged deficiency, females were said to have weak minds and the study of academic philosophy and theology was therefore not for them. They were prohibited from attending public lectures, usually referring to 1 Tim 2:11-12: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man”. In the same way women were not allowed to hold spiritual jurisdiction over males, as the former were “naturally” subjected to the latter. They did not reflect the image of God (Imago Dei) to the same degree as males did, having a lower degree of rationality.12

Paul’s prohibition against women speaking in public (1 Tim 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35) barred them from priesthood. According to scholastic theologians, women could not hold the officium praedicatoris as they were subjected to male authority and thus should not instruct them in Christian doctrine. A distinction, however, was made between public and official instruction (ex officio) through sermons and catechism, and the informal teaching (ex beneficio), done in private without holding an office. There was, for instance, nothing that impeded a woman from instructing her children, girls and boys alike. In fact, a virtuous mother should teach her offspring Christian doctrine and morality. The teaching space formally conceded to women was thus limited. Summarizing these ideas, medievalist Alastair Minnis writes that women should not move “beyond private into public sphere, addressing an audience made up by both men and women and (most dangerous of all) ascending a pulpit/speaking in church”.13 Thus scholastics agreed that women should not be ordained priests or given any other formal teaching office in church.

Still, though not allowed to become priests, for hundreds of years and particularly until the thirteenth century, abbesses could have very far-reaching authority. Some presided over joint-houses including both nuns and monks, heard nuns’ confessions, preached within and outside the convent,

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attended local church meetings and appointed parish priests in their area of jurisdiction. Some wore insignia usually associated with clerics: stole, maniple, pectoral cross and crosier, and occasionally even a mitre. The convents were sometimes exempted from episcopal jurisdiction and directly subjected to the Holy See. Taken together, abbesses had quasi-episcopal jurisdiction, though without the sacerdotal power invested in the bishop as the ordinary. The instatement of an abbess was usually referred to as ordination, though not regarded as a sacrament. Criticism against the considerable authority of abbesses grew stronger from the early thirteenth century, when Pope Innocent III made clear statements on the matter and the decrees on strict enclosure from the same era sought to diminish their authority. The Council of Trent made this opposition even clearer, though in some convents, particularly in Spain, abbesses would retain their quasi-episcopal powers until the late nineteenth century.14

The charismatic gift of prophesy, which women could have according to Thomas Aquinas and other scholastics, posed some questions regarding teaching. In the Supplementum to his Summa Theologiae it is stated that: “Prophesy is not a sacrament, but a gift of God. Therefore it does not need any symbolism, but only charismatic actualization. Because women does not differ from man in the reality of the soul, and sometimes a woman is better in her soul than many men are, she may well receive the gift of prophesy, but she cannot receive priestly ordination.”15 Prophesy was not for everyone. It was only for those who gratuitously had received the gift. But nothing hindered women from prophesizing, quite the contrary. In a recent study, Alistair Minnis states that prophesy “empowered … the select few who were specially elected and privileged (specialiter electae et privilegiatae), while leaving those who belonged to the ‘common state of women’ (in statu communi mulierum) just as they were, ordinary members of the frail and highly suspect female sex.”16 Prophesy was thus not an office or a sacrament, but a gratia gratis data, given for the good of the community.

The gift of prophesy did not entail the right to preach in public and even an influential and high-profile visionary and prophet like Birgitta of Sweden only preached by proxy. Other women, however, did teach or

preach in public settings. Such was, for example, the case of a number of Italian medieval women. Rose of Viterbo, a woman with saintly reputation, who was later formally canonized, was neither a nun, nor a tertiary, yet preached on the streets.\textsuperscript{17} Catherine of Siena was another example of an influential medieval preacher. While both hagiographers and modern scholars have focused on her severe penitence and her role in international church politics, through Karen Scott’s research a somewhat different picture appears. Scott argues for Catherine of Siena’s self-understanding as a female apostle, an \textit{apostola}, who saw her main mission as travelling around as an itinerate preacher, speaking to people in order to promote their conversion and salvation.\textsuperscript{18}

There were early Christian models for female preaching, too. Medieval traditions asserted that, after Christ’s death and resurrection, Mary Magdalene was a preacher in southern France, where she allegedly died after spending a long period as a hermit. Augustine of Hippo, and possibly others before him, called her “the apostle of the apostles” (\textit{apostola apostolorum}), thus singling her out as an extraordinary person. According to these stories, Mary Magdalene had been an exception to the rule, and the anomaly was explained by the shortage of male preachers at the time. Catherine of Alexandria was another role model. Her historicity is debated among modern scholars, but traditionally she was believed to have suffered martyrdom in the early fourth century. Referring to her great learning, it was claimed that she converted non-Christian philosophers through her teaching and preaching.\textsuperscript{19}

These women’s possibilities and abilities to preach was interpreted as a golden crown (\textit{aureola}), given by God to a select few. The story about women preachers were thus somewhat more complicated than they might seem at first sight, though exceptions to the rule were few and far in between, particularly in the early modern era. This has bearing on the situation in the colonial Spanish Indies, too.

\textsuperscript{17} Minnis 2010: 57-59, cf. Howe 2011.
\textsuperscript{18} Scott 1992. There are examples indicating that her missionary work was underlined in colonial works too, see Rubial García 2006: 90.
Filipina Catechists

In his chronicle of the Augustinian recollects in the Spanish world, Luis de Jesús included many brief biographies about virtuous women associated with the order. The Philippines was an important mission field for the recollects and two of the biographed people were native Filipina beatas from Butuán on the island of Mindanao, who both were actively involved in missionary work.²⁰ One of them was Clara Calimán, who belonged to a wealthy family and died in 1639. Luis de Jesús claimed that after converting to Christianity as an adult, she lived a penitent life and he compared her to both Mary Magdalene and Augustine of Hippo. When widowed she became an Augustine beata, taking simple vows, though given her neophyte status she had to wait for a long time. Clara Calimán was literate and had access to various works of edification in her own language. Her biographer mentioned that she constantly travelled around the town and visited people to read and teach them Christian doctrine, thus trying to fill them with the love of Christ. She wanted them to accept baptism, realize their sins, and prepare for confession. If there was no time for a male missionary to arrive at a deathbed, she would convince the dying to feel contrition, so that they, hopefully, escaped the eternal punishments of hell.²¹

Hermana Isabel, the other Butuán beata died in 1646. Luis de Jesús’s condensed two-page biography focused entirely on her missionary work. As an adult and still married, she was baptized by Augustinian recollects and just like Clara Calimán Hermana Isabel, established a close relationship with the order. Widowed, she took the simple vows. Even before turning beata, the Spanish missionaries sent her out in the province and considered her a “co-worker” and “spiritual mother”, who catechized many people, thus bringing them to the fold. The friars assigned her villages where they thought that the devil was most active and where people were regarded as “obstinate idolaters”.²²

In such places, she established schools for girls, trying to counteract their former religious beliefs and practices, and in the view of the chronicler she was singularly eloquent and clear when explaining the Catholic faith.

²⁰ Luis de Jesús 1681. For a detailed study of the Christianization of the area, see Schreurs 1991.
²¹ Luis de Jesús 1681: 296-298.
²² Luis de Jesús 1681: 371-372.
She also taught catechism in the local church buildings on a daily basis. At such occasions, both baptized and non-baptized attended. Likewise, she was ordered by the Augustinians to go out on the streets to preach to non-Christian people and they thought that she indeed was a manly woman, who played an important role in converting large numbers of people in the province. Therefore, she was called an apostle, though one that prepared the way for the male clergy, who administered the sacrament of baptism.\footnote{Luis de Jesús 1681: 371-372.}

To some extent, Clara Calimán and Hermana Isabel cooperated in their missionary task, walking around in the Butúan area teaching large groups of people in their own language. They did this with the explicit license of the local Spanish missionaries and taught both in private homes, schools and church buildings, thus being conceded a high degree of agency and a wide space, working with little male supervision.

**A Learned Dominican Nun**

In a 1649 funeral sermon, Cipriano de Medina wrote about the recently deceased Dominican prioress Lucía de la Santísima Trinidad, whom he considered the corner stone of the convent of Catarina de Siena in Lima. The orator praised her exact fulfilment of the rule and constitutions, as well as her extraordinary virtues such as severe penitence and fasting. In one of the final passages of the homily, however, the author referred to the Pauline interdict against women speaking in public, the classic locus used to hinder women from preaching. In Medina’s view, Madre Lucía was an exception to the rule and he claimed that some female Dominicans were unusually well-suited for intellectual work, including theology. Therefore, they sometimes reached far beyond the positions normally conceded to women, being extraordinarily vigorous and strong. Though considered rare, Lucía de la Santísima Trinidad was not unique.\footnote{Medina 1649: 18-19,}

Catherine of Siena was her most important role model. In fact, she was referred to as a Peruvian version of her. Other Dominican religious women mentioned by Medina were the Italian tertiaries Margaret of Castello and Osanna de Mantua. Margaret of Castello was blind and crippled at birth, but still established a school and died in 1320, and Osanna de Mantua, who
lived in the fifteenth century taught theology to both women and men. Following their example, Lucía de la Santísima Trinidad was compared to the great male theologians, displaying “tanto saber, tanto magisterio y enseñanza”. As she had the charismatic gift to “read the hearts of people”, she knew what and how to teach the individual person, in that way showing great prudence. She taught and preached, not only to the nuns inside the convent, but to outsiders too. In fact, Cipriano de Medina wrote that when he confessed her, she usually preached to him in such a way that he trembled in awe. The author argued that the nun of Lima possessed divinely infused knowledge and had the right to preach as a member of the Dominican order. Through his reference to other cases, he argued that Paul’s interdict was not always applicable to women, at least not if belonging to the Order of Preachers.

Infused Interpreters of Scripture

In his chronicle of the Franciscan province of the Twelve Apostles of Peru (1651), Diego de Córdova Salinas included a large number of brief biographies of nuns and beatas. A few of them were singled out for their theological knowledge and ability to teach others. One of the founders of the convent in Huamanga, María de la Concepción was famed for her great prudence. In particular, she was deemed a great biblical exegete. According to the chronicler, on various occasions she disputed difficult passages with the Franciscan guardian in the town, who, himself, was very well versed in exegesis. Given his experiences of these disputations, the friar was confident that she was infused with divine knowledge and that everybody were impressed by this enlightenment. María de la Concepción’s knowledge was thus not seen as something that she had learnt from reading much, but as an infused quality. It is interesting to note that she was said to have “disputed”, an activity normally restricted to male scholars and that the nuns compared her to St. Jerome, the church father, who translated the Bible into Latin.

Córdova Salinas mentioned other Peruvian nuns who were biblical experts. One of them was María Arias de Bobadilla, the founder of the

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25 Medina 1649: 10.
26 Medina 1649: 18-19.
convent in Trujillo. As in the case of María de la Concepción, she was said to have received divine knowledge that enabled her to elucidate holy texts

Comunicávale el Señor particular luz, no solo para entender la sagrada Escritura, y sus mistérios, sino también para declararlos en las pláticas que hazía en la comunidad, y refectorio, y otras en las profesiones que daba, tantos lugares de la sagrada Escritura, y originales de santos, que suspendía a los que la oían, y aún enseñaba a muchos predicadores, y hasta las criadas, y esclavas no faltaban a ellos. Tanto encendía en el amor de las virtudes y en los deseos el cielo.\(^{28}\)

Her audience was wide and varied. It did not only encompass the cloistral community, including both nuns, servants and slaves, but the author stated that she taught many priests, too. Nowhere, however, was it mentioned that she preached, the words used in this context were that she taught or that she gave talks about the biblical and hagiographical texts. In both cases, the nuns were said to have had a divinely inspired exegesis, and their talks on the subject benefitted co-sisters, confessors and other priests.

**Peruvian apóstolas**

A very different type of teaching activity was that of the Franciscan *beata* Estefanía de San José, who originated from Cuzco, but who lived for most of her life in Lima. She was the daughter of a *mulata* and a Spanish man. In his chronicle, Diego Córdova Salinas wrote that she felt a great love for her neighbours and tried to help them in both spiritual and material ways. As a kind of missionary activity, she took in four foster children; two girls and two boys. With age, one of the boys became a Jesuit and the other a secular priest and both girls became nuns. Apart from teaching her foster children, Estefanía de San José went around explaining Christian doctrine to people in town, bringing her devotional books with her in order to attract people to the faith, preaching several times a day. Another missionary method of hers was to bring small envelopes with raisins with her when she was passing the streets. She approached small children and asked them if they brought a rosary. If so, she gave them the dried fruits. Otherwise, she admonished

\(^{28}\) Córdova Salinas 1651: 461.
them to go home and ask their parents for a rosary, trying to spread its use among the inhabitants of Lima.  

Isabel Cano was a mestiza tertiary, who served in the Poor Clares’ convent in Lima, attending to the sick. She asserted that she saw the image of the suffering Christ in each infirm woman. On Sundays, she went around town bringing Indians to church. Despite her condition as a woman, wanting to help Christ and the church, she went out on the streets trying to convert indigenous people, and according to the hagiography, God placed the words in her mouth. She was therefore able to teach them in a gentle, adequate and efficient way. During the Peruvian so-called extirpation of idolatry campaigns in the early seventeenth-century, about a hundred suspected male and female religious specialists (hechizeros) were imprisoned in the Santa Ana hospital in Lima. Isabel Cano went there to teach them catechism. One of them, a man of ninety years, was described as “obstinate and rebellious” and according to the testimony she managed to do what the male missionaries had failed. He was baptized shortly before passing away. According to Córdova Salinas the successful mission was due to the persuasive power of her “sainfty warnings” about what would happen to them if they did not ask for the sacrament of baptism.

Both Estafanía de San José and Isabel Cano were lay religious and therefore not bound by enclosure. They were allowed to walk the streets and come to various institutions in order to teach. Though it was not explicitly stated that they did it with ecclesiastical license, it was most certainly the case, living in the clergy-filled capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru.

Teaching the Life and Death of Christ

The Nazarena community was founded by Antonia Maldonado, known by her religious name as Antonia Lucía del Espíritu Santo (1646-1709). She was born in Guyaquil in present-day Ecuador, but after the death of her father, the family moved to Lima’s port, Callao. Against her will, she was married, but in 1680, when she was 34 she still was able to found the Beaterio de las Nazarenas in Callao. Shortly thereafter, her husband died. In

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30 Córdova Salinas 1651: 526.
31 Córdova Salinas 1651: 527. For a study about the interconnectedness between the extirpation of idolatry and Catholic sainthood in the Andes, see Cussen 2005.
1683 the community was transferred to Lima and the founder started to formulate a set of constitutions that should govern their common life. After the death of Madre Antonia Lucía, the beaterio was transformed into a convent following the Discalced Carmelite rule and the Nazarene constitutions, which were promulgated by the Holy See in 1727.

The direct sources to the life of Antonia Lucía del Espíritu Santo are few. She wrote a vida and many other documents, but chose to burn them, in part due to the perceived threats of the Inquisition. Few years had passed since the 1694 inquisitorial process against Ángela Carranza, an Augustinian nun from Lima, who was condemned by the Inquisition for feigning visions and spreading heterodox teachings. At the same time her numerous writing were put on the bonfire. The only extant hagiographical text about Madre Antonia Lucía was authored by Josefa de la Providencia in 1744, and somewhat extended in the next couple of years. She had personally known the foundress and is to some extent a co-protagonist in the account, which was also built on relations written by confessors and interviews with co-sisters. The text remained in the convent archives and was not found until almost five decades later, when it was prepared for publication by the prioress Mariana de Santa Pazis, who included a pastoral letter that served as introduction. It was finally printed in 1793.32

According to the intentions of Antonia Lucía del Espíritu Santo and the 1683 constitutions, the charisma of the Nazarene Institute was to “manifest and publicize” the incarnation, life, suffering and death of Jesus Christ, so that he was not forgotten by mankind. They should remind humanity of the second coming of Christ and the Final Judgement. The sisters’ scope was nothing universal. Through their acts, they should preach to heretics, gentiles, Jews, Muslims and bad Christians.33 According to Mariana de Santa Pazis, they regarded themselves as apóstolas, followers of the women who had first witnessed Christ’s resurrection. She described them as “un nuevo colegio de vírgenes apostólicas, que sin salir de su claustro, ni discurrir por el mundo, menos con el pensamiento que con pasos corporales, den testimonio de Christo con el grito de la voz de sus virtudes, no menos

que los apostólicos varones con la expresión inflamada de sus lenguas eruditas.”

On a daily basis the sisters exercised the Stations of the Cross, carrying a heavy cross on their shoulders and a crown of thorns on their head. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they exercised the Viacrucis in the choir and at those times people gathered in church to hear them. These activities were seen as a kind of preaching and indeed considered the most efficient form of teaching. The habit of the Nazarenas should be distinct from other orders’, and resemble the dress worn by Jesus on Golgotha, and according to the hagiography, it was Christ who had offered it to the founding mother. They wore a purple coloured tunic, a kind of coif to cover the head, a rope around the neck, a crown of thorns, and on the chest a painting of Christ carrying the cross.

The hagiography by Josefa de la Providencia also included a large number of more common accounts of Antonia Lucía del Espíritu Santo’s teaching activities. She wrote that many people came to search the foundress’s advice and as she could read their souls, she contributed towards many conversions. The Nazarenas were apostolic contemplatives.

**Busy Bee Catechist**

Josefa Antonia de Nuestra Señora de la Salud (1688-1750) was first married, but lived as a widow for long period of time. She spent most of her life in the Mexican province of Michoacán and moved several times within it and to some adjacent areas. Born in the old Purepecha capital of Tzintzuntzan with the family name Gallegos, she later lived in Pátzcuaro, Querétaro, Valladolid, Queréndaro and Capula. At her death, José Antonio Ponce de León, a prolific hagiographical author, preached a funeral sermon, and later wrote a biographical account of her, which was basically a presentation of her virtues. The work, printed in 1752, was destined to the parishioners of Pátzcuaro, where she had spent more than a decade. One central image the author employed was that of the bee. The title of the biography is *La Abeja*

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34 Josefa de la Providencia [1744-1747] 1793: no pagination
38 Ponce de León 1752. For a study of Ponce de León’s hagiographical works, see Vallarta 1991.
de Michoacán, referring to Josefa Antonio de Nuestra Señora de la Salud’s constant work and diligence. Using this imagery, her first confessor, Franciscan missionary Antonio Margil de Jesús in Querétaro was called a wise bee-keeper and her meditation and growth in virtues was described as her collecting exquisite honey, which she passed on to others.39

In his biography, Ponce de León stressed that Josefa Antonia’s learning had a miraculous origin. She did not attend school. Instead, Virgin Mary taught her how to read and write. Later she studied many edificatory works, including those of Eusebio Nieremberg, María de Ágreda and Ignacio de Quítranadueñas, as well as a great number of hagiographies. The author pointed out that she never read “out of curiosity”, a noun that had negative connotations in early modern Spanish, but meditated on the contents, thus combining reading and prayer. The time she devoted to contemplation was extensive. On a daily basis, she dedicated seven hours to mental prayer and two hours to reading.40 Josefa Antonia made early vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and even enclosure, though living at her family hacienda, attending to bookkeeping. According to Ponce de León she only went out from her self-imposed retirement when explicitly ordered by Christ. While she lived a nun-like life, her confessor ordered her to get married. After the death of her husband, who was almost never mentioned in the biographical account, she became a Franciscan tertiary and took simple vows.41

At least during her time in Pátzcuaro, Josefa Antonia de Nuestra Señora de la Salud was a midwife. Apart from her medical office, she spiritually counselled the women and baptized infants, who risked dying before a priest could arrive. According to Ponce de Leén she catechized groups of Indians, teaching them with “sweetness, intelligence, frequency and perseverance”. When she walked around on the streets or visited people’s homes she distributed rosaries and convinced people to seek a priest to make their confessions, thus bettering their post-mortem chances. Through these activities, her biographer claimed that she was “indefatigable” in her zeal to convert people and make them stop offending God through their abhorrent ways of life. Josefa Antonia’s spirituality was inspired by the Society of Jesus, and she annually took the spiritual exercises and was much involved in teaching, just as they were. In a concluding evaluation of her life

39 Ponce de León 1752: 1-4.
40 Ponce de León 1752: 5, 26 and 50-51.
41 Ponce de León 1752: 12, 31 and 86.
and virtues, Ponce de León underscored that she had untiringly taught Indians from childhood to death, thus certainly deserving the epithet of the busy bee.\footnote{42 Ponce de León 1752: 80-81 and 88.}

**A Prudent and Discrete Counsellor**

María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio, the eighteenth-century Dominican nun in Puebla was known for her intellectual activities, including the writing of a theological treatise on the soteriological effects of Virgin Mary’s breast milk. Following the hagiographical genre, she was presented as saintly even as a little child, when she taught church doctrine to household members and guests. When writing about her later life, her biographer José Bellido included other aspects of her teaching. Some were fairly standard, such as her counselling through the convent turn-box.\footnote{43 Bellido 1758.} Others had a more unusual content. Among the latter, he told a story about a vision she had had

\begin{quote}
Día de la Santísima Trinidad le mostró también el Señor varios clarines, que los tocaban en las tinieblas de la infidelidad; sus vozes eran luces que alumbraban aquellas almas. Passados días entendió, que significaban la predicación del evangelio, y por esso se daban a los sacerdotes, que tienen facultad de tocarlos. Su Magestad le hizo el favor de darle a ella uno; para que ayudasse a la Santa Iglesia. Lo tocaba con gran gusto, y echaba de ver, que eran muchas sus vozes, y derramavan luces. En otra ocasion vió, que la llevaban por las calles, tocaba clarín, y se juntaba mucha gente: el que la llevaba, que no conoció quien era, la hacía parar “Este clarín se lo dió su Esposo, por lo mucho, que se avía mortificado.”\footnote{44 Bellido 1758: 260.}
\end{quote}

According to this story, God gave her a horn, which she played together with the clerics. She understood that the horns signified the spreading of the gospel. The male ecclesiastics had the faculty to preach, but because of her great mortification, which made her manly, she was also given a horn by divine intervention, and became able play it in an expert way. When playing, every tone entered the hearts of the many people who gathered around her when she walked the streets and the sermon-like music made them mend their ways, and stop offending God.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ponce de León 1752: 80-81 and 88.
\item Bellido 1758.
\item Bellido 1758: 260.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Maria Anna Agueda de San Ignacio was a tornera, a turn-box keeper, for almost two decades, when the institution she lived in was still a beaterio. Bellido stated that she feared the office, as it placed her closer to the outside world. He described the turn-box as the lungs of the convent, which were necessary for its daily life, but at the same time exposed the nuns to the “cold air” from the world. Still, Bellido claimed that due to her virtuousness, she withstood all possible temptations during this extended period of time. In the passages about her spiritual advice, it was clearly stated that she was often called to the turn-box, even after leaving the office, in order to animate people to confess and Bellido asserted that in this capacity she was responsible for “innumerable conversions”. Still, according to the biographer, she did not understand what sin was, as she had never committed a deadly one.45

Teacher and Wonder-worker

The case of Salvadora de los Santos (1701-1762) was unusual. She was an Otomí Indian, living in the Carmelite beaterio in Querétaro. Just after her death, Jesuit Antonio de Paredes wrote an edifying letter about her life and virtues. Two decades later, a second edition of the work was prepared by the indigenous governors of the neighbourhoods of San Juan and Santiago in Mexico City. It had a circulation of a thousand copies and was distributed for free to young Indians. The editors hoped they would use it to learn how to read and gain knowledge about a virtuous woman “who was like them”—an Indian.46

Salvadora de los Santos was an Otomí speaking woman and Paredes devoted some space to describe how barbarous he considered this particular indigenous group. More generally, he deplored that many Indians still had their “natural simple-mindedness”, despite centuries of Christian presence. Salvadora de los Santos was born near Fresnillo in the current state of Zacatecas, but later moved to San Juan del Río, near Querétaro, and then to the city itself. The author included a rather standard story about her childhood, stating that she had an active prayer life, that she mortified herself and sought solitude. She was attending to her family’s sheep, which meant that she, for periods, could live an almost eremitical life, though she

46 Paredes 1784.
frequently went to mass, took communion and confessed. Already in this period, she wore a kind of religious habit and learnt the basics of reading, so that she could get access to edificatory works.\textsuperscript{47}

Salvadora de los Santos wanted to enter the Carmelite beaterio in Querétaro, but due to her ethnicity she was only accepted as a donada. In this capacity, her task was to serve the beatas, and according to Paredes the other women treated her almost like a slave. Though the institution was cloistered, as an alms-collector, Salvadora de los Santos was licensed to leave enclosure. She made journeys through the environs of Querétaro, but sometimes went as far as Salvatierra and Valladolid. During her walks, she prayed together with people she met and taught them Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{48}

En todas las posadas intermedias, difundiendo en los próximos el buen olor de Christo, que guardaba en su interior, los exhortaba a que amasen el Sumo Bien, y para que les entrara con suavidad el documento les cantaba versos, que como saëtas sacaba de la aljaba apostólica, que siempre para este fin llevaba consigo, no perdiendo ocasión en los caminos de excitar piadosos afectos en los que la hospedaban.\textsuperscript{49}

Thus, she taught, exhorted and sang for those who housed her, and Paredes described her words as arrows brought from her “apostolic quiver”, aimed at her hosts. Due to her activities, according to the author, Salvadora de los Santos was often accused of being sanctimonious, ridiculed for her appearance (her religious habit and unusual length), and criticized for meandering in a way that was found unsuitable for a woman. Still, she became well-known for her ability to heal both humans and animals, and for finding lost things, and this made her a sought-after person. In such contexts, she took the opportunity to teach, too. One of the stories that Paredes included was about a young boy, who was close to death, but whom Salvadora de los Santos brought to Querétaro. When he eventually recovered, she taught him Catholic doctrine and he, in turn, assisted her in the collection of alms for the beaterio.\textsuperscript{50}

Towards the end of his book, Paredes gave his general valuation of Salvadora de los Santos and her evangelizing mission, pointing to her

\textsuperscript{47} Paredes 1784: 1-20.
\textsuperscript{48} Paredes 1784: 21-40
\textsuperscript{49} Paredes 1784: 40.
\textsuperscript{50} Paredes 1784: 41-87.
simplicity, but also to her efficiency in conferring knowledge, saying much with few words. He asserted that people were impressed by her instruction, not being able to believe that an Otomi woman could do all this. He thus regarded her as pusillanimous, but that she still taught the people she met in an efficient way, though her pronunciation sometimes made her Spanish difficult to understand. Paredes claimed that she knew the catechism by heart, and possessed all cardinal virtues in a perfect way. Therefore, every time the possibility arose she taught others the Catholic teachings in an accessible way that made an impression on the listeners. She was an efficient and humble teacher.51

Advisor through the Turn-Box

For 25 years Melchora de Jesús (1701-1781) was the gobernadora of the Discalced Mercedarian convent in Lima. Shortly after her death, José Manuel Azero Lamadriz preached a funeral sermon about her, building on a question from the Book of Proverbs: Mulierem fortem quis inveniet—“Who shall find a valiant woman?” In that passage, the biblical author presented an image of the good woman, who ran her household with wisdom and industriousness. Allegorically, in Azero’s view the good Bride of Christ was a prudent and energetic keeper of her household, the convent. Though Melchora de Jesús’s administrative qualities were singled out, so were her mortification and exact compliance of the rule. According to the author, the type of woman Melchora de Jesús represented constantly fought her feminine frailty and therefore turned strong and manly. Thus the Mercedarian nun was lauded in masculine terms such as vigorous, industrious and virile.52

As regards teaching, Azero Lamadriz accentuated Melchora de Jesús’s role as a spiritual advisor, which he saw seen as a clear sign of her love of her fellow humans. As in other cases, the nature of these problems and the people visiting her were described in quite general terms, but the hagiographer exclaimed:

Si os pudiese numerar quantos en el siglo se tubieron por felizes, por haver participado en sus mayores angústias, de sus benignas influencias! Entonces

51 Paredes 1784: 88-108.
52 Azero y Lamadriz 1781: no pagination.
veriais quantos casados confiesan por fruto de su interposición, la paz que
gozan; quantos se dispusieron con su aviso, para el trancito regoso de una
eternidad irrepresentable; que hubieran tal vez perdido descuidados; quantos
repusieron la amistad de Dios perdida, por medio de el sacramento, porque
fueron de ella prevenidos. 

Her teaching and advice were thus described as very far-reaching and
powerful: anguish was transformed into happiness, domestic problems into
peace, and sick people were cured through her intercessions. According to
Azero Lamadriz, she miraculously knew if the individual was withholding
any sins and then made them conscious of them, so that they could feel
contrition and confess their transgressions to a priest. As many of the other
women she had the charismatic ability to “read hearts”. Though Melchora de
Jesús was a very active spiritual advisor, her biographer emphasized that she
never broke the vow of enclosure, but always advised people through the
turn-box. He also underlined that she gave advice in a discrete way, so that
not much was known about the details of her activities. Though it is stated
that she always convinced people to go to confession, it was her own
spiritual advice and its good effects that were the focus of the author’s
description. 

**Teaching, Counselling and Converting**

The gender-related constrictions of space had an important bearing on the
teaching and counselling activities of contemplative women. Generally, their
mobility was curtailed, but there was certainly a difference between women
who lived in strict enclosure, and *beatas* living on their own. For cloistered
nuns, the convent turn-box and parlour were liminal areas, where they could
communicate with outsiders, who came to seek their advice, and some of the
nuns seem to have been enormously popular. In my corpus of texts, there
were many similar stories about nuns being able to teach and counsel
without breaking enclosure.

In his funeral sermon about Mexican Capuchin Agustina Nicolasa
María, printed in 1755, Eguira y Eguren stated that she often met secular
people through the turn-box. He emphasised that her conversations only

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53 Azero y Lamadriz 1781: no pagination.
54 Azero y Lamadriz 1781: no pagination.
treated spiritual issues and that she used few, but pertinent, words when counselling them. Her teaching was founded in her love of God and neighbour, and the author asserted that the meetings had edificatory effects on the listeners.\textsuperscript{55} The close relationship between love and teaching was also emphasized in Sousa Pereira’s hagiography about Quito Conceptionist nun, Mariana de Jesús. He stated that

she carried out the office of porter like an apostle of divine love. The sinners who came to the turn-box attracted by the benevolent magnetism of her words would leave in compunction and remorse, wounded by the timbre of her words … For if the heart of the porter was a burning furnace of divine love, it is not strange than the lukewarm souls that drew near it become warm, and the one already afire should increase their ardor.\textsuperscript{56}

In some sources, nun’s hidden apostolate were regarded as superior to those of the male clergy, as they had received this divine grace of being able to read the hearts of people and knew what to say to each individual who sought their advice. In his chronicle about the San José convent in Puebla, Gómez de la Parra accentuated the work done by the early seventeenth century nun Francisca de la Natividad

en el torno se reducían y convertían muchos mas pecadores, que los que se ganaban por la predicación en los púlpitos; porque las religiosas añidían a sus consejos, persuaciones y direcciones, los ruegos, y las oraciones de toda la comunidad, que no cesaba de clamar a Dios hasta que su divina magestad se apiadaba misericordioso.\textsuperscript{57}

The chronicler stated that her conversion work was more successful than the preaching of ordinary male priests. Her counselling was also regarded as particularly efficient as it was combined with the whole community’s prayers. In his funeral sermon on Luisa de Santa Catarina, a Dominican in Mexican Valladolid, López Aguedo referred to a vision she had had. While in ecstasy, she had seen a dumb preacher. She concluded that this meant that his words did not come from the heart and that they therefore did not reach the hearts of the listeners. She realized that many wanted to be called

\textsuperscript{55} Eguira y Eguren 1755: 1-13.  
\textsuperscript{57} Gómez de la Parra 1732: 113.
preachers, but some of them just made noises. She wanted to bring these insights to the attention of the clergy, who, indirectly, were thought to have less knowledge than she possessed.\footnote{López Aguado 1738: 44-47.}

Some of the contemplative women had the charisma of being able see into the souls of the people who visited them, thus knowing their sins, something which male confessors normally were unable to do, unless they had received this \textit{gratia gratis data}. In his late seventeenth-century biography of Antonia de San José, a nun in San Clara in Querétaro José Gómez wrote.

Tenía particular don de Dios para aliviar los desconsuelos de la alma y males de espíritu, que los desvanecida de tal suerte, y vencía la dificultad, y resistencia que ay para daxarlos con su enseñansa, y doctrina ayudados de especiales consejos - - - venían pecadores, y volvían convertidos; que por algunos motivos convenientes no los especifico, mas es suficiente prueba de la eficacia, y persuaciva de sus palabras lo yo tenía sus persuación, quando las oía de sus labios, porque me assoraban: porque como los grados de la charidad y amor están con tal orden.\footnote{Gómez 1689: 26.}

She could teach and counsel those visiting her, even if they were ignorant. As in many other cases, the subject of teaching and converting was described in very general terms, despite underlining her efficiency, which was based in her perfect love. Marcela de Estrada y Escobeda, founder of the Capuchin convent in Querétaro had a very similar role. In his funeral sermon, printed in 1771, Juan Antonio Rodríguez underscored “los saludables consejos, que daba a quienes la buscaban en sus trabajos, las diferencias, que compuso desde su retiro, siendo imperiosas las palabras de su humildad, y a mi me consta, que en una grave enfermedad cuidado de si reconcilió unas personas de autoridad.”\footnote{Rodríguez 1731: 12.}

One of the Capuchins, who in 1666 travelled from Toledo to Mexico City to found a new convent, was Sor Lorenza Bernarda. In his chronicle about the foundation and the founding nuns, Ignacio de la Peña emphasised her charismatic authority and unusual ability to give advice to people who came to visit her, though underlining that her modus was different from confessors’.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{58} López Aguado 1738: 44-47.\textsuperscript{59} Gómez 1689: 26.\textsuperscript{60} Rodríguez 1731: 12.}
Fueron muchos los que consiguieron el bien espiritual por las encendidas palabras de la venerable madre, porque eran estas con notable discreción, aunque de mucho peso, nada pesadas, sin afectar razones, ni sentencias, sin contristar, ni descubrir los defectos de los próximos, porque la movía la verdadera caridad y la governaba el don de discreción y no el indiscreto celo. Por eso tenían tan buenos efectos sus moniciones.61

A very indirect form of teaching, or teaching-by proxy was found in Juan Antonio Mora’s vida about Augustinian María Inés de Dolores, who according to the hagiographer displayed a very ardent missionary vocation, praying for missions and missionaries. While her gender impeded active work on the mission fields, she wanted to further the indoctrination of indigenous people, making necklaces with colourful glass beads, which she sent to her brother who was a Jesuit missionary in northern Mexico. According to her wish, he should in turn give them to little Indian girls, who had learnt the catechism by heart.62

While women living in beaterios were often subject to enclosure, some were given much more space. Salvadora de los Santos, the Otomí donada from Querétaro made long journeys collecting alms. She taught Christian doctrine in the homes she stayed in, and attracted people with her healing abilities. The Filipina catechists Clara Calimán and Hermana Isabel had a regional responsibility with explicit license from the male superiors, visiting, teaching and preparing locals for baptism. They taught both in peoples’ homes and in the church buildings, but also went preaching in the streets and their work was described as being more efficient than male clerics.

The Franciscan tertiary Feliciana de San Ignacio Mariaca was born in La Paz in present-day Bolivia, but moved to Lima at a young age. In her thirties, she began to live a strict penitent life. According to José Castillo y Bolívar, who wrote a brief biography of her, even before she became literate “hablaba de los mystérios divinos, de la oración mental, y sus efectos, con tan discretos y elevados discursos, que causaba no poca admiración, y confusión en sus domésticos.”63 Drawing parallels to Christ, the author asserted that there were no notices of her life between the age of 12 and 30,

61 Peña 1728: 143.
62 Mora 1729: 315.
63 Castillo y Bolívar 1733: no pagination.
but thereafter she appeared in public. Castillo y Bolívar included some examples of her work. Four days before her death she managed to convert an eighty year old slave woman. The woman had no knowledge whatsoever of Christian doctrine, and was not prepared to make her confession. Feliciiana de San Ignacio Mariaca tried to instruct her, but the old woman did not even learn how to make the sign of the cross. Therefore Feliciana prayed to Our Lady of the Rosary and just before her death the unnamed slave women made a good confession to a priest.  

The Argentinean beata María Antonia de San José, who died in 1799, was very close to the Society of Jesus. After their expulsion in 1767, she continuously gave Ignatius of Loyola’s spiritual exercises, first in Córdoba and then in Buenos Aires and other places in the region, and later founded a beaterio in the capital of the viceroyalty. An increasing number of women assisted her in giving the spiritual exercises, which attracted people from many states of life: rich and poor, women and men, laypeople and clerics. Some women were presented as unwilling teachers. In his work on the Guatemalan tertiary Ana Guerra de Jesús, Siria claimed

\[\text{que si salía algunas veces de su casa a visitar en algún trabajo o desconcierto a algunas personas sus conocidas y bienhechoras, eran menester expressos mandatos de su confesor que la obligaba a costa de su propia mortificación a dar a otros e[l] consuelo y espiritual aprovechamiento que interesaban en sus santas pláticas y conversaciones.}\]

In this case, teaching which implied going to other places was presented as a kind of mortification, not a free choice, but a response to the instigations of the confessor. Humility and charismatic authority went hand in hand.

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Contemplative women’s teaching activities were usually regarded as informal. Being women, they did not have a formal teaching office which would have enabled them to doctrinate and preach in public. Their teaching

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\[64\] Castillo y Bolívar 1733, no pagination
\[65\] For a selection of her letters to the ex-Jesuit Gaspar Juárez, who lived in Rome, see María Antonia de San José [1778-1793] 2006. For a fine study of her work, see Fraschina 2006.
\[66\] Siria1716: 145.
took many different forms and not surprisingly, there were differences between the activities of cloistered nuns and those of some beatas, who did not live that kind of spatially restricted life. Nuns’ normal teaching space was the convent turn-box, the torno, where they could meet people without seeing them or being seen by others. In hagiographical texts they were described as spiritual advisors, though they lacked sacramental powers. Still, they were regarded as highly skilled and efficient as they had received charismatic gifts, enabling them to “see into the hearts” of people who came to see them, understanding their problems and sins better than they did themselves. Though they urged people to confess their sins to a cleric, hagiographers often claim that nuns were responsible for many conversions. They did this work ex charitate—as an effect of their love of God and other human beings.

Particularly in the seventeenth-century material, there were several examples of beatas who walked around catechizing indigenous and other people, baptizing in cases of emergency. They were often regarded as more efficient than many male ecclesiastics, as they had knowledge about the souls of people and could contextualize their message and the forms to convey it. Thus, they could be successful even in cases that were regarded as impossible. Hagiographers normally described the contents of the advice as simple but prudent and efficient.
Descriptions of journeys through purgatory, heaven and hell were quite common in early modern works by and about contemplative women. Though less common, there also existed stories about spiritual journeys through the world. Apart from accounts of flights to nearby destinations—within the city or province—there were narratives on passages through far-away regions, where women sometimes were said to have preached, catechised or otherwise taken an active, though mystical, part in the church’s missionary work. On other occasions, they observed the areas, oversaw the work of male missionaries, co-operated with them in different ways, or reconnoitred new mission fields, thus being able to guide the priests who planned to go there.

Sometimes the sources indicated the exact destination of the women’s journeys, but often the descriptions were vaguer. Bartolomé de Letona wrote a brief account on one of the Franciscan nuns who went to Manila in the 1620s—Maria Magdalena de la Cruz. As a child, while still in Spain, the future nun felt a great zeal for the conversion of “infidels” and Letona claimed she was spiritually brought to a foreign country, where a group of girls surrounded her. In the text there was no clear indication that she spoke to these girls or interacted with them in any other way.¹

Occasionally, such experiences were understood as bilocations, that is, that women were thought to be physically present at two places at the same time, both at home and in another location. More often however, terms such as spiritual flights or flights of the spirit were used, and not surprisingly they had great difficulties explaining what they had experienced. In fact, in my textual corpus, the term bilocation was hardly ever used, though in some cases it was clear that the women themselves or their biographers believed

¹ Letona 1662: 83.
that they had been observed by people in another location, while at the same time remaining at home.

**Flights of the Soul and Bilocations**

According to Teresa of Avila, the human being’s way to God implied a long and arduous journey through the prayer of recollection. In this process, periods of tranquility and rest were combined with ecstatic experiences, including what she sometimes called flights of the soul (*vuelos del espíritu*), which were stations on the way to unity. Teresa’s ecstatic terminology was not very systematic or coherent, and it is clear that she struggled to communicate the nature of her experiences. Apart from the flights of the soul, she referred to the experiences as rapture (*arrobaramiento*). They came unexpectedly and deprived the individual of her senses. While ecstatic, she became like a dead person to outside observers, during which time she would experience visions. These kinds of experiences only lasted for a brief period of time, after which one came to one’s senses, while the effects of the violent occurrences could last longer.²

Levitation was a special case of flying, but was at least indirectly related to ecstasy and flights of the soul. Levitation implied that a body was lifted above the ground and that the event could be observed by others. The word was not coined until the late nineteenth century, but stories about such occurrences were told long before that, particularly in hagiographical works from the sixteenth century onwards. The accounts included both males and females and in most cases the person was lifted just over the ground. Teresa of Avila testified that her body once was lifted up when taking communion, without her being able to hinder it, though other nuns tried to hold her back. On another occasion, while in the Carmelite convent in Segovia, she thought that she had travelled to Salamanca in order to comfort a co-sister on her deathbed. The witnesses in Segovia thought that Teresa was dead, but coming back from Salamanca she came back to her senses. The most famous of levitators was seventeenth-century Italian Franciscan Joseph of Copertino. His hagiographers testify to hundreds of instances when he was elevated celebrating mass or chanting the divine office. Apart from such cases, where

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he was hanging just over the floor, they asserted that he made longer and higher flights, too. Sometimes he carried other friars with him.3

In medieval and early modern Catholic hagiography there were stories about saintly persons, male and female, who had been visible in two places at the same time. Scholastic theologians tried to get to grips on this purported mystical phenomenon, which today is referred to as bilocation or multilocation. In line with Thomas Aquinas, many of them claimed that even through a divine miracle, it was impossible for a body to be present in two places simultaneously. The only explanation was an apparent or seeming bilocation, that is, that a body in fact remained in one place, but that God caused a vision of the body that could be observed by people in another location. Alternatively, it was thought that through the divinely conceded favour of agility, a body could move from one place to another with utmost swiftness, so that its absence from the original location remained unnoticed. In this case, too, the bilocation was apparent.4

On the other hand, some Franciscans theologians argued in favour of the possibility of robust bilocation, that is, that a person sensu stricto could be physically present in multiple locations at the same point of time. The medieval theologians who held this view were influenced by John Duns Scotus, who treated the issue in his early-fourteenth-century gloss on Peter Lombard’s Libri Quatuor Sententiarum. A more elaborate Scotist argumentation on the subject was found in a commentary to Aristotle’s Physics, attributed to the Aragonese theologian Antonius Andrae, but probably written by a younger colleague of his towards the mid-fourteenth century. In this work, the author questioned Aquinas’s conclusions. He claimed that God indeed could make a body, whether human, angelic or animal, be simultaneously present in two or more places, and that this phenomenon was not a contradiction in terms, but a direct consequence of God being omnipotent. In line with this view, the anonymous author claimed that under special circumstances a person could act at one location and be still at the other, and even that he or she could die in one place, but not in the


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other. Thus concerning bilocation, to the Scotists there were no limits for divine action.⁵

**Spanish Contemplative Women with Wings**

Stories about spiritual missionary journeys were in no way restricted to women in the Spanish Indies, who lived geographically closer to colonial mission fields. They had a prehistory and parallel development in the mother country. Though there existed earlier accounts, in the seventeenth century there appeared what Jane Tar calls a “new generation of ‘flying Franciscans’”, whose activities included inter-continental flights.⁶ Although Franciscan nuns of different branches were overrepresented in the Spanish material, there were accounts about flying women who belonged to other religious orders.⁷

Luisa de la Ascensión (1565-1635), most often referred to as the Monja de Carrión was a Poor Clare who lived in the convent in Carrión de los Condes, where she eventually became the abbess. Widely known for her sanctity and miraculous intercessions, she acted as a spiritual advisor to influential people, including the royal family. At the very end of her life, however, she was accused by the Inquisition and died in Valladolid while still under investigation.⁸ According to hagiographers and documentation in the archives of the Holy Office, Luisa de la Ascensión made a number of spiritual journeys to far-away places. She was present on a battle field in Flanders in company with St. Anthony of Padua, Bonaventure and the Eleven Thousand Virgins, thus securing a Catholic victory. She went to Rome, hindering the pope from being poisoned. She visited St. Francis’s grave in Assisi and was present at the deathbed of Philip III in Madrid, helping him to die a good death. She even made longer journeys to Japan, animating missionaries to search for martyrdom.⁹

The most famous accounts, however, were those of her flights to northern Mexico, where she ministered to indigenous people. A seventeenth-century theologian, who believed the stories about her evangelization tours, claimed that she had preached to and baptized Indians, but also guided

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⁵ Gensler et al. 1999: 346-353.
⁶ Tar 2008: 263-302; citation on p. 280
⁸ Tar 2008: 280-282, see also the monograph by García Barriusó 1986.
⁹ García Barriusó 1986: 90-100.
missionaries to them. During the Holy Office’s investigation, Luisa de la Ascensión denied ever having been corporeally present outside Spain, but stated that she, in spirit, had travelled to distant places, even if she did not know the exact destinations

que estando en raptos que suele tener, fue llevada en espíritu a cierta tierra que no conoció, aunque después por lo que le pasó echo ver era tierra de indios, pero no sabe qué provincia, y en espíritu vio doce personas se querían ir del sitio donde estaban y ésta en espíritu les exhortó y les pidió a que no se fuesen porque a las personas que esperaban que eran unos religiososos de San Francisco venían o llegarían presto y que el conocer estaba en las Indias fue porque se la dieron a entender en las revelaciones el espíritu. Dice que no conoció a las personas o si la llevaron en espíritu a las Indias, estando de noche en raptos en su celda o ermita.

This passage referred to a much less material presence in the Indies than those portrayed by some hagiographers. Her level of agency was described as considerably lower, though to some degree, she interacted with the indigenous people, convincing a group of twelve to wait for Franciscan friars to arrive. She did not doubt that God might have made her visible to the Indians, but did not know how and in what way.

Ana María de San José (1581-1632) testified to having made spiritual flights to mission fields, too. Growing up close to Ávila, in 1603 she professed in a Discalced Franciscan convent in Salamanca. She was a known ecstatic and prophet, who, among other things, was believed to perform food multiplication miracles. At the very end of her life, her confessor Juanetín Niño ordered her to write a vida, which he published immediately after her death, something that was quite extraordinary. To the autobiographical account he appended a questionnaire that should be used when taking testimonies to prepare a cause for beatification. The book was dedicated to the Infanta Margarita de la Cruz, who was a nun in the Descalzas Reales convent in Madrid and Niño hoped that she would lobby for the case. Within a decade the autobiography was re-published twice in Mexico City.

10 García Barriúso 1986: 90-100.
12 Niño 1632.
13 I have not had access to the Mexican editions from 1635 and 1641, which, however, are studied briefly in Sampson Vera Tudela 2000: 5 and Bieñko de Peralta 2014: 170-173.
Still, at least from the early eighteenth century, the work was put on the Index of Forbidden Books, for reasons not entirely known, but probably due to some of the extraordinary experiences she related.14

One theme in her autobiography was her missionary flights to far-away countries, which took place during a period of two decades. She described that sometimes she was present there “in spirit”. On other occasions “her heart” travelled to the Indies and other places and sometimes she was brought on angels’ shoulders. Before going there, she always took communion and therefore believed that the sacramental Christ was present within her. From her breast she saw rays of lights that fell on people, and stars appeared on the foreheads of prospective converts. The angel, who accompanied her, gave her a type of chalice filled with oil, and she used it to anoint people present, teaching them catechism at the same time. On such occasions, Christ put the words in her mouth, but afterwards she did not remember what she had told them.15

In her article on flying contemplative women in early modern Spain, Jane Tar cites an interesting passage from one of Ana María de San José’s unpublished letters. There, she connected her flights and teaching to the lack of male missionaries and little fervour among the clergy for the urgent missionary tasks. In such a context, she felt that she had to contribute to the mission enterprise in order to save souls

Muchas veces me hace la divina bondad, y de muchas maneras: que no es aceptador de personas … El ir a las Indias, a la mar, a la corte, a Santiago, a visitar corazones: a sacar de pecado y hacer favores. Hasta el último rincón del mundo, y que parece que para él no hay predicación, ni quién enseñe, allá va la visita.16

Spiritual flights were an important subject in Ana María de San José’s autobiography and according to herself, she frequently travelled to different parts of the world over an extended period of time. The main reason for her journeys was that people should not be condemned due to the insufficient number of male missionaries, and that she, with divine assistance, acted as a stand-in for them.

15 Niño 1632: 32-33, 110-113 and 124
16 Tar 2008: 284.
As a 52-year old widow, Juana de Jesús María (1564-1650) made her profession in the convent of Santa Clara in Burgos. Earlier, as a Carmelite tertiary, she was said to have received the stigmata, frequently fallen in ecstasy and experienced numerous visions. Animated by her confessors, she wrote several autobiographical texts and a series of spiritual diaries. Apart from that, several hagiographical works were devoted to her, but only one was published in early modern times. Written by Franciscan Francisco de Ameyugo it was originally printed in 1673 and re-issued several times in the next couple of years. In 1679, however, it was banned in totum by the Holy Office, which claimed that the book was filled with incredible and scandalous visions and other supernatural experiences of questionable nature.17

Ameyugo’s La nueva maravilla de la gracia contained a rather substantial chapter on Juana de Jesús María’s teaching on far-away mission fields. After an encounter with Virgin Mary, she had a very firm belief in the church’s teachings and felt a strong urge to spread the faith and suffer martyrdom. Subsequently, God gave her the possibility to travel the world. Apart from animating Christians who were incarcerated in Turkey and Algeria, she constantly travelled to attend to “infidels” in the Ottoman Empire, Brazil and other parts of the Americas, as well as the Philippines.

During these journeys she was said to have preached and taught Christian doctrine, and her missionary work seemed to be efficient. In order to win people to her cause, she brought them food and gifts. According to the text, most of them listened to her and wanted to be baptized, while others, animated by the Devil, showed hostility. Once, when the Indians saw her flying above them, they called her a witch and shot arrows after her.18 Interestingly enough, another of her biographers mentioned that she sometimes went to the New World in company with La Monja de Carrión, Luisa de la Ascención, thus relating her to a renowned missionary flyer.19

The Conceptionist María de Jesús (1602-1665), often called María de Ágreda after her hometown, was without any doubt the most famous of the Hispanic spiritual missionaries. Posthumously, she is well-known as the author of a very voluminous and popular biography of the Virgin Mary, La mística ciudad de Dios, and for her prolonged correspondence with King

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18 Ameyugo 1676: 426-429.
19 García Barriúso 1986: 140.
Philip IV. She wrote many other works too, which were circulated in a large number of manuscript copies. One of these texts, *Tratado de la redondez de la tierra*, completed when she was already in her teens, recounted a mystical journey through the universe. In the text she described the heavenly spheres, the terrestrial topography and the inhabitants of the globe. The work formed the background to the later narrations on her missionary bilocations.

Maria de Ágreda’s primary destination as a missionary flier was New Mexico, but her own accounts of the journeys are limited. Apart from later hagiographical text, the main sources are some texts from the 1630s and a few documents dated in 1650. Alonso de Benavides, a Franciscan missionary to New Mexico was the catalyst of the first cluster of records. In a relation about the Franciscan missions there, first published in 1630 and then translated into several European languages, he wrote that a group of Jumaros (Apaches) had recounted that they had been visited by a lady dressed in blue, who had urged them to call for missionaries so that they could be baptized. The friars had showed them a picture of Luisa de la Ascención, and though noting the resemblance, they claimed that the woman they had observed was younger. This early document, however, does not identify the woman as María de Jesús, who as a Conceptionist wore a blue cape.

When in Spain, seeking royal support for the missionary work in New Mexico, Benavides heard about María de Jesús and went to Ágreda to meet her. After their encounter in 1631, he wrote a letter to his colleagues back in Mexico. There he identified the lady in blue as the Conceptionist nun and claimed that she had been present in New Mexico on innumerable occasions since 1620, asserting that she had travelled there with the help of St. Francis and Michael the Archangel. While in the New World, María de Jesús preached to groups of Indians and admonished them to search for missionaries in order to escape eternal damnation that otherwise awaited them. Sometimes she brought a monstrance, distributed rosaries and even died the death of a martyr on several occasions. To the letter, Benavides attached a brief account written by María de Jesús in which she described

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20 For a recent, very sympathetic biography, see Fedewa 2010, cf. Colahan 1994.
21 An English translation of the work is found in Colahan 1994: 47-91.
22 Nogar 2008: 81-94. For the editions and translations, see Benavides 1945: 19-33.
her experiences. He concluded that she “has preached our holy Catholic faith and illuminated the darkness of their idolatry.”

In 1634, Benavides authored a more extensive version of his earlier account. This second report did include the history of María de Ágreda’s prodigious missionary tours, but the text implied that Luisa de la Ascensión had made similar journeys, too. The text was, however, not published until modern times. Still, the stories about María de Jesús’s bilocations appeared in the *vida* written by Pedro Ximénez Samaniego, which was appended to editions of the *Mística ciudad de Dios.* The history of her spiritual missions was also included in the chronicles of the Mexican Franciscans, written by Agustín de Vetancurt towards the very end of the seventeenth century.

On two occasions during her life, María de Ágreda was questioned by the Inquisition, though she was never formally tried. The second investigation, which took place in 1650, included a number of questions related to her spiritual missionary journeys and a contemporary letter from her dealt with the matter, too. In these documents María de Ágreda was very careful when addressing the prodigious events. She claimed that Benavides had widely exaggerated what she had told him, and that she did not realize that he would make the stories public. She asserted that she had only faint memories of her journeys, which had only occurred between 1620 and 1623, and she did not know if she had been there corporeally, or if an angel had taken her place.

Cautiously, she pointed out that “it seemed to me I addressed them [the Juramos] and begged them to seek ministers of the Gospel to teach them the catechism and baptize them, and I came to know them, too.” The documents referred to her detailed notes about the journeys she made, but they are not known to be extant. Apart from inter-continental flights, in the literature about María de Ágreda there was another, less famous, episode of

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23 Benavides 1945: 135-158, citation on p. 148
24 Benavides 1945: 35-103 includes an English translation of the document.
26 Vetancurt 1697.
29 MacLean 2008: 32.
missionary bilocation that involved a Muslim man imprisoned in Pamplona. He claimed that he had been visited by her and as a result he was baptized.\textsuperscript{30}

Apart from these quite well-documented cases there were brief notes on other flying women in early modern Spain. Isabel de Jesús (1611-1682) was a Carmelite tertiary, whose very extensive \textit{vida} was printed shortly after her death. It included reports on her flights to Marocco, where she supported Christian prisoners.\textsuperscript{31} According to her hagiographer, the Conceptionist abbess Inés de Jesús (1630-1677) from Miedes in Aragon was often transported to Japan and the Indies, where she animated missionaries in their work, actively taught catechism and anointed people on their foreheads.\textsuperscript{32} There were also nuns who had a much more violent role, fighting for the victory of Catholic troops. Mariana de los Ángeles allegedly took part in the Lützen battle in 1632, where she killed the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus, and Antonia Jacinta de Navarra fought in a battle between Turks and Christians.\textsuperscript{33}

A number of early modern Spanish women thus claimed that they had travelled spiritually or corporeally to the Americas, Asia and Northern Africa. Many of them and their biographers described their interaction with non-Christians, teaching, preaching and administering sacraments. Their unusually active role in the ministry was explained as a response to the lack of male missionaries and that they only paved the road for their work. Still, given this state of emergency, God conceded them rights and duties that early modern religious women normally did not have. Even in the seventeenth century, the stories about María de Ágreda’s journeys were well-publicized and certainly influenced the accounts about flying contemplatives in the Spanish Indies.

A Mexican Conceptionist Flyer

One of the earliest known flying nuns in the Spanish Indies was María de Jesús Tomellín (1582-1637), a Conceptionist known as the Lily of Puebla. She became the subject of several hagiographical texts, including those written by her co-sister Agustína de Santa Teresa and her Jesuit confessor

\textsuperscript{30} Fedewa 2010: 80-81.
\textsuperscript{31} Poutrin 1995: 312-313 and Haliczer 2003: 239. For a monograph study on her, see Velasco 1996.
\textsuperscript{32} Franco de Villalba 1733: 152-160.
Miguel Godínez, none of which were made public during the colonial era. Some authors claim that a book about María de Jesús, written by Francisco Acosta was published already in 1648, but that is a misunderstanding. That text, printed in Madrid, was in fact about a Carmelite nun from Toledo, who had the same religious name.

In the 1640s, Bishop Juan de Palafox of Puebla tried to convince the famous Jesuit author, Eusebio Nieremberg to write a hagiography. That did not work out and the first printed vida about the Poblana nun was written by the cleric Francisco Pardo in 1676, based on the manuscripts by Agustina de Santa Teresa and Miguel Godínez. Some bibliographers assert that Andrés Sáenz de la Peña, a secular priest from Puebla, wrote another book on her that was printed in 1683, but if it ever made it to the presses, there are no known copies. Nevertheless, in that very year, the Spanish church man Diego Lemus published another biography, printed in Lyon, France, which was later translated into Italian. Finally, towards the mid-eighteenth-century the last in this series of hagiographies, authored by Trinitarian Félix de Jesús María was published in Rome. Excluding the works on the formally canonized Rosa of Lima, María de Jesús seems to be the most biographed Hispanic American contemplative woman. Nevertheless, despite more than a century’s lobbying, she was never beatified.

In the books about María de Jesús, stories about supernatural experiences abound, including spiritual flights, where angels took her by her hands enabling her to travel more rapidly than the wind blows. This seems to imply that she was thought to have received the divine gift of agility. In these visions, nothing indicated that she or her biographers thought that her body had been present at various places at the same time. They were described as spiritual journeys and there were no notes on the exact destinations. During her flights through the world, she once saw what first appeared to be a group of humans. Later, she discovered that they were in fact fierce animals and realized that the devil walked around in these parts of the world, trying to bring people into the eternal flames of hell. From there she was brought to non-Christian areas, “lands of infidels”:

36 Lemus 1683 and Félix de Jesús María 1756.
37 For a study of the thwarted process of beatification, see Rubial García 1999: 165-201.
38 Pardo 1676: 76r-77r.
De allí la llevaron los ángeles a otros, y remotos climas, los quales eran tierras de infieles, donde descubrieron sus ojos muchas riquezas, profanas pompas, sobradas placeres, amenas arboleadas, y agradables frutas; después de aver visto los gentiles y paganos, que habitavan en estos estalajes, en forma de hombres, dentro de breve rato los miró en figuras de brutos, fieras, y animales de diferentes apariencias, talles, y deformidades conforme a los vicio, que cada uno de ellos frequentaba, y exercía.39

Before her eyes “pagans” were transformed into strange and deformed animals and she thought that it signified the many sins that they committed in their infidelity. After these events, she was brought to Christian areas, where she also saw many deformed people. Once again she interpreted it as signs of sinfulness. Still it was not dark there, as it had been at the previous destinations. In Catholic areas the light was shining.40 In his 1756 biography Félix de Jesús María claimed that María de Jesús’s love of her fellow-men made her spiritually leave the enclosure to attend to their needs. He wrote: “muchas veces fue llevada, o fuese por un modo intellectual, o por otro reservado a Dios, a diferentes partes del mundo, adonde el próximo padecía alguna desgrácia, para que a su vista, fuese mas ferverosa su oración.”41

According to this passage, too, she indeed travelled the world, but there was no evidence that she taught people directly. It seems that she observed them and that after the journey she was evermore convinced that they needed her prayers. Apart from these mission-related stories, Lemus included accounts about María de Jesús travelling to different parts of Europe. While in Rome she attended the ceremony of the Ethiopian Orthodox church’s vow of obedience to the pope and she was present at the funeral of King Philip III in Spain.42

**Flights to “Those Areas”**

A contemporary Poblana colleague of María de Jesús’s was Francisca de la Natividad, a Discalced Carmelite in the convent of San José. She was the author of one of the oldest extant spiritual autobiographies written in the

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39 Pardo 1676: 77r.
40 Pardo 1676: 77v.
41 Félix de Jesús María 1756:156
42 Lemus 1683: 236-237
Americas, dated to about 1630. In this work she narrated a spiritual missionary journey to an unspecified location. The experience began while she was in church praying for the conversion of non-Christians. She felt “holy jealousy” towards the male missionaries, who could physically travel and help others to escape perdition. In fact, for that reason she wished to have been born male.\(^4^3\)

In that context, Francisca de la Natividad had a vision of her travelling in spirit to areas inhabited by non-Catholics. She claimed to have seen a church building, noting that hordes of people wanted to enter it. Some had darker complexion, and she thought they were “Moors”. Others were light-skinned, and she identified them as heretics, but she observed groups of “pagans” and Jews, too. In her understanding, the church was a Jesuit mission and she realized that there was a great need for missionaries in the area. At the same time she saw a Franciscan mission church, which also lacked the necessary apostolic personnel and lamented the shortage of priests who could teach and baptize all these people, who were apparently inclined to conversion. That was particularly true for the “pagans”, who would easily convert if only given the possibility, she thought. As she saw no alternative, Francisca de la Natividad felt compelled to teach them herself.\(^4^4\) Trying to explain the teaching situation she exclaimed

\begin{quote}
venid a mi almas redimidas con la sangre de mi Señor Jesucristo pues faltan otros que os enseñen, yo en el nombre del Señor y Dios mío os quiero enseñar, y como cuando se juntan muchos muchachos como para que les enseñen la doctrina ansí me parecía que estaba yo cercada de todas aquellas almas y ansí empecé en voz clara a enseñarles a hacer la señal de la cruz, el credo y el pater noster, el ave María, la salve y los diez mandamientos y esto les enseñaba con tanta eficacia y ternura de mi alma y corazón como si los tuviera yo a todos visiblemente presentes y los viera con los ojos del cuerpo que con los del alma muy presentes los tenía.\(^4^5\)
\end{quote}

Through the description of this experience it is clear that Francisca de la Natividad believed that she had actively taught Christian doctrine and convinced people to listen to her, as no male missionaries were present. She

\(^{4^3}\) For selections of the texts, see Francisca de la Natividad [c. 1630] 2002. For studies, see Loreto López 2002c and Bienko de Peralta 2014.


\(^{4^5}\) Francisca de la Natividad [c. 1630] 2002: 50
was, however, cautious enough to state that it only seemed this way, as it was her confessor’s right to evaluate the contents of her visions in order to judge their veracity and origin. Moreover, Francisca de la Natividad used the word teaching and not preaching. Still, according to the passage, with confidence and “in a clear voice” she taught them all the parts of Christian doctrine that were considered necessary for salvation, a task normally reserved for male missionaries. She wrote that she had related her experiences to her confessor and asked him to arrange for missionaries to be sent to “those areas” (aquellas partes), without further specifying the location. However, he later returned recounting that some indigenous leaders—caciques—had indeed arrived from “those areas” requesting missionary priests. Taken together, it was clear that her confessor regarded her experience as authentic and that both of them understood that the provinces intended were found in New Spain.46

**Jesuit Co-worker with a Bird’s Perspective**

In his three-volume work on Catarina de San Juan, the India-born beata from Puebla, Alonso Ramos devoted much space to her spiritual missionary journeys, though he claimed that he had chosen to include but a fraction of what he knew from conversations with her. According to Ramos, Catarina de San Juan continuously made such journeys in the 1670s and 1680s. During this period

[fueron repetidíssimas sus ilustraciones, y mysteriosos buelos de su espíritu por todo el mundo: assistiendo a inumerables conversiones, y fundaciones de nuevas christiandades, en que se estendía, e ilustraba la Santa Iglesia, recreando el Señor el abrasado zelo de las almas, que havía comunicado con su divino amor, a su querida sierva.47]

She had travelled the world contributing to the conversion of individuals and the establishment of the church in new areas, thus expanding the realm of Christendom. Ramos gave much attention to Catarina de San Juan’s flights through Asia, the part of the world where she was born.48 In a 1674 vision she saw two lights in the East, which she interpreted as Christ and Virgin

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47 Ramos 1690: 164v.
48 Ramos 1690: 154r-159v.
Mary and followed them through Asia and the Pacific to the Philippines, Japan, India, China and the Mariana Islands, where God showed her the partial success of the Catholic missions, but above all pointed to the remaining work that still had to be done in order to spiritually conquer the areas. Somewhat later, Virgin Mary sat on her shoulder sprinkling all parts of Asia with the blood of her son, so that natives would convert more easily. In this context, the preparatory missionary work was described as co-operation between the Virgin and Catarina de San Juan, seconded by Christ and the Archangel Michael.49

Ramos claimed that Catarina de San Juan was involved in missionary activities on a more individual level, too. He related that she once had come close to the Emperor of China and took the opportunity to sign a cross on his forehead with the blood of Christ, while praying for him. On other occasions, when she returned to the Emperor:

le predicaba, y exhortaba a dexar los errores del gentilismo, y a abrazar la ley de Christo con palabras, que la dictaba el Señor, y su Santíssma Madre, le hallaba algunas vezes, como determinado a obedecer a las inspiraciones del cielo, y a las vozes de los predicadores de Christo; otras vezes se le representaba dudoso, y otras absolutamente rebelde, y obstinado.50

In this passage, Catarina de Juan was said to have exhorted and preached to the Emperor, trying to win him for the Catholic cause. However, it was Christ and Virgin Mary who put the words directly into her mouth, and thus her perceived inferior status as a (foreign) woman was obliterated and she became a mouthpiece for the divine. Still, Ramos did not include her in the category of the “preachers of Christ” as this group was made up only by male missionaries, but in a mysterious way she tried to prepare the way for them through her interactions with the Emperor. She preached but was not considered a preacher.

In the late seventeenth century, the Mariana Islands in Micronesia had been recently colonized by the Spaniards. On a spiritual journey to the archipelago, where Jesuits did missionary work, Christ gave Catarina de San Juan rotten fish and shellfish to eat. In his usual flowery style, the story was interpreted allegorically by Ramos

49 Ramos 1690: 153v-154r.
50 Ramos 1690: 155r.
entre las congojosas ansias, que sentía su alma en combites de vascas, entendía, eran hyeroglificos, y símbolos de las conversiones del gentilismo: a cuyas reducciones assistía, y se la repressentaban en forma de sementeras, cuydando ella desde la siembra, hasta la consecha, del riego, y la escrada, como si fuera la principal obrera, y operaria de aquellas haciendas.\footnote{Ramos 1690: 166v.}

Once again it was stated that she assisted the missionaries in the conversion of non-Christians, but Ramos also claimed that she, as “the principal worker” had a more prominent position, overlooking the missionary enterprise from above and thus reaching an all-encompassing knowledge that the individual male missionaries lacked. While in Mexico preparing for a missionary journey to the Marianas, German Jesuit Adam Kaller wrote an edificatory letter about Catarina de San Juan, who recently had passed away. More than thirty years later, the epistle was included in the influential German collection of Jesuit accounts, the \textit{Neue Welt-Bott}. Just as in the works by Ramos, in Kaller’s text, Catarina de San Juan prominently appeared as the protector of the Jesuit mission in the Mariana Islands, which were considered a particularly difficult and dangerous field. She assisted them in their daily work and prepared them for the martyrdom that probably awaited them. Kaller also claimed that Catarina de San Juan had been spiritually present in battles in Central Europe and had followed his ship through the Caribbean, thus throughout placing her in his own contexts.\footnote{Strasser 2007 and Molina & Strasser 2009. On the Jesuit early mission on the Marianas, see Coello de la Rosa 2011.}

Though Alonso Ramos related Catarina de San Juan’s Asian journeys in quite a detailed way, he devoted much more space to her alleged flights to northern Mexico and the southern parts of present-day United States.\footnote{Ramos 1690: 159v-175r.} According to him, beginning in 1679 and 1680 Catarina de San Juan “se hallaba muchas vezes en las provincias de los Taraumares, donde assistía en espíritu, a la multiplicación, y aumento de las misiones nuevas; y se disponía también en aquel tiempo la entrada en las Californias; adonde havía dado muchos buelos su espíritu.”\footnote{Ramos 1690: 163v.}

This seems to have been a spiritual presence and not a bilocation in the strict sense of the word. She overlooked the frontier missions in north-

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\footnote{Ramos 1690: 166v.}
\item\footnote{Strasser 2007 and Molina & Strasser 2009. On the Jesuit early mission on the Marianas, see Coello de la Rosa 2011.}
\item\footnote{Ramos 1690: 159v-175r.}
\item\footnote{Ramos 1690: 163v.}
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western Mexico, including the California peninsula, an area where the Jesuits did not establish a permanent mission until 1697, though there had been earlier attempts to that end. However, on other occasions, Ramos claimed that Catarina de San Juan walked around, talking and working with the missionaries. She warned them of the dangers that threatened, or animated them to die for the church’s faith. In the Mexican cases, too, Ramos maintained that Catarina de San Juan had a kind of reconnoitring and co-ordinating function, looking after and observing the mission fields and all that was going on there. Once again using the common agricultural metaphors and the opposition between light and darkness, he asserted that she

veía las missiones, que havían de arraygarse, y crecer con el riego, y cultivo de la palabra del evangélio, y sudores de sus predicadores, y las que havían de resfriarse, marchitarse, o desvanecerse por el maleficio de los echizeros, luciérnagas en la obscura noche de la ignorancia, que reynaba en el emisphério de aquel bárbaro gentilismo.55

The author thus maintained that Catarina de San Juan could observe and foresee the success or failure of missions in different places in a detailed way, and counselled the priests in their encounters with native religious specialists, referred to as witches and bats. To the hagiographer, they actively contributed to keep the indigenous in the “dark night of ignorance” they lived in.

Other texts stressed that not only did Catarina de San Juan bring non-Christians to the Catholic fold, she also helped the missionaries in more material ways, constructing houses and chapels. According to the Spanish colonial policy, the building of villages was a presupposition for Christian and “civilized” life, and an integral part of the missionary work. In line with this guiding principle, she made demarcation lines between the settlements and chose suitable places for the buildings. Moreover, Ramos claimed that she had exact knowledge of the missionaries’ names and the number of converted and non-converted people, thus keeping track of the development of the missionary endeavour.56

55 Ramos 1690: 170v.
56 Ramos 1690: 153v-154r.
Even more abundant than the descriptions of her missionary flights through Asia and the Americas, Alonso Ramos devoted some 70 pages to other kinds of air travels, related to her defence of the position of the Catholic Church, including assistance on European battle fields and in pirate attacks against Spanish ships in the Caribbean.57 Unlike Ramos’s gigantic hagiography and Aguilera’s funeral sermon, it is noteworthy that José Castillo de Grajeda’s much more down-to-earth Compendio included no details on any missionary flights.58

Eyewitness to the Spiritual State of Petén

According to Antonio de Siria’s hagiography, while in the city of Guatemala, Ana Guerra de Jesús received frequent visions of “infidels”, who she saw submerged in mud-puddles, while at the same time noticing that some of them managed to escape from the dirt with the help of Catholic priests. Moreover, Siria maintained that she observed the world divided into two easily distinguishable regions, one light-filled and the other pervaded by darkness and shadows, that is, the most common missionary tropes used to distinguish Christians from non-Christians.59

While most of her visions of the fate of the “infidels” were of a general nature, there were exceptions to the rule. In the late 1690s, when troops in Guatemala prepared to depart to the province of Petén, Ana Guerra de Jesús prayed for the success of the conquest. Mayan Petén was one of the few areas in the Indies, which had managed to almost totally resist Spanish colonisation, and the colonisers considered it a vile and uncivilized place filled with enemies of church and empire. In this context, Ana Guerra de Jesús asserted to have circulated over the area with Christ as her guide “le mostró el Señor unos campos muy dilatados, envueltos en sombras y ceñidos de tinieblas, quedando solo una pequeña parte esclarecida de luz y toda la restante en su antigua tenebrosa oscuridad.”60

The theme of light and darkness was clearly present in this more contextualized vision, too. According to the story as rendered by Siria, Christ let her know that very few of the inhabitants would convert and be

57 Ramos 1692: 116-152r.
60 Siria 1716: 297-298; citation on p. 298.
baptized, and that the vast majority would remain in a hopeless condition outside the church. This passage implied a spiritual journey, but Ana Guerra de Jesús did not claim to have taken active part in the conversion work. Instead, she stated that she observed the area and its geography from above, and that Christ informed her of the religious future of its inhabitants.

Traveller to China

Úrsula Suárez (1666-1749) was a Poor Clare in Santiago de Chile and the author of an extensive and unusual text that in modern times has been published under the title _Relación autobiográfica_. It included a life story and reports on her supernatural experiences but her tone was much more humorous and ironic than other texts of this kind, including stories about pranks and an almost flirtatious interaction with Christ. She was known as the Happy Nun. In her manuscript, Úrsula Suárez included a narration about a mission related experience. One night, when in her cell praying, she suddenly felt herself brought to an unknown part of the world, where it was sunny and people had light complexion and white clothing. She realized that she was not in Santiago anymore: “Fui mirando esta tierra y veí una hermosa sementera pareja y bien aporcada, limpia, que divertía la vista, y era esto en ¡[n]vierno, porque esta noche estaba aquí lloviendo y allá hasía buen tiempo.”

While realizing that she was flying over the area, she saw her confessor levitate from the ground. He was prepared to administer the sacrament of baptism, but she did not hear him say anything, though repeatedly approaching him. First she thought that the people clad in white were angels, but later reached the conclusion that they were indeed humans, though not Christians. Thus, they were potential converts who had the possibility to be saved, if only instructed in the Catholic faith.

In her vision, Úrsula Suárez told them that they should give praise to God, who was the creator of heaven and earth, and according to her they indeed thanked him with tears in their eyes. She was impressed by their

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faith. Thus, she thought that she had the ability to interact and communicate with them, while it was not stated that she taught them Christian doctrine, apart from telling them that God was the maker of all. Not knowing what part of the world she had visited when coming to her senses, she deplored the fact that she could not tell her confessor where to send male missionaries in order to convert these people, who, while being “heathen”, had some rudimentary knowledge of God and a favourable disposition for baptism. Later, however, the same group of people reappeared, telling her that in fact, she had been to China.63

In the paragraphs of the Relación that followed directly upon this story, Úrsula de Suárez wrote about her constant prayers for the salvation of all mankind, while not mentioning any other spiritual journeys.64 Later in the Relación, however, she stated that she was called by people in “Arabia” to preach to them, but the passage is too brief to know if she believed that she had travelled there.65

**Explorer of the Heart and the World**

The Poor Clare Jerónima del Espíritu Santo (1669-1749), often known by her family name Nava y Saavedra, lived in Santa Fe de Bogotá. On the instigation of her confessor, she kept a spiritual diary, which in the modern edition is called an autobiography. In this work her visions and other mystical experiences had a prominent place.66 Among the supernatural events she recounted was the story that she once saw Christ as a gardener, attending to his orchard. She observed that the wall that surrounded it was partly ruined and that flowers grew without any order. According to her, Christ first repaired the wall, so that the garden was made safe. Thereafter, he arranged the flowers according to their species and took away the weeds. Jerónima Nava y Saavedra mentioned that she felt great relief when seeing this, though her happy mood did not last for long. She was bored having nothing to do. In this context, she unexpectedly stated her strong desire to go somewhere with Christ. He answered:

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63 Úrsula Suárez [c. 1708-1730] 1984: 219
“¿dónde quieres que te llebe?”. Yo no sabía de qué avía de hacer elección. Y antes de responder yo me pareció que me vi en una parte muy distante y remota, en la cual avía grande espesura de árboles hermosísimos, pero sin fruto ninguno. Y me díje: “ésta es la Asia”. Y me dava a entender que allí avía pocos que le conociesen; y que pidiera por ellos que nesesitavan de gran lus. Y después me sacó a otro sitio más despejado, más claro; y avía en él varias plantas, aunque distavan mucho unas de otras; tenía algunas flores. Desíame: “¿será aquella parte de las Yndias?”. Pero no supe quá.\textsuperscript{67}

Jerónima Nava y Saavedra thus claimed that she first had had a vision of an enclosed garden, a \textit{hortus conclusus}, a concept that often has been interpreted as the relation between Christ and his bride, the church. By repairing the wall and taking away the weeds, Christ reinstated the relationship between himself and his bride, she, in whose “heart” the vision had taken place.

From this mystical garden Jerónima Nava y Saavedra was brought to faraway places. In the description of the mission fields she continued to use horticultural images, describing fruitless trees in Asia and tender and dispersed plants in the Indies. In the former area, almost no one was Christian, while in the Indies the missionary work had been more successful, though not in any way perfect. When describing her experiences, she did not give herself an active missionary role; she was an observer. But when the journey was over, Christ asked her to pray for the peoples who lived in the areas they had visited. What set this story apart from others is that the initial reason for the journey was not related to a missionary vocation. In fact, Jerónima Nava y Saavedra wrote that she only wanted to go someplace “to divert herself” and was accidentally shown several mission fields.\textsuperscript{68}

A Well-Travelled Dominican

Jacinta María Ana de San Antonio (1674-1720) was a Dominican nun in the convent of Santa Catarina de Siena in Oaxaca, Mexico. Considered particularly virtuous, she became the object of a funeral sermon by Sebastián de Santander y Torres, a friar who was a prolific writer of hagiographical literature. The sermon was very much focused on her suffering, both self-inflicted and in the form of various illnesses that plagued her during her

\textsuperscript{67} Jerónima Nava y Saavedra [1707-1727?] 1994: 83-84.
\textsuperscript{68} Jerónima Nava y Saavedra [1707-1727?] 1994: 83-84.
entire life. She was lauded for her theological knowledge and the author wrote that she talked about God not as a “stupid woman”, but as a “consummate theologian”.69 Towards the very end of the sermon, before turning to the description of her final miseries and death, Santander y Torres discussed some of the visions she had experienced. In this context, he devoted almost two pages to her spiritual missionary journeys.

Throughout life, from childhood onwards, Jacinta María Ana de San Antonio made flights to local, regional and international destinations, including areas inhabited by non-Christians and heretics. As in other stories of this kind, there was no clear demarcation line between the journeys throughout the world, and those that had purgatory or hell as their goal. She had told her confessor that when she made these flights together with Christ, she felt as if her soul was crucified. Her journeys were very painful experiences. When she went to Jerusalem, Christ showed her where he had walked during his life on earth and where and how he had suffered, and she took his pains upon her.71

When she went to the “provinces of heretics and regions of idolaters”, she got to know exactly what they needed spiritually and physically. Her suffering became even greater as she, being both a woman and very sick, could not go out and preach to convert all these people, whose needs she well understood. In fact, she was desolate. Reflecting on her frustrated vocation, her hagiographer wrote “porque como se veía muger, religiosa, y en una cama, y que no podía salir a predicar, y dar vozes para ganar las almas de sus hermanos, rebentaba en gemidos, en lágrimas, en llanto, en quejas, en ardores, en incendios, que por último la acavaron, la consumieron.”72

69 Santander y Torres 1720.
70 Santander y Torres 1720: 13v.
71 Santander y Torres 1720: 13v-14r.
72 Santander y Torres 1720: 14r.
Thus, according to Santander y Torres, filled by this vocation, she died for not being able to missionize in an active way. Jacinta María Ana de San Antonio was certainly well-travelled, though apart from Rome and Jerusalem nothing was said about the exact destinations of her journeys. Regarding her contacts with “infidels” and “heretics”, the biographer only mentioned that she received knowledge about their needs. However, there was no indication to suggest that she taught them. In fact, even during her spiritual flights, suffering was her only missionary method, and it was not described as very efficient.

A Bilocating Beata

Francisca de los Ángeles (1674-1744) was a Franciscan tertiary living in the beaterio, later colegio, of Santa Rosa de Viterbo in Querétaro, Mexico, situated close to the Franciscan missionary institution there, the Colegio Apostólico de la Santa Cruz. Like other women in this study, she reportedly felt a great vocation for becoming a missionary. The hundreds of letters she wrote to her confessors and spiritual advisors from 1689 onwards gave a multifaceted image of her spiritual missionary work. At a young age, she was questioned by the Holy Office. Among other things, they investigated her testimonies about journeys in spirit to Texas and New Mexico. But the case was not brought to its end, probably because the local representative of the Inquisition had a positive evaluation of her piety.

Some of the most detailed narratives of her missionary flights were found in a couple of letters to the famed Franciscan Antonio Margil de Jesús, who, based in Querétaro made lengthy missionary journeys through Central America, the northern parts of Mexico and the southern parts of present-day United States. Given his great evangelizatory zeal, Margil was very interested in her experiences of the northern-most provinces of New Spain. In a letter dated February 1700, Francisca de los Ángeles told Margil that for almost ten years she had made numerous spiritual flights to other parts of the

73 For specialized studies, see Owens 2003 and Gunnarsdóttir 2004.
74 For a sample, see Francisca de los Ángeles [1696-1727] 2002. The original letters are found in the Franciscan archives in Celaya, Mexico; cf. Gunnarsdóttir 2004: 63-67 for her role as a prolific writer of letters.
76 On the close relations between Francisca de los Ángeles and Antonio Margil de Jesús, see Gunnarsdóttir 2004: 103-138.
world, travelling with Christ, her guardian angel and St. Rosa of Viterbo, the patroness of the convent. In her understanding, the nature of her journeys had changed through the years, beginning as mere dreams. Later they took the form of visions and ended up as a mysterious physical presence on distant mission fields. Francisca de los Ángeles claimed that she often went there on a weekly basis, normally every Thursday.\footnote{Owens 2003: 160-162, cf. Gunnarsdóttir 2004: 97.}

In the letters, Francisca de los Ángeles combined the topos humilitatis with very far-reaching claims of divine favours. In another letter to Margil, which is translated by Sarah E. Owens, Francisca de los Ángeles explained how she understood her corporeal presence in far-away provinces. She stated that she found herself traveling “as if corporally and with the same ease as if it had only been spiritually. I was in that form without sorrow and without wasting a lot of time on the journey, that I did not believe it, I mean, I would not have thought it had been corporally unless the experience and events that happened to me did not make me a believer.”\footnote{Owens 2003: 168.}

Still, she had problems getting to grips with these events. In another letter, dated in June 1699, Francisca de los Ángeles told Margil, who had asked her to describe the nature of her current journeys: “en estas ocasiones no uso de todos mis sentidos a mi voluntad; siéntome mover, andar, oír, ver, y tocar con un impulse muy superior y ágil, y paréceme que el Señor es el que gobierna todas mis acciones.”\footnote{Francisca de los Ángeles [1696-1727] 2002: 243.} Although she used all her senses, she believed that they were controlled and amplified by God, and that she was able to fly and walk with a supernatural speed. Even if the destination of her journeys was not always stated, many of her flights went to Texas, where the Spanish military and missionary conquest had just begun, and the opposition from the indigenous people was great.

Another common destination of hers was New Mexico, where Franciscan missionaries had been present from the early seventeenth century, but had only been partially successful in their endeavours, experiencing much resistance. The level of activity during her missionary flights changed over time. First she was a mere observer. Later she had a much more active role. She recounted visits to mission stations, describing geography, climate, inhabitants, houses and church buildings. She even
compiled a guidebook for future missionaries based on her experiences, which does not seem to be extant.\(^{80}\)

Sometimes, Francisca de los Ángeles reported seeing groups of Indians, whom she considered so uncivilized that she described them as grubbing about like pigs, looking for their false gods in the mud. These scenes filled her with horror. Despite their low status, she thought that they were worthy of receiving the sacrament of baptism. In fact, if only approached in the right way they would listen, as God wanted every human being to be saved. She asserted that she was willing to die, if it only would further their salvation. In fact, she claimed that the journeys themselves implied a kind of martyrdom, as they were painful and as her general health gradually deteriorated.\(^{81}\)

Due to the lack of male missionaries, she brought recently born infants to a chapel and baptized them, her guardian angel providing blessed water for the occasion and God supplying the words used for the rite. The supernatural context aside, from the perspective of early modern church law, it was no problem for women to baptize children in case of emergency. However, in her visions she also taught the basics of Christian doctrine and preached, while always claiming that it was God who acted through her. God was the real agent behind all this: “en estas cosas no hay nada mío; todo es del Señor. Su Majestad mirará por ellos como por cosa que corre por su cuenta, y por la mía solo de estarme de asunto en mí nada”.\(^{82}\)

In a miraculous way, Francisca de los Ángeles claimed that she was able to communicate with the Indians she met though unfamiliar with their language. She baptized older people, including two very old men, who had listened to the teachings of the Spanish bilocating nun María de Jesús Agreda many decades ago, but who had remained unbaptized until Francisca de los Ángeles intervened, shortly before their passing away. She believed that God had provided her with male missionary clothing and a staff, and the Indians apparently did not know whether she was male or female as they referred to her as señora, mother and father. She claimed that “the Lord gave me the order so that I should adopt the manner and dress of a male cleric”.\(^{83}\) In one of her letters to Margil, she related that she used her voice, singing

\(^{80}\) Gunnarsdóttir 2004: 87-95.


\(^{83}\) Owens 2003: 167-171; citation on p. 169.
loudly, to attract the inhabitants she met when travelling with her guardian angel:

me hallaba ir cantando alabanzas al Señor y saetas, y esto era en voz alta con el ángel y yo tocaba una campanilla de estas con que tocan al levantar la hostia [...] A esta novedad seguimos gran multitud de gentes y todas en general hacíamos mil agasajos reverentes, según ellos podían y alcanzaban [...] Las canciones y cosas que cantábamos eran para despertar en aquellas almas el conocimiento de Dios … y a este modo íbamos cantando palabras reverenciales, temerosos de esperanza y de caridad, y como quien me enseñaba sabía también de amor de Dios.84

Even if most of her spiritual journeys went to the southern parts of present-day United States, there were stories about her travelling to Muslim areas, too. In a letter to another of her confessors, Pedro de Sitjar, she recounted that she and the Infant Christ had gone to a country that she identified as Turkey. From there they brought three new-born babies, flying with them to an unspecified location, which she thought was a Christian region, to be baptized.85 The theme of spiritual missionary journeys thus had a prominent place in the correspondence of Francisca de los Ángeles, describing her as spiritually assuming active roles that ordinarily were restricted to male missionaries, though she saw herself as an ancilla Dei, a handmaid of the Lord without any will or agency of her own. He was the one behind everything, and she was nothing.

**Preacher with Wings**

María Manuela de Santa Ana, Dominican nun in the convent of Santa Rosa de Santa María in Lima lived until she was almost a hundred years old and wrote an autobiographical vida. There, she related how her soul was brought to heaven and that the infused love of Christ compelled her to spiritually travel the world, as she wanted everybody to be saved. Christ had communicated much knowledge to her, and she wanted to communicate it to all people. Though she constantly wanted to die in order to be united with God, she understood that her vocation was another: to live in order to counteract the devil’s work, as he constantly tried to deceive people, leading

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them away from the way of perfection. She wished to “inspire everyone”, so that they would not continue to offend God. 86 In another passage in the text, she was somewhat more explicit about this matter. Through her counsels (consejos) four people had converted to the true faith, though she did not reveal any details on the matter.87

In María Manuela de Santa Ana’s vida nothing was stated about the exact destinations of her journeys, only that she travelled the world. Apart from the story about the four conversions nothing clearly indicated that she was thought to have interacted with people during her spiritual flights, though she thought that her mission was just to “inspire” people to convert. However, in a posthumous eulogy written by one of her confessors, the missionary theme had a more prominent place. In that document some of her destinations were clearly stated: “Se vió en espíritu, varias veces, en Guinea, en la China, y otros payzes incógnitos predicando, cathequizando, y conociendo que hablando ella en castellano le entendían.”88

Here the author claimed that she was in fact involved in both preaching and teaching activities, and that she miraculously made herself understood by the listeners in the far-away regions in Africa, Asia and possibly the Americas, too. Nevertheless, in the following passages it was stated that she only paved the road, as she asked God to send male missionaries to these places to continue the doctrinal instruction.89 The author of the eulogy pointed out that María Manuela de Santa Ana felt a great sorrow for not being “un misionero apostólico, para viajar por el mundo y cathequizar a judíos, hereges, y gentiles, principalmente a los negros, por cuya conversión y bautismo, pedía siempre al Señor.”90

Similar to other contemplative women, she was unhappy not being born male, a condition which would have enabled her to become an “apostolic missionary” and devote herself whole-heartedly to the African, Asian and Caribbean missions. Though it was stated that she made her spiritual journeys to more or less uncharted mission fields, she still felt an urge to become a “real” missionary, a position which her gender impeded. In her other main work, Esquelas originales de correspondencia espiritual María Manuela de Santa Ana devoted an extended passage to other spiritual

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journeys, where she had a more active role. She explained that “her spirit” was moved to Rome and that she asked the pope to send Jesuits to a place that God had shown her. Shortly thereafter she travelled there together with St. Augustine and St. Paul, “who preached to her and she preached together with them”. Once again she was uncertain of the location, but an unknown writer included the following note:

El lugar que aquí dice fue llevada, y que en que estaban San Pablo y San Agustín como convirtiendo las almas no lo conoció expresamente, pero por las señas en la corte de algún grande emperador como el chino o el gran turco, aunque más me inclino sea éste por algunas rasones que para mí tengo bien entendido que esto puede ser disposición para que algún tiempo susediese ganada la fe lo que podemos esperar de la divina misericordia.91

According to her own text, she went to an unknown area to which she, St. Paul and St. Augustine were sent on divine order, where they prepared the way for the Jesuits. The commentator claimed that they could have been to China or Turkey, but looked upon the story as prophesies about the future conversion of the inhabitants there.

**Flying Contemplative Missionaries**

Spiritual flights through the world is the least common of the mission related themes studied in this book. The accounts were quite diverse, but through the analysis of works by and about the nine women in the Spanish Indies it is possible to identify some recurrent themes. In general, the passages devoted to their alleged flights were rather succinct, entering quite unexpectedly into the texts, but there were more extensive and detailed descriptions of such phenomena, too, in particular the case of Catarina de San Juan. In many narrations of their spiritual flights, the women had an observing status, overlooking the landscape and the missionaries, or reconnoitring possible future mission fields. In that context, agrarian metaphors of growing or withering fields, trees and plants were common as was the binary division between darkness and light.

While many journeys went to the northern parts of Mexico, which had not been entirely subdued by the Spaniards, others went to Asia, which was

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considered a very complicated mission field and where, with the exception of the Philippines, the existence of the church was very precarious. However, a few journeys went to unspecified or unknown places in Africa or Muslim areas.

Although the texts by and about the nine women were quite specific in their description of their flying apostolate, some other texts in my corpus gave brief accounts of similar journeys to local destinations. Sousa Pereira included an account about the Conceptionist Mariana de Jesús, who travelled in spirit to a place outside Quito, where she converted a brother of one of her co-sisters.92 The author was the only one in my sample, explicitly using the word “bilocation” to explain the event, but then his biography was written as late as 1790. According to Sánchez Castro’s hagiography on Augustin recollect Antonia de la Madre de Dios, which was based on her own notes, she travelled in spirit to the Caribbean, interceding for ships that were about to wreck.93 In her journal Colombian Carmelite María de Jesús noted that she had circled over her home town, Santa Fe de Bogotá, reconnoitring the state of things.94

In his lengthy chronicle about the Conceptionist José María convent in Mexico, Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora mentioned that one of the nuns, Inés de la Cruz used to fly to the hermit Gregorio López, who lived in Santa Fe outside the city, well known for his saintliness. She went there on a regular basis and they conversed on spiritual matters, becoming good friends. Some women also visited other convents within the city, conversing with nuns there.95

Though not destined to the mission fields, Chilean Dominican Dolores Peña y Lillo told her confessor about a mystical flight that should have taken place in 1765. Without knowing how, in ecstasy she was transported to the sea, where she attended to the crew of a sinking ship. According to the modern editor of her letters, the boat she was referring to was the Purisima Concepción which went down on its way to Callao. As the men on board were in dire straits, she felt compelled to intercede for their souls, not least as they were fighting with each other. Sor Dolores wrote

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93 Sánchez Castro 1747: 483.
94 María de Jesús [mid 17th c.] 1950?
95 Sigüenza y Góngora 1684: 95r
At sea, the Dominican nun was placed in a castle, from which she prayed, but she also took the drowning men by the hand and helped them to reach a small isle, where some of them recuperated. When coming back to her senses, Sor Dolores continued praying for them. Though more common during the mid-colonial era, stories about flying religious women did not disappear. In letters from the very first years of the nineteenth century, the Poor Clare María Ignacia del Niño Jesús wrote about experiences of bilocations to Rome and Spain in a series of letters to her confessor.97

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The notions of gender, space and agency are clearly relevant when approaching the texts about spiritual missionary flyers. The missionary role of women was curtailed, and their space and mobility normally restricted through enclosure or retirement. Spiritual or physical presence on the mission fields were ways for religious women to actively contribute to the kind of work usually reserved for male ecclesiastics. Thus, they found a medium to channel their love of God and humanity. Apart from that, it could imply a possibility to suffer martyrdom.

According to the longer texts by the Hispanic American religious women I have used observation was a common form of flying experience, hovering over the far-away mission fields. Six of the nine women, however, claimed that they had, in fact, also played a more active role, teaching, preaching or baptizing, but not, for example, destroying “idols”. Most often they explained their actions by referring to the dearth of male ministers, but they could state that they in fact had no active role in it all; it was God who worked directly through them. Thus, according to the testimonies, there were a number of Spanish American contemplative women with wings, whose spiritual experiences were related to the global Catholic missionary

enterprise, whether in the Indies, Asia or Africa. As the female contemplative missionaries often did the pioneering work on a mission fields, paving the way for male ecclesiastics, Kristin Ibsen observes that “[s]uch visions are doubly transgressive, because not only do they place the female author in a role women were not permitted to pursue; they take credit for the missionaries sent there”.  

The accounts of the spiritual flights can be said to have an element of mimicry. The women could do almost everything that the males could do, but their bird’s eye perspective meant that they had a more encompassing knowledge about the bigger picture, being able to guide the male religious and foresee the effects of the work. According to the texts studied in this chapter, contemplative women had a desire to advance scenarios of new “spiritual conquest”, not in the rearguard, but as an advance militia, observing and informing others. Their desires to move beyond enclosure could only be satisfied by their travel to the most dangerous places.

Such spiritual missionary accounts seem to have been a sensitive matter. It is clear that many of the books about Spanish flying religious were banned by the Holy Office and that some of them, and their contemporaries on the other side of the Atlantic, were questioned by the Inquisition. A number of the hagiographies devoted to the Spanish religious women were condemned. Likewise, the only hagiographical work in the Indies to become completely censored after publication was Alonso Ramos’s three volumes on Catarina de San Juan, which included very long descriptions of long-distance flights. Even if the travel accounts were not the only reason for proscribing the texts, they certainly influenced the verdict. On the other hand, many accounts about the same matters, though often not as detailed, were found in texts by and about religious women and were not censored at all, but evidently looked upon as unproblematic and orthodox. Accounts about such active missionary work, albeit spiritual, were thus regarded as trustworthy.

In the texts from the Spanish Indies, which I have studied in this chapter, hagiographers and the contemplative women themselves did not seem to regard missionary flights as much more peculiar than other “favours of God”. In the texts written by ecclesiastics, the stories were not introduced in a special way, and the censors of the Holy Office hardly ever stated explicity that it was the accounts of missionary travels that was a main

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98 Ibsen 1999: 111.
reason for considering the texts heterodox in nature. Instead, it was the sheer number of visions that attracted their attention.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, there was a growing scepticism, at least in peninsular Spain, against works recounting multitudes of miracles and visions. Still, apart from the case of Catarina de San Juan, none of the other cases in texts from the Indies were censored by the Inquisition and in that case her ethnicity and low social status certainly influenced the verdict. The accounts about flying found in women’s own writings were not suppressed by their confessors and spiritual advisors. Thus, on the other side of the Atlantic, flights were generally not considered an extremely strange or questionable missionary method, but an integral, albeit rare, form of apostolic contemplative activities.
Conclusions

Based on an extensive textual corpus, I have explored the relationship between contemplative and apostolic aspects of religious life in accounts by and about religious women in the Spanish Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. My aim has not been to do a quantitative study of mission related topics. But after analysing the whole material, it is possible to conclude that to a smaller or larger degree such ideas were present in the lion’s share of the confessional and hagiographical texts. In some cases, they were indeed central or even constituted the very core of the accounts. In other cases, they had a much more marginal place.

To explore the subject, I have presented case studies of individual women, supplying them with examinations of more general patterns, based on the reading of the whole corpus. Well aware of the exemplary nature of the confessional and hagiographical genres, where imitation was central, I have observed general *topoi* and related them to texts by and about specific women. To put the accounts in a broader ideological context, I have connected the accounts to biblical, early Christian, medieval and early modern theological and hagiographical sources.

In this book, I have defined mission as conscious acts made by a person perceived to be in favour of the salvation of others. Without playing down the role of the colonial expansion politics, it is possible to state that the contribution to others’ conversion and salvation was an obvious goal for early modern Catholic missionary activity. Still, the conversion motif was combined with the aim to create formal ecclesiastical structures, such as parishes and dioceses, features that constituted an established church. The apostolic activities were considered particularly important as the Catholic Church taught that the institution, headed by Christ and his vicar on earth—the pope—had universal soteriological importance. It was the sole vehicle for humanity’s salvation. In official documents, the Catholic Church claimed
that there was no salvation outside its visible structures, at least not under normal circumstances.

Nevertheless, even for baptized Catholics, salvation was considered difficult to attain and hell was an ever-present threat. Early modern Catholicism was thus characterised by a *Heilspessimismus*—the view that few would be saved. Moreover, it was believed that an even lesser number would reach heaven without having to spend time in purgatory, the painful station for the less-than-perfect on their way to eternal bliss. The earth was considered a slippery place, where people easily fell, though it was believed that Christ had instituted the sacraments to offer succour.

It is evident that contemplative life within enclosure was considered the most appropriate and perfect life for early modern Hispanic women, though in practice, economical, ethnic and other social factors made such an existence inaccessible for the vast majority. Still, women could also search for perfection through a non-professed life in recollection, being *beatas*, *recogidas*, *tertias* or *donadas*. My initial study of a large corpus of sermons, hagiographies, constitutions and manuals showed how the way of perfection for professed women went through the exact fulfilment of the vows and the practice of humility. Solemn vows were for nuns, but to a large degree applicable to other religious women, whether taking simple vows or not. Still cloistral life offered an even more retired option. Profession was frequently described as death and a holocaust to God. A woman who entered convent actively chose death in life to become a Bride of Christ. In the life as a living dead, collective prayer and inner recollection were essential parts.

The four vows—poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure—were the main governing principles of conventual life. In a strict interpretation, poverty did not only mean the absence of personal material belongings, but implied a life without feeling the need for anything. The search for that goal involved constant mortification of the will. It was believed that external appetites would impede the amorous relationship between God and the human being, and to free oneself from worldly longings would provide place for God. Chastity, a much lauded *sine qua non* of female religious life, demanded continuous battle against temptations, acts, thoughts, words and, on the whole, a mortification of the senses, not seeking, or enjoying, any alleviating pleasures.

The vow of obedience meant the total subordination of one’s will to that of superiors. Male confessors and spiritual advisors, but female religious
authorities, too, should serve as undisputable guides on the road towards greater perfection. Ideally, obedience should be blind and prompt, without questioning, thinking or asking for reasons. Its perfect fulfilment required much action. The religious woman should constantly fight her own will and wishes. To take the vow of obedience was to choose not to be able to choose anymore. Enclosure was to disappear from the sight of the world. It was in fact not only a sign of contemptus mundi, but fuga mundi, a flight from the world, not wishing to be part of it, not longing for it, but still relating to it through intercessions. Active and passive enclosure should keep interaction with outsiders to an absolute minimum, not to disturb the relationship with the nuns’ sole lover, Christ. To live according to the vow required actions to counteract temptations.

Though not a vow, humility was an underlying female religious virtue, necessary for sanctification, and a precondition for a life in perfect concordance with the rule and the Decalogue. The perfect execution of the virtue was to consider oneself a nada, worthless and sinful. Such insights were regarded as ever more important if a woman had spectacular spiritual experiences, so that they did not lead to pride, one of the root sins. Pride was a contradiction of the spiritual perfection that was the ultimate aim of the religious state, and humility was a presupposition for the possibility to love God and neighbour wholeheartedly.

Vows of chastity, obedience, and often poverty, were taken by members of the regular clergy, too. Enclosure, however, was not a precept for the great majority of them, and especially not in the Spanish Indies, where monks, stricto sensu were very few. Most of the male religious there were friars and Jesuits, many of them active in education and mission. The male religious roles included greater variation, vaster mobility and the possibility for an active apostolic life, though many friars wished to lead a more contemplative way of life than they did, considering it the better part. Still, this is a theme where more investigation is needed and from the current state of research it is difficult to draw conclusions and make comparisons.¹

Nevertheless, male ecclesiastics had choices that women in the Spanish Indies normally did not have, as female religious life was synonymous with contemplation. Notwithstanding, my main thesis throughout the book has been that even the contemplative way of life could

¹ See Turley 2014 for a study of sixteenth-century Franciscan friars in New Spain and the relation between apostolic and contemplative.
include apostolic/missionary aspects, at least for individual women who were considered saintly.

The five mission related themes I have traced in the texts by and about religious women are love, prayer, suffering, teaching and flights. Love was generally considered the Christian virtue par excellence and the foundation for both contemplative and apostolic life. It was more of a missionary catalyst than a method. Charity had two directions: the love of God and the love of neighbour. It was a virtue that all Catholics should develop, but it was thought that few who did not have a specialized religious role could reach a high degree of perfection, as constant cultivation was needed. The ideal was to love God wholeheartedly and every human being equally. It included the desire to contribute to other people’s spiritual good, and ultimately their eternal salvation.

According to both confessional and hagiographical texts, women, often at an early age, realized that not everybody in the world were Catholics, and that many nominal Catholics were great sinners in dire straits. They understood that there were vast numbers of souls in purgatory in need of intercession from the living. Although those in purgatory did not sin anymore, they suffered greatly for their wrongdoings during life. This state of things had several effects that affected both God and humans. By their unbelief and transgressions, humans offended God, not fully realizing, knowing about, or actively denying, Christ’s vicarious suffering and death for the restitution of humanity. On the other hand, human incredulity and iniquities would lead to the eternal perdition of great numbers of people. In other words, multitudes walked the road towards the everlasting pains of hell.

According to texts in my corpus, based on their love of God and humanity, many women wanted to assuage this state of things, contributing to others’ salvation and the greater glory of God. Some planned missionary tours in order to convert non-Christians, both teaching and dying the death of a martyr. Some dreamt about going out on the streets and plazas, preaching conversion to sinful Christians. They often considered the number of male missionaries too reduced to fulfil the enormous task that lay ahead. Missionary vocations were too few and ecclesiastical priorities were sometimes wrong, not focusing enough on evangelization and conversion work. Something had to be done.
According to the texts, these women became frustrated when realizing the constrictions of their gendered religious roles that impeded active missionary work. They wanted to find ways to channel their love, which was often described in terms such as excessive and insatiable. Their hearts were burning and on the verge of bursting. They were compared to furnaces or bonfires. Like the phoenix bird they burnt up, but were reborn from the ashes, only to burn up again. Still, they felt that they could do nothing or at least very little to act upon their love of God and neighbour. They believed that there was nothing for them to do and nowhere to go, and this frustrating insight was often described as most painful, a kind of martyrdom in itself.

The ability to love God and other humans was understood as an infused divine grace, to be acted on by the individual. According to classic Catholic theology, the cultivation of the virtue was a co-operation, but God’s invitation came first and was a precondition for what followed from the human being’s side. Charity was impossible without divine initiative, but through grace individuals could search for a perfect amorous relationship with God, often understood as unity, betrothal or marriage. Still, the effects of this perfect love should be directed to other people; they should not be kept inside. The channelling could have an individual, regional or universal scope. Through love, women wanted the salvation of specific humans who were on a dangerous path, they could feel compassion for their home city or another specific location, or they could wish for the salvation of humanity at large, so that nobody perished and God was not offended.

A main outlet for the love felt by the contemplative women was prayer for other human beings. A central ecclesiological image implied that the church was the mystical body of Christ, where all members were interconnected. They were indeed body parts, with Christ as the head, having different responsibilities for the whole. In the mystical body of Christ there were no clear demarcation lines between living and dead. Saints in heaven, living people on earth and souls in purgatory were interlinked. Within this body there was an interchange of merits of soteriological importance, a spiritual economy. The constituent and essential merit was Christ’s redemptive suffering and death that had re-established the broken relationship between the divine and humanity, opening up the possibility for salvation. But faithful on earth, not only saints in heaven, could perform meritorious deeds that were transferred to others in a system of spiritual solidarity. Superabundant merits could be transmitted through intercessory
prayers, but masses, alms and indulgences were thought to have similar functions.

According to hagiographical works, holy women who had reached a state of spiritual perfection did not commit mortal sins and few, if any, venial ones. They could therefore use their prayers to intercede for living individuals, groups and inhabitants of a city or interact for the salvation of those suffering in purgatory. The latter could visit them, but also ask for alleviation during women’s journeys through purgatory. The inhabitants of the third post-mortem place, whom the women observed, and helped, came from every state of life, from kings, popes and bishops to indigenous people and slaves. Nobody was on the safe side. The accounts on purgatory sometimes included an implicit or explicit criticism of the lax behaviour of many male ecclesiastics and women religious, who did not live according to the divinely instated norms, and who did more harm than good. Visits to or from purgatory seem to have increased women’s apostolic zeal, and so did the less common travels through hell. Observing the post-mortem state of things, they realized what they were fighting against. In their contemplative mission, women could intercede themselves or cooperate with saints to reach the desired goal—the conversion of the living and the liberation of souls undergoing purgation.

While prayers of a saintly individual were regarded as very efficient, those of a whole community of cloistered nuns were considered even more so. Though a much less prevalent theme in the texts, women could devote their prayers to the missionary enterprise at large, particular mission fields or missionaries. They could also pray for more vocations, increased missionary zeal and augmented willingness to suffer martyrdom. The function of intercessory prayers was to make the body of Christ healed, stronger and more complete. The sinners were rotten or weak members, not functioning well, and non-believers bound for hell should be integrated in the one body and hopefully eventually reach salvation. Still, those already in hell had no chance; they would remain outside forever.

Suffering as a method for contributing to others’ spiritual wellbeing was a ubiquitous theme in the texts I have studied. It could take the form of illness, demonical attacks and self-inflicted disciplines. According to a more general medieval and early modern discourse, females were more closely related to their fleshiness than were males. Therefore they were considered inconstant and driven by temptations and whims. Though the body was an
enemy, it was an enemy they had to live with. The contemplative life did not offer a possibility to escape the body, but with divine grace there was a potential to transform it into something virtuous in order to evade the supposed frailties. For medieval and early modern contemplative women, the body was the main locus of their spirituality. It was a very somatic spirituality where they, in a concrete way, sought to imitate Christ, taking his sufferings upon themselves. In a strict sense, the divine redemptive sacrifice was deemed inimitable, but accepting and actively searching for pain, women could partake in his suffering and to some extent become co-redeemers, expiating sins of others.

To withstand demonical attacks and temptations, patiently suffer ailments and punish the body were aspects of the search for individual spiritual perfection, but such virtues could be transferred to other people or humanity at large. In fact, women could chose to endure every pain they experienced for the good of others, just as they could use all their prayers for that goal. God sent diseases to strengthen their fidelity, and demonical attacks only occurred with divine permission. Apart from the pains that were sent to them with God’s approval, women could discipline themselves using cilices, whips or other devices, or undertake strict fasts for others’ benefit. Just as in the case of prayer, the merits collected from withstanding pain could be transferred to other members of the body of Christ and be applied for the conversion of non-Catholics.

According to this way of thinking, all pain, anguish and misery could have soteriological value for the living on earth and the souls in purgatory. It could be used as a means to placate divine ire and intercede for others, suffering vicariously, just as Christ had done. There seems, however, not to have existed an internal logic for the length and intensity of agony needed to contribute to the conversion and salvation of others. In some cases, women had to suffer long periods for a single soul. In other cases it was enough to endure relatively brief periods to contribute to the release of multitudes. By withstanding pain and temptations, saintly women were transformed. Through their steadfastness and mortification, they could be regarded as virile women, who consistently exhibited spiritual manliness and fortitude. The male hagiographers claimed that they had won a victory over the unstable and fragile female body, a process that made them hard and strong, like stones or diamonds. Therefore they, in a way, ceased to be female and were believed to be more robust than most males.
Teaching and counselling were other forms of contemplative missionary activity. Early modern Catholic women were barred from priesthood and preaching, as well as from formal, public teaching positions, and were generally not allowed to undertake higher studies, least of all in theology. Nevertheless, saintly religious women were believed to be able to teach and counsel by charismatic, divinely conceded authority. Thanks to gratuitously conceded divine graces, gratiae gratis datae, they were thought to be able to read souls and discern the spirits, they could show extreme prudence and they were able to prophesise. Their authority was grounded in divinely infused knowledge and profound experiences of God and other celestial beings. And they could and should forward this knowledge to others.

There were some differences between the teaching and counselling activities of cloistered nuns and religious women not living in enclosure. The spatial confinement of the former was of course stricter, but even in its ideal form the cloister had a degree of permeability. Nuns had access to some liminal areas such as the convent turn-box and parlour. Hiding behind grilles and curtains, they could talk to and counsel outside visitors. Some nuns, who already in life were considered prophets in their own country, seem to have been much sought-after by the locals. The turn-box and the convent parlour was an in-between social space that became a sort of pulpit or confessional, though the women were not conceded any formal teaching office or sacramental powers.

Though most sources only describe such encounters in very general terms, it becomes clear that different kinds of people sought these women’s advice, including both laypeople and clerics; the latter sometimes through the confessional. But, of course, the saintly nuns advised inhabitants of the convent, too. Through the charismatic gifts, granted to an elect few, they were believed to be able to read the souls of other humans. Therefore they knew what plagued people and what sins they hid. Hagiographers often asserted that the saintly women knew how to teach the visitors in an apt, efficient, skilled and simple way and that they converted many people in a much more effectual way than many clerics who had not received such gifts. Charismata did not come automatically by ordination to priesthood. Still, it was only through the sacrament of penance, a male clerical prerogative, that sins could be forgiven. From that perspective, women paved the road for male clerics.
The teaching situation of non-professed contemplative women was somewhat different, though they generally lived quite retired lives. Beatas, at least those not living in beaterios, could move somewhat more freely. Particularly in the examples from the first half of the seventeenth century, women, not least indigenous or mestiza saintly women, were able to move around more easily, teaching and counselling both Hispanics and people of indigenous or African descent, and males as well as females. Nevertheless, there were similar examples from later colonial times, too. These women were described as very zealous and efficient teachers, who were able to convert people, including in cases where male clerics had been unsuccessful.

The fifth and last of the mission-related themes I have analysed is spiritual missionary flights, where women took active part in the mission enterprise, though in a supernatural way. On some occasions, flight destinations were described in quite general and almost symbolic terms, but in other cases, names and places were explicitly mentioned. There were relatively few detailed accounts of such experiences which developed after and parallel to stories about women from the Iberian Peninsula. The flying religious women in the Spanish Indies and their hagiographers did not only claim that they had travelled through nearby areas, journeys could be made to all parts of the world. They had a universal dimension. Flying women went to places in the Americas, Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, but in particular to locations where few, if any, male missionaries were present.

According to the accounts, when flying, some women overlooked, observed and reconnoitred the mission fields, and were able to see the progress and problems of the missionary work carried out by males, or were brought to places where no Catholic missionaries were to be found. From above, they could make observations of the landscape and the people, but also discern dark or light areas, depending on the success of Catholic missions. In such cases they were co-operators and co-ordinators of the male missionaries, having a bird’s eye perspective and knowledge about the future of the mission fields. In some stories, women’s role on the mission field was described as more active. They were preaching, teaching, baptizing and anointing individuals and groups of people. In that way, both women themselves and hagiographers claimed that they concretely contributed to the conversion work and paved the road for male missionaries. The experiences...
were often combined with prayers for the arrival of missionaries who could continue the work initiated by themselves.

The concepts of agency and space, studied against a background of gender, provide a key to the analysis of these mission-related themes. All these aspects were built on co-operation between God and human being. Charity was infused, but should be acted upon by the individual. According to both confessional and hagiographical texts, prayers of saintly women were efficient and had great impact on others’ eternal well-being. They constituted a kind of spiritual agency with a borderless universal scope, including both living and dead. But the basis of prayer for others was the divinely infused ability to love. Women could both pray directly for conversion or indirectly through intercessions for male missionaries. To make their prayers more proficient they could co-operate with Christ, Virgin Mary and the saints. Prayer should be an important part in every Catholic’s life, but nuns and other contemplative women were trained in the cultivation of the virtue, and were often regarded as more perfect in their love of God and humans than others.

The prayer apostolate for the dead and the living was generally considered unproblematic by church authorities. Suffering could also be understood as an active missionary method, not only part of the personal sanctification. The meritorious goal was to counteract, resist and stoically accept illness and demonical attacks. Philopassionism was the wish to suffer as much as possible and suffering could have a vicarious element, actively choosing to transfer the merits to other people in need of superabundant merits.

Teaching and counselling were missionary methods, too. Though barred from ordination and without the sacramental power conceded to male clergy, women could receive *gratiae gratis datae* from God, which made them singularly knowledgeable and prudent. Hagiographers claimed that the chosen women could see into the depths of others and had great abilities when teaching and convincing people with whom they met. In that way, they asserted, women could efficiently contribute to the conversion of individuals and groups, and their teaching was often described as more effective than male clerics’.

Flights were unusually clear answers to the frustration many women felt by not being able to do as much as they felt that their love required. In some texts about mystical flights, the degree of agency was described as
great. Due to the lack of male missionaries, during their visits to mission fields women did things that normally only males did. They preached and taught on a public scene. Still, the authors always underscored that it was God who was behind all this. He was the main actor and women became his instruments.

In an article about human agency and the divine, based on both medieval sources and postcolonial studies on nineteenth-century India, Amy Hollywood writes that “women’s putative passivity and malleability render them particularly apt sites of divine agency on earth.” Jane Tar appositely describes such an elect woman as a “locus of spiritual power, a channel of grace, a direct pipeline to the eternal.” In such a way they had much more experiential knowledge than male clerics normally had. Of course, women writing about their own experiences or males writing about them were influenced by the formats of hagiography and mystical theology. Combining their own literary abilities and the canonical forms and symbols, they tried to explain alleged supernatural experiences and generally played down female agency to stress God’s active role.

It is important to note that in my material it was often, if not always, claimed that God was the real—or ultimate—actor. According to the texts, it would be possible to describe women’s agency as instrumental or indirect. To investigate the putative supernatural origin of the experiences is not a task for historians, and not for academic theologians either. It is beyond empirical methods and has no part in scholarly endeavour.

Nevertheless, another fallacy, I think, is to reduce the claims made by women and their hagiographies to diminish their own agency as mere strategic choices or rhetoric. Such an approach, I argue, would be to infringe the women. To take contemplative women’s claims seriously, it might therefore be appropriate to talk about divine agency that was believed to be channelled through the women, a form of indirect or instrumental agency. Not to consider that way of thinking would be anachronistic. From an early modern Catholic perspective it was hardly to diminish the value of an act, if stating that it was God who was the main agent. In fact, God as the creator of everything was the actor par excellence, even if humans could co-operate with him. Holy women were believed to have reached such an elevated

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3 Tar 2008: 515.
spiritual state, that they had been united with God. Thus distinctions between human and divine agency was of less importance.

Applied to my textual corpus, the other analytic concept, space, can be said to have included both physical and social aspects. Both living and dead came asking for prayers. The living through visits to the women’s home or the convent turn-box or parlour. The dead interacted with them during their flights through purgatory or when souls appeared to the women in the convent, beaterio or in the retirement of their homes. Suffering was part of a universal contemplative mission, without boundaries, at least not for the perfect. Disciplines should be carried out when retired to a cell or a room apart. It should be made in secrecy, and in the ideal case, self-torture should not be noticed by others.

For nuns, the physical space of teaching and counselling was restricted to the turn-box and the parlour, but the social space was much more expanded as people came to seek their advice. To a certain extent other religious women moved around, teaching and counselling people. The accounts of religious women’s flights to the mission field were clearly implying a dramatic expansion of the restricted space in which they normally lived and acted.

In this context, space can be said to have had a clear spiritual element and understood as women’s spiritual movements through the physical or sacred geographies: to different parts of the world as well as to heaven, purgatory and hell. Prayers and the effects of vicarious suffering did not end at the convent wall. Following the ideas of Teresa of Avila, the strict convent should be physically enclosed, but spiritually permeable.

Throughout this study, I have explored apostolic aspects of female contemplative life in the colonial Spanish empire. Despite clear restrictions of space and agency connected with gender, to some extent these saintly women in the Spanish Indies were thought to have moved beyond the ordinary constrictions. They were considered exceptional cases. Therefore, many aspects of their life, as seen in the sources, were characterized by fluidity and mutability. There were no evident boundaries between the body and soul, no absolute borders between spiritual and physical activities, no obvious demarcations between the living and the dead, and no absolute distinctions were made between the contemplative and apostolic forms of religious life. The former inspired and motivated the other.
Women were not conceded ecclesiastical formal authority, but the chosen few were believed to possess great charismatic authority. Thus a limited number of religious women could transcend the usual norms connected to gender, though the basic ideals of female religious life were constituted by both physical and inner recollection. Many of the women, whom I have studied in depth, indeed lived according to the principle *contemplatione in actione*—contemplation in action or action in contemplation.
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