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Asunción Lavrin  
*Howard University*

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# UNLIKE SOR JUANA?. THE MODEL NUN IN THE RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF COLONIAL MEXICO\*

by Asunción Lavrin

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, towering figure of viceregal culture in New Spain, is remembered as a poet, as a woman, and as a nun. While she has been subjected to careful scrutiny and evaluation as a poet and as a woman, her role as a nun has received much less attention. This, despite the fact that she lived most of her life as a nun, and that, in her own words, her profession gave her the freedom she wished to devote herself totally to writing. We know that Sor Juana's choice to live as a nun created a constant tension between the secular train of life which she still carried within the convent, and the prescribed discipline of the cloisters. The unrestrained flights of her creative imagination clashed, at critical moments of her life, with the confining boundaries which strict adherence to religious life should have meant for her. Reflecting on Sor Juana's words, we may question whether the religious state was indeed appropriate for the purposes for which she chose it. If it was not designed to give women peace and quiet to write and to learn, what were then the expectations which women had from life as professed nuns, and what was expected from them once they entered the convent? In what ways was Sor Juana an atypical nun? In order to answer these questions I propose that we survey the available colonial literature on nuns and by nuns, such as biographies, autobiographies, sermons, pastoral letters, and books of religious instruction and religious meditations, to reconstruct the world of the cloisters in which Sor Juana lived. These sources will help us elicit the norms, attitudes and values of religious life, and the moral and intellectual forces which were so important to the Church and to the persons living within it.

The question of training and vocation for religious life should be the first to be discussed, as it has raised some controversy among historians, and because Sor Juana's own profession remains itself a controversial subject. Some historians assume that vocation for religious life was not always completely sincere, and that families disposed of their unmarried daughters by putting them into a convent. Profession, it is claimed, was less expensive than marriage, since it required a smaller dowry. Thus, a family saved money by sending one or several daughters to a nunnery. Both on economic and on intellectual grounds, this interpretation fails to present a convincing and true-to-the-period picture. The endowment of a nun ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 pesos in the XVII and XVIII centuries. In addition, profession in most convents involved other expenses, such as clothes, purchase of a cell for the nun, provision of slaves or servants, and, possibly, an endowment which would provide the nun with an annual sum of money for her living expenses. The number of families which could afford these expenses was relatively small. Pious endowments were created to help some families to defray the expenses of their daughters' profession. Sor Juana's own dowry and profession expenses were paid by two benefactors, Don Pedro Velázquez de la Cadena and the jesuit Antonio Núñez.

Although studies of the mean values of marriage dowries for colonial Mexico are scarce, available information for women's dowries in Mexico indicate that the dowries of most brides was roughly between 1,000 and 5,000 pesos.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the dowry of many women was often promised but not given at the time of the marriage, while the dowries of nuns were most of the times deposited in cash and less commonly mortgaged as a lien on the family's properties. With the exception of a number of disalced orders which did not require an endowment, although

they took it if it was offered, profession was not a cheap affair.

On the subject of religious vocation, we must not underestimate the powerful religious character of the XVI and XVII centuries in Spain and its colonies. Spain produced a large number of distinguished theologians such as Melchor Cano, Francisco de Osuna, Luis de Granada and Domingo de Soto. Among the saints, let us remember Santa Teresa de Jesús, San Juan de la Cruz, San Pedro Alcántara, San Juan de Avila, San Ignacio de Loyola and San Francisco de Borja. In Spanish America Santa Rosa de Lima, Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo, San Martín de Porres, Santa Mariana de Jesús, and the *beato* Sebastián de Aparicio, represent the strong currents of spirituality characteristic of the age. The political unification of Spain had also entailed a religious unification and reformation dating back to the Catholic Kings. Both the regular and the secular clergy came under the Crown's scrutiny in its drive to create a more dedicated and less corrupt Church. The transformation of the regular clergy into a more militant religious body moved by stronger spiritual forces was one of the ecclesiastical landmarks of the XVI century. The Society of Jesus, the reformed Carmelite Order of Santa Teresa and the new Conceptionist Order founded by Beatriz de Silva and approved in 1511 by Julius II are the fruits of this internal revitalization.<sup>2</sup> Later in the century, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) regularized and systematized the behavior of the members of the secular Church, giving a clear sense of direction to Roman Catholicism, then facing the challenge of Protestantism.

Another important characteristic of the XVI century was its strong drive towards mysticism. This impulse had its roots in the reforms of the Franciscan Order and the flowering of the concept of *recogimiento*, the withdrawal of the self to reach God through mystical contemplation. *Recogimiento* was best expounded by Francisco de Osuna, author of *Abecedario Espiritual* and other books which became widely read and accepted throughout Spain.<sup>3</sup> Santa Teresa accepted the concept of *recogimiento* as soon as she read Osuna. In Spanish America, a century later, Sor Josefa de la Concepción de Castillo, perhaps the best female mystic writer of the colonial period, mentions Osuna as one of her readings.<sup>4</sup> These are only two examples of the many followers of *recogimiento* in Spain and the overseas possessions. Although *recogimiento* was an important element in mysticism, it was not the only path (*vía*) followed in the XVI and XVII centuries. San Ignacio de Loyola advocated intense mental prayer blended with an active life in the world. His *Exercises* became one of the staples of devotional activity in the XVII and XVIII century, and a genre much imitated in this period. The more conservative members of the Church continued to adhere to prayer and devotional acts, while the most radical adopted erasmian and *alumbrado* concepts of receiving God by grace, and by the mystical contemplation alone in the case of the *alumbrados*, without any need for devotional works or the mediation of the Church. These two paths were considered heretical, before and after the Council of Trent and explains the concern of the Church with so-called mystical advocates. The Counterreformation Church stressed the role of prayer and spiritual exercises, the cult of the Virgin Mary and the saints, and the role of the Church as an intermediary between mankind and God. Mysticism and *recogimiento* did not disappear in the XVII century. The discalced orders, for example, adopted canons of prayer and austerity with roots on *recogimiento*, and a number of theologians writing in that period followed its tenets. However, there was in that century a return to more classic forms of spirituality, based on concepts of the need to uproot the vices and replace them with virtues through attendance to religious ceremonies (mass, the eucharist, etc.), prayer, and acts of penance and devotion.<sup>5</sup> The blend of these trends is reflected in the works written for nuns and by nuns, and the norms of religious life adopted by convents in the XVII and XVIII centuries, which will be examined later. To ignore this heritage and to deny that it translated itself into the foundation of

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distort and misinterpret the character of the period.

In considering the prevailing religiosity and the formation of a religious vocation, we must also consider the usual education of girls. This was largely confined to a solid indoctrination in the principles of the faith, the training in the so-called womanly occupations, and, as an additional although not common ornament, reading and writing. An educated woman who passed beyond mere literacy into the reading of literary or historical texts, or who knew Latin and had some notions of mathematics, was an unusual individual in the XVI and XVII centuries. Knowledge beyond these narrowly defined parameters was not for women.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, few boundaries were set to their piety. Thus, while intellectual training was weak, the biographical sources of professed nuns cite early indoctrination by pious parents, and teaching and practice of a religious life since the earliest age. Parents interned their daughters in convents for their education, or simply to raise them under strict religious orthodoxy. Some parents hoped that their daughters would receive the religious call and follow a religious life, since it carried a considerable degree of social prestige. Father Antonio Núñez, confessor to Sor Juana and author of several religious tracts, indicated that the purpose of raising a girl in a convent was to make them fall in love with religious life through the living example of the nuns of the community.<sup>7</sup> Exposure to devotional practices at home, or to life within the cloisters, could not fail to produce a natural inclination to it. The religious call which many women felt was a sincere reaction to their religious and educational training.

Several examples of religious upbringing will help illustrate the situation which led many women to profess willingly. The parents of Micaela Josefa de la Purificación, discalced Carmelite in the convent of Puebla, were extremely pious, and "raised her in perpetual enclosure, with good examples and healthy advise..." She used to wear a nun's habit in her early childhood, and at age 14 started seeking profession, practicing discipline and silence, and fasting. She professed at age 17, in 1699.<sup>8</sup> Sor María Josefa Lino de la Canal, of the rich merchant Canal family, daughter of a Knight of Calatrava, was the founder of the convent of La Concepción in San Miguel Allende, Michoacán. She was under the spiritual guidance of the same confessor from the time she was 6 until she was 31. He left a testimonial of her life, stating that since she was a little girl, she lived in a separate room in her home, as a nun in her cell, and for practicing her humility, she shared the domestic duties of the house's servants.<sup>9</sup> Sor Encarnación de Cárdenas, a Yucatecan, of the distinguished Cárdenas-Escobar family, entered as a pupil in the convent of La Concepción in Mexico City at 14, professing 5 years later.<sup>10</sup> Isabel de la Encarnación, a discalced Carmelite in the convent of Puebla, felt a religious vocation since age 9. At that tender age she started exercising herself in acts of spiritual and material penitence. She professed in 1606.<sup>11</sup> Mariana de San Miguel, in the words of her biographer, Sor Ana María Josefa de la Purificación, also behaved as a nun since she was a child. She lived separate from the rest of her family, with little personal communication even with her brothers. This was regarded as a rehearsal of the edifying life which she later carried out in the convent.<sup>12</sup> Sister María de Jesús a nun in the Conceptionist convent of Puebla, came from the rich family Tomellín Campo. Her mother had been raised in a convent, and had left it to marry as an act of obedience to her parents. She raised her daughter in a very religious atmosphere which accounts for the latter's refusal to obey her father when he intended to arrange a marriage for her. Defying his will, but with the tacit approval of her mother, María de Jesús professed in 1599.<sup>13</sup> Sor Ignacia Gertrudis de San Pedro, daughter of an employee of the Royal Exchequer, lived in the convent of Santa Clara, in Mexico City, since she was three and a half years old. Needless to say, at the appropriate time she took the veil.<sup>14</sup> Sor María Magdalena de la Soledad entered the convent of Regina

Coeli of Morelia, accompanied by her sister, when she was 7 years old. Her biographer adds that "...the good example and virtues of the parents of our Magdalena inclined her since childhood to the perfection of the religious state..."<sup>15</sup>

Another important factor in the education of women was the influence which confessors had over them since their tenderest age. Sor María Inés de los Dolores, born in Puebla in 1659 and blind since the age of 7, was under the guidance of a confessor shortly after this accident occurred. She is described as soft wax upon whom he impressed his teaching. At age 9 she made a vote of chastity, promising to devote herself to God alone.<sup>16</sup> This is just one example, among many, of the preeminent role which confessors played in the shaping and strengthening of the religious vocation of many women, prior and after profession.<sup>17</sup>

Let us turn to Sor Juana and examine her statements about her childhood and profession. Sor Juana made it abundantly clear that a strong religious vocation was missing in her. What she had was a "vehement" and "overpowering" inclination towards learning, a natural impulse that neither the admonition of others nor her own meditations had been sufficient to restrain. At the age of three this inclination set her on fire with a desire to learn rather than to engage in religious exercises. Unlike other professed nuns who ached for a life of retreat, sacrifice and complete devotion to God, Sor Juana admitted, after 22 years of religious life, that "the spiritual exercises and company of a community were repugnant to the freedom and quiet I desired for my studious endeavors." She professed knowing that life in a convent entailed certain conditions "...most repugnant to my nature; but given the total antipathy I felt for marriage, conventual life, was the least unsuitable and most desirable I could elect, given the security of salvation I desired..."<sup>18</sup> She used the term "repugnant" twice over, which should leave no room for doubt about her profession having been more an intellectual than a religious decision. This profession, however, was an act of her own will, which she never regretted afterwards. Why not? Sor Juana might have had doubts about living in a community, but these doubts were mostly egotistic, insofar as she dreaded the thought of being disturbed by others when she wished to be alone to do what she wanted to do the most. On the other hand, Sor Juana was a devout and sincere believer, who like most other people in her times, was deeply concerned with the salvation of her soul. Conventual life was acceptable because it was regarded as a secure road to perfection and salvation, and as a Catholic, she was willing to endure those "certain conditions", repugnant as they might be, in order to save her soul.

The influence of her confessor, Antonio Nuñez, should not be underestimated either. He helped her to make up her mind about profession, and materially aided her to enter the two convents where she tried religious life before her final profession. Father Nuñez' biographer relates that taking into consideration Sor Juana's beauty, talent and charm, Nuñez considered that "God could not have sent a greater punishment to the Kingdom than allowing Juana Inés to remain in the publicity of secular life."<sup>19</sup> Some will see a strong misogynist strain in this statement. Although not denying that indeed there is a significant degree of misogyny in a theology which wishes to separate outstanding women from society, in my opinion Father Nuñez was also expressing religious attitudes of the period. For a Jesuit of that century, the combination of so many felicitous virtues in a woman was not a mistake of nature, but a challenge to the Church. Such perfection should be devoted to God rather than wasted in secular life. Life as a professed nun was the most perfect state. The consecrated virgins were God's most loved objects. Sor Juana could only do harm to the world within it because with her assets she would be able to dominate many men. The dominant woman was not acceptable to XVII century religious thinkers and educators.<sup>20</sup> Within the convent, contained and reoriented toward the search of spiritual perfection, Sor Juana would not only not hurt others, but would be able to use her

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superior abilities for the highest possible goals. Sor Juana was highly influenced by Núñez throughout her life. He remained her advisor for many years, always trying to separate her from secular distractions. Even though he left her for several years, when she suffered her last spiritual crisis she called him back. Doubtless, Sor Juana was tied to this man by strong religious bonds, just as other nuns had been to their own confessors.

Other professed nuns who entered the convent with untested vocations, remained in it due to a strong will or the influence of their spiritual directors. Sor Mariana Josefa Nepomuceno, the founder of the Capuchine convent of Nuestra Sra. de Guadalupe, in Mexico City, was born in Puebla in 1751. She was in love with an army officer, who proved to be married in Spain. Her youthful emotional disappointment led her to ask admission in the Capuchine convent of San Felipe de Jesús, despite her mother's opposition. Having professed at age 19, she suffered numerous "temptations" to leave the convent, but eventually succeeded in overcoming them. Later in life she used to help in the convent's kitchen to make up for the many nights she had spent dancing and attending theatrical performances.<sup>21</sup> Luisa de Santa Catarina, born in Michoacán in 1682, never thought of becoming a nun throughout most of her youth. After the death of her parents, she administered her inherited properties and refused several marriage offers. Her decision to become a nun was the direct result of the influence of her confessor, Fr. Juan L. Aguado. She underwent a "horrifying novitiate", and many times thought of leaving the convent, but never did, eventually becoming reconciled to her state<sup>22</sup>. Anna Antonia de San Buenaventura, a nun in the dominican convent of Santa Rosa de Lima, in Valladolid, was referred to as a proud and less than promising novice. However, under the guidance of a Jesuit confessor, she mended her ways and became a model nun.<sup>23</sup> Doubtless, a poorly defined vocation for religious life — despite intense religiosity — caused these nuns a great deal of mental anxiety. Many such as the mentioned above populated the nunneries of Mexico and Spanish America. However, to admit the difficulties of religious life for a number of nuns is not the same as to state that most nuns lacked a vocation or the strength to carry out their duties. Sor Juana, despite her confessed lack of vocation, stood the annoyances involved in communal life, and remained in the convent like thousands of others.

One important difference between Sor Juana and others, however, is that the vast majority of nuns made, at times, heroic efforts to achieve the goals of religious life, and wrote copiously about them. Sor Juana made only minor references to her experience within the convent in her writings, except in those instances in which she was prevented from carrying out her studies. In order to learn about what constituted life within the cloisters, we must turn to the writings of other nuns, to pastoral letters and books of religious edification.

The essence or model of religious life is difficult to describe, as some convents were more strict than others in their internal discipline, and because some nuns were constantly trying to exceed the rules in their desire to achieve perfection. Religious life started with the final profession as a nun of black veil. This profession entailed four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure. According to Antonio Núñez, the vows consecrated the nuns totally to God in what he termed "a perfect holocaust".<sup>24</sup> Poverty and obedience meant the renunciation of material possessions and the surrender of personal will to the will of the superiors. Enclosure prevented her from stepping into the world again. Virginity precluded any carnal knowledge, since the Bride of Christ had to remain untouched by human sin. Guarded in the garden of God, the nun was supposed to live a contemplative life devoted to the task of the salvation of her soul through prayer and acts of discipline and obedience. Her prayers could also benefit the souls of others by interceding for them before Christ, God, the Virgin Mary or the saints.<sup>25</sup> This was the ideal of religious life.

The reality of conventual life in New Spain, as revealed by historical records, shows that the ideal was difficult to achieve. Although most nuns renounced their share in the family's inheritance, this was done in many instances after the allocation of enough funds to reassure them a comfortable living in the convent. As institutions, convents did not renounce worldly possessions. Whereas many of them remained relatively modest in their holdings, others eventually accumulated a significant number of properties and liquid capital. Even those convents with relatively small incomes, still spent large sums of money, donated by patrons, on their buildings and ornaments. Nuns held property in the form of cells, slaves and clothes. They drank enormous amounts of chocolate and even kept their own cooks. In the seventeenth century some convents allowed nuns to introduce ornate habits of rich fabrics. The celebration of religious feasts with special receptions for visitors such as friends and members of the family were not unusual in Sor Juana's times. Thus, when the latter received members of the viceregal court or her friend Sigüenza y Góngora in the convent, she was following a practice common in her times, even though irregular by the strict interpretation of the Rules of most orders.<sup>26</sup>

Obedience was put to test in numerous occasions when the nuns challenged orders from their superiors, or carried out internal fights with each other.<sup>27</sup> The vow of chastity was also put to test as nuns were subjected to numerous temptations either in the form of advances from unscrupulous confessors or lay male friends. Even though the recorded incidents of amorous involvements is notably low, personal internal struggle against the so-called temptations of the flesh was experienced and described by many nuns, or by their confessors, who considered them acts of the devil to try the nuns' vocations. Visions of lewd young men or lascivious infernal figures tormented some of the most devout nuns.<sup>28</sup>

These failures in carrying out the ideal religious life were to be expected and regarded as natural given the fact that human affairs were, after all, imperfect in essence. Thus, the struggle for perfection was one of the purposes of religious life. Physical and spiritual discipline, prayer, meditation, self-effacement, and a constant restraint of human desires were some of the means to achieve perfection within the religious state. Following Father Núñez' advice, the most important duties of a nun were the fulfillment of her vows and the Rules of her religious order, the practice of her daily prayers — which he called the hands and feet of souls —, and the attendance to all community acts, since they facilitated the achievement of perfection in her state. In his words, to achieve her religious goals the nun had to wage a constant war against herself as a fallible human being. Like many other spiritual directors, he envisaged religious life as a trying experience, calling it "a perpetual cross, a continuous martyrdom of the soul and the body."<sup>29</sup>

Archbishop Lanciego y Eguilaz (1712-28), in a *Pastoral Letter to his beloved daughters* printed in 1716, recommended prayer as the food of the soul, and in addition, the subjection of all passions and the watchful restraint of the senses. Religious profession, in his words, was undertaken by the nun to communicate with God, and to consecrate herself to Him. Only through continuous religious exercises, could a nun achieve perfection.<sup>30</sup> Nearly a hundred years later, in 1804, Sor María Vicenta de la Encarnación wrote a play for the profession of a sister in religion. The symbolic actors were the Devil, the Flesh, the World, Religion, Patience, Vocation, Constancy, Perseverance, Christ, and his bride, the nun.<sup>31</sup> The Devil commissioned the World to tempt the novice; Christ supported her calling on Vocation and Perseverance, but in order to test the love of His promised bride, he allowed the Devil to tempt her. After continuous harrassment Religion protected the novice from the attack of the enemies of Christ, who reappeared and promised to relieve her from the fatigues of the battle through the act of consecration as one of his brides. This elegant small piece carried the message that religious life

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involved a continuous struggle to test the mettle of the nun's vocation. This message had changed little throughout the colonial period.

The struggle for perfection, the leitmotif of religious life, took place within the individual nun and it was supposed to remain contained within her. Outwardly she should be humble, meek and self-effacing. Sor María Petra de la Trinidad, a Capuchine in the convent of San José de Gracia, Querétaro was once found in the farthest corner of the convent's vegetable garden, where she lay covered with branches and leaves, persuaded "with saintly sincerity, that she would become a worm."<sup>32</sup> This kind of debasement of the self is missing in Sor Juana. The adulation of the most notable men of her time, and that of the members of the viceregal court, could have hardly kindled any sense of humility in her. She was well aware of her intellectual capacity, rhetorical disclaimers of her own worthlessness aside, and only under great duress did she suffer orders from her own superiors to suppress her writing or change their character. Only after she underwent her final spiritual transformation in 1693, do we find expressions of personal humiliation in her writings that bear strong resemblance to those found in the works of other nuns. Thus, we read in the *Petición Causídica*: "I, Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most insignificant of the slaves of the Blessed Mary...", and, "Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most unworthy and ungrateful creature of all created by Your Omnipotence..."<sup>33</sup> She also asked to have the following phrases written in the book in which her death would be recorded: "I have been the worst one. I beg the forgiveness of all my sisters, for the love of God and His mother. I, the worst one in the world. Juana Inés de la Cruz."<sup>34</sup> Sor Juana had started to write like a model nun. Even if we follow Ezequiel Chávez in believing that these writings were not really authored by Sor Juana, but simply signed by her, when she carried out this act she joined the company of those who represent the typical feminine religious writings of the XVII century.<sup>35</sup>

Suffused with the melancholic character of the struggle against the weakness of the self and the temptations of the world and the devil, the writings of colonial nuns are often joyless narratives of souls in perennial state of spiritual siege. They fight back with disciplines and prayers, but the sense of despondency is overwhelming. One of the best examples of this kind of literature is the work of Sor Sebastiana Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad, a Franciscan nun (d. 1757) in the convent of San Juan de la Penitencia, Mexico, who left a little known collection of unpublished letters and poems. Depicted as an example of chastity, docility and religiosity by her biographer, her letters offer the somber picture of a person who is far from finding inner peace.<sup>36</sup> She describes herself as unworthy of her confessor's spiritual care, expressing constant doubts about herself. "I am untrustworthy. I am such, that I would like to take my own life because I cannot tolerate the violence of my fearless surrender to my own appetites; all is lost. I do not know what could liberate me from myself..." Torn between her desire for perfection and her own perceived imperfection, she was overwhelmed by a constant sense of guilt. "Nothing can console me. I cry helplessly because I cannot bear this any longer; but concealing the grief in which I live, I attend the Choir. At times it is hard to stop my tears, but if this is the will of God, may He give me comfort and expand my oppressed heart, for my chest might burst of repression..."<sup>37</sup>

One of her poems expresses her consuming desolation in a style strongly resembling that of Santa Teresa, although lacking the latter's masterly style:

What relief may be given  
To one who lives suffering;  
The remedy to my afflictions  
Will be found only in death.





Relieve me from this death  
My God, and grant me life,  
Do not constrain me  
In these tight bonds.  
I crave for the sight of you,  
And my suffering is so total,  
That I die because I do not die.<sup>38</sup>

Other nuns have left poems written in a similar vein. For example, a poem quoted by the biographer of Sor María Ignacia de los Dolores, who lived with a professed sister in the convent of San Lorenzo, Mexico, reads as follows:

Sadness, suffering, pain,  
And whatever you send me,  
I deserve, and it is nothing  
If your grace assists me.  
If I suffer in your grace,  
The torment becomes joy,  
Without it, all consolation  
Becomes abysses of misery.<sup>39</sup>

Sor María de Santa Clara, in a book of spiritual exercises written for other nuns tersely summarizes the spirit nurturing these sorrowful experiences: "If the Husband is surrounded by offenses, the Bride should not be surrounded by laughter. Religious life is undertaken to assume the suffering of the Husband."<sup>40</sup>

Not all nuns wrote of tormenting experiences all the time. Some seemed to have achieved a serene enjoyment of life through religion at some points in their lives. Among those are Sor María Marcela, a Capuchine nun in Querétaro, and Sor María Agueda de San Ignacio, of the Dominican convent of Santa Rosa de Santa María, in Puebla, both of whom lived in the eighteenth century. Sister María Marcela's autobiography remains in manuscript form. She professed after an unhappy courtship, and after a difficult novitiate, she seemed to have encountered rest and peace in her religious life. The serene tones of her writings contrast strongly with the anguished expressions of Sor Sebastiana Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad and are closer to mysticism than asceticism. The change in her life is described as follows:

All my illness ceased naturally, without medicine... All became quietness, calmness, enjoyment, such as on returning from a weary trip, full of risks, hunger, tiredness and calamities, and arriving at one's own cherished country; thus relaxing and enjoying the most beloved possessions...<sup>41</sup>

The cloisters did not seem a prison to her, but rather "a palace and wide meadow where the soul and the heart may expand themselves, full of such consolation that the soul feels like a rock in its center..." There is an almost Franciscan spirit in some of her expressions: "I found God within myself. I found Him in all the creatures. I could not see anything that could not take me to God: flowers, trees, fruits, water, the Sun... The flights of the soul were continuous..."<sup>42</sup>

Sor María Agueda de San Ignacio is a relatively neglected figure in the religious literature of colonial Mexico. During her lifetime she received some recognition, as her works were printed at the expense of the Bishop of Puebla Pantaleón Alvarez de Abreu. Four titles form the core of her work: *Leyes del Amor Divino*, *Maravillas del Amor Divino*, *Devociones* and *Ejercicios*.<sup>43</sup> A

dual character of ascetism and delicate mysticism is present in her works. She does not linger solely on the intimate and personal experience of the search for God, and in that sense she is not a total mystic. She was under the direction of a Jesuit confessor, and her writings resemble more the exercise genre than the *recogimiento* expression. She dwells on such themes as the imitation of Christ, the cult of the Passion of Christ, and the cult of Mary. The latter is best expressed in *Maravillas del Amor Divino* in which Mary is presented as the intercessor for sinners. Mary is the provider of the milk of her special knowledge and love, in which humankind would find prudence and hope. Through her we will know Christ. The *Laws of Divine Love* were those which nuns, as brides of Christ, should follow to be more agreeable to Him, and achieve a final union with Him. Through prayer and the contemplation of God the soul reaches the unitive state. Writing on the complete attention that nuns should devote to Christ, the third law of divine love, she says:

Thus, the loving wife who does not depart from the sight of her beloved is reborn into a new life of grace, and grows up so much in it that she comes to enjoy a unitive presence with God, which is an admirable thing, and a very particular grace, and even a total transformation is achieved.<sup>44</sup>

All the laws of divine love have the ultimate purpose of achieving a mystic union with Christ, which María Agueda describes as follows:

The soul finds itself free of its passions, and without impediment to join its beloved, Thus, not only the soul feels this divine union but the body also feels that it is possessed by the beloved... Everything seems fire in the fire... The inflamed will loves without knowing how, because it is led by God himself, and in Himself it is transformed and living, but not by itself; it lives, but not its own life; it lives the life of the beloved. And it may well be said, as Saint Paul: "I live, but not by myself, for I live in Christ."<sup>45</sup>

Thus, even though her work is largely concerned with exercises, measures and rules, her ultimate goal, in spirit and expression, is mystic.

To understand the nuns' writings, we must place them within the context of classic and Spanish spirituality. Since Saint Augustin, theologians and mystics have described the different stages of the human ascent to God. The classic interpretation of this ascent was through paths (*vías*): purgative, illuminative, and unitive, expressed through vocal, intellectual and affective prayer. The soul must divest itself of worldly cares (purgative) in order to achieve the knowledge of God itself (illuminative) and reach the final union with God (unitive). These paths or stages did not have to be experienced in succession; they could be felt at different times or in different manners throughout life, although the movement of ascent — or as others put it, inward descent into the core of the soul — was essential to reach the ultimate goal.<sup>46</sup> Melquíades Andrés suggests that Spanish writers of the XVI and XVII centuries emphasized the "austerity and perfection and nakedness of the spirit" in order to rid the soul of its worldly needs. He adds that interior and exterior mortification, and the search for perfection are characteristics of Spanish culture in the XVI century.<sup>47</sup> It is obvious that XVII and even XVIII century feminine religious literature was deeply influenced by XVI century spirituality, either through confessional advice or the readings that the nuns themselves undertook. Within this context, the themes of the road to perfection, humility, poverty, obedience, chastity, mortification and the rest, which appear in the writings by nuns or for nuns, become easily understandable.

Many other nuns in addition to those cited here engaged in writing during the colonial period. Sor Juana did not emerge out of a vacuum. Writing was an activity common enough within the cloisters. However, prior to Sor Juana, none of the works of these women seems to have been published or received much public attention. Neither has their character or number made any impact on the literary and intellectual history of New Spain, although they could constitute a significant source of information on the religious mentality of the age, and the feminine religious experience. Some of these works were written at the instigation of the nuns' confessors, and this confessional character has, apparently, condemned them to oblivion. In their times they were regarded as means of refining and ultimately achieving self-perfection, but not as literary pieces. Nuns were not supposed to write for pleasure. Even so, the variety of these works is surprising: autobiographies, biographies, histories of convents, plays, poetry, and personal letters. Most remain in manuscript form in the archives of Mexico and Spain; others have been lost forever, and are only known through excerpts or references in other works. For example, Bishop Juan de Palafox (Puebla), on returning to Spain, took with him a copy of Sor Agustina de Santa Teresa's biography of Sor María de Jesús, of the convent of La Concepción, in Puebla, which he never published. The eventual biographer of Sor María de Jesús, Br. Francisco Pardo, chaplain of the cathedral church of Puebla, knew this work, but called the author "a poor unlettered and humble religious" (*una pobrecita iletrada y humilde religiosa*).<sup>48</sup> One of the first nuns to profess in the Carmelite convent of Puebla, Sor Melchora de la Asunción, was apparently a very talented woman. After professing she assumed the expected humility of her state, and tried to hide her talents and to appear as a simpleton ("*dio en encubrir su talento, haciéndose simple*"). Her confessor, however, forbade her to cover her abilities, using the argument that the Carmelite Order needed her talents. As gifts of God, those abilities should be used in His service. She was described as wise and discreet, engaged in correspondence with the order in Spain to learn more about matters of religion, on which topic she was consulted by many persons. The Carmelite Fathers considered her one of the "best talents of Spain."<sup>49</sup> Whether or not there is any exaggeration in this statement, we may never know, as not a single piece of her writings or her letters has as yet been discovered. Thus, either through religious self-imposed humility, or through the snobbish disregard of male religious authorities, the work of many nuns remains ignored or forgotten.

Within that context, we can appreciate how fortunate we are that Sor Juana did not start her life as a writer within a convent, but under lay patronage of the highest caliber. Even her purely religious works, with a couple of exceptions, differ significantly from the bulk of the works authored by other nuns. Her *Villancicos*, written on request for special religious celebrations, such as the consecration of the church of the convent of San Bernardo (1690), or for the feast of San Pedro Apóstol, are light and happy works, suited to musical expression, and devoid of any theological complication. Most of them praise Mary — she may be added to the list of cultivators of the Marian cult — the Queen, the beautiful, the favorite of God. *El Divino Narciso* is a delightful pastoral hymn. The *Loas* are straightforward intellectual exercises in composing poetry of religious themes, quite similar in technique to those written for secular purposes. The *Ofrecimientos para el Santo Rosario de Quince Misterios*, and the *Ejercicios Devotos* for the nine days before the feast of the Incarnation, are the most religious and most exceptional in that sense, works of Sor Juana, and not often commented upon.<sup>50</sup> In the *Ejercicios* Sor Juana extolls the qualities of the Virgin Mary, destined to be the mother of Christ, and pure since her own creation. A meditation for each day is followed by an offering to Mary, and a request for her protection. It ends with the prescription of some exercises, such as prayer and a pious resolution for every day. The *Ofrecimientos* are litanies for Mary and her suffering, as she saw Christ being crucified and buried, and requests for her guidance and protection.

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In these works Sor Juana came closer to what was expected from her as a nun. They were more unconditionally pious and devotional than anything else she wrote. These were, probably, the type of writings that Antonio Núñez and Bishop Fernández de Santa Cruz would have liked Sor Juana to write more often. However, one misses in these works the clever theological analysis of the *Carta Atenagórica*, which brought her condemnation from the Bishop, and in the end, we must conclude that although they meet the demands of formalized religion, and are a serviceable aid to others in the road to perfection, they are not original in either purpose or execution.

Reminded as we are by these works that Sor Juana is a devout Catholic and a professed nun, there are still elements in the religious works produced by other nuns — or about them — which are missing from her writings, and which set her apart from them. Sor Juana never experienced visions or supernatural events, or the “mystical” experiences which abound in the religious literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In contrast, a typical nun, such as María Petra Trinidad, had numerous ecstasies, and was supposed to have forecast her own death. Sor Agustina Nicolasa María de los Dolores, Abbess of the Capuchine convent of San Felipe de Jesús, in Mexico, predicted the death of several persons, had visions of the Virgin, and had the cupboard of the convent replenished several times as miraculous acts resulting from her faith. Isabel de la Encarnación had numerous visions of demons who constantly tortured and tempted her. María de San José, founder of the Augustinian convents of Santa Mónica of Puebla and Oaxaca, also had numerous visions of the devil, as well as of the Virgin, prior and after her profession. Fray Agustín de Vetancurt, in his *Menologio*, or biographies of Franciscan monks and nuns, written at the end of the seventeenth century, candidly narrates innumerable miracles of some of the nuns cited in his work.<sup>51</sup> Even Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora in his history of the convent of Jesús María, *Paraiso Occidental*, conceded the apparition of the devil under different guises and the state of ecstasy reached by many nuns of that institution.<sup>52</sup> María de Jesús, nun of La Concepción, in Puebla, had visions since she was a little girl, and acquired the stigmata during one of her ecstasies. She was also credited with having had transportations to other lands of gentiles and pagans, and mystical travels to Ethiopia, Spain and France.<sup>53</sup> These are typical expressions of seventeenth century religiosity, and we need not accept them as verifiable to note that a nun who did not bother to mention even once such circumstances in her writings, must have been quite atypical.

Another element missing in Sor Juana's writings is the narrative of acts of penance and purification. Rigorous disciplines for the punishment of the flesh, described in meticulous detail, are hardly ever missing from the biographies of most colonial nuns. The aim of penitence was the subjection of the flesh to the spirit or, in other instances, the imitation of the sufferings of Christ. Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra y Dávalos, biographer of Sor Josefa María Lino de la Santísima Trinidad, while refusing to mention any “miracles” in the life of his biographee, spared few details in the description of her disciplines and her sicknesses. He explained that penitence was the just reward for sinning. “The virtue of penitence is a sincere rejection of sin and a strong desire to punish it and repair the injury made to God...”<sup>54</sup> Without this kind of mortification, nuns could not preserve the purity of their state. The imperfections of the human condition had to be fought and eliminated. Fasting, putting bitter substances in the food, eating left-overs, or only bread and water, wearing metal instruments that tore the flesh, beatings with ropes, punishment taken from other nuns, were all daily occurrences in the cloisters. Sister María Agueda de San Ignacio, the author mentioned before, used pliers to pinch the delicate parts of her body as penitence. Once, carried out by fervor, she twisted the pliers so hard that she took off a piece of flesh from

her arm. Others like Sor María Leocadia, of the Capuchine convent of Puebla, ulcerated their bodies wearing *cilicios*.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, not all spiritual directors approved of such excesses. Antonio Núñez wrote against the immoderate use of *cilicios* or instruments of mortification, since “notable manglings” could also be construed for acts of pride. “Solid virtues do not consist in extraordinary discomfords, wakes, *cilicios* and other penitences.” Yet, he only criticized the excesses. He assumed that suffering was an intrinsic part of religious life. One of his maxims was: “A painless virtue does not count; the more it torments me, the more I appreciate it.”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps not every nun practiced such excesses, but the fact that they were quoted as examples for the edification of Christian women obliges us to conclude that they were essential to the religious pathos and imagery of the period.

Abstention, mortification, renunciation, humiliation, are all key words in the religious vocabulary of the colonial period. They pointed out to the total loss of personal will, and the obliteration of the self in Christ and God. A preacher thus summed up the aim of religious life for a nun in 1803: “Not to reflect except upon not examining; not to think except upon not inquiring... all the nun’s discretion and prudence should consist in not possessing any.”<sup>57</sup> He proceeded in his discourse by stating that reason should only be exercised to judge as good the orders received by the nun. “That the lights of of reason should serve to obscure one’s own judgment. This means to leave everything for God: reason and will, desire and thought.”<sup>58</sup> Archbishop Núñez de Haro (1771-1800), had the following advise to the nuns of his archbishopric: “Try to be humble, chaste and suffered, amiable, charitable and disinterested. In these virtues resides the perfection to which you should aspire, and they suffice to reach a high degree of sanctity.” The nun should say to herself: “The more I debase myself, the more I see myself despised; the less I seek the applause of the world esteems, the more I will resemble Jesus my Savior, my Supreme King... my adored Husband. I will suffer forgetfulness and despite with joy. I will thus free myself from self-esteem and vanity, which have obliged me to do and say so many things alien to my profession.”<sup>59</sup> To add the last word, let us return to Sor Juana’s confessor, Antonio Núñez, who advised his pupils “to cut the adornments of talent with the knife of mortification.”<sup>60</sup>

Against this background, is it very difficult to understand the constant criticism and pressure under which Sor Juana lived on account of her talent and her writings? Consider that Sor Juana’s greatest pride were her intellectual gifts, and that the main theme of the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz* was the defense of her right to learn, to judge, and to think for herself. It is also easy to see why a siege was laid around her after the publication of the *Carta Atenagórica*, but not why she surrendered to carry out a life patterned after the models here discussed. In 1693, as a result of a religious crisis which no biographer has succeeded in explaining adequately, she recalled Fr. Antonio Núñez, who at that point claimed the last victory. He started redirecting her. Sor Juana became humble and pious. She, presumably, rediscovered how to be “alone with her Husband, and considering Him nailed to the cross for the sins of men, her love gave her inspiration to imitate Him, trying with all her might to crucify her passions and her appetites with such rigorous fervor in the penitence, that she needed the prudent advice and attention of Father Antonio to hold her back, lest her fervor would end her life. And Father Núñez used to say, praising God, that Juana Inés was not running, but flying to perfection.”<sup>61</sup>

Was Sor Juana a typical or an atypical nun? She was both at different times in her life. She did not seem to have had an overpowering vocation for religious life, but she was a dutiful nun who fulfilled her daily routines, performed the conventual assignments for which she was appointed, obeyed her superiors and befriended her sisters in religion. She was not typical insofar as she did not engage in the practice of the ascetic rigors which seemed to have been so common among

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certain Orders. And yet, during the last years of her life, she seemed to have lived as the typical nun of the religious literature, in a self-holocaust of humility and penitence. Did she surrender or did she find her ultimate vocation through her faith, as others had done prior to her? This question will undoubtedly elicit several contradictory answers, but there is no doubt in my mind that the "model nun" overpowered the exceptional genius in the last years of her life. However, the Sor Juana that is best known and most remembered is the atypical nun: the one who would not write solely on religious topics but would let herself speak with many voices; the one who would challenge long-held attitudes on women's behavior with the power of her logic; the one who would allow her mind the total freedom of its own inquisitiveness.

Howard University

### NOTE

\*Hagiography, the life of saints, *beatas*, etc. is a much neglected historical-literary genre which could provide much factual information on the lives of persons in religious institutions, and the religious life of many seculars deeply committed to the Church. The mingling of fact and fancy, of usable historical data, and less reliable information such as revelation and ecstasies, has discouraged many historians from using these sources. This is regrettable, since even the non-factual material could help determine religious beliefs and religious imagery. Psychohistorians and *mentalité* historians could also find much material of interest in these works. It is also important to point out that even at the time of their writing, hagiographic works were not uncritically accepted by the Catholic Church itself, which subjected the claims to beatitude and sanctity to close scrutiny, and enforced a rule whereby books on saints, *beatos* or simply pious individuals, had to print a disclaimer stating that the facts related therein lacked the final authentication of the Church. Pope Urban VIII issued several Dispatches dated 13 march 1625, 5 July 1631 and 5 July 1634, which obliged all biographers of religious persons to disclaim support to any assumption of sanctity or divine intervention by the author until and unless it was backed by the Church. The material printed had to be considered as an example of virtue for the faithful. An example of such a *Protesta* reads as follows: "...I protest that none of the things of which I write have infallible authority, but are based on the faith of the human authorities who wrote about them... and I also declare that any cult-sounding word such as Saint, Blessed, or Martyr... does not apply to the persons, but emanates from customs and opinions, and should not be assumed to have a rigorous meaning..." See, Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano*, 4 Vols. (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1941), IV, 4-5. This work was originally written in the seventeenth century.

NOTES

- 1 Asunción Lavrin and Edith Couturier, "Dowries and Wills: A View of Women's Socioeconomic Role in Guadalajara and Puebla, 1640-1790," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2, May 1979, 280-304.
- 2 Antonio Domínguez Ortíz, *The Golden Age of Spain, 1516-1659* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), 199-228; John Elliot, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 87-99; Tarcisio de Azcona, O.F.M., *La elección y reforma del episcopado español en tiempos de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto "P. Enrique Flores," 1960); Josefina Muriel, *Conventos de monjas en Nueva España* (Mexico: Editorial Santiago, 1946), 16-17.
- 3 Melquíades Andrés, *Los recogidos, Nueva visión de la mística española, 1500-1700* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976); Francisco de Osuna, *Tercer Abecedario Espiritual*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, S.A., 1972).
- 4 Francisco de Osuna, *Tercer Abecedario Espiritual*; Estudio histórico by Melquíades Andrés, p. 58; Sor Josefa de la Concepción de Castillo, *Obras Completas*, 2 Vols. (Bogotá: Talleres Gráficos del Banco de la República, 1968), Vol. I, *Su Vida*, Cap. XXII, 75; Sor María Petra de Trinidad, a lay nun at the Capuchine convent of San José de Gracia in Querétaro wrote some spiritual works which are only known through excerpts quoted by her confessor and biographer. The following passage on prayer indicates the influence of *recogimiento*: "...porque luego comienza a recogerse el alma y a estar en una quietud tan suave, que no tengo palabras con que explicar lo que siento. Y de esta quietud me resultan en el cuerpo tales fatigas y desmayos, que poco me falta para esperar. Es tanto lo que esto apura, que quedo sin el uso de los sentidos... Con solo llevar los ojos al cielo, o ver una flor, u otra cosa semejante, es bastante para ponerme en la presencia de Dios." See, José Ignacio de Cabrera, *Gloriosa exaltación de la mystica piedra maravilla. Sermón fúnebre... en las honras de la R.M. Soror María Petra Trinidad, religiosa lega del convento de Señor San José de Gracia y Pobres Capuchinas de la ciudad de Santiago de Querétaro* (Mexico: Imprenta de la Biblioteca Mexicana, 1762), 25-26.
- 5 Melquíades Andrés, *Los recogidos*, 21-56.
- 6 To illustrate the negative attitude women's education elicited even among the intellectuals, let us quote the opinion of Dr. Juan Huarte de San Juan, author of a widely read work, *Examen de ingenios*, first published in Baeza in 1575, and which by 1582 had already been translated into Italian and French. Huarte was a doctor and he examined the nature of the human intellect in this work. On women, he had to say what follows: "Females, due the frigidity and humidity of their sex cannot reach a great depth of talent (*ingenio*). We see them talking with some appearance of ability on easy and light subjects, with well studied and common terminology. But, if they go deeply into letters, they cannot learn more than a little Latin, and this being the work of memory. They are not to be blamed for this lack of intelligence (*rudeza*) but the coldness and humidity that made them women; those qualities, as we have already proven, contradict talent and ability." Their destiny was to be mothers, and nobody doubted that. See, Alvaro Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados*, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, Seminario Cisneros, 1978), Vol. II, 360.
- 7 Antonio Núñez, *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa* (Mexico, 1708), 1.
- 8 Antonio de Miqueorena, *Vida de la V.M. Josefa de la Purificación* (Puebla, 1755).
- 9 Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra y Dávalos, *Vida de la R.M. Sor María Josefa Lino de la Santísima Trinidad, fundadora del convento de la Purísima Concepción de San Miguel de Allende, obispado de Michoacán* (Mexico: Imprenta de Alejandro Valdés, 1831).
- 10 Francisco de Sosa, *Biografía de mexicanos distinguidos* (Mexico: Oficina Tipográfica de Fomento, 1884), 202.

- 11 Pedro Salmirón, *Vida de la Venerable Madre Isabel de la Encarnación, Carmelita Descalza...* (Mexico: Francisco Rodríguez Lupercio, 1675).
- 12 Ana María Josefa de la Purificación, *La obligación de nuestra hermandad...* (Mexico, 1797).
- 13 Francisco Pardo, *Vida y virtudes heroicas de la Madre María de Jesús, religiosa profesada en el convento de La Limpia Concepción de... N. Señora de la Ciudad de los Angeles* (Mexico: Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1676)
- 14 Nicolás de Jesús María, *El Christo A B C de la virtud y cartilla de la santidad. Sermón panegírico en la solemne profesion... de... la M. Ignacia Gertrudis de San Pedro* (Mexico, 1726). See also, Fr. Joseph de la Vega, *Oración espiritual a Sor María, novicia de 5 años en el religioso convento de San Felipe de Jesús de religiosas capuchinas de esta ciudad de México* (Mexico, 1691). This nun used to visit the convent as a child since the age of three. Once, after a temper tantrum due to her wish to stay, she was allowed to stay. At age 5 she started wearing the habit of a novice, professing 14 years later, when she was of age for that act.
- 15 Fr. Diego Díaz, *Sermón solemne en la profesión de la madre María Magdalena de la Soledad... en el convento de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, Regina Coeli de Antequera* (Mexico, 1694). Other examples of early and decided vocation are available. Agustina Nicolasa María de los Dolores, professed in the discaled Capuchines of Mexico City in 1705. This novice was the heir to a dowry estimated in 100,000 *dobloones*. Her parents opposed her decision, but Bishop Ortega y Montañez lent Agustina Nicolasa his support and persuaded her parents to allow her to profess. See, Joaquina María Zavaleta, *Copia de la carta escrita sobre las virtudes de la M. R. M. Agustina Nicolasa María de los Dolores, abadesa de dicho monasterio* (Mexico: Imprenta Nueva de la Biblioteca Mexicana, 1755). See also, Fr. Miguel de Torres, *Vida ejemplar y muerte preciosa de la madre Bárbara Josepha de San Francisco* (Mexico, 1721). This woman professed after becoming a widow, but she had been under the direction of confessor since age 6, and had lived a very retired existence within her own house before professing; José María Gómez y Villaseñor, *Sermón predicado el día 3 de marzo de 1803, en la solemne profesión de religiosa de coro... de Sor María Manuela de la Presentación* (Guadalajara, 1803)
- 16 Juan Antonio de Mora, *Admirable Vida y Virtudes de la Venerable Madre Sor María Inés de los Dolores* (Mexico, 1729)
- 17 Another excellent example is that of Sor Luisa de Santa Catarina, who was under the influence of Fr. Juan L. Aguado. See, José A. Ponce de León, *La Azucena entre espinas. Vida y Virtudes de la V. Madre Luisa de Santa Catarina* (México, 1750); José María Munibe, *Carta edificante que descubre la vida religiosa y ejemplares virtudes de la R. M. Inés Josefa del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús* (Mexico, 1805). The confessor helped this young woman to rescind a marriage vow, ordered her to make a vow of chastity and authorized her to take discipline regularly.
- 18 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz,” in *A Woman of Genius*, trans. by Margaret S. Peden (Salisbury, Connecticut: Lime Rock Press, 1982), p. 30.
- 19 P. Diego Calleja, S.J., *Vida de Sor Juana* (Mexico: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1936), 50. The citation belongs to P. Juan de Oviedo, S.J., *Vida del P. Antonio Núñez de Miranda, S.J.* (Mexico, 1702), Cap. V. Early in the XVI century, Cardinal Cisneros, one of the first reformers of the Church, had stated the need to put “humanistic studies to the service of religion.” See, Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 94.
- 20 Asunción Lavrin, “In Search of the Colonial woman in Mexico: the Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” in Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 23-59; Juan Luis Vives, *Instrucción de la Mujer Cristiana* (Buenos Aires: Colección Austral, 1940); Fr. Alonso de Herrera, *Espejo de la perfecta casada* (Granada, 1636)
- 21 Anon, *Vida de Sor Mariana Josefa Nepomuceno* (Mexico, 1808)
- 22 José A. Ponce de León, *La Azucena entre espinas*; Fr. Juan López Aguado, *Florido Huerto. Sermón... a la muerte de... Luisa de Santa Catarina* (Mexico, 1738)



23 *Ibid.*, 56.

24 Antonio Núñez, S.J., *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa* (Mexico, 1708), 2; *Plática doctrinal... en la profesión de una señora del convento de San Lorenzo* (Mexico, 1710)

25 Archbishop Francisco Javier Lizana y Beaumont, *Carta pastoral... que escribe a sus amadas hijas las religiosas de toda su filiación* (Mexico, 1803)

26 Asunción Lavrin, "Religious Life of Mexican Women in the XVIII Century," Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1963, Chapters III, V.

27 Asunción Lavrin, "Ecclesiastical Reform of Nunneries in New Spain in the Eighteenth Century," *The Americas*, Vol. XXII, October 1965, 182-203.

28 Pedro Salmerón, *Vida de la Venerable Madre Isabel de la Encarnación* (México, 1675), 19v; Francisco Pardo, *Vida y virtudes heroicas de la Madre María de Jesús* (as in note 11), 30. *Devociones* were special friendships between lay men and nuns, very popular in XVII Spain and Spanish America.

29 Antonio Núñez, S.J. *Distribución de las obras ordinarias y extraordinarias del día... conforme al estado de las señoras religiosas* (Mexico, 1712)

30 Archbishop Fr. Joseph Lanciego y Eguilaz, *Carta pastoral a sus amadas hijas las religiosas de toda su filiación* (Mexico, 1716)

31 Coloquio que compuso la R.M. María Vicenta de la Encarnación para la profesión de su discípula la hermana María de San Eliseo, Carmelita Descalza en el convento de Santa Teresa la Antigua, 1804. Manuscript Collection of the University of Texas, Austin.

32 José Ignacio de Cabrera, *Gloriosa exaltación de la mystica piedra maravilla. Sermón fúnebre.. en las honras de la R.M. Soror María Petra Trinidad...* (Mexico: Imprenta de la Biblioteca Mexicana, 1762).

35 Ezequiel A. Chávez, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Ensayo de Psicología*, 2nd. edition, (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1970).

36 Cartas en las cuales manifiesta a su confesor las cosas interiores y exteriores de su vida la V.M. Sor Sebastiana de la S.S. Trinidad, Manuscript at the Biblioteca Nacional de México, Archivo Franciscano; José E. Valdés, *Vida admirable y penitente de la V.M. Sebastiana Josepha de la S.S. Trinidad* (Mexico, 1765); Ignacio Saldana, *Sermón fúnebre en las exequias de Sor Sebastiana de la S.S. Trinidad* (Mexico, 1758)

37 V.M. Sebastiana de la S.S. Trinidad, Cartas. On page 40 it reads: "... que de mi no hay que fiar, que me veo tal que me quiziera quitar la vida, por no poder tolerar la violencia con que sin temor me rindo a mi apetito y anda todo perdido, y no se que me valga para verme libre de mi..." On page 2: "No me entra cosa, que me pueda consolar; y allí bramo sin poder mas; pero disimulando las amarguras con que vivo, y asisto al choro, que a veces me cuesta trabajo detener las lagrimas; y si esto es voluntad de Dios me de conformidad, y ensanche este oprimido corazon, que me rebienta el pecho de lo que lo reprimo..."

38 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Qué alivio puede caber  
En quien vive padeciendo  
Si el remedio de mis males  
Lo tendrán sólo muriendo

●●●●●●

Sácame de aquesta muerte,  
Mi Dios, y dame la vida  
No me tengas impedida  
En este lazo tan fuerte  
Mira que peno por verte,  
—Y mi mal es tan entero  
Que muero porque no muero.

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39 Juan A. de Mora, *Admirable vida*, p. 69.

Tristezas, penas, dolores,  
Y todo lo que me envías  
Que lo merezco, y es nada,  
como tu gracia me asista

●●●●●●

Que si padezco en tu gracia,  
El tormento es alegría:  
Y sin ella los consuelos  
Son abismos de desdicha.

40 Sor María de Santa Clara, *Subida al Monte de Mhirra* (Mexico, 1747)

41 Vida de la Madre María Marcela, religiosa Capuchina del Convento de Querétaro, copiada por una religiosa Brígida en 1848. Manuscript at the Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico. Archivo Franciscano. In fol. 121, it reads: "Cesaron las enfermedades sin preceder medicinas sólo como naturalmente... Todo era quietud, sosiego, gozo, y como quien cansado de un largo camino en que padeció grandes peligros, hambre, cansancio y todas calamidades, llega a su amada patria, se tira a descansar, y demás de eso se regala con la prenda que más ama..."

42 *Ibid.*, fols. 99 and 122. "... solo palacio y dilatado campo donde el alma y el corazón se dilatan y esparcen con tal consuelo que está el alma como la piedra en su centro..." "... hallé a mi Dios dentro de mi misma; hallávalo en todas las criaturas, no veía cosa que no me llevara a Dios, las flores, los árboles, los frutos, el agua, el Sol... los buelos de el alma eran continuos..."

43 Maria Anna Agueda de San Ignacio, *Devociones. Impresas por orden y a expensas del Illmo. Sr. D. Domingo Pantaleón Alvarez de Abreu* (Puebla, 1758). The rest of her works are in her biography, written by Fr. Joseph Bellido, *Vida de la V. R. M. Maria Anna Agueda de S. Ignacio, primera priora del religiosísimo convento de Dominicas Recoletas de Santa Rosa de la Puebla de los Angeles* (Mexico, 1758).

44 Maria Anna A. de San Ignacio, *Devociones*, p. 169. "Asi la Esposa amante que no se aparta de la vista de su amado, renace a una nueva vida de gracia, y crece tanto en ella, que viene a una Presencia de Dios unitiva, que es cosa admirable, y gracia muy particular, y aun se llega a una total transformación."

45 *Ibid.*, 245-47. "el alma se halla como libre de sus pasiones, y sin impedimento pasa a unirse con su amado de suerte, que no solo siente el alma la unión divina, aun en el cuerpo siente que le tiene poseido su amado... Todo parece fuego en el fuego... La voluntad inflamada, ama sin saber cómo, porque es sobre todo del mismo Dios encaminada, y en el mismo transformada viviendo, pero no ella; vive pero no su Vida, vive la Vida de su amado, y puede muy bien decir lo que San Pablo: 'Vivo yo; pero no yo, porque vive en mi Christo.' "

46 Melquiades Andrés, *Los recogidos*, 14-15, 31-32, 73-105.

47 *Ibid.*, 96, 105.

48 Francisco Pardo, *Vida y virtudes heroicas*. See also, Fr. Félix de Jesús María, *Vida y Virtudes, y dones sobrenaturales de la Ve. Sierva de Dios, Sor María de Jesús* (Roma, 1756).

49 Pedro Salmerón, *Vida de la Venerable Madre Isabel de la Encarnación*, 9v. Sor Melchora had professed in 1606. An example of another unknown author, although published, is, María de la Antigua, whose work *Estaciones en la Pasión del Señor* was printed in 1699.

50 Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Obras Completas*, 996-1023.

51 Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano. Descripción breve de los sucesos exemplares...*, 4 Vols. (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1961). See Vol. IV, *passim*.

- 52 Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso Occidental, plantado y cultivado por la liberal y benefica mano... en su magnifico Real Convento de Jesus Maria de Mexico* (Mexico, 1648), 88, 125.
- 53 Francisco Pardo, *Vida y virtudes heroicas*, 137, 140, 74. This nun used to put absynthe in her food to make it bitter and punish her palate, avoiding anything sweet. One wonders whether some of her visions were not due to the abuse of this drug.
- 54 Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra y Dávalos, *Vida de la M.R. Sor Maria Josefa Lino*, 56.
- 55 "Carta escrita por la Señora Sor María Teresa, Abadesa en el convento de Capuchinas de la Ciudad de la Puebla de los Angeles... dando noticias... de la Vida y Virtudes de la Señora Doña Leocadia González Aranzamendi, y en la Religión Sor María Leocadia, fundadora del referido convento de Capuchinas," in *Compendio de las Ejemplares vidas del P. José de Guevara de la Ca. de Jesús, y de su tía la Sra. Da. Leocadia González Aranzamendi, naturales de la Imperial ciudad de México* (Madrid, 1754).
- 56 Antonio Núñez, *Distribución de las obras ordinarias*, 18.
- 57 José María Gómez y Villaseñor, *Sermón predicado el día 3 de marzo de 1803 en la solemne profesión de religiosa de coro... de Sor María Manuela de la Presentación*, 16. This nun was doña María Manuela Fernández de Barrena y Vizcarra, a rich heiress from Guadalajara.
- 58 *Ibid.* p. 16
- 59 Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta, *Sermones panegíricos y pláticas espirituales*, 2 Vols. (Madrid, 1807), II, 300.
- 60 Antonio Núñez, *Distribución de las obras ordinarias*, 37.
- 61 P. Diego Calleja, *Vida de Sor Juana*, 52. The quotation is originally in P. Juan Oviedo, S.J. *Vida del P. Antonio Núñez*, Chapter V. In 1763, Sor María Josefa de San Ignacio, a nun in the convent of Jesús María, Mexico, paid for the reimpression of Sor Juana's *Protesta de la Fe*, which she allegedly wrote with her blood. It is difficult to ascertain whether she was extolling Sor Juana's dramatic gesture or using this text as a model of religious faith. In either case, it is significant that of all of Sor Juana's actions, this one was the most vividly remembered by some of her sisters in religion. See, *Protesta de la fee, y renovación de los votos religiosos que hizo y dejó escrita con su sangre la M. Juana Inés de la Cruz, monja profesa de S. Geronymo de México* (México: Herederos de la viuda de D. Joseph de Hoyal, 1763)