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Painting the Two Marías:

Sor María de Ágreda and Marian Iconography in Colonial Mexico

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Art History

by

Miranda Saylor

2023

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2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Painting the Two Marías:

Sor María de Ágreda and Marian Iconography in Colonial Mexico

by

Miranda Saylor

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Charlene Villaseñor Black, Chair

This dissertation investigates a collection of innovative and unorthodox paintings that aggrandized the role of the Virgin Mary. These works were inspired by a seventeenth-century biography of the Virgin written by the Spanish mystic Sor María de Ágreda (1602–1665). Sor María argued that the Madonna was Christ and God's equal, queen of wisdom, and co-redeemer of the world—shocking claims that provoked debate in Europe and the Americas. In the Viceroyalty of New Spain, artists embraced Sor María's dramatic valorization of Mary by creating distinctive images that elevated the Virgin's stature, altering canonical sacred subjects including the Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, Last Supper, Flagellation, and Assumption. By examining instances of colonial painting departing from orthodoxy, this project underscores how New Spanish artists were at the forefront of iconographic developments that transformed sacred art rather than the recipients of pictorial traditions inherited from Europe. Moreover, the

thesis promises to reveal the fundamental role of female authors and subjects in colonial art first by highlighting how a woman's visions inspired these pictorial changes and second by analyzing the exceptional importance of the Madonna in Mexican Catholicism beyond the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The dissertation of Miranda Saylor is approved.

Stella Elise Nair

Stefania Tutino

Bronwen Wilson

Charlene Villaseñor Black, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of numerous people. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Charlene Villaseñor Black. Since entering the program at the M.A. level, I have benefitted from Charlene's unwavering dedication to my development as a scholar. Without her, the first-year seminar paper on Sor María de Ágreda's portraits would not have developed into a decade-long research endeavor investigating this remarkable nun's impact on sacred art in the colonial Americas. I am grateful to have an advisor whose scholarship and pedagogy I so admire, and whose warmth, dedication, and generosity have facilitated my success in UCLA's art history program. I am also deeply appreciative of my committee members, Stella Nair, Stefania Tutino, and Bronwen Wilson. I thank Stella Nair for being a close mentor from my very first days at UCLA. Her key insights on Andean space and place have been foundational for my own approach to art and material culture of the Americas. I am indebted to Stefania Tutino whose expertise on the history of Catholicism greatly enriched the dissertation. And I thank Bronwen Wilson for her incomparable erudition and investment in the project. Her wise counsel challenged me to think critically about the objects of analysis, theoretical frameworks, and the dissertation's overall contributions. My sincerest thanks also extend to Miwon Kwon for leading such a formative Methods seminar and to George Baker, Sharon Gerstel, and Dell Upton for whom I had the privilege of serving as a teaching associate.

I want to thank a host of early supporters who paved the way for graduate school. To my teachers from the Montclair Cooperative School, Chris Posluszny, Jane Brown, Suzanne Nakamura, and Judy Bereczki, thank you for instilling in me a sense of curiosity, passion for history, and love of learning. To my professors at the University of Pennsylvania, Gwendolyn

DuBois Shaw, Christopher Nygren, and Loa Traxler, I share my heartfelt thanks for fostering my intellectual development as an undergraduate art history major and introducing me to the possibility of a career in academia. To my dear friends and fellow art history majors, Olga Symeonoglou, Courtney Raterman Casal, and Travis Mager, thank you for the late nights making flashcards, writing papers, and slogging through exams together. To Zeke Trautenberg, thank you for being a model of organization, hard work, and preparedness. I'm so grateful you introduced me to the West coast and UCLA. And to Madeline Frank, thank you for being a bedrock of constancy and trust since you approached me in Kindergarten to play blocks together.

The completion of the dissertation is indebted to the generous financial support from the University of California and other organizations. UCLA's Art History Department and Graduate Division funded my first years of coursework, preliminary research, and dissertation writing with an Edward A. Dickson Fellowship, Graduate Research Mentorship, Graduate Summer Mentorship, Harry and Yvonne Lenart Graduate Travel Fellowship, and a Dissertation Year Fellowship. The U.S. Department of State supported my fieldwork in Mexico during the 2018–2019 academic year with the Fulbright-Garcia Robles Research Fellowship. A grant from the Mellon Summer Institute in Spanish Paleography at the Huntington Library strengthened my dexterity with archival documents. And the Barbara S. Mosbacher Fellowship from the John Carter Brown Library made it possible to consult a number of important engravings and printed books.

This dissertation, which required extensive fieldwork in Spain and Mexico, would not have been possible without the invaluable guidance of individuals based in Madrid and Mexico City. Luisa Elena Alcalá, Ana Elena Mallet, Cristina López Uribe, and Clara Bargellini answered numerous queries related to archives, museums, churches, and primary sources. Luis Javier

Cuesta generously served as my host advisor while I worked in Mexico as a Fulbright scholar. Javier welcomed me as though I were his own advisee, inviting me to lectures, writing letters of introduction, and serving as an important sounding board during the project's early stages.

Throughout the graduate program, I was also fortunate to learn from a cohort of inspiring museum professionals. Working as a research assistant on the exhibition *Design in California and Mexico: 1915*–1985 under the supervision of LACMA's Design and Decorative Arts Department introduced me to the collaborative effort and interdisciplinary skills required to organize such a project. Thank you to Wendy Kaplan, Staci Steinberger, and Abbey Chamberlain Brach for introducing me to the curatorial process. I am also deeply appreciative to have worked with Ilona Katzew whose masterful exhibitions and keen eye for acquisitions serve as an inspiration. I spent the final two years of the graduate program at the Meadows Museum of Southern Methodist University as the Center for Spain in America Curatorial Fellow where I was given the rare opportunity to curate an exhibition and complete the dissertation. Thank you to Mark Roglán for selecting me for the position and to José Luis Colomer for funding the fellowship. My gratitude also extends to Amanda W. Dotseth, Anne Kindseth, and Anne Lenhart whose exemplary management and mentorship helped advance my dream of pursuing a curatorial career while simultaneously allotting valuable writing time to finish the dissertation. And thank you to Clarisse Fava-Piz and Olivia Turner for being such supportive and cherished colleagues.

The constellation of friendships formed throughout the program is one of the most unexpected and greatest outcomes of pursuing the PhD. Thank you to Jennifer Cordileone, Dan Abbe, Jamin An, Lauren Taylor, Meg Bernstein, Alessandra Amin, Hannah Thomson, Sayantan Mukhopadhyay, Rebecca Wolff, JoAnna Reyes, David Bardeen, Talia Lieber, and Rafael

Barrientos Martinez for making my time at UCLA unforgettably wonderful. Special thanks to AJ Meyer and Rachel Daphne Weiss for being the greatest motivators, writing accomplices, and sources of encouragement. Despite the inevitable highs and lows of graduate school, celebrating the victories and lamenting the disappointments together kept me sane

And lastly thank you to my family. Gustavo, thank you for being my constant companion throughout the dissertation process. Thank you for being the biggest advocate of my research, for accompanying me during fieldwork, and for making anywhere with you feel like home. When I've doubted myself, your unwavering belief in my abilities has guided me through. To Jenevieve and Charlotte, I feel exceedingly lucky to have sisters to whom I can always turn. Jenevieve, thank you for being the best listener and model big sister. Charlotte, as you know, you are my favorite person to go to museums with. Standing in front of artworks with you, I unfailingly learn something new thanks to your patient eye and attention to materials. Thank you both for being an infinite well of love and comfort. To my parents, Adine and Durston, your sacrifices to ensure I received the best education in and out of the classroom do not go unnoticed. Thank you for teaching me to look closely, do my homework, and pursue a life surrounded by art and loved ones.

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PUBLICATIONS

"Un Herrera para Dallas." *ARS Magazine* (Spring 2023). Commissioned essay. https://arsmagazine.com/producto/atribuciones-1-i-un-herrera-para-dallas/

"Néstor Basterretxea," "Rafael Canogar," "Modest Cuixart," "Francisco Farreras," "Luis Feito," "José Guerrero," "Antonio Lorenzo," "Gerardo Rueda," "Antoni Tápies," "Gustavo Torner," "Fernando Zóbel." *In the Shadow of Dictatorship: Creating the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art*, edited by Amanda W. Dotseth and Clarisse Fava-Piz. Dallas: Meadows Museum and Ediciones El Viso, 2023, p. 84–87, 98–101, 104–107, 108–111, 114–117, 124–125, 146–149, 164–167, 170–173, and 176–179.

Book Review. Anna M. Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), *Aztlán* 44, 2019.

"The Federal Building, San Diego, 1935," "Judithe Hernández's Imagery for the Chicano Cause," and "A Cry for Freedom." *Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985*, edited by Wendy Kaplan. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Prestel Publishing, 2017, p. 174–75, 178–79, and 328–29.

SELECTED CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

"From Outside the Tower: Picturing Saint Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle*." Luis Martin Lecture Series in the Humanities, Meadows Museum, Dallas. October 2022. [Invited]

"*Mystical City of God*'s Passage from Print to Painting." Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil. January 2022.

"Influencia de los textos de sor María de Ágreda en la pintura novohispana del siglo XVIII." VI Coloquio de Historia del Arte at la Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City. November 2019.

"Transforming the *Virgin of Solitude* Sculpture through Painting." Making Worlds, 1400-1800 Conference at University of California, Los Angeles. May 2019.

"Contrasting Modes of Representing Sor María de Ágreda in Print." Early Modern Iberian Conference at the University of Pennsylvania. April 2017.

INTRODUCTION

Painting the Two Marías:

Sor María de Ágreda and Marian Iconography in Colonial Mexico

On June 26, 1681, the Holy Office of the Catholic Church censored the book *Mystical City of God*, a multi-volume biography of the Virgin Mary written by the Spanish mystic Sor María de Ágreda (1602–1665). The Church took issue with the text's theological arguments it claimed violated doctrine including excerpts describing the multitude of angels continually flocking the Virgin, Mary's visions of divinity, the proclamation that her flesh and blood constituted part of the Eucharist, and her multiple bodily Assumptions to heaven during Mary's lifetime.[1] The censor concluded, "As this work contains many things contrary to sound doctrine, some things false, others apocryphal and implausible, it is dangerous to leave it in the hands of the faithful particularly unlearned readers."[2] Although *Mystical City of God* was removed from the Index of Prohibited Books less than a year after it was censored, the book continued to provoke controversy throughout Europe as a result of its divinely inspired female author as well as its

[1] "Son además señaladas con dignas de reparo las siguientes doctrinas: las funciones de Madre y Maestra de la Iglesia, ejercidas por la Virgen el la primitiva Iglesia, los frecuentes traslados corporales de la Virgen al cielo, las visiones intuitivas y abstractivas de la divinidad, la multitud de ángeles puestos al servicio de María, la concepción de Cristo con tres gotas del corazón de María, las tentaciones que experimentó la Virgen, la doctrina de que en el Sacramento del a Eucaristía esta una porción de la carne y sangre de María, que los Prelados son sucesores y vicarios del Padre eterno, la expresión 'nuestro Unigénito' en boca de la santísima Trinidad, los milagros ocurridos de la muerte de la Virgen, y varios otros detalles de menor significación." P. Benito Mendia, O.F.M. and P. Antonio M. Artola Arbiza, C.P., *La Ven. M. María de Jesús de Ágreda y la Inmaculada Concepción: El proceso eclesiástico a la "Mistica Ciudad de Dios"* (Ágreda: Monasterio de la Concepción, 2004), 68. All English translations of *Mystical City of God* and other Spanish texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

[2] "Como esta obra contiene muchas cosas opuestas a la sana doctrina, algunas cosas falsas, otras apócrifas e inverosímiles, es peligroso dejarla en manos de los fieles, particularmente de los lectores indoctos y juzga que esta obra debe ser prohibida absolutamente." Ibid.

theological contents that upheld the Virgin as the immaculate co-redeemer of the world who was equal to Christ.

Despite its tumultuous reception history, *Mystical City of God* made its way across the Atlantic to the Viceroyalty of New Spain where it was tremendously popular. By the eighteenth century, the book's author, Sor María, was so beloved that a member of the viceregal court commented that she "was spoken of publicly with such veneration, it was as if she were a native of Mexico."[3] A vast collection of paintings and prints illustrating the nun and her text created by colonial artists further attest to *Mystical City of God*'s esteem. For instance, Mexican artists often turned to the frontispieces fastened to the book's opening pages to illustrate Sor María as an erudite author while others responded to the book's vaunted accounts of the Virgin Mary's life. Strikingly, it is the very textual passages flagged by the Holy Office as dangerous that seemingly resonated with the artists in Mexico: they depicted Mary as an immaculate and visionary co-redeemer who was routinely surrounded by angels, participating in rituals, and leading the Church in ways that transgressed the Virgin's traditional role prescribed in scripture.

This dissertation gathers together a collection of unorthodox paintings created in colonial Mexico that aggrandized the role of the Virgin Mary inspired by Sor María de Ágreda's *Mystical City of God*. Citing Sor María's dramatic valorization of the Virgin, New Spanish artists produced distinctive images elevating Mary's stature and altering canonical sacred subjects such as the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Last Supper, the Passion, and the Assumption. These examples draw from specific passages of Sor María's revised account of the Virgin's biography and together convey the author's assertion that Mary was instrumental in

[3] Anna Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 88.

humanity's salvation. Although these paintings inspired by Sor María mark significant changes in Marian iconography that diverge from European precedent, their significance has not been comprehensively studied.

My dissertation is therefore the first to investigate how and why artists in Mexico turned to *Mystical City of God* as a productive source for representing a radical portrayal of the Virgin Mary as co-redeemer. Ultimately, the project will consider the following questions: What can these material objects reveal about Sor María's impact on Catholic imagery in Mexico? How was *Mystical City of God*'s exalted depiction of the Virgin visualized and transformed by Mexican artists? How did artists invent new iconographic possibilities instigated by *Mystical City of God*'s revisionist theology and experiment with canonical scenes representing the lives of Christ and the Virgin?

To address these queries, this study traces the history of paintings that responded to Sor María's theology starting with the earliest examples that emerged at the close of the seventeenth century and concluding with works produced in the late eighteenth century. The objects to be examined range from small private devotional paintings to life-size oils on canvas that envelop entire sacristy walls. These works were created by the period's most celebrated artists including Juan Correa, Cristóbal del Villalpando, and Antonio de Torres as well as lesser-known figures living in cities throughout the viceroyalty such as Zacatecas, Querétaro, and Puebla. The project also investigates the Franciscan patrons who were Sor María's staunchest advocates and responsible not only for disseminating her books throughout New Spain but for commissioning paintings linked to *Mystical City of God*. That being said, this dissertation is not a survey that aggregates every painting within Mexico that is directly or indirectly associated with the book.

Each artwork considered cites ideas penned by Sor María but each operates distinctly from one another.

Mystical City of God's role as instigator of novel pictorial modes introduces new approaches to studying how subversive ideas published in texts were folded into Catholic imagery. By examining instances of New Spanish artists departing from orthodoxy, this project changes our view of viceregal art by underscoring how these artists were at the forefront of iconographic developments that transformed sacred art rather than the recipients of pictorial traditions inherited from Europe. Further, the thesis promises to reveal the fundamental role of female authors and subjects in sacred art first by highlighting how a woman's visions inspired these pictorial changes and second by analyzing the exceptional importance of the Madonna in Mexican Catholicism beyond the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Returning to Sor María's own words, the author is steadfast in her advocation for beholding the Virgin Mary. When defending her portrayal of the Virgin as the "Immaculate and most perfect mirror of the divinity" she notes,

> Sometimes when we look into a mirror we may observe something new. When we look at Mary – as into a mirror – we know the Most Holy Mother participated in our redemption by taking the flesh of the Son of God into her womb […] In partaking of man's redemption, it seemed to me that the Most Holy Mary helped to restore man's resemblance to God, and in doing so by virtue of her own immaculate purity, she acts as a mirror in producing the most genuine likeness of God.[4]

Through portraying the Virgin as a mirror, Sor María encourages her followers to behold their Holy Mother. Only through the act of looking at Mary can the viewer truly reflect on and recognize Christ's image. The viewer therefore sees Christ anew as the Son of God, but only by way of his mother.

[4] Translated by Marilyn H. Fedewa, *María de Ágreda: Mystical Lady in Blue* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 187.

Although artists portraying both the Virgin and Sor María's likeness would not have been aware of this testimony, they gravitated toward passages in *Mystical City of God* centered on Sor María's revised accounts of the Virgin. Through the amplification of Mary's presence in scenes depicting the life of Christ and the exaltation of her own life, these works participate in the Sor María's call to behold the Virgin. In doing so, the objects confront the viewer with the argument that through Mary's elevated role she is crucial to human salvation as the co-redeemer of the world.

Historical Context

In early modern Spain it was widely believed that women, as the descendants of the biblical figure Eve, were morally inferior, susceptible to temptation, and even a threat to man's salvation. To restrain this perceived hazard, the Spanish monarchy and the Catholic Church restricted the public life of women.[5] Those who professed as nuns were more strictly regulated than male monks, as Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand imposed reforms that gave male ecclesiastics oversight of their female counterparts. In 1563 the Council of Trent expanded upon on these disciplinary measures by barring nuns from venturing outside the convent or receiving visitors without approval from church authorities.[6] Women's mobility was not the only aspect that was restrained. They were also believed to be intellectually inferior. St. Paul's statements in 1

[5] See Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Culture and Control in Counter-Reformation Spain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[6] See Elizabeth Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005); Mary Giles, ed., *Women in the Inquisition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Jennifer L. Eich, et. al., eds., *Women's Voices and the Politics of the Spanish Empire: From Convent to Cell to Imperial Court* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2008); Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

Corinthians 14:34 against women addressing church congregations were routinely cited as justification to prohibit women from speaking publicly in any form. And throughout the second half of the sixteenth century the Inquisition's Index of Forbidden Books banned countless devotional texts written in the Spanish vernacular out of fear that they would have a pernicious influence on lay spirituality.[7]

Within this political climate, the nun Sor María de Ágreda both conformed and transgressed prescribed gender roles: she never left her hometown and yet through visions she claimed to have bilocated throughout the globe as a missionary and received divine knowledge from God and the Virgin Mary, which she used to write *Mystical City of God*. María Coronel y Arana was born on April 2, 1602 in Ágreda, Spain, a Castilian village near the border with Aragon. The daughter of a devout family, Sor María claimed that as a child she had been educated by God.[8] In 1619, her mother converted their home into a Franciscan convent devoted to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, naming herself the mistress of the nunnery.[9] From 1620 through 1623, Sor María suffered from extreme illness and diabolical temptations. In an act of penitence, she imposed such severe physical harm on herself she lapsed into "*exterioridades*" or trances. In this unconscious state, she claimed to have undergone hundreds of bilocations—the act of simultaneously being present in two distinct places—by way of angels who carried her to evangelize Indigenous tribes in Mexico's northern frontier.[10] During these mystical journeys, she

[7] Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1–4.

[8] Thomas Kendrick, *Mary of Ágreda: The Life and the Legend of a Spanish Nun* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 4.

[9] Ibid., 8.

[10] Antonio Royo Marín notes that in the case of bilocation "the person is physically present in one place and miraculously represented by a sensible representation in the other term of bilocation." See Antonio Royo Marín, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, trans. Jordan Aumann (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1962), 671.

maintained that she catechized her followers and urged them to seek spiritual counsel from the Franciscan monks.[11]

In 1631, her bilocations gained recognition when the director of Franciscan missions in New Mexico visited the convent. Fray Alonso de Benavides had returned to Spain from the Americas in 1630 with the intention of receiving authorization to establish a bishopric in New Mexico.[12] In Ágreda, Benavides sought to verify declarations issued by the Jumano tribe exclaiming they had witnessed a Lady in Blue who had urged them to take up the Gospel. Benavides's meeting with Sor María bolstered his campaign to portray New Mexico as receptive to Catholicism, but concomitantly authenticated Sor María's revelations. Following their exchange, he wrote, "She convinced me absolutely by describing to me all the things in New Mexico as I have seen them myself…"[13] After deliberating with Pope Urban VIII on February 12, 1634, he met with the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide[14] – the congregation in Mexico most active in advocating Sor María's canonization. However, Benavides's disseminated reports of Sor María's mystical travel elicited critical attention from the Holy Office in Madrid, which scrutinized her visions in 1635 and again in 1649.[15] Benavides's report catalyzed the nun's prominence beyond the borders of her town. Most significantly, it caught the attention of King Philip IV who, after reading the account, visited her convent and started an epistolary

[11] José Ximénez Samaniego, *Life of Venerable Mary of Jesús de Ágreda: Poor Clare Nun,* trans. Ubaldus da Rieti (Evansville, IN: Keller-Crescent Printing and Engraving, 1910), 269.

[12] George P. Hammond, *Fray Alonso de Benavides' Revised Memorial of 1634* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1945), 15.

[13] Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda,* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 104.

[14] Hammond, *Fray Alonso de Benavides' Revised Memorial of 1634*, 12.

[15] Fedewa, *María de Ágreda: Mystical Lady in Blue*, 88, 161.

relationship with Sor María between 1643 and 1665, which comprised over six hundred letters.[16] In one letter addressed to Sor María, the King wrote, "I trust myself very little because I have offended God greatly and still offend Him, so I beseech you to fulfill your promise of crying out to heaven on my behalf."[17] As is evident by this excerpt, Philip viewed Sor María as a trusted spokeswoman to God and the Virgin. As part of her spiritual counsel, she provided the king with a copy of her *Mystical City of God* manuscript, which she encouraged him to consult during periods of political difficulty.[18]

Sor María's manuscript of *Mystical City of God* was published in 1670, five years after her death. She started writing the biography in 1637 following a series of intellectual visions in which God and the Virgin instructed that she record her knowledge.[19] The work is divided into three parts: "Conception" traces Mary's childhood from St. Anne's pregnancy until she is fifteen; "Incarnation and Transfixion" describe the life of the Virgin in collaboration with Christ; "Coronation" recounts the Virgin after Christ's Ascension and concludes with her coronation as the Empress of Heaven. Throughout the text, Sor María portrays the Virgin as an omniscient visionary: she witnessed the creation of heaven and earth, cooperated with Christ in all his prayers, experienced the physical pain of the Passion, and comprehended God's mysteries. Sor María elevated the Virgin Mary to such a prominent position that she is presented as Christ's equal.

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[16] Luis R. Corteguera and Sherry Velasco, "Authority in the Margin: Re-examining the Autograph Letters of Sor María de Ágreda and Philip IV of Spain," in *Women's Voices and the Politics of the Spanish Empire: From Convent to Cell to Imperial Court*, ed. Jennifer L. Eich, et. al. (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2008), 235.

[17] Ibid., 241.

[18] Ibid., 244.

[19] Rachel Fulton Brown, "Compline Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda and the Mystical City of God," in *Mary and the Art of Power. The Hours of the Virgin in Medieval Christian Life and Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press), 460.

In addition to depicting the Virgin's exemplary life and knowledge, Sor María ends the chapters with a section titled "Doctrine that the Queen Gave Me." In these concluding remarks, the narrative voice shifts from Sor María speaking in the first person to the Virgin Mary reflecting on the preceding accounts. This format operates as a rhetorical device that vindicates Sor María's intellectual visions. By not only exposing the reader to the Virgin's true biography, but also allowing access to the author's conversations with the Virgin, Sor María upholds her own role as intercessor.

Immediately following Sor María's death in 1665, the bishop of Tarazona initiated her case for sainthood, and in 1672 it was introduced in Rome. However, that same year the Inquisitor General ordered *Mystical City of God* to be discontinued until her writing could be reviewed more carefully—a decision that led to Pope Innocent XI placing the work on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1681. However, it only remained there for five months due to Bishop Ximénez de Samaniego, King Carlos II, and Queen Margaret of Austria's appeal to the Pope.[20] Although *Mystical City of God* only stayed on the Index for a brief period, the controversy persisted due to Sor María's emphatic defense of the Immaculate Conception coupled with doubt surrounding whether a woman was capable of writing such a work. In spite of the pushback, the Franciscan Order, Spanish monarchy, and local publishers were committed to securing Sor María's legacy.[21] The Franciscan Order, for example, founded the religious press Imprenta de la Causa de la Venerable Madre María de Jesús de Ágreda, the sole purpose of which was to serve

[20] Antonio M. Artola, "La Mística Ciudad de Dios en la Sorbona: un conflicto teológico a nivel europeo," in *El papel de Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda en el barroco español* (Soria: Universidad Internacional Alfonso VIII, 2001), 202.

[21] Anna Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue*, 56.

her cause for sainthood by publishing her and her followers' writings.[22] The Spanish Crown and Franciscans were as committed to advocating for Sor María throughout the colonies as they were in Europe. Church and secular officials were ordered to oversee the collection of pious donations for Sor María, which were specially exempted from royal import taxes.[23] And missions throughout Mexico taught Sor María's writings to the priests as a central part of the curriculum.

Archival documents housed in Mexico's Archivo General de la Nación provide evidence of what was an inundation of Sor María's writings: in 1690, an edict from the Holy Office of Spain stated that Sor María's publications could be sent to Mexico.[24] In 1699, Joseph Barela Camaño of Seville dispatched an initial shipment of *Mystical City of God* with the following note scribbled in the margins: "these books are not banned."[25] The annotation reveals a persistent uneasiness surrounding Sor María's controversial biography even after its approval by the Inquisition. Four years later, Don José sent a box of copies of Sor María's magnum opus to Acapulco,[26] and in 1707 Barela Camaño delivered an additional twelve boxes with volumes of *Mystical City of God,* this time without a note in the margins vindicating its contents.[27] Alongside petitions to circulate *Mystical City of God* in Mexico, documents also demonstrate a groundswell of support in the viceroyalty. On July 3, 1692 Franciscan friars sent alms to Spain backing Sor María's canonization campaign, and in 1698 and 1755 similar donations were also

[22] Ibid., 74.

[23] Ibid., 89.

[24] Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Indiferente Virreinal, exp. 56.

[25] "Estos libros no están prohibidos." AGN. Indiferente Virreinal, exp. 3.

[26] AGN, Inquisición, Volumen 726, exp. 4.7.

[27]AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, exp. 26.

delivered to Europe.[28] One of her most famous readers, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, references Sor María in her 1691 letter defending a woman's right to pursue an education, which suggests that intellectuals in Mexico were well acquainted with Sor María's writing even earlier than these archival documents indicate.[29]

In addition to archival material, library inventories map *Mystical City of God*'s presence throughout the viceroyalty, and many of these collections included the 1670, 1688, 1696, and 1708 illustrated editions. For example, *Mystical City of God* occupied the shelves of the Propaganda Fide colleges in Mexico City, Zacatecas, and Querétaro. They were also housed in the libraries of Colegio de San Ignacio de Loyola Vizcaínas (a school for orphaned girls in Mexico City), the Convento de San Pablo in Guanajuato, the Convento de Santa Mónica in Puebla, and the Monasterio de Santa Catalina de Siena in Morelia, among many others. A number of books I consulted included inscriptions in the frontmatter identifying the original owners. For example, ink jotted within the margins of a 1670 copy of *Mystical City of God* currently housed in the Biblioteca Franciscana in Cholula wrote, "this book is the possession of the sinner Maria Josepha de los Dolores."[30] A note scrawled in a copy of *Peregrinacion Christiana por el camino real de la Celeste Jerusalen*, an eighteenth-century book that cites Sor María, reads "Owned by Sor María Rafaela de San Ygnacio […] and given to Sor María Gertrudis."[31] Documenting the transfer from one nun to the next, this inscription elucidates how Sor María's ideas circulated within Mexican society. Based on these findings, we can infer that a

[28] AGN, Reales Cédulas Originales y Duplicados, vol. 40, exp. 325 and AGN, Inquisición, vol. 975, exp. 1.

[29] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *La Respuesta*, trans. Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2009), 90.

[30] "Este libro es de la pecadora María Josepha de los Dolores."

[31] "De Sor María Rafaela de San Ygnacio […] y pasó a el de Sor María Gertrudis."

diverse readership from missionaries and nuns to young female students read Sor María's writings and came into physical contact with the author's likeness as they turned the opening pages of the book.

Methodological and Theoretical Frameworks

This study is the result of extensive fieldwork identifying paintings in museums and churches as well as examining seventeenth- and eighteenth-century books housed in national, convent, and church libraries. I began my research with a two-month trip to Spain, where I visited the Biblioteca Nacional de España and read multiple editions of *Mystical City of God* and also analyzed the frontispieces and loose-leaf prints illustrating the various volumes. After familiarizing myself with the text, I was equipped to review the paintings through the lens of Sor María's theology. While in Spain I also visited churches and museums in Madrid, Seville, Soria, Segovia, and Barcelona in order to study the iconographic traditions from which the Mexican paintings diverged. Lastly, I traveled to Ágreda and visited the Convento de la Concepción, Sor María's convent, which is still active. There I met with the current abbess and was given permission to view the convent's collection of artworks, which includes some of the earliest portraits representing Sor María as well as objects that were sent to Ágreda from Mexico in support of her canonization.

I spent almost two years in Mexico conducting archival research, compiling a list of relevant prints and paintings, and reading colonial texts that cite *Mystical City of God* published in Mexico. At the Archivo Nacional de México, I reviewed documents related to Sor María's posthumous presence in the viceroyalty, locating records from the late seventeenth century that

indicate an early interest in shipping *Mystical City of God* from Spain. I also consulted records logging alms that were collected for Sor María's canonization.

To determine which artworks to include in this dissertation, I created a list of paintings previously identified by art historians Francisco de la Maza, Clara Bargellini, Jaime Cuadriello, Ricardo Fernández García, Elisa Vargas Lugo, and Luisa Elena Alcalá, among others, who had linked paintings with Sor María's text. I then categorized the paintings according to iconographies and in doing so, detected alterations and innovations instigated by Mexican artists that had previously been overlooked. After pinpointing these interventions, I consulted the Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas' photography archive and visited museums and churches where Sor María's writing was popular in order to expand the checklist of paintings with my new findings. With a preliminary list of objects, I consulted works housed in the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, the Museo Soumaya, the Museo de Guadalupe, and the Museo Nacional de México.

Although I was based in Mexico City, I spent considerable time traveling to other regions where Sor María was beloved, visiting churches, libraries, and archives in Puebla, Querétaro, and Zacatecas. I explored the rare book collections of the Biblioteca Nacional, the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Biblioteca Vizcaínas, the Biblioteca Palafoxiana, the Biblioteca Franciscana, Biblioteca Elías Amador, among others. I inventoried editions of *Mystical City of God* that had been published in Spain and sent to Mexico and logged the *marcas de fuego* that identified collections in which the books were originally housed. I also read through the numerous books published in Mexico that cited *Mystical City of God*. Based on these findings, I was able to map a network of publications by or related to Sor María that signaled her popularity. Additionally, I visited museums, Franciscan churches and convents including the Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, the Convento de San Gabriel, the

Museo de Guadalupe, the Templo y Ex-Convento de la Santa Cruz, and the Convento de Santa Clara.

As I toured collections throughout these cities, I identified more paintings that were either directly or indirectly inspired by Sor María's *Mystical City of God*. While some of these artworks have been published, many have not, and none, importantly, had been associated with Sor María. Thus, fieldwork for this project has brought to light an even larger body of sacred art that appropriated Sor María's theological ideas than had been known previously. On occasion, Sor María's text is cited explicitly in inscriptions, but the vast majority of paintings incorporate visual elements that align with *Mystical City of God*'s unusual account of Mary's and Christ's lives.

My methodology combines close textual readings with iconographic and semiotic analysis to consider a range of paintings spanning the late seventeenth through late eighteenth centuries. Bridging iconographic and semiotic approaches enables the viewer to glean the ways in which these paintings build on a long tradition of sacred art and simultaneously appropriate novel ideas from Sor María's *Mystical City of God*.[32] Many art historians of the early Ibero-American world deploy an iconographic approach and recognize treatises by Inquisition censors such as Francisco Pacheco's *Art of Painting* (1649) and Juan Interián de Ayala's *The Christian*

[32] For seminal studies on iconography, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). Many scholars have justifiably critiqued Panofsky's method and found fault in the tendency to search for a textual reference as carrying the key to interpret an image at the expense of considering the picture itself. See E. H. Gombrich, "Aims and Limits of Iconology," in *Symbolic Images* (London: Phaidon, 1972), 1–25; David Summers, "Conventions in the History of Art," *New Literary History* 13 (1981): 111; Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 236; Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of St. Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 18; and Hubert Damisch, "Semiotics and Iconography," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 237. For seminal studies on semiotics, see Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991): 174–208.

and Erudite Painter (1730) for their influence on sacred art. These texts prescribed proper Christian iconography according to Inquisition guidelines and were deployed by both Spanish and Latin American artists.[33] Art historians often refer to these authors' typologies of religious subjects and trace the one-to-one correspondence between the publications and the paintings abiding by the orthodox regulations.[34]

Unlike works influenced by Pacheco and Interián de Ayala, however, paintings citing Sor María challenge the idea of searching for an authoritative, original source. Sor María, after all, was not a censor or an artist, but rather a female monastic author dedicated to writing her divinely inspired account of the Virgin Mary's life which deviated from scripture. Further, *Mystical City of God* is also unusual for its inclusion of multiple voices narrating the book. For example, the majority of the text is recounted in the first person from Sor María's point of view, but the end of each chapter turns the narration over to the Virgin Mary who speaks directly to the nun. Thus, Sor María's visions enable her to tell an elaborated account of the Virgin and Christ's lives but also lay bare to her readers Mary's own exegesis which she communicated directly to Sor María. Accordingly, *Mystical City of God* provides a different kind of textual model for artists. Rather than a dogmatic publication written to propagandize the Church by enforcing a standardized iconography of religious subjects, *Mystical City of God* presents a surprising account of the Virgin Mary's life that lends itself as a source for artists to appropriate Sor María's visions and create new pictorial possibilities. Additionally, artists may have come into

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[33] Charlene Villaseñor Black, "Inquisitorial Practices Past and Present: Artistic Censorship, the Virgin Mary, and St. Anne," in *Art, Piety and Destruction in the Christian West, 1500–1700,* ed. Virginia Raguin (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 173–200.

[34] Agustín Bustamante García, "El Santo Oficio de Valladolid y los artistas," *Boletín del Seminario de Arte y Arqueología* 61 (1995): 301–317; Jonathan Brown, "Theory and Art in the Academy of Francisco Pacheco," in *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 21–83.

contact with Sor María's ideas through abridged versions of *Mystical City of God* or other publications that cite the text. Thus, it is important to think about an iconographic method that complicates pairing an artwork with a singular original source.

Walter Benjamin's and Talal Asad's theoretical writings on translation help decipher a more nuanced approach to iconography. Considering the relationship between the original and translation, Benjamin writes, "[A] translation proceeds from the original. Not indeed so much from its life but from its "afterlife" or "survival."[35] Applying this concept to the artists working in colonial Mexico, the paintings responded to Sor María's ideas decades after she had first drafted her manuscript and thus propelled their transmission. At the same time, though, these artists were involved in a process of selection and interpretation. As Asad argues, "Translation is never a direct move from discourse A to discourse B because it always involves an interpreting (mediating) sign X."[36] This understanding of translation therefore allows the viewer to grapple with the ways in which artists selected certain passages while ignoring others and pieced them together to envisage new iconographies.

Dismantling the notion of a uniform and linear passage from source material to painted visual translation, it is necessary to highlight the various ways these paintings cite Sor María's text. The first group of paintings deploy inscriptions to refer explicitly to the exact volume and chapter of *Mystical City of God* on which the artwork is modeled. For instance, Antonio de Torres places a cartouche in the corner of his *Last Supper* that quotes Sor María's words, and signs her name (fig. 2.1). A second group of works, exemplified by Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas's

[35] Steven Randall, "The Translator's Task, Walter Benjamin (Translation)," *Traduction, terminologie, redaction* 10, no. 2 (1997): 153.

[36] Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 4.

Dormition of the Virgin (fig. 4.5), includes Sor María within the composition as a witness who beholds a vision of the Virgin Mary. These paintings forge a connection between image and text by framing the central scene as a manifestation of Sor María's divine revelations. The third group of paintings include highly unusual forms that solicit iconographic interpretation. For instance, Cristóbal de Villalpando's *Annunciation* is unprecedented. Its setting, in an amphitheater subsumed by angels, is befuddling without background knowledge of Sor María's textual account that describes a similar scene. The fourth subset of paintings, which constitutes the majority of paintings to be discussed, is made up of pictures incorporating surprising visual forms that were likely transmitted from painting to painting and did not emerge directly from *Mystical City of God*. For example, although the Virgin's presence in Last Supper paintings was originally instigated by Sor María, as I argue in Chapter Two, Mary eventually became integrated within the standardized repertoire of characters present during the Institution of the Eucharist and over time, the iconography lost any direct association with Sor María's writings.

In order to approach this indirect relationship between text and image, I will turn to Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Zizek, and Maria Loh, all of whom grapple with the relationship between repetition and innovation in compelling ways. In Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition,* he writes, "The ideal constitution of repetition thus implies a kind of retroactive movement between two limits."[37] By highlighting the potential posited in the space between, Deleuze unravels the linear relationship between original source as influencer and repetition as influenced. Deleuze acknowledges the agency of the repetition and its effect on the original. Slavoj Zizek builds on Deleuze's analysis and adds "Becoming is thus strictly correlative to the concept of repetition: far from being opposed to the emergence of the New, the proper Deleuzian paradox is that

[37] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 71.

something truly New can only emerge from repetition […] The truly New is not simply a new content but the very shift of perspective by means of which the Old appears in a new light."[38] Lastly, Maria Loh interrogates repetition, but centers her analysis on artistic production. She describes this process as "a particular type of imitative creation that intentionally glosses, appropriates, or re-contextualizes previous works and builds into the logic of the work the moment of recognition of the repeated elements."[39] By underlining the artist's intentionality behind repetition, Loh demonstrates how repeated elements are not evidence of a lack of inventiveness, but instead comprise part of the experimental artistic process, noting that "originality resided in the way something was presented and the way that mode of presentation encouraged the viewer to see things in a different and unanticipated way."[40] If we think about the paintings under review in relation to issues of repetition and innovation, a more complex understanding of these works emerges. Iconography in these circumstances does not propel standardized forms but generates new ones.

My dissertation also approaches the relationship between *Mystical City of God* and sacred art through theories centered on visions. The project is beholden to Victor Stoichita's *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (1995), which poses the question, how do paintings render visible the unrepresentable experience of the soul encountering the transcendent? [41] Through analyzing pictorial and compositional strategies, Stoichita determines that seventeenth-century Spanish artists responded to this challenge by depicting the illusion of a spatialized

[38] Slavoj Zizek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York and London: Routledge), 14.

[39] Maria H. Loh, "New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 3 (2004): 478.

[40] Ibid., 491.

[41] Victor Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, trans. Anne Marie Glasheen (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 7.

vision—the visionary experience appears to take place in a specific setting, such as a desert or sacred interior, for example. Further, painters stratified the setting by ordering the space according to a vertical composition that located the visionary in the lower part of the painting and the vision in the upper part.[42] Stoichita also notes that within the verticalized composition artists incorporate pictorial elements such as clouds and light to operate as visible signs that embody the vision.[43]

Although Stoichita does not explicitly identify his scholarship as semiotic, his approach aligns with Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's discussion of sign making: "semiotics investigates how works are intelligible to those who view them, the process by which viewers make sense of what they see…[S]emiotics has at its object to describe the conventions and conceptual operations that shape what viewers do."[44] This conception of visual forms operating as intertwining codes stems in large part from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of intertextuality, which describes the incongruous strands of prior cultural discourses embedded within a work.[45] As Julia Kristeva explains, intertextuality asserts that a text is "constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is an absorption and transformation of another."[46] By outlining the visual conventions deployed to convey visions, Stoichita draws from both semiotics and intertextuality.[47] Informed by Stoichita's theoretical framework, my discussions of artworks

[42] Ibid., 27.

[43] Ibid., 85.

[44] Bal and Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," 184–185.

[45] Ibid., 203.

[46] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

[47] Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, 198.

shifts the analysis away from a purely iconographic interpretation to one that assesses strategies deployed to render visions visible.

Unlike Stoichita, however, I will examine the crucial role text plays in mediating the representation of visions. While Stoichita references writing by mystics such as Teresa of Ávila, he dedicates more attention to artist treatises, such as Vicente Carducho's *Dialogues on Painting* (1633), that outline how to translate a textual description of a vision into a picture. Yet this model, which prioritizes artist treatises, does not hold for Sor María's *Mystical City of God* and the related paintings and prints in New Spain. Colonial Mexican painting commonly incorporates banderoles, captions, and cartouches, a notable distinction from comparable European depictions, and one considered diagnostic of colonial art. These devices suggest an additional convention deployed in this region to connect the pictorial representations with a textual tradition. Moreover, the paintings considered in this dissertation engage directly with Sor María's work—either through inscriptions or subject matters. For example, the cartouche in Antonio de Torres's *The Last Supper* circumscribes a textual citation of *Mystical City of God* and consequently guides a viewer's interpretation of the painting (fig. 2.1).[48] Thus, a rigorous study of these paintings requires an intertextual model that examines how *Mystical City of God* was taken up as it became part of the visual lexicon and identifies the ways in which sacred imagery was revised according to Sor María's text.

While the dissertation would benefit from a closer examination of patronage and social history, in many instances, we do not know the specific circumstances in which the pictures were produced. In response to a dearth of archival documentation, I deploy a theoretical framework

[48] I will draw from Jacques Derrida's discussion of the cartouche as a pictorial convention that enables intertwining discourses to be embedded within a pictorial representation. See "Cartouches," in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 183–254.

that centers on the mobility of motifs, circulation of ideas, and citational strategies. When the pictures under review do have records detailing their historical patrons, locations, and audiences, I incorporate this information within the iconographic and semiotic analysis.

Literature Review

Sor María de Ágreda's captivating life story has attracted the interest of scholars for decades. Thomas Downing Kendrick, Clark Colahan, and Marilyn Fedewa are the definitive English sources recounting Sor María's biography.[49] Colahan's *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda* studies Sor María's writing as he translates and analyzes *Mystical City of God* as well as her lesser-known texts. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary celebrating the Immaculate Conception becoming dogma, Fathers Antonio María Artola Arbiza and Benito Mendio published the first major study tracing *Mystical City of God*'s controversial reception history in Spain, France, and the Holy Office.[50] Although this book is not strictly scholarly and was in fact published with the intention of reviving Sor María's case for sainthood, it unearths important archival documents that shed light on the Vatican's waffling support. A separate body of literature focuses on Sor María as the bilocating "Lady in Blue" who traveled to the Americas as a missionary. The majority of these publications examine how her figure was embraced in New Mexico as a model missionary.[51] Others including Silvia Evangelisti, Monica Díaz and Stephanie

[49] Thomas Downing Kendrick, *Mary of Ágreda: The Life and the Legend of a Spanish Nun* (London: Routledge, 1967); Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Marilyn Fedewa, *María of Ágreda: Mystical Lady in Blue* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

[50] Antonio A. Artola Arbiza and Benito Mendio, *Venerable M. María de Jesus de Ágreda y la Inmaculada Concepcion* (Spain: Monasterio de la Concepción, 2004).

[51] Ignacio Omaechevarría, "Un ejemplo maravilloso de contemplación misionera: sor María de Jesús de Ágreda," *Missionalia hispánica* 10 (1953): 585–594; John L. Kessell, "María de Ágreda's Ministry to the Jumano Indians of the Southwest in the 1620s" in *Great Mysteries of the West,* ed. Ferenc Morton Szasz (Golden,

Kirk conduct comparative studies linking Sor María with other women mystics and authors of the Spanish Empire.[52]

To date, the most comprehensive source bridging Sor María's biography and her legacy in both Europe and the Americas is Anna M. Nogar's *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue*. Nogar asserts scholars should recognize "that from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the mystical evangelization narrative and Sor María's spiritual writing were understood as two faces of a single coin by Spanish and New Spanish subjects alike."[53] Nogar opens her book outlining Sor María's biography, but then goes on to map the Spanish crown and Franciscan Order's promotion of her. She finds that both the monarchy and Franciscans were equally as committed to advocating for Sor María throughout the colonies as they were in Europe. Nogar also demonstrates that support for Sor María emerged locally in Mexico. The author meticulously assembles an extensive bibliography of colonial sources composed of Sor María's writing published in Mexico as well as devotional literature that drew from her text. Her archival research coupled with copious transcriptions and translations of historical documents reveals how Sor María de Ágreda's ideas permeated New Spanish society.

In addition to analyzing Sor María as an historical figure, art historians have gravitated to the nun as a subject of study. These publications can be broken down into two categories: those

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CO: Fulcrum, 1993); Ana Morte Acín, "Sor María de Ágreda y la orden franciscana en América," *Antíteses* 4, no. 7 (2011): 291–316.

[52] Silvia Evangelesti, "Spaces for Agency: The View from Early Modern Female Religious Communities," in *Attending to Early Modern Women: Conflict and Concord,* edited by Karen Nelson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013): 117–34; Mónica Díaz and Stephanie Kirk, "Theorizing Transatlantic Women's Writing: Imperial Crossings and the Production of Knowledge," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8 (2013): 53–84.

[53] Anna M. Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 2.

that study visual representations of Sor María and those that investigate the *Mystical City of God*'s influence on sacred artworks. "Iconografía de la Venerable María de Jesus de Ágreda," by Patricia Andrés González was the first article to examine Sor María's visual representations.[54] Andrés González organizes the prints and paintings according to iconographic groups including "Writer Inspired by the Virgin," "American Bilocation," and "Family Tree." Ricardo Fernández Gracia's *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda* is the second and most thorough art historical analysis of the subject. Expanding on Andrés González's concise study of eight works, Fernández Gracia aggregates hundreds of paintings, sculptures, and prints located in Spain and the Americas. He recounts how the nun's reputation was disseminated throughout seventeenth-century Europe by way of her text and by word of mouth, propelling the demand to "physically meet" the author through an illustrated representation.[55] Thus, Fernández Gracia characterizes these prints and paintings as transmitters of the nun's likeness and fame. Informed by these aforementioned authors, I have also investigated portraits of Sor María de Ágreda produced in Europe and Mexico that circulated throughout the viceroyalty. Beyond disseminating Sor María's reputation, as Fernández Gracia has argued, I compare the nun's Spanish author portraits with the Mexican prints and paintings that uphold her as staunch advocate of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.[56]

From the early studies of Francisco de la Maza, to later analyses by Clara Bargellini, art historians have looked at the connection between New Spanish sacred art and Sor María, linking

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[54] Patricia Andrés González, "Iconografía de la Venerable María de Jesús de Ágreda," *Boletin del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* 62 (1996): 447–463.

[55] Ricardo Fernández Gracia, *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda* (Soria: Caja Duero, 2003), 105.

[56] I first delivered these findings at conferences organized by the Department of Art History of La Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City in November 2019 and the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art in Sao Paulo in January 2022.

an individual work or series to a specific *Mystical City of God* passage on the basis of visual evidence.[57] De la Maza, for example, was the first to associate Villalpando's 1706 painting of the Annunciation with *Mystical City of God.* Quoting the exact passage from Part Two, Book Three of *Mystical City of God*, de la Maza matches the unusual iconography with Sor María's vivid depiction of "thousands of angels" permeating the space with a "rare beauty" and looking down onto the Virgin "bathed in glory."[58] Adding to the repertoire of subjects inspired by Sor María, Clara Bargellini examined a Passion cycle by the Zacatecas-based artist Gabriel José de Ovalle and argued that the unusually graphic depiction of Christ's torture was instigated by Sor María. Bargellini carefully analyzes multiple textual passages and convincingly pairs these block quotes with paintings of the Last Supper, Flagellation, Ecce Homo and others. Multiple art historians have followed a similar approach and linked *Mystical City of God* to other works including representations of the Adoration of the Magi, the Virgin Mary's Baptism, the Virgin Mary's Communion, and the Assumption.[59]

Another instance in which scholars have argued for *Mystical City of God*'s influence on sacred art in New Spain relates to prints embedded within the text by Johannes Wierix of Antwerp. Originally produced to illustrate the gospels *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia que in sacrosanto missae sacrificio toto anno leguntur; cum Evangeliorium concordatia historia*

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[57] Francisco de la Maza, *El pintor Cristóbal de Villalpando* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1964); Clara Bargellini, "Amoroso horror: arte y culto en la serie de la pasión de Gabriel de Ovalle de Guadalupe, Zacatecas," in X*VIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte: arte y violencia* (San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, 1994).

[58] De la Maza, *El Pintor Cristóbal de Villalpando*, 28.

[59] Elisa Vargas Lugo, *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra,* vol. 2 (Mexico: UNAM, 1985), 389; Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, *Arte y mística del barroco*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Colegio de San Ildefonso, 1994), 226–9; María del Consuelo Maquívar, "Cristo: la segunda persona de la santísima trinidad," in *Parábola novohispana: Cristo en el arte virreinal*, ed. Elisa Vargas Lugo (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 2000), 149–74; Luisa Elena Alcalá, "The Assumption of the Virgin, 1719," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, exh. cat., ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 217–18.

integritati sufficienti by the Spanish Jesuit Jerónimo Nadal, these prints were later included in editions of *Mystical City of God* that were also published in Antwerp. Kelly Donahue-Wallace and Alena Robin argue that these works on paper likely served as models for a collection of paintings on hide in New Mexico and a retablo in Xaltocán, respectively.[60] This approach falls in line with an established method common in the study of colonial Latin American art: searching for a European prototype—whether it be a printed image or text—that functioned as a model for the Latin American artwork. For example, scholars often note how painters in the Spanish colonies abided by proper iconographic typologies prescribed by Inquisition censors such as Francisco Pacheco's *Art of Painting* (1649) and Juan Interián de Ayala's *The Christian and Erudite Painter* (1730).[61] Most recently, Cristina González Cruz and Aaron Hyman have studied New Spanish painters' familiarity with prints by Peter Paul Rubens that were shipped to the Americas from Europe.[62]

Beyond art historical publications that focus specifically on Sor María, this dissertation is indebted to the recent scholarship centered on eighteenth-century Mexican art. Ilona Katzew's exhibition catalogues *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici* and *Archive of the World: Art and Imagination in Spanish America, 1500–1800* include hundreds of thoroughly researched catalogue entries on works that were often conserved and photographed for the first time. They

[60] Kelly Donahue-Wallace, "Print Sources of Colonial New Mexican Hide Paintings," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 68 (1996): 43–69; Robin, Alena, "El retablo de Xaltocán: las imágenes de Jerónimo Nadal y la monja de Ágreda," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 88 (2006): 53–70.

[61] Agustín Bustamante García, "El Santo Oficio de Valladolid y los artistas," *Boletín del Seminario de Arte y Arqueología* 61 (1995): 301-317; Brown, "Theory and Art in the Academy of Francisco Pacheco," 21–83.

[62] Cristina Cruz González, "The Circulation of Flemish Prints in Mexican Missions and the Creation of a New Visual Narrative," *California Mission Studies Association* 25, no. 1 (2008): 5–34; Aaron Hyman, "Inventing Painting: Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa, and New Spain's Transatlantic Canon," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 102–35.

also provide an invaluable index for a number of viceregal artists who have up until recently been overlooked by scholars.

Lastly, the dissertation builds on the impressive bibliography that analyzes the intersection between art and gender in colonial Mexico. Charlene Villaseñor Black's *Creating the Cult of Saint Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire* and more recently *Transforming Saints: From Spain to New Spain* introduce the social functions of images representing male and female saints and also provide a crucial methodological model for studying artworks produced in both Spain and its colonies.[63] Beyond sacred art, the dissertation was also informed by scholars researching the representation of female monastics in Mexico. Crowned nun portraits are the most popular genre, which has been studied recently by James Córdova.[64] Kelly Donahue-Wallace and Cristina Cruz González have also published on representations of nuns but have expanded beyond the profession portrait to examine works on paper that uphold these women as living exemplary lives modeled on Christ's physical suffering.[65] These works have been pivotal in understanding how Sor María was visualized in Mexico but also for considering the ways in which the paintings under review opened up these otherwise male-dominated compositions to additional female subjects. And lastly, Josefina Muriel and Jodi Bilinkoff have studied writing by colonial Latin American women and argue that these authors actively participated in the

[63] Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of St. Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2006); Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Transforming Saints: From Spain to New Spain* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2022).

[64] James M. Córdova, *The Art of Professing in Bourbon Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

[65] Kelly Donahue-Wallace, "'Bajo los tormentos de tórculo': Printed Portraits of Male and Female Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New Spain," *Colonial Latin America Review* 14, no. 1 (2005): 103–35; Cristina Cruz González, "Beyond the Bride of Christ: The Crucified Abbess in Mexico and Spain," *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 4 (2017): 102–132.

creation of Mexican culture.[66] Expanding on these approaches to gender, I analyze how painted imagery reveals Sor María's roles as an author and visionary, and how both her writing and images that communicated it, shaped theological discourse in Mexico.

Chapter Summaries

The dissertation is organized iconographically, starting with paintings depicting the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception, followed by chapters focused on her participation in the Last Supper and Christ's physical suffering, and concluding with her Assumption. The chapters' chronology unfolds according to *Mystical City of God*'s account of the Virgin Mary's life. Following the introduction, Chapter One will address the first painted series produced in Mexico inspired by Sor María—Cristóbal de Villalpando's *Tree of Life, Annunciation, Sacred Family,* and *Mystical City of God* (1706) commissioned by the Colegio Apostólico de Propaganda Fide in Zacatecas (figs. 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5) This series is remarkable in that it integrates sacred imagery with a painted iteration of the frontispiece portraying Sor María with Duns Scotus, St. John, and the Virgin Mary. It further alludes to the publication by altering the *Annunciation* according to Sor María's writing. This chapter will closely read each work, but also consider the series as an example that draws from multiple sources to elevate the status of the Virgin Mary. Not only is the series significant pictorially, its place in Zacatecas is paramount. As the first documented instance of a series inspired by Sor María in Mexico, the works arouse questions related to patronage and commission history. The city of Zacatecas and the Franciscan Order appear to be

[66] Josefina Muriel, *Cultura femenina novohispana,* Serie de historia novohispana (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1982); Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitentes, 1450–1750* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

major advocates of Sor María, and consequently the series will also serve as a starting point to trace her network of support.

Chapters Two and Three revise biblical episodes from the life of Christ by inserting the Virgin Mary into the composition. Chapter Two studies paintings of the Last Supper which unusually expand the Cenacle to include the Virgin Mary participating in the Institution of the Eucharist with the apostles and Christ. The chapter starts with a monumental painting by Antonio de Torres that features a cartouche crediting *Mystical City of God* and Sor María as the artist's inspiration for the work (fig. 2.1). The chapter then turns to earlier examples of the Virgin receiving Communion by the artist Juan Correa who also cites Sor María's version of the Last Supper but does so by centralizing the Virgin Mary and relegating the biblical scene to the background (fig. 2.21). Torres's painting as well as subsequent versions seem to calibrate Correa's blatant unorthodoxy by placing the Virgin Mary in an alcove to the side of the composition. Nevertheless, these paintings uphold Mary as a key constituent who receives the Eucharist as a means of sheltering her son.

Chapter Three considers paintings of Christ's physical suffering that challenge the notion that the Virgin was absent during her son's torture and instead insist she was present as a source of solace. These works picture the Virgin Mary as a witness peering through a window beholding Peter's repentance as well as Christ's Incarceration and Flagellation. I argue that these paintings respond to Sor María's account of the Passion in which she proclaims that Mary saw every episode leading up to her son's Crucifixion through divine revelation. Focusing specifically on the artists' use of the window, I maintain that the strategy of framing Mary within the recessed space moderates such overt unorthodoxy by placing her outside. The window therefore amplifies

and restricts the Virgin Mary: she is not granted full access to the foregrounded scene, but she is visible to the viewer as physically present and attentive to the events unfolding before her.

Chapter Four examines scenes of the Virgin Mary's passage to heaven that picture her Dormition and Assumption. Unlike the previous two chapters which revealed how Sor María's revisionist Passion narrative was initially embraced by artists and later integrated to such a wide degree it became commonplace, this chapter identifies a pictorial change that did not develop into a standardized iconography. In this chapter, only four works depicting the end of the Virgin Mary's life will be reviewed and linked to Sor María. This small selection of paintings testifies to the fact that certain theological ideas inspired by *Mystical City of God* were less prevalent than others. As a consequence of the Assumption's relative lack of popularity, we can approach these works as case studies of artists engaging with Sor María's theology in disparate ways. Ranging in style, format, and iconography, these works exemplify how artists developed a pliable relationship with *Mystical City of God*, one in which they responded to the text in varying ways that yielded innovative and diverse pictorial results but all of which upheld the Virgin as co-redemptrix.

Overall, this thesis looks at artworks in which canonical subjects in sacred art are depicted in surprising ways. Organized iconographically, the chapters examine representations of the life of the Virgin that elevate her role as both immaculate and a leader of the Church as well as paintings that insert Mary into scenes of the life of Christ from which she is traditionally excluded. Thus, this project considers the ways iconography gets mediated through different kinds of sources and institutions, as well as through the circulation of materials. By examining how new spiritual ideas can generate innovative visual forms, this dissertation highlights artists in colonial Mexico who departed from orthodoxy through experimentation.

CHAPTER ONE

Picturing an Immaculate Co-Redeemer:

Cristóbal de Villalpando, Sor María de Ágreda, and the Virgin Mary

Rising above a walled city and flanked by archangels, the Virgin Mary gazes toward heaven surrounded by radiating sunbeams and turbulent clouds (fig. 1.1). The Trinity descends from an opening in the sky and encloses Mary's body with the Holy Spirit hovering just above her head while God and Christ sit by her side. Cherubs swoop in from the right of the composition bearing lilies and roses. These emblems of purity, coupled with Mary's blue and white robes, twelve-star crown, and crescent moon, identify her as the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, the cult dedicated to the belief that Mary, like her son, was conceived without original sin. And yet, the picture's lower half expands the subject matter. Etched just beneath the walled city is the inscription "Mística Ciudad de Dios." Beneath the text, two seated figures behold the celestial space above. Accompanied by his eagle, the apostle Saint John the Evangelist sits with his quill in hand and book resting on his knee. Raising her pen toward the sky, Sor María de Ágreda dons blue and white robes as well as a nun badge emblazoned with a second Immaculate Conception.

Cristóbal de Villalpando (ca. 1649–1714), one of the most lauded artists of the period, created this painting in 1706. He modeled the composition on a 1668 printed frontispiece that accompanied the first edition of *Mystical City of God* (fig. 1.2) designed by the Spanish royal court artist Pedro de Villafranca (ca. 1615–1684). In Villalpando's version, however, the artist altered the engraving's design and produced the work as part of a series that included three additional paintings: *Annunciation, Tree of Life,* and *Holy Family* (figs. 1.3, 1.4, 1.5). At first

glance, the works' distinct subject matter appears incongruous: the series' first picture represents the Immaculate Conception alongside a seventeenth-century mystic, the second depicts a scene from the life of the Virgin, the third allegorically represents Adam and Eve, and the fourth illustrates the Christ Child flanked by family members. Together, the four paintings do not recount a cohesive narrative, nor do they present a uniform cast of characters.

As such, art historians tend to study and exhibit the works independently of one another. The painting *Mystical City of God*, for example, has been cited by scholars as evidence of the polemics of the Immaculate Conception in colonial Mexico while the *Annunciation* has been regarded as a painting inspired by Sor María.[1] The remaining works within the series, meanwhile, have traditionally not been associated with Sor María's writing. Even the publications by Francisco de la Maza and Juana Gutiérrez Haces, which print the four works together, analyze each picture's individual iconographies.[2]

A dearth of archival evidence further explains the lack of analysis examining the series as a whole. Neither patronage documents nor records detailing how it was originally displayed have been uncovered. Regardless, both de la Maza and Gutiérrez Haces argue that the paintings were likely made for a *retablo* in the Colegio de Propaganda Fide de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe,

[1] Clara Bargellini, "The Mystical City of God," in *The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain, 1600–1821*, exh. cat., ed. Clara Bargellini and Michael Komanecky (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 2009), 274–5; Antonio Rubial García, "Civitas Dei et novus orbis. La Jerusalén celeste en la pintura de Nueva España," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 20 (August 1998): 22–3; Ricardo Fernández Gracia, *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda: imágenes para la mística y la escritora en el contexto del maravillosísimo del barroco* (Soria, Spain: Caja Duero, 2003), 150; Anna Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 138–2; Elisa Vargas Lugo, "Anunciación," in *Arte y mística del barroco*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Colegio de San Ildefonso, 1995), 99; María del Consuelo Maquívar, *De lo permitido a lo prohibido: iconografía de la Santísima Trinidad en la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2006), 122.

[2] Francisco de la Maza, *El pintor Cristóbal de Villalpando* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1964), 204–206; Juana Gutiérrez Haces *et al*., *Cristóbal de Villalpando: ca.1649–1714; catálogo razonado* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1997), 317–21 and 412–3.

Zacatecas where they are housed today as free-standing works.[3] Although the Propaganda Fide was only formally established in 1707, a year after Villalpando signed his canvases, it is possible that the Franciscan friars commissioned the paintings while they were awaiting the royal cédula, which was issued in Spain in 1704.[4] Given the Propaganda Fide's longstanding support of Sor María that emerged in the seventeenth century, it is no surprise that the college would commission works illustrating the nun's likeness and her theological ideas.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first will analyze Villalpando's interpretation of the Immaculate Conception in tandem with Sor María's text and the devotion's iconographic history. The second section will examine how Villalpando situated the work in dialogue with the other three paintings and consider how it implicates the series' meaning. In all four paintings, I will argue, Villalpando gravitated toward Sor María's ideas that emphasize the Virgin Mary as an immaculate co-redeemer. Villalpando's painting of the Immaculate Conception picks up Sor María's vaunted Virgin Mary surrounded by the Trinity, angels, and the Mystical City. But by foregrounding Sor María and Saint John, the artist illustrates the role of visionaries as vital witnesses to the Virgin's immaculacy. Furthermore, featuring Sor María primes the viewers to examine how the Virgin Mary is depicted within the series writ large: throughout the other three works Villalpando intermingles passages from *Mystical City of God* with iconographic elements associated with the Immaculate Conception as a method of upholding the Virgin Mary as a central player in human salvation. Given the series' location within the missionary college of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, it is likely such themes of

[3] Gutiérrez Haces *et al*., *Cristóbal de Villalpando*, 317.

[4] For the history of the founding of the apostolic college in Guadalupe, Zacatecas, see José Francisco Sotomayor, *Historia del Apostólico Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Zacatecas, desde su fundación hasta nuestros días*, 2nd ed. (Zacatecas: Imprenta de la Rosa, 1889); Alberto María Carreño, "The Missionary Influence of the College of Zacatecas," *The Americas* 9, no. 3 (1951): 297–320.

redemption would have resonated with the missionaries in training who would have identified their own work with both the Virgin's and Sor María's.

Iconographic History of the Immaculate Conception in Spain and Mexico

Before analyzing Villalpando's series, it is first necessary to examine the history of the Immaculate Conception within the early modern Hispanic world in order to identify the pictorial precedent from which this chapter's paintings emerge. Although there is no book-length publication that analyzes representations of the devotion in colonial Mexico, Suzanne Stratton's *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* provides a comprehensive history of the Marian cult's polemics and iconography from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century.[5] Stratton describes Spain's uniquely ardent support for the doctrine which began with the Franciscan Order's advocacy as well as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's personal devotion. In response to the cult's growing political significance, demand for paintings of the Immaculate Conception emerged in Spain in the late fifteenth century.

The theological tenet's abstract nature elided a straightforward visual translation, however, and artists were pressed to experiment with an iconographic program that adopted pre-existing themes and motifs. For example, the earliest representations re-purposed the Tree of Jesse by inserting the Virgin Mary and her child seated at the pinnacle of Christ's genealogy, and by the sixteenth century the tree's generational branches had been cut to feature only Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne.[6] Other methods for representing the Virgin's immaculacy included the Santa Ana Triplex, which conjoined the bodies of Anne, Mary, and Christ in a stacked

[5] Suzanne L. Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[6] Ibid., 12–20.

formation, as well as rendering Anne and Joachim embracing in front of the golden gate after learning they will be having a child.[7] By the end of the sixteenth century, visualizing Mary's earthly parents fell out of favor following the newly revised interpretation of the Immaculate Conception: the argument identified Mary's purity as originating from the moment her soul was animated by God rather than through holy physical conception, thus nullifying Anne and Joachim's significance as they related to this part of the Virgin's biography.[8]

At the same time, artists turned to a new mode of visualizing the Immaculate Conception that emphasized the Virgin's body as the primary subject. This change emerged after the Council of Trent, when Immaculists argued that Mary must have been free of original sin if she were to have been exempted from corporeal degradation and thus could ascend to heaven in the flesh.[9] Stratton identifies two modes that artists subsequently merged: the Virgin *tota pulchra* and the Apocalyptic Woman (fig. 1.6). The Virgin *tota pulchra* (all beautiful) encircles Mary with emblems drawn from Marian litanies that extol her purity including the sun, moon, thornless rose, star of the sea, spotless mirror, among others. Originally found in the Hebrew Bible, these emblems were interpreted as symbols of Mary's prefiguration.[10] The second source derives from the Book of Revelation 12:1 in which Saint John of Patmos recounts a vision wherein he witnesses "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars […] And she brought forth a manchild, who was to rule all nations, And there was a war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon

[7] Ibid., 26–38.

[8] Ibid., 39.

[9] Ibid., 65.

[10] Ibid., 40–4.

was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world. And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, now is come salvation."[11] Artists gravitated towards particular iconographic elements from Saint John's vivid description including the radiant light, the crescent moon, and the satanic creature as a means of visualizing her triumph over sin.

In addition to the blending of the Virgin *tota pulchra* and the Apocalyptic Woman, Spanish theologians and artists underscored Mary's physical beauty, as Tanya Tiffany has demonstrated in her study of Diego Velazquez's *Immaculate Conception*. Tiffany analyzes the 1621 text *Hermosura corporal, de la Madre de Dios* by the Sevillian friar Juan de las Ruelas who argued for the devotional necessity of contemplating Mary's outward appearance. He claimed that Mary possessed the only feminine beauty that could be admired without fear of temptation, noting that beholding the Virgin's loveliness contained the unique power of bringing people closer to God: "by looking at this celestial beauty, even the most modest eyes…will become very chaste, and the most penitent and honorable men will certainly be greatly improved."[12] As such, Mary's authority as an exemplary spiritual leader centered on her striking outward appearance.

Tiffany also analyzes the ways the artist Francisco Pacheco (1564–1644) extoled the Virgin's physical splendor. When prescribing iconographic guidelines for rendering the Immaculate Conception in *Art of Painting* (1649) he writes, "in this very pure mystery, then, the Virgin should be painted in the flower of her youth, between twelve and thirteen years old, a

[11] Ibid., 48.

[12] [Si] de larga a los ajos para que vean la hermosura de acá, … por ley divina, aquí solo pueden sin peligro vero, porque, … Dios encubría y escondía en la Virgen, todas aquellas cosas que podían incitar … algún deleite sensual." Juan de las Ruelas, *Hermosura corporal, de la Madre de Dios* (Seville: Diego Pérez, 1621), 189–90, cited and translated in Tanya J. Tiffany, *Velazquez's Early Paintings and the Culture of Seventeenth-Century Seville* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 39–40.

very lovely girl, pretty and grave eyes, a perfect mouth and nose, and rosy cheeks, her very beautiful flowing hair, the color of gold; in sum, the most a mortal paintbrush could achieve."[13] He transitions to describing her costume, detailing that she should be painted with a white tunic and blue mantle and coronated with an imperial crown and twelve stars.[14] Pacheco simultaneously underscores the splendor of Mary's garments alongside the appropriate iconography.

Pacheco's own work depicting the Immaculate Conception (c. 1615–20) housed in the Palacio Arzobispal in Seville aligns with his written account: golden light emanates from her body as she stands perched upon a convex moon, a crown surrounded by twelve stars coronates her head, and celestial clouds engulf the background (fig. 1.7). At her feet a landscape with the symbols of her purity frame the canvas' lower edge. Beyond iconography, however, Pacheco's Immaculate Conception emphasizes Mary's physical beauty: her blonde hair drapes her shoulders, her flushed cheeks radiate against her ivory skin, and the sheen of her robes elucidate her body. Thus, Pacheco not only espoused the devotion to the Immaculate Conception by orchestrating a proper arrangement of motifs but by attending to her corporeal presence through the representation of an alluring young woman.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, Spanish paintings of the Immaculate Conception stripped down the iconography to envisage a Virgin Mary whose physical presence supplanted precise adherence to *tota pulchra* and the Apocalyptic Woman. Bartolomé Esteban

[13] "Hase de pintar, pues, en este aseadissimo misterio esta Señora en la flor de sue dad, de doce o trece años, hermosíssima niña, lindos y graves ojos, nariz y boca perfectísima y rosadas meillas, los bellisimos cabellos tendidos, de color d oro; en fin, cuanto fuere posible al humano pincel." Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, 576, cited and translated in Tanya Tiffany, *Velazquez's Early Paintings and the Culture of Seventeenth-Century Seville*, 31.

[14] Tiffany, *Velazquez's Early Paintings and the Culture of Seventeenth-Century Seville*, 31.

Murillo (1617–1682), for example, abandoned the symbols of the litanies in favor of a more triumphal Virgin elevated into a diaphanous space of golden light and silver clouds (fig. 1.8). Although Murillo clears his composition of landscapes and symbols outlined in the *Art of Painting*, he abides by Pacheco's emphasis on physical beauty, rendering his Virgin Mary with a sweet, youthful likeness. Mary's hands graze her breasts evoking a sense of tactility and sensuality. Adding to this emphasis on the body, a sea of nude putti swarms her figure. Thus, Murillo's work represents a doubling down on Mary's beauty that ultimately supersedes ancillary emblems as a means of conveying her immaculacy.

In contrast to the iconography in Spain, which Stratton argues was standardized by the seventeenth century, colonial Mexican painters continued to depict the Immaculate Conception through a variety of motifs, figures, and allegories that resisted a singular, codified image. Scholars Sergi Doménech García and Jaime Cuadriello take up the subject of the Immaculate Conception in Mexico and analyze how these works were particularized by viceregal artists.[15] *The Immaculate Conception of the Litanies with Saints Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus* completed circa 1558 is one of the earliest painted examples.[16] This grisaille fresco, located in the Franciscan monastery of Huejotzingo, Puebla, is divided into a tri-partite composition with the Virgin Mary surrounded by emblems of purity (fig. 1.9). A banderole unfurls across the upper edge of the fresco reading *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te* or "You are

[15] Jaime Cuadriello, "The Theopolitical Visualization of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception: Intentionality and Socialization of Images," in *Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World,* exh. cat., ed. Ronda Kasl (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2009), 121–46; Sergi Doménech García, "La recepción de la tradición hispánica de la Inmaculada Concepción en Nueva España: el tipo iconográfico de la 'tota pulchra,'" *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Revista de la Facultad de Geografía e Historia / Serie 7, Historia del Arte*, no. 3 (2015): 275–309.

[16] Sergi Doménech García, "La recepción de la tradición hispánica de la Inmaculada Concepción en Nueva España," 279.

completely beautiful." God the Father blesses the scene from above and Saints Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus flank the Virgin.

Sergi Doménech García argues that in contrast to Spanish artists who abandoned a strict adherence to the *tota pulchra* model, this iconography endured well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Mexico. The painting by Baltasar de Echave Ibía (1583–1644), for example, typifies the prolonged deployment of Marian symbols distributed throughout the space (fig. 1.10). While the landscape is replete with the familiar emblems of the *tota pulchra* including the ship, lilies, and roses, an unusual cluster of bodies commingles with the more traditional symbols. Doménech García links this scene with the biblical passage in the Song of Songs which says, "Who is this that arises like dawn, beautiful as the moon, resplendent as the sun, imposing as battalions?"[17] Within the lower right corner, minute loose brushstrokes visualize armored soldiers on horseback carrying flags ready for battle. This novel addition animates the Virgin's space, which is traditionally laden with stationary motifs, and calls attention to biblical passages that signal a militant defense of the cult. The *Immaculate Conception* (seventeenth century) located in the Cathedral of Texcoco de Mora is a second example of a painting that mobilizes the Virgin Mary's space by inserting even more figures of varying scales throughout the periphery of the canvas (fig. 1.11). Christ, God the Father, and cherub heads populate the upper corners while representations of John of Patmos, Saint Francis, Jacob, Adam, and Eve occupy the terrestrial space alongside the traditional symbols of her immaculacy.

In addition to *tota pulchra* imagery, Doménech García highlights how Mexican artists revived Mary's earthly parents Anne and Joachim as figures consistently associated with the

[17] Ibid., 287.

Immaculate Conception, a pictorial tradition that had also waned in Spain by the seventeenth century. He notes that Sor María's *Mystical City of God* was possibly the most decisive and influential work promulgating the recovery of these figures but does not elaborate further.[18] Artists including Juan Sánchez Salmerón (active 1666–1688) and Antonio de Torres (1667–1731) placed Joachim and Anne in the bottom corners of the canvas with leafy vines stemming from their chests and converging at the Virgin's feet where her body blossoms (figs. 1.12, 1.13). Ultimately, Doménech García argues that these pictorial elements exemplify the ways in which religious paintings in colonial Mexico allowed for variability in the implementation of theological principles.[19]

Jaime Cuadriello similarly identifies pictorial elements in the Immaculate Conception which contrast with Spanish precedent. The *Immaculate Conception* attributed to Manuel de Echave (seventeenth century), for example, combines traditional iconography with more unusual figures (fig. 1.14). Surrounded by the customary emblems of her prefiguration, Mary stands above Adam who occupies the bottom corner of the composition tied down in chains and dressed in rags. Bearing a triumphant palm frond, Mary appears as the redeemer of humanity who lifts Adam up from his squalid environs. A second example is Basilio de Salazar's 1637 *Immaculate Conception*'s use of architectural metaphors that frame the Virgin (fig. 1.15). Located in Querétaro, this painting renders the Immaculate Conception in a space overflowing with bodies, inscriptions, and architectural structures. Wearing the crown of the Holy Roman Emperor, the Virgin clasps her hands and gazes downward toward the scene below. Underneath her feet, Saint

[18] Sergi Doménech García, "La concepción de María en el tiempo. Recuperación de fórmulas tempranas de representación de la Inmaculada Concepción en la retórica visual del virreinato de Nueva España," *Revista de dialectología y tradiciones populares* 69, no. 1 (June 2014): 58.

[19] Doménech García, "La recepción de la tradición hispánica de la Inmaculada Concepción en Nueva España," 282.

Francis operates as the foundational root of her genealogy. Numerous Franciscan theologians and nuns congregate within the walls' interior carrying books and gazing upward at the Virgin. Cuadriello argues that here the conflation of the Virgin's body with the triumphant city positions Mary as the intercessor between heaven and laity but also establishes the Franciscans as the defenders of the city and thus Mary's protectors.[20] Following his visual analysis of the work, Cuadriello also cites a passage from Sor María's text that characterizes the City of God as a fortified and secure refuge for sinners.[21] Like Doménich Garcia, Cuadriello alludes to Sor María's writings as part of a popular discourse concerning the Immaculate Conception in New Spain, but he does not link her writing to specific artworks.

Building on Doménich García and Cuadriello's studies, I maintain that these Immaculate Conception paintings not only synthesize old iconographies with new ones, but also constitute the Virgin's immaculacy differently by relying on figures outside of her body. Rather than strictly focusing on her corporeal primacy, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexican artists continued to deploy varying combinations of inscriptions, symbols, architecture, and ancillary characters, in ways that resisted standardization. These additional figures establish a capacious space composed of intersecting mobile elements. Therefore, her immaculacy is not only constituted by portraying the Virgin's beautiful body, but by elaborating on what is beyond or outside her. Further, by inserting other subject matter such as Adam, the City of God, Anne and Joachim, and St. Francis, the paintings center on more than just her immaculacy. For instance, the heavenly city merges her body with an architectural metaphor, establishing the Virgin as sanctuary. Meanwhile, the representation of Adam and Eve allude to a genealogy of biblical

[20] Cuadriello, "The Theopolitical Visualization of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception: Intentionality and Socialization of Images," 126.

[21] Ibid., 126.

figures in which the Virgin Mary is presented as the one who can restore humanity. These ancillary characters and motifs therefore reveal the devotion's polemics and go to great lengths to depict the arguments in favor of the Immaculate Conception as well as the parties involved in promoting it. By amplifying the devotion's associations with redemption, in particular, it seems as though these paintings created in Mexico sustain the Immaculate Conception's significance by associating her with the mission of evangelization.

Mystical City of God's Immaculate Conception

Sor María wrote her account of the Immaculate Conception at the height of the devotion's fervor in Spain. In Book One of *Mystical City of God*, Sor María not only introduces the Virgin Mary but describes the divine visions she receives as the author. God speaks to Sor María directly and says, "I point to my Mother and Virgin as Teacher; she will instruct you and direct your steps to my pleasure and approval."[22] Following this initial exchange, the Virgin Mary enters the conversation, exclaiming, "My daughter, I want you to be my disciple and companion; I will be your Teacher; but be aware that you have obeyed me with strength, and from this day on you will not be recognized as a remnant of Adam's gaze."[23] From the outset, Sor María's dialogue with Mary establishes the Virgin's guiding role in lifting her out of Adam's sinful shadow. Following her conversations with both God and Mary, Sor María narrates the creation of the world citing the Book of Genesis. Rather than abiding by the traditional sequence of events,

[22] "Te señalo por Maestra a mi Madre, y Virgen; ella te industriará, y encaminará tus passos a mi agrado, y beneplácito." María de Jesús de Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios: milagro de su omnipotencia, y abismo de la gracia, historia divina, y vida de la Virgen madre de Dios, reyna, y señora nuestra Maria santissima, restauradora de la culpa de Eva, y medianera de la gracia*, vol. 1 (Madrid: B. de Villa-Diego, 1670), 19.

[23] "Hija mía, quiero que seas mi discípula, y compañera; yo seré tu Maestra: pero advierte que me as de obedecer con fortaleza, y desde este día no se a de reconocer en ti resabio de hija de Adán." Ibid.

however, she highlights that, "The first and most admirable image in the mind of God, after the eternal generation, was that of Christ and then that of his Mother."[24] From these early chapters, therefore, the reader grasps that the Virgin Mary, alongside her son, was conceived by God before his other acts of creation.

After citing Genesis, Sor María turns to Revelation 12 and introduces the Apocalyptic Woman: "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman covered with the Sun, and under her feet the Moon, and a Crown of twelve stars on her head."[25] Expounding on the passage's symbolism, Sor María clarifies to her readers that, "the night of guilt, signified in the moon, had to remain at her feet; and the sun which is the day of grace, was to clothe her entirely […] She alone was to be free from the night and the waning days of Lucifer and Adam."[26] Situating the moon as subservient to the Virgin's body, Sor María argues for Mary's unparalleled virtue.

Turning her attention to a different metaphor, Sor María quotes Saint John's description of the mystical city: "I, John, saw the new city of Jerusalem, coming down from God and Heaven."[27] Writing from her own perspective, she adds that the wall and doors "of this mystical City of Blessed Mary are so hidden and grand that with difficulty I, an ignorant woman, take time to reduce to words what I have been given to understand."[28] As she intersperses her

[24] "La primera y mas admirable imagen de la mente de Dios, después de la eterna generación fue la de Christo y luego la de su Madre." Ibid., 44.

[25] "Apareció en el Cielo una gran señal, una mujer cubierta de el Sol, y debajo de sus pies la Luna, y una Corona de doce Estrellas en su cabeza." Ibid., 64–5.

[26] "La noche de la culpa significada en la Luna había de quedar a sus pies; y el sol que es el día de la gracia había de vestirla toda eternamente. Y También porque los menguantes de la gracia que tocan a todos los mortales habían de estar debajo de sus pies y sola ella había de ser libre de la noche y menguantes de Lucifer y Adán." Ibid., 67

[27] "Y yo Joan vi la Ciudad Santa Jerusalén nueva, que bajaba de Dios desde el Cielo." Ibid., 140.

[28] "Los misterios encerrados en este muro, y puertas de esta Ciudad mystica de Maria Santissima son tan ocultos, y grandes, que con dificultad podré yo mujer ignorante, y tarda, reducir a palabras lo que se me a dado a entender." Ibid., 156.

authorial voice with Saint John's, Sor María placates her adamancy with gendered expressions of self-doubt and bolsters her position by citing the male apostle.[29] While she relies upon the apostle's text, she also justifies her own narration of events: "It is now time that human understanding straightens up and stretches in honor of our great Queen; and also that whoever was opposed shrink back and halt in dispossessing […] her divine conception […] for this reason, it has been necessary to address this mystery so many times."[30] Writing on the Immaculate Conception in the seventeenth century was necessary, she argues, to sustain the campaign of convincing disbelievers.

Sor María introduces Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, in Chapter Twelve of *Mystical City of God*'s first volume. Sor María describes Anne as a "very humble, beautiful, and chaste maiden" who had "infused knowledge of Divine Scripture and profound intelligence of the hidden Mysteries and Sacraments […] and her prayers were so accepted by the Lord to hasten the passage, that she was able to respond singularly."[31] Following her portrayal of Mary's mother as an exceptionally pious figure, Sor María outlines the sequence of events in which the archangel Gabriel notifies Anne and Joachim of their forthcoming child. Gabriel presents Mary to Joachim through a dream, explaining she "will be great, chosen, powerful, and full of the Holy

[29] For more on the rhetoric of feigned ignorance used by female authors in early modern Spain, see Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[30] "Tiempo es ya de que el entendimiento humano se desencoja y alargue en la honra de nuestra gran Reina; y también que el que estuviere opuesto, fundado en otro sentir, se encoja y detenga en despojarla y quitarla el adorno de su inmaculada limpieza en el instante de su divina concepción […] y por esto ha sido forzoso tocar tantas veces en este misterio…" Ibid., 17, cited in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 54 and Kate Risse, "Strategy of a Provincial Nun: Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda's Response," *Ciberletras* 17 (2007): 8.

[31] "Con estos dones prevenida oraba continuamente por la venida de el Mesías: y sus ruegos fueron tan aceptos al Señor para acelerar el paso, que singularmente." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 100.

Spirit: and because of Anne's sterility, her conception will be miraculous."[32] For Anne's announcement, Gabriel approaches her in person declaring, "You will give birth to a daughter, who by Divine ordination will be called Mary. It will be the cloud that will pour out the dew from Heaven to refresh mortals: and in it the prophecies of your ancient Parents will be fulfilled. It will be the door of life and health for the children of Adam."[33] Gabriel's announcements to both Joachim and Anne stress God's role in Mary's sinless conception. Through Gabriel's words, Sor María introduces Mary's immaculacy as a way of upholding her role as a spiritual leader and redeemer.

Sor María then returns to the Book of Revelation, dedicating three chapters to transcribing scriptural passages and subsequently analyzing each quotation. In Chapter Seventeen, for instance, Sor María cites Saint John as he recollects his visions: "And I, John, saw the new Holy City Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven; prepared, as a bride adorned for her husband."[34] Sor María explains that Saint John "calls it a new Jerusalem, because all its gifts, greatness, and virtues are new, and cause new wonder to the Saints […] and when the other children of Adam descend from earth, earthly, and tainted by it, this Queen of all creation comes from Heaven, as a descendant only of God by innocence and grace."[35] Here Sor

[32] "Será grande, escogida, poderosa, y llena de el Espíritu Santo: y por la esterilidad de Ana será milagrosa su concepción." Ibid., 108.

[33] "Parirás una hija, que por Divina ordenación se llamará María. Será bendita entre las mujeres, y llena de el Espíritu Santo. Será la nube, que derramará el rocío de el Cielo para refrigerio de los mortales." Ibid., 110.

[34] "Y yo Joan vi la Ciudad Santa Jerusalén nueva, que bajaba de Dios desde el Cielo; preparada, como esposa adornada para su esposo." Ibid., 141.

[35] Por esto la llama Jerusalén nueva, porque todos sus dones, grandeza, y virtudes son nuevas, y causan nueva maravilla a los Santos […]Y cuando los demás hijos de Adán descienden de la tierra, terrenos, y maculados por ella, esta Reyna de todo lo criado viene de el Cielo, como descendiente solo de Dios por la inocencia y gracia." Ibid., 144.

María distinguishes the Virgin Mary's birth as exceptional because she descends from heaven rather than earth.

Chapter Eighteen quotes Saint John's vivid description of the city's architectural design: "It had a great and high wall with twelve gates with twelve angels in them […] and the city was squared, and its longitude is as much as its latitude […] and the fabric of its wall was made of jasper stone: but the City was purest gold, similar to pure glass."[36] Following the citation, Sor María expounds upon Saint John's metaphor: "Here he declares that the Holy City of Jerusalem he was shown is the woman, wife of the lamb" and adds that according to John's description, the Virgin was to be understood as a "sacred refuge, protection, and defense of all men […] and just as she cooperated with the Passion, and gave her Son, to suffer for the human lineage, so the Lord himself made her a participant in the dignity of Redeemer."[37] Sor María's exegesis centered on the Books of Genesis and Revelation demonstrates her mastery of scripture and acute understanding of the biblical metaphors that equate the Virgin Mary with protection and redemption. Further, she develops the story of Mary's sinless birth by detailing the lives of Anne and Joachim. Together, these chapters establish the Virgin Mary's role of co-redeemer as contingent on her Immaculate Conception.

Coalescing Sor María with the Immaculate Conception

How did the devotion of the Immaculate Conception come to be associated with Sor María? Even before the first edition of *Mystical City of God* was issued in print, she was known as an

[36] "[Y] su luz era semejante a una piedra preciosa como piedra de jaspe así como cristal. Y tenia un grande y alto muro con doce puertas con doce Ángeles en ellas." Ibid., 153–4.

[37] "[S]agrado refugio, amparo, y defensa de todos los hombres […] Y así como ella cooperó a la Pasión, y dio a su Hijo, en que padeciese por el linaje humano, así también el mismo Señor la hizo participante de la dignidad de Redentora." Ibid., 157–9.

advocate of the Marian cult. Suzanne Stratton, for example, highlights correspondence between Sor María and Spanish king Philip IV in which the nun reminded the monarch of the Virgin's significance in Spain: "We must believe in the Queen of Heaven as the intercessor, mediatrix, advocate, and restorer of this monarchy […] I hope that you will be very powerful above all else in order to assure the definition of the mystery of the Conception of the Queen of Heaven."[38] In the letter, Sor María espouses her own vaunted interpretation of the Virgin Mary and also uses the opportunity to advance the argument that the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception should be declared dogma. Stressing a sense of urgency, Sor María warned that the very survival of the monarch's reign was contingent on the Philip's defense of Mary's immaculacy.

Following Sor María's death, the Franciscan Order solidified the association between the nun and the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. The Franciscans originally supported *Mystical City of God* in large part because the book's lengthy passages on the Marian devotion aligned with their own centuries-long argument that the Virgin was untainted by original sin. The order had historically turned to the fourteenth-century theologian Duns Scotus to argue against Thomas Aquinas's stance that the Virgin was only released from sin after conception. According to Duns Scotus and his Franciscan followers, Anne and Joachim conceived Mary miraculously and thus Mary's divine grace was bestowed before birth.[39] By the fifteenth century, Franciscans in Spain formally endorsed the Immaculate Conception and in 1645 they made their support even more explicit by declaring her the patron of the order.[40] With the publication of her writing in 1670,

[38] Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art*, 100, originally quoted in Emilia Pardo Bazán, *Vida de la Virgen María según la Venerable Sor María de Jesus de Agreda. Prólogo de Emilia Pardo Bazán* (Barcelona: Montaner y Simón, 1941), 16.

[39] Ibid., 3–4

[40] Ibid., 98.

Sor María came to be paired with Duns Scotus as Spain's primary spokeswoman of the Immaculate Conception.[41] Her confessor and biographer, Fray Joseph Ximénez Samaniego, had previously written a biography of Duns Scotus which was published in 1668, just two years before *Mystical City of God*. He likely fostered the association between the two even though Sor María herself never referenced the medieval friar.

Mystical City of God's detractors within the Church also propelled the associations between the author and Virgin. In 1672 the Inquisitor General ordered that all extant copies of the book be pulled from circulation to consider the work more carefully before continuing its distribution. In 1685 a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Spanish Inquisition concluded it was worthy of being read but the Dominicans present at the gathering took issue with its Scotist precepts.[42] In 1696, the Sorbonne censored the book following its publication in France, listing a plethora of reasons for the ban: "it referred all [Mary's] graces to the Immaculate Conception; that it attributed to her the government of the Church; that is designated her in every respect the Mother of Mercy and the Mediatrix of Grace, and pretended that St. Ann had not contracted sin in her birth, besides a number of other imaginary and scandalous assertions."[43] While the Sorbonne commented that *Mystical City of God* contained multiple errors, it focused above all else on *Mystical City of God*'s concentration themes related to Mary's conception and her participation in humanity's salvation. Sor María's notoriety, therefore, in many ways stemmed from her version of the Immaculate Conception, which was linked with the Virgin's elevated role of redeemer.

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[41] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 64.

[42] Ibid., 56.

[43] Thomas Campbell, "Maria de Agreda," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), quoted in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 57.

The Vatican also took issue with the Immaculist content. In 1692 Pope Innocent XII ordered the *procurador* or administrator of Sor María's cause to respond to the 1681 censure, but Franciscans in Spain only replied decades later in 1729. Nogar suggests that the delay was a result of the Franciscans' drawn-out deliberation of how to reference the Immaculate Conception without overtly challenging Church officials.[44] Ultimately, the Franciscans' written justification failed when in 1773 Sor María's case for canonization was declared perpetually silent. In an attempt to mitigate the controversy galvanized by *Mystical City of God*'s detractors who opposed the Immaculist arguments, the Spanish monarchy discussed a possible strategy of reopening her case and separating her cause from her writing. But Spain's ambassador to the Vatican reported that this would not be possible since "His Holiness said that he did not understand how one could arrive at the separation of two branches that have always been indivisible and which in and of themselves should be seen as essentially connected."[45] The decision to close the case for canonization demonstrates that by the eighteenth century, Sor María's reputation as an Immaculist author was too important to delink her from the Marian devotion, even if it meant the demise of her case for sainthood.

Despite the controversy in Europe, Sor María's writing on the Immaculate Conception was routinely cited by Mexican publications. *Chronografía sagrada de la vida de Christo Nuestro Redemptor* (1696), the earliest abridged version of *Mystical City of God* published in the viceroyalty, is dedicated to Saints Anne and Joachim, "who were a mine of crystal from which a stainless mirror was formed…parents of the best mother, and grandparents of the most precious

[44] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 57–8.

[45] Ibid., 59, originally cited in José María Pou y Martí, "El arzobispo Eleta y el término de la causa de la Venerable María de Ágreda," *Archivo ibero-americano* 10, no. 50 (1923/5): 363.

grandson."[46] The author, the Franciscan friar Agustín de Vetancurt, produced this abridged edition narrating key episodes including Anne and Joachim's marriage, Mary's Immaculate Conception, Christ's death and resurrection, and the evangelization of the apostles. When describing Mary's immaculacy, the book notes, "the following Saturday, the eighth of December, the second pure conception occurred, the Almighty creating the soul of his Mother, filling her body with it, so that she entered into this world the more pure child."[47] Despite the book's title, which focuses on Christ, the publication's contents follow *Mystical City of God*'s model of magnifying the significance of the Virgin Mary's conception and purity.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, three additional books citing Sor María's account of the Immaculate Conception were also published. *Novena en honor de los mil angeles de guarda de la Santissima Virgen Maria* (1747) specifically reprinted Sor María's discussion of angels from Book One. *Peregrinación christiana por el camino real de la celeste Jerusalen* (1756) describes New Jerusalem. And *Novena sagrada que a la Inmaculada Concepcion de la Serenissima reyna de los angeles…* (1759) entitled the supplicant to indulgences for the prayer's advocation of Sor María's Immaculate Conception theology.[48] Curiously *Peregrinación*

[46] "De los que son mina de cristal de que se formó el espejo sin mancha . . . Padres de la mejor Madre, y Abuelos de el [sic] Nieto más precioso." Agustín de Vetancurt, *Chronografía sagrada de la vida de Christo Nuestro Redemptor: Predicación evangélica, con las circunstancias de lugar, y tiempo en que obró los misterios de nuestra redención, obras de su omnipotencia, y maravillas de su gracia en Maria Santíssima, y en el seraphico padre S. Francisco, y su apostólica religión* (Mexico City: Doña Maria de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1696), 3, quoted and translated in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 106–7.

[47] Ibid.

[48] *Novena en honor de los mil Angeles de Guarda de la Santissima Virgen Maria Nuestra Señora. Todo lo que en ella se contiene, está sacado de lo que Soror Maria de Jesus de Agreda, trae en la Mistica Ciudad de Dios, part. 1. Lib. 1. Cap. 14 desde num. 201 hasta el num 207* (Puebla: Viuda de Miguel Ortega, 1747); Joachín Osuna, *Peregrinación christiana por el camino real de la celeste Jerusalén: dividida en nueve jornadas, con quatro hospicios, que son unas estaciones devotas al modo del Via-Crucis, guirnaldas a la sagrada Passión de Christo, y dolores de su santíssima Madre: añadida al fin una refección spiritual de oraciones para antes, y despues de recibir los santos sacramentos de la penitencia, y comunión* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Mexicana, 1756); *Novena sagrada, que a la Inmaculada Concepción de la serenissima reyna de los angeles Maria Santissima Nuestra Señora, que*

christiana cites *Mystical City of God* when in actuality it quotes an excerpt describing New Jerusalem that originated from the Book of Revelation. Thus, these publications demonstrate an interest in a range of passages from Volume One and an investment in Sor María's authoritative account of the Virgin's conception as part of the story of humanity's creation.

Mexican painters also were keen to portray Sor María visually as a promoter of the Immaculate Conception. Works such as the one by Villalpando and a painting in the Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica reveal a direct link with Villafranca's iconographic antecedent (fig. 1.16). The Virgin Mary occupies the center of the composition hovering above the Mystical City with Saint John the Evangelist, Sor María, as well as Duns Scotus below. Additional paintings in the Propaganda Fide de San Fernando in Mexico City and the Ex-Convento de San Francisco in Pachuca feature her with other Franciscans who gather in support of the Marian cult (figs. 1.17, 1.18). Others portray her as a branch of a genealogical tree representing the Franciscan Order gathering around the Immaculate Conception or as part of a procession parading in front of the Marian devotion (figs. 1.19, 1.20).[49] Significantly, Mexican painters do not seem to follow the predominant printed model that visualized Sor María as cloistered. Instead, they render Sor María as a figure amongst a larger assembly of mostly male bodies who populate the lower register of the picture underneath the airborne Immaculate Conception. In Mexico, therefore, artists mobilized Sor María's figure in a divergent way from the European printers. Sor María's presence in scenes of the Immaculate Conception broadened her renown; no longer strictly the author of her writings about, and speaking for, the Virgin, she became a significant proponent of the Marian cult which bolstered devotion to the Virgin.

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consagró la afectuosa devoción de los Religiosos Descalzos de N.S.P.S. Francisco, cited in Nogar, *Quill and Cross on the Borderlands*, 119–22.

[49] Fernández García, *Iconografía de Sor María de Agreda*, 163, 215.

The Propaganda Fide and the Colegio Apostólico de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Now that we have outlined the history of representing the Immaculate Conception in Spain and Mexico and reviewed Sor María's introduction to the Virgin Mary in *Mystical City of God*, we can return to Zacatecas. In spite of the lack of archival records related to the commission of Villalpando's series, there is ample documentation revealing the Propaganda Fide's support for Sor María's theology in the city. The Propaganda Fide's mission was to train missionaries to cultivate the faith amongst Catholics on both sides of the Atlantic and convert Indigenous populations throughout the Spanish Empire.[50] It developed in Mexico in the late seventeenth century with the arrival of Franciscan friar Antonio Llinás who was responsible for organizing support to found the apostolic colleges. Born in Mallorca in 1635, he first traveled to the viceroyalty in 1664 where he worked as a lector in the Franciscan province of Michoacán for eleven years.[51]

In 1679, Llinás traveled back to Spain to request permission to set up Franciscan seminaries in the Cerro Gordo region of northern Mexico. As part of his campaign, he met with the minister general of the Franciscan Order, Fray Joseph Ximénez Samaniego, Sor María's biographer and former confessor. Ximénez Samaniego endorsed Llinas's mission noting:

> There should be from the provinces of Spain a mission of twenty-four Religious of known virtue, zealous for the greater glory of God and the propagation of the Catholic Faith, who should found in those parts a convent or college of missionaries, where they should be maintained and draw to themselves others of the same spirit, fluent in the

[50] For the history of the Franciscan Colleges for the Propagation of the Faith and the institution's missionary training program in the Hispanic world, see David Rex Galindo, *To Sin No More: Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[51] Ibid., 15.

> various languages of the Indians, and whence they could proceed to the active missions as may seem best to them.[52]

In addition to obtaining permission, Llinás also received from Ximénes Samaniego (or possibly an associate) a copy of Sor María's 1631 letter in which she described her visions of bilocating to the New World and evangelizing the Indigenous peoples.[53] This letter is significant because it signals an awareness amongst Franciscan missionaries from the Propaganda Fide's very foundation in Mexico of Sor María's mystical journeys and her role as an evangelizer worthy of emulation.

After arriving in Veracruz in the spring of 1683, Llinás, along with a group of Franciscan missionaries, established the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Querétaro, which would go on to serve as the model for the subsequent apostolic colleges.[54] Although Llinás set sail for Spain just two years after his return to Mexico, Franciscan friars from the Colegio de Santa Cruz continued their mission northward traveling to Zacatecas in 1686. In 1703, they opened a hospice in the nearby town of Guadalupe, which would eventually serve as the original site of the college.[55] The following year, the Spanish monarchy issued a royal *cédula* granting permission to formally establish the new apostolic college "in order to be nearer to the Indians who need their preaching in the province of Coahuila and others in that vicinity."[56] Zacatecas, therefore, was a strategic

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[52] Carreño, "The Missionary Influence of the College of Zacatecas," 299, originally quoted in Isidro F. Espinosa, *Crónica apostólica y seráphica de todos los Colegios de Propaganda Fide de esta Nueva España de misioneros franciscanos observantes* (Mexico City: Hogal, 1792), 38–9.

[53] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 178.

[54] Galindo, *To Sin No More: Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830*, 39.

[55] Michael Brendan McCloskey, *The Formative Years of the Missionary College of Santa Cruz of Querétaro, 1683–1733* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1955), 90–9.

[56] Carreño, "The Missionary Influence of the College of Zacatecas," 305, originally quoted in Espinosa, *Crónica apostólica y seráphica de todos los Colegios de Propaganda Fide de esta Nueva España de misioneros franciscanos observantes*, 501–2.

location for the Propaganda's Fide's continued mission to convert Indigenous populations in the north of New Spain. Commenting on the city's local support, the *cédula* also noted: "after these Religious had preached their missions in the City of Zacatecas, the inhabitants of that city and of its province begged of them that they should found a College in the Hermitage dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe."[57] This document underscores the local endorsement of the college as a means of justifying its founding. Once in operation, the college trained mostly Creole novices and friars who came from other Franciscan houses in Mexico. Laymen who chose to enter as a novice did so as a result of the college's dedication to missionary work and believed they had been assigned the "task to rescue fallen men and women from the clutches of Satan through preaching and missions."[58]

Eighteenth-century sources evidence Sor María's importance both for the Propaganda Fide in general and Zacatecas specifically. In addition to learning Latin, philosophy, theology, and Indigenous languages, the missionaries at the Colegio de Santa Cruz studied Sor María's theology;[59] by 1729 her writing was prioritized to such a degree, the college created a position dedicated to Sor María and Duns Scotus.[60] The Franciscan Order's high esteem for Sor María even caught the attention of outside observers, as demonstrated by the Dominican friar Servando Teresa de Mier who mocked the Franciscans' seemingly exaggerated devotion, remarking that

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 180.

[59] For the history of training Franciscan missionaries of the Propaganda Fide, see Galindo, *To Sin No More: Franciscan and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830*, 117–68.

[60] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 189.

they "cite her [Sor María] even in the pulpits as if she were a Holy Father"[61] and "go so far as to call their Mother Ágreda the second Bible…"[62] In Zacatecas, the first designated guardian of the apostolic college was Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, one of the original twelve missionaries who had traveled from Spain with Llinás, a founder of multiple several Propaganda Fide colleges in Mexico, and a staunch follower of Sor María. Margil was not only a devotee of the nun's but such a zealous a promoter, he encouraged the friars at the college to emulate Sor María, "whose imitations they all embraced happily."[63] Thus, Margil's role as founding leader was central to the college's devotion to Sor María.

Additionally, multiple copies of Sor María's publications still housed in the Colegio de Guadalupe's library evidence her popularity as an author and missionary. Upon reviewing the library's holdings, I located nine different editions of Sor María's writing and biographies including a copy of *Mystical City of God* published in Lisbon in 1685, an abridged version of Sor María's magnum opus entitled *Escuela Mystica de Maria Santissima en la Mystica Ciudad de Dios* published in Mexico in 1731, and an account of Sor María's life written by Ximénez Samaniego entitled *Relacion de la Vida de la Venerable Madre Sor María de Jesus*. Notably, this third text includes a copy of Villafranca's 1668 print that Villalpando modeled his painting on. Lastly, the façade of the mission's church built in 1721 testifies to the magnitude of Sor María's presence at the college. Sculpted in low relief, she appears just above the front entryway

[61] "los padres franciscanos la citan [a Sor María] hasta en los púlpitos como Santo Padre." Servando Teresa de Mier, *Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, los Imprescindibles* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1953), 91, originally cited in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 188.

[62] "los padres franciscanos, que hasta suelen llamar segunda Biblia a su Madre Agreda, son dueños de creer lo que se les antoje." Ibid., 144–5, originally cited in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 188.

[63] Juan Domingo Arricivita, *Apostolic Chronicle of Juan Domingo Arricivita: The Franciscan Missionary in the Eighteenth Century in Arizona, Texas, and the Californias*, trans. George Hammond and Agapito Rey (Berkeley: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1996), 2:335, originally cited in Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 197.

with a quill in hand standing next to Duns Scotus and opposite the apostles Luke and John (fig. 21). Based on these sources, it is likely that Villalpando's paintings were commissioned as one of the earliest series to be housed in the missionary college.[64]

Cristóbal de Villalpando's Painting Series

Like many subsequent artists, Villalpando drew inspiration from the 1668 printed frontispiece when painting *Mística Ciudad de Dios*. As mentioned earlier, the engraving was originally designed by the Spanish royal engraver Pedro de Villafranca to be published in the first edition of *Mystical City of God*. Villalpando adhered to the same vertical, tripartite scheme divided between a celestial sphere, middle terrain, and ground. Additionally, he maintained, for the most part, the same central characters: the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, New Jerusalem, and acolytes. Both Villafranca and Villalpando illustrate *Mystical City of God*'s advocacy of the Immaculate Conception first by coalescing the Virgin with New Jerusalem and second by emphasizing the Immaculist authors as recorders of these spiritual tenets.

And yet despite Villalpando's observance of Villafranca's precedent, he, to a greater degree, elevates both the Virgin Mary and Sor María. Let's first turn to Mary (fig. 1.18). In line with the iconographic model of Immaculate Conception paintings produced in colonial Mexico and studied by Doménech Garcia, Villalpando infuses the Virgin's space with multiple pictorial elements that attest to her holiness including angels bearing lilies, roses, and a spotless mirror. This practice also resembles previous Immaculate Conceptions Villalpando completed earlier in

[64] For the history of Mexico City artists sending paintings and sculptures to missions throughout New Spain, see Clara Bargellini and Pamela Huckins, "Junipero Serra's Tastes and the Art and Architecture of the California Missions," in *The Worlds of Junípero Serra*, ed. Steven W. Hackel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 165–94.

his career in which the artist enveloped the Virgin amongst a dense space of clouds, cherub heads, and symbols—a constellation of motifs that sharply departs from the printed frontispiece (fig. 1.22).

Unlike his earlier paintings or the print, however, Villafranca also added the archangels Gabriel and Michael as well as the Trinity. Villalpando potentially included these holy figures as a way of re-envisioning Sor María's text. Given Volume One's passages recounting Michael battling Lucifer and Gabriel announcing Mary's miraculous birth to Anne and Joachim, their presence here recalls the devotion's associations with the Apocalyptic Woman as well as Mary's earthly parents. Furthermore, in Chapter Nine of Book One, Volume One, Sor María names Michael and Gabriel the "ambassadors of the human word, and of the Most Holy Mother Mary."[65] Thus, their novel presence not only promotes Mary's singular holiness but also conveys their roles as intermediaries between the Virgin Mary and laity.

Villalpando further diverges from Villafranca's printed model by depicting a winged Mary surrounded by God and Christ who sit devotedly by her side. While artists attached wings to representations of the Virgin of the Apocalypse, they excluded such appendages for the Immaculate Conception. Perhaps Villalpando chose to keep the Virgin's wings as a method of demonstrating the painting's close relationship with Saint John and Sor María's revelations, which both describe the "woman [with] two wings of a great eagle."[66] Meanwhile, aligning her with the Trinity also appears to respond to Sor María's extended discussion of the Immaculate Conception. Book One notes "in the first instant of Mary's Conception […] the entire Trinity

[65] "…Embajadores de el Verbo humanado, y de María su Madre Santissima." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 77.

[66] The first publication to highlight the winged Virgin Mary was *The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain*, exh. cat., ed. Clara Bargellini and Michael K. Komanecky (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 2009), 274.

renew[ed] the old decrees to raise her and magnify her […] and just as she cooperated with the Passion, and gave her Son, to be the father of the human lineage, so the Lord himself made her a participant in the dignity of Redemptor."[67] Therefore, Villalpando adjusts the iconography by presenting the Virgin's body in flight and emphasizing her kinship with God and Christ.

Turning to the Mystical City itself, Villalpando's representation of architecture at first glance aligns closely with the print. Both associate their urban design with Sor María and Saint John's texts which describe the square plan circumscribed by high walls punctured by twelve doors with angels guarding their respective portal. An important addition Villalpando made to his representation of the city is the inclusion of red and green gemstones embedded within the city's walls. Connecting back to Sor María's text, which in turn quotes John's Book of Revelation, the painting cites the author's vivid description of a wall composed of precious stones including emerald, topaz, amethyst, and jasper. While Villalpando does not picture the complete set of stones Sor María outlines in Chapter Nineteen of Book One, he does ornament the walls with colorful gems symbolizing the Virgin's virtues.

Villalpando was not the first to represent John of Patmos's vision of New Jerusalem. A painting by the sixteenth-century Flemish artist Martín de Vos originally displayed in Mexico City's Metropolitan Cathedral and currently housed in the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Tepotzotlán pictures the city in a similar manner (fig. 1.23).[68] Both works paint a gridded urban

[67] "advirtiendo, que en el instante primero de la Concepción de Maria Santissima, quando se le manifestó la Divinidad por aquella visión, y modo, que arriba dije, entonces a nuestro modo de entender toda la Beatissima Trinidad, como renovando los antiguos decretos de criarla, y engrandecerla […] Y assi como ella cooperó a la Passion, y dio a su Hijo, en que padiesse por el linaje humano, assi también el mismo Señor la hizo participante de la dignidad de Redemptora." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 159.

[68] For the iconographic history of the Immaculate Conception and the Mystical City in colonial Mexico see Antonio Rubial García, "Civitas Dei et novus orbis. La Jerusalén celeste en la pintura de Nueva España," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 20, no. 72 (June 8, 1998): 5–37.

plan with a dome at the center. De Vos's painting also includes ribbons of green and red gemstones running around the wall's periphery. Given that Villalpando was commissioned to complete paintings for the Cathedral's sacristy earlier in his career, he very likely came into contact with de Vos's work, demonstrating Villalpando's response to painting practices in addition to printed ones.

Shifting our attention to the bottom half of the composition, we also observe how Villalpando altered the print's earthly figures. In the lower left corner, Villalpando replaces Duns Scotus with Saint John the Evangelist and drops the Mystical City to the center of the composition. Even though Sor María herself never mentioned Duns Scotus in her text, it is possible that her confessor, Ximénez Samaniego, was responsible for having Duns Scotus featured as Sor María's male counterpart in Villafranca's engraving given his personal promotion of the two. As such, the Villafranca print equates the authors under the presence of Saint John the Evangelist, whose Book of Revelation was cited by both as the original source of the conceptionist mystery. Thus, the print creates an Immaculist genealogy with Saint John positioned closest to the Mystical City and Sor Maria and Duns Scotus as his successors situated along the lower edge of the frame.

Villalpando, in contrast, expunges Duns Scotus and exchanges him with Saint John: Sor María is no longer equated with a fellow Franciscan but with the apostle and author of the original scripture. The two are rendered nearly life size positioned with their books lying open in their laps, raising their quills, and witnessing the divine figures above. Modifying Saint John's placement to cohabit the ground register with Sor María coupled with their parallel postures and expressions radically levels the relationship between the apostle and the seventeenth-century mystic. Perhaps Villalpando pictures Sor María as an equal counterpart as a way of referencing

her self-described close relationship to Saint John's Book of Revelation. As mentioned earlier, Sor María devotes multiple chapters to citing and explaining the apostle's visions. On the other hand, Villalpando transforms the iconographic convention of presenting John as the sole spectator who presents the Immaculate Conception.[69] Villalpando does not just illustrate a painting of John's vision; in this work, both the Evangelist and Sor María embody the role of spectator and visionary. Therefore, the miraculous figures pictured above are just as much an illustration of Sor María's vision as they are of Saint John's. By placing the two characters on the same footing, Villalpando models Sor María after Saint John as an author deeply versed in scripture but also as one who is divinely inspired in her own right.

Upon closer viewing, Villalpando takes one step further in elevating Sor María's preeminence. He positions Sor María's finger grazing the gate and her quill extending upward brushing the celestial clouds. Modeled in this posture, she is the only one to come into contact with New Jerusalem and link the Virgin's space with that of the authors. While the feather's tail grazes the city's walls, the tip is elevated just above an inscription. Seemingly raising her quill after just having signed the painting with its title, Sor María's gesture intensifies her link with the text. Notably, the title written on a horizontal line running across the canvas is Sor María's magnum opus not the Book of Revelation. Thus, it is Sor María's writing that is overtly displayed as a kind of description of the work, defining the painting's subject as one that is of the female author's creation.[70] Villalpando's inscription therefore deepens the union between the Immaculate Conception, Sor María, and her magnum opus. She is no longer a part of an

[69] See Victor Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in The Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 109–17.

[70] For a discussion on title pages, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33.

assembly of Immaculist authors like the print or paintings we previously viewed, but instead the extraordinary visionary who imparts theology to her readers and viewers through her direct link with heaven.

Although Villalpando's *Mystical City of God* is not a frontispiece like the original engraving, the Propaganda Fide's library holdings in Zacatecas indicate that the friars would have been aware of the relationship between the print and painting. Thus, it could be argued that just as Villafranca's frontispiece operated as a device that framed Sor María's text, Villalpando's painting with Sor María could have functioned similarly. As Gérard Genette theorizes, the frontispiece constitutes part of a book's paratext, which establishes the framework containing the text itself.[71] While Villalpando's painting is not a literal frontispiece, the allusion to such a framing device potentially conditions the beholder to approach the rest of the series in a similar way. Afterall, Sor María and Saint John's placement in the foreground does not just make present the Immaculate Conception in this particular painting but primes the viewer to attend to the Virgin Mary as she is represented throughout the entire series. As such, this painting offers the viewer the opportunity to enter into the series as a whole through the lens of Sor María and her ideas.

While each work depicts seemingly disparate subjects, I will argue Sor María's portrayal of the Virgin as co-redemptress underpins all of these works. If we place them in conversation with one another, we notice that Villalpando organizes each painting around a tripartite structure split between God coronating the summit, a central register, and two figures flanking the lower corners. Thematically, the series seems to bring to the fore the concerns surrounding Mary's immaculacy: Villalpando ingeniously weaves together Sor María's exalted descriptions of the

[71] Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

Virgin Mary with pictorial elements connected to the Immaculate Conception as a way of presenting her as player central to humanity's redemption.

Shifting our attention first to the representation of the Annunciation, we immediately identify how unusual this painting is. Villalpando completed numerous Annunciations throughout his career including the work housed in the Museo Nacional de Arte (fig. 1.24). This painting represents the Virgin in a quiet domestic interior accentuated through the representation of cats, furnishings, and architectural features. The Annunciation located in Zacatecas, on the other hand, takes place in a monumental amphitheater teeming with thousands of radiant angels who bear witness to Gabriel announcing Mary's pregnancy. God the Father hovers directly above the Holy Spirit atop a swollen cluster of clouds. Just to the right of the composition's central axis, a glowing sun painted with a child's face stares toward the viewer. At the bottom register, Gabriel grasps a bouquet of lilies and kneels in reverence towards the Virgin Mary who stops reading from her copy of Isaiah to heed his words.

As mentioned earlier, Francisco de la Maza was the first to link this work with *Mystical City of God*. Citing Chapter Ten of Book Two, he quotes from Sor María's description of Gabriel who "descended from Supreme Heaven, accompanied by many thousands of beautiful Angels who followed him in a visible way."[72] He goes on to describe the archangel as "a most elegant man, of rare beauty. His face was resplendent […], his countenance grave and majestic."[73] De la Maza also highlights areas in which the artist departed from Sor María's descriptions noting Villalpando's vivid representation of the Virgin's red, navy, and gold garments, which contrasts

[72] De la Maza, *El Pintor Cristóbal de Villalpando*, 205.

[73] Ibid.

with Sor María's characterization of Mary's clothing as humble and poor.[74] While de la Maza aptly highlights these connections between text and image, he does consider how the Annunciation's significance transforms with the novel presence of angels.

According to Sor María, the thousands of angels not only appear in this episode of Mary's biography but are a standard fixture throughout *Mystical City of God*. Sor María first introduces them in the chapter that follows Gabriel announcing Anne's pregnancy and preceding the Immaculate Conception. In Book One, Chapter Fourteen, God appoints hundreds of angels to act as guardians to the Virgin Mary, designates twelve others to assist her in a "visible way," assigns eighteen more to serve as emissaries between God and Mary, and arranges seventy angels to await her arrival in heaven. As the two primary leaders, the archangel Michael commands the squadron while Gabriel serves as God's primary ambassador.[75] By prefacing Mary's immaculacy with an entire chapter dedicated to her company of angels, Sor María once again emphasizes the Virgin's elevated status. She associates Mary with celestial figures from the moment of her conception and subsequently affixes them to her person as constant accomplices, thereby illustrating a holy Virgin Mary whose time on earth is uniquely divine. Moreover, by repeating the notion that thousands of angels were not only present at the moment of her conception but also at the Annunciation, Sor María creates a visual link between the two events. Notably, when the Holy Office condemned *Mystical City of God* in 1681, they singled out "the multitude of angels placed at the service of Mary" as one of Sor María's doctrines that

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 119–21.

was "worthy of repair."[76] Therefore, Villalpando's decision to transform the Annunciation this way was a blatant example of the artist gravitating toward Sor María's unorthodoxies.

Although Villalpando does not delineate between the different categories of angels as Sor María does, he takes up this idea of celestial guardians. The carpet, table, and chair are the only allusions to a domestic setting, leaving the rest of the composition to be overtaken by celestial figures. But in contrast with representations of the Virgin Mary that inundate her space with putti heads, Villalpando instead features a multitude of adult angels as a kind of regiment dressed in an assortment of colors and kneeling in adulation. Situated along streams of clouds, the angels replace the interior with a dramatic theater that maximizes the capacity of spectators beholding the event.

The angels are not the only figures that call to mind Mary's own Immaculate Conception. The Holy Spirit, Gabriel bearing lilies, and God the Father dressed in a papal tiara all appear twice in the series: first in Villalpando's *Mystical City of God* and second in his *Annunciation*. Another pictorial element that Villalpando repeats, although in a diverging manner, is the anthropomorphized sun that hovers above the heads of Gabriel and Mary. In *Mystical City of God*, Villalpando renders a yellow face peeking out from behind the Virgin Mary's blue cloak. This strategy was quite common in paintings representing the Immaculate Conception in colonial Mexico as illustrated by Juan Correa's and José Rodríguez Juárez's works (figs. 1.25, 1.26). However, such a device was typically reserved for the Immaculate Conception as a reference to the Book of Revelation's Apocalyptic Woman. Curiously, Villalpando removed this visual motif from behind the Virgin's body and brought it to the composition's center. These moments of

[76] P. Benito Mendía and P. Antonio M. Artola Arbiza, *La Ven. M. María de Jesús de Ágreda y la Inmaculada Concepción: el proceso eclesiástico a la "Mística Ciudad de Diós"* (Ágreda: [s.n.] 2004), 68.

overlap connect Mary and Christ's annunciations and promote the Virgin as a heavenly figure. They also demonstrate how Villalpando turned to *Mystical City of God*'s text while at the same time deployed local painting traditions to create an entirely new Annunciation that exalted the Virgin Mary through an emphasis on her divinity and immaculacy.

While the remaining two paintings do not appear to be inspired by specific passages within *Mystical City of God*, they also underline the Virgin Mary's immaculacy as consequential to her role in the Incarnation and Redemption. Turning first to the *Tree of Life*, we see Adam and Eve in an unusual setting. Typically, the pair is situated within the Garden of Eden or amidst their expulsion as illustrated by Juan Correa as well as Villalpando's earlier work dated to around 1689 (fig. 1.27). But in this 1706 painting, the two figures flank a large wooden cross covered in grapes and topped with a crown of thorns evoking the Eucharist. Eve clasps her hands together in prayer while Adam wraps his left arm around the back of the cross and gestures toward the ground below with the other hand. Vines stemming from the wooden structure latch on to Adam and Eve's chests with the roots planting themselves into their skin. Just above the pair stand the archangels Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel. At the cross' base, three figures huddle together: at the center is a shackled woman wearing a feathered headdress, and on either side, a skeleton and serpent.

Villalpando uses the cross' unusual vines as a way of upholding the Virgin Mary as a central player in Adam and Eve's penitence. Nestled within the bulbous grapes, two ovular medallions decorate the cross – one featuring the Crucifixion and the other the Virgin Mary. Strikingly, the Virgin stands atop a crescent moon and is crowned by a halo while the sun peeks its head out from behind her body. Thus, Mary in the guise of the Immaculate Conception is

equated with the scene of the Crucifixion, linking the two iconographies for their shared evocations of redemption.

Taking a closer look at the representation of vines, the painting also evokes ideas of redemption through the allusion to the Eucharist. This painting's incorporation of vines and grapes calls to mind themes of transubstantiation and sacrifice. In colonial Mexico, it was common for paintings to meditate on the significance of Christ's blood as exemplified by Juan Correa's *Allegory of the Holy Sacrament* (circa 1690) (fig. 1.28). Unlike Correa's work, however, which focuses on the singular figure of Christ, Villalpando aligns Christ with his immaculate mother. In *Mystical City of God*, Sor María writes that Christ's body was formed through three drops of blood drawn from the Virgin Mary's heart.[77] The book also frequently emphasizes Mary's participation in the Passion as well as the significance of her role in the sacrament, which will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters. Thus, it is not only Christ's blood sacrifice that is visualized but also Mary's. As a consequence of her immaculacy, she is pictured as a co-redeemer with her veins/vines as a fundamental link to humanity's salvation.

Compounding this notion of redemption are the three figures pictured at the bottom of the cross, symbolizing sin. The skeleton holding a globe alludes to the evils of worldliness while the nude figure with a chain wrapped around her neck can be identified as an Indigenous figure, marshalling race to liken indigeneity with sinfulness. Zeroing in specifically on the serpent, this figure frequently appears in representations of the Immaculate Conception. In his essay on colonial paintings dedicated to this devotion, Jaime Cuadriello analyzes this demonic figure and cites Sebastian de Covarrubias's *Emblemas morales* (1610) which equates sin with the female

[77] "[T]res gotas de su purísima sangre, y puestas en el natural lugar, para la concepción del cuerpo de Christo Señor nuestro, fue formado de ellas por la virtud del Divino, y Santo Espíritu de fuerte, que la materia de que se fabricó la humanidad Santisima del Verbo, para nuestra Redencion, la dio, y administró el corazón de Maria purisima a fuerza de amor, real, y verdaderamente." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Diós*, vol. 2, 81.

body: “The vice of the flesh is a woman, who is very beautiful from the waist up, the bottom half, a fish, with hard scales, Horrible abominable, and frightful.”[78] Within the Propaganda Fide, sexuality, particularly women’s alleged promiscuous nature, was a recurrent theme in sermons. For example, the missionary Fray Juan Hernández remarked that the Devil used women to entice men: “The woman is a Devil’s net […] and thus, she takes the man by three different ways, which are: by staring at them, by talking to them, and by touching them.”[79] Through the appropriation of a symbol typically seen below the Virgin’s feet in the Immaculate Conception, Villalpando creates an additional connection between Mary’s purity and her role as co-redeemer. Therefore, viewers are reminded of Mary vanquishing over the perceived inferiority of her gender and her capacity to transfer her sacred nature to penitent souls while leaving the racialized and gendered representations of sin at her feet.

And lastly, the *Holy Family* illustrates Mary’s parents, Anne and Joachim, the Virgin, Joseph and Christ enthroned. A small rendering of the Tree of Jesse is carved in relief within the steps and evokes the lineage of Kings from which Jesus descends. Villalpando appears attentive to genealogy in this work. In comparison to traditional renderings of the Tree of Jesse which culminate with Christ and the Virgin, Villalpando creates two separate family trees, distinguishing these larger five figures from the royal lineage as exceptional. Notably, Anne and Joachim are featured in the lower corners of the composition in the same manner as many Immaculate Conception paintings that present the Virgin Mary blossoming from a flower that stems from her parents. By insisting that the holy family starts with Anne and Joachim’s parents,

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[78] Cuadriello, “The Theopolitical Visualization of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception: Intentionality and Socialization of Images,” 130–1.

[79] “Es la muger una red del Diablo, y por escoger al hombre por medio della de tres maneras; que no son por mirarlas, por platicar con ellas, y por palparlas…” Galindo, *To Sin No More: Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683–1830*, 262.

Villalpando once again reminds the viewer of not only Christ's immaculacy but his mother's as well.

A nearly identical version of this same painting housed in the Templo de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria underscores Villalpando's attentiveness to family lineage. While both works are close copies of one another, a few pictorial differences are noteworthy. In the Mexico City rendition, a dog occupies the lower corner whereas in Zacatecas there is no pictorial element distracting the viewer from the primary subject matter. Second, Villalpando's Zacatecas painting arranges the flowers as well as Anne and Joachim's hands in a manner that guides our gaze toward the bas-relief of the Tree of Jesse. And lastly, in the Zacatecas version Christ and the Virgin Mary stare towards one another whereas the Templo de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria's Christ gazes outward toward the viewer. These slight but important maneuverings evidence Villalpando's attentiveness to the unique bond between mother and child as well as the affiliated but hierarchical relationship between the primary enthroned holy family and their secondary predecessors.

Analyzing this series as a whole, the Virgin Mary's role as immaculate co-redeemer comes to the fore. Starting with Villalpando's *Mystical City of God*, this painting offers the viewer the opportunity to enter into the series through Sor María's theology and attend to the themes of salvation evoked through the four works. Beholding Villalpando's paintings within the Propaganda Fide, the novices and friars likely would have identified with such imagery. Both the Virgin Mary and Sor María, therefore, would have served as powerful spiritual models that furthered the Franciscans' mission.

Conclusion

Despite the paintings' renown today, Villalpando's iconographic changes did not have a lasting impact on subsequent paintings. I have not located any other series of images that merges Sor María with the Virgin Mary. Moreover, Villalpando's exalted Annunciation did not take hold as a predominant method of rendering this scene from the life of the Virgin. One possible theory for this is that there was a specific meaning in mind for the patron, the Propaganda Fide in Zacatecas. Given that the paintings would have been seen by missionaries well versed in scripture and theological writings, it is logical that these paintings would have been conceived for a learned audience. Another explanation could be the degree to which this the work's iconography went too far in breaking with iconographic orthodoxy. And yet despite the work's lack of influence, it is still important to consider as an early case study. Examining these four works together places the pictorial elements, ideas, and figures together and allows us to pay attention to see what emerges in-between: we become attentive to genealogies, Mary's immaculacy, and her role as co-redeemer.

Despite the seeming lack of resonance, however, there are instances in which other colonial artists gravitated toward Sor María's description of a multitude of angels. Scholars have linked José Rodríguez Carnero's *Adoration of the Magi* with Sor María's description of the Virgin Mary as constantly flocked by a congregation of angelic figures (fig. 1.28). I also would add two additional paintings I came across during my research as similarly inspired by Sor María: *The Allegory of the Immaculation Conception* by Juan de Villalobos (fig. 1.29) and an unattributed eighteenth-century *Annunciation* located in the collection of the Convento de San Gabriel in Cholula, Puebla (fig. 1.30). The first work represents Anne and Joachim in an enclosed garden with Sor María and other Immaculists in the foreground. A flock of angels

surround the walls' periphery, alluding to Sor María's revision. Similarly, the unattributed *Annunciation* also includes a cluster of angels accompanying Gabriel in Mary's chamber. While all of these works deploy the celestial figures differently, they speak to the flexibility with which artists in Mexico appropriated certain unconventional ideas and applied them in varying ways to their paintings.

Lastly, this series is not only one of the earliest examples in Mexico illustrating Sor María as an author but exemplifies an artistic practice that would be influential throughout the viceroyalty: the citation of different components of *Mystical City of God*, whether textual or visual, and in turn, re-envisioning Sor María's theology. By explicitly summoning Sor María and her text, artists invited viewers to consider the Virgin Mary mediated through Sor María's visions. In this dissertation's first case study, in particular, Villalpando consulted multiple chapters throughout Volume One and also looked to the book's frontispiece for inspiration. At the same time, Villalpando utilized traditional iconographic tropes throughout the four paintings, interweaving the standardized with the novel. In doing so, Villalpando's series demonstrates how *Mystical City of God* lends itself not as a prescriptive treatise but instead as an open-ended source whose ideas can be unleashed, picked up in varying ways, and encourage pictorial invention. In the following chapters, we will analyze how other artists turned to Sor María's writing and re-envisioned her revelations of the Virgin Mary.

CHAPTER TWO

A Malleable Cenacle: The Virgin Mary and the Last Supper

Antonio de Torres's life-size painting located in the sacristy of Propaganda Fide de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Zacatecas, depicts an unusual Last Supper (fig. 2.1). Positioned within a dark interior, the apostles gather around the central table and lean toward Christ as he administers Holy Communion. In contrast to his followers who direct their attention toward the Eucharist, Christ gazes upward where God the Father, the Holy Ghost, and angels supplant the ceiling with celestial clouds. Two additional representations of the ritual flank the central gathering. Occupying the foreground's right side, Elijah and Enoch from the Hebrew Bible kneel as Saint Peter administers the Eucharist; and to the left of Christ, the Virgin Mary receives the sacrament from Gabriel within a niche in the background. Multiple inscriptions cover the composition. God the Father and Christ utter psalms visualized through words emanating from their mouths. And in concert with the curving speech scrolls, captions overlay the canvas' surface.

Why disrupt the conventional representation of the Last Supper by inserting novel subjects and additional registers? More specifically, why illustrate the Virgin Mary as present, when the Gospels make no reference to her? The cartouche positioned in the lower left corner frames a textual passage that elucidates such queries. It describes an altered account of the Last Supper, in which Gabriel delivers Mary the Eucharist before the apostles receive first Communion. Significantly, the inscription also cites the narrative source for this revision: "according to the Venerable Mother María de Jesús de Ágreda, Part Two, Book Six, Chapter Eleven." This cartouche, placed just underneath the Virgin Mary's alcove, corroborates Torres's

novel rendition of the Last Supper by gesturing to an external source, the publication *Mystical City of God* (1670) by the Spanish nun Sor María de Ágreda.

Antonio de Torres's 1720 painting exemplifies some of the iconographic changes, inspired by Sor María's *Mystical City of God,* that took place in colonial Mexico and altered canonical representations of the sacraments. Specifically, Mexican artists transformed representations of the Last Supper by painting the Virgin Mary as partaking in the ritual. Traditionally neither scripture nor sacred art depicted the Virgin Mary as the recipient of Communion alongside the Institution of the Eucharist. And while supplementary characters including servers and angels appeared in early modern representations of the Cenacle, the Virgin was consistently absent. In the Viceroyalty of New Spain, however, artists augmented Mary's role by re-envisioning Sor María's account of the Last Supper and visualizing the Virgin as present.

While paintings reviewed in this chapter vary in how artists infused their compositions with apertures, inscriptions, and unconventional figures, they all include the Virgin kneeling as she receives the Eucharist from Gabriel. And although she is never pictured interacting with Christ or the apostles in the Cenacle, her insertion to the left of center came to be a standard fixture of Last Supper paintings in eighteenth-century Mexico. Such an alteration argues for a closer connection between the Virgin Mary's body and Christ's: in addition to operating as a vessel for her son as an infant, she consumes his body via the Eucharist. This extraordinary development inspired by writing authored by a holy woman signals a major change in canonical sacred imagery that did not take place in Europe but was consistently embraced in Mexico.

This chapter sets out to explore the following three points: the irrefutable association between *Mystical City of God'*s revisionist Last Supper and colonial Mexican paintings; the

inventive ways in which these artists transformed this canonical scene by de-centering the Last Supper's focus and adding new figures that repeat the ritual; and finally, the significance of the Virgin Mary's unorthodox and enduring presence. Ultimately, the chapter will argue that Mexican paintings of the Last Supper upended conventions by amplifying the composition, specifically by fragmenting the viewer's singular focus on Christ and insisting on the Virgin's presence as a means of upholding her role as co-redemptress.

Iconographic History of the Last Supper

Before analyzing how New Spanish works broke with convention, it is necessary to examine the iconographic history of the scene. According to the Gospels, the Last Supper was Christ's final meal with the disciples before his arrest. As the men gathered to celebrate Passover, Christ first announced that one of his twelve followers would betray him and then instituted the Eucharist. The earliest visual representations of the Last Supper emerged in the sixth century and typically represented one of these two episodes—Christ identifying the traitor or the Institution of the Sacrament. Throughout the early Middle Ages, the Latin Church preferred representations of Christ identifying Judas, and it was only in the fourteenth century that autonomous depictions of Christ consecrating the bread and wine developed as a popular theme.[1]

Taddeo Gaddi's and Andrea del Castagno's Florentine frescos of the Last Supper from the mid fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are two early examples of the scene that stand

[1] For an introduction to the history of the Last Supper iconography, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* vol. 2, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 24–40. On the development of Last Supper paintings in refectories see Creighton E. Gilbert, "Last Suppers and Their Refectories," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 371–402.

independently of a larger Passion cycle (figs. 2.2, 2.3).[2] Gaddi and Castagno depict Christ in the center raising his right hand as he administers the blessing. Eleven apostles order themselves around the far end of the rectangular table while Judas sits on the opposite side separated from the group. Engaged in conversation or focused on the sacrament, the apostles assemble within an enclosed, flat space. Bread, carafes of wine, and other dinnerware decorate the respective tables illustrating the Eucharistic symbols.

Painted a century later, Leonardo da Vinci's work (1494–98), located in the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, became the pictorial touchstone for most Last Supper paintings (fig. 2.4). Leonardo embraced the earlier tradition of organizing the composition laterally and representing Christ at the center of a long rectangular table flanked by twelve acolytes. Despite these formal similarities, scholars have routinely commented on the apostles' heightened expressivity in reaction to Christ's utterance.[3] This analysis originated with Giorgio Vasari's interpretation published in *The Lives of the Artists* (1563) which stated, "Leonardo imagined, and succeeded in expressing, the suspicion that seized the Apostles wanting to know who would betray their master."[4] Huddled together in groups of three, the apostles convey a sense of astonishment through their individualized gestures and facial expressions, which contrasts with the earlier method of representing the figures uniformly aligned along the table.

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[2] André Hayum, "A Renaissance Audience Considered: The Nuns at S. Apollonia and Castagno's 'Last Supper,'" *The Art Bulletin* 88 (April 3, 2014): 243

[3] Giorgio Vasari was the first to publish on the apostles' emotional reactions in 1568. See Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans., Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Nineteenth-century writers Claudia Salvi Stendhal and Johanna Wolfgang von Goethe maintained this method of analyzing painting's psychodrama. For an extensive discussion of the historiography on the painting, see Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

[4] Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 289, originally quoted in Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 19.

Paintings produced in the aftermath of the Counter Reformation exhibit a reinvigorated emphasis on the significance of the sacraments.[5] In response to Protestant attacks, the Council of Trent decreed that "after consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really, and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those sensible things."[6] Christ, they argued, was therefore present in the form of bread and wine. Last Supper paintings were instrumentalized in the effort to promote the mysteries of Transubstantiation and Communion, and treatises such as Gabriele Paleotti's *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582) outlined expectations for properly rendering the scene's iconography. Paleotti wrote, "there would be an evident imperfection with respect to number if a scene of the Lord's last supper, where he eats the Passover lamb with the apostles, showed only six or eight of them instead of the full complement of twelve."[7] Paleotti underscores the necessity to follow scripture's model of illustrating the appropriate number of participants in attendance. He breaks down the multiple events that constitute the Last Supper's narrative:

> Everyone knows that at the Lord's last supper, the eating of the lamb was one thing, the institution of the sacrament another, the washing of the apostles' feet a third. So a painter who chooses to show the eating of the meal at table will not be deficient if he leaves out the washing of the feet or the Eucharist because they are different actions.[8]

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[5] James Clifton, et. al, *The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150–1800* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 112; Émile Male, *El arte religioso de la Contrarreforma. Estudios sobre la iconografía del final del siglo XVI y de los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2001), 75–84.

[6] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroder (Binghamton and New York: Vail-Ballous, 1960), 73, quoted in Lauren G. Kilroy-Ewbank, *Holy Organ or Unholy Idol?: The Sacred Heart in the Age, Religion, and Politics of New Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 157.

[7] Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. William McCuaig (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 233.

[8] Ibid.

Paleotti's treatise clarifies the chronology and outlines the cycle's different episodes into potential subjects to be picked up by artists. Such instructions also show how artists merged multiple episodes into one image. In scenes depicting the elevation of the Eucharist, for example, a water basin and jug are often inserted into the foreground alluding to the washing of the feet.

In line with Paloetti's direction, Peter Paul Rubens's *Last Supper* (1630–1631) glorifies the sacrament of the Eucharist (fig. 2.5). Rubens strips away the meal's superfluous items and leaves just a chalice and bread roll atop the white tablecloth.[9] Additionally, Rubens presents the scene within a nocturnal setting harnessing the light emanating from candlesticks to intensify the focus on the host.[10] Other iconographic details include the altar propping up an open book, the curtain draped over the composition's upper left corner, the ornate architecture. These elements reappear in New Spanish depictions of the Last Supper and will be explored later in this chapter.

In early modern Spain, Last Supper paintings also affirmed the miracle of Transubstantiation, but they have received less scholarly attention compared to their Italian and Flemish counterparts.[11] Juan de Juanes's *Last Supper* (1555–1562), for example, was inspired by a copy of Leonardo's painting housed in the Cathedral of Valencia and adopts the apostles' dramatic expressions as well as a similar Cenacle configuration (fig. 2.6).[12] And yet in Juanes's work, Christ explicitly directs the viewer's attention toward the sacrament by elevating the host

[9] Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper,* 40.

[10] David Freedberg, "The Last Supper," in *Peter Paul Rubens: Oil Paintings and Oil Sketches* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1995), 81–82.

[11]The subject is studied within the larger context of the polemics of the Eucharist in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. See of Manuel Trens, *La eucaristía en el arte español* (Barcelona: Aymà, 1952); Lamberto Font, *La eucaristía. El tema eucarístico en el arte de España* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1952); Mariano Casas Hernández, *Memoria de la cena de Jesús: aportaciones de la eucaristía en el arte español* (Burgos: Fundación las Edades del Hombre, 2011).

[12] Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1600–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 28.

with his right hand and holding his left just above the chalice. A second work by Pablo de Céspedes completed in 1595 replaces the Cenacle's back wall with a balustrade that opens up to the heavens revealing the Holy Spirit flying just above Christ (fig. 2.7). And a third painting by Francisco de Ribalta commissioned in 1606 for the Colegio de Corpus Christi, Valencia organized the picture around a vertical format that aligns the wine, bread, and Christ's body along the central axis intensifying the connection between the scene's protagonist and Eucharist (fig. 2.8).[13]

Less scholarship is published on the history of the Last Supper in colonial Mexico. While the Eucharist was a central point of discussion for the Church specifically when it came to its role in conversion and who had access to Communion,[14] the polemics surrounding the doctrine and its connection to viceregal paintings of the Last Supper have yet to be thoroughly addressed. The limited scholarship that does exist focuses on identifying printed prototypes that operated as compositional models for the paintings. For instance, the *Last Supper* located in the Cathedral of Texcoco, attributed to the Spanish artist Alonso Vázquez (fig. 2.9), is associated with Cornelis Cort and Gerard de Jode (figs. 2.10, 2.11).[15] This painting features the twelve apostles seated at a circular table covered in food. A green curtain drapes across the upper edge of the composition and frames an alcove filled with silverware and a female server. Christ holds the bread in his left

[13] This composition resembles Rubens's painting but predates it by a few decades. For more on the history of the painting's commission see Lisandra Estevez, "Francisco Ribalta's *Last Supper* as a Symbol of Reform in Early Modern Valencia," in *Art and Reform in the Late Renaissance,* edited by Jesse M. Locker (New York: Routledge, 2019), 203–21.

[14] See Kilroy-Ewbank, *Holy Organ or Unholy Idol?: The Sacred Heart in the Age, Religion, and Politics of New Spain*, 157–164. See also Jaime Lara, "The Spanish New World," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 293–319.

[15] Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, "Las pinturas atribuídas a Alonso Vázquez en México," *Anuario de estudios americanos* 38 (1981): 661; Rafael Gómez Ramos, "Alonso Vázquez, la Última Cena de la Catedral de Texcoco o la anatomía de la rutina," *Laboratorio de arte* 28 (2016): 113–23.

hand which he consecrates with his right hand. Despite the dearth of publications, the Last Supper was a popular subject of sacred paintings in colonial Mexico. Works by Juan de Vera, Miguel Cabrera, Lorenzo Zendejas, and others included in collections such as the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, the Museo del Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, and the Museo de Guadalupe, to name a few, represent a range of compositions deployed for rendering this episode from Christ's life (figs. 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15).

The Last Supper paintings reviewed in this section spanning the fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries and created in Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Mexico take different approaches to their subject. Even though they all represent Christ as the protagonist and the twelve apostles arranged around him, some paintings insert a rectangular table while others deploy a circular one; some tables are set for a feast and overloaded with objects while others only bear the sacramental bread and wine; the settings vary from flat space, to enclosed rectangular chamber, to elaborate interiors replete with Solomonic columns, niches, and alcoves; most only feature the apostles and Christ, but a few add ancillary figures such as angels or servers.

The revisionist Mexican paintings of the Last Supper to be analyzed later in this chapter build upon this tradition, often representing the biblical scene in a dark interior with the apostles huddled next to Christ. They emphasize the Institution of the Eucharist rather than Judas's betrayal, opting for a sparse table with just bread and wine instead of a platter-adorned feast. However, they also transform the scene by repeating the ritual once or twice through the inclusion of the Virgin Mary and at times Elijah and Enoch. Although many of these works have previously been published in catalogue raisonnés, these publications typically have not connected their iconographic eccentricities to *Mystical City of God*. For example, Elisa Vargas

Lugo's analysis of Miguel Cabrera's painting comments on the scene's enigmatic subject matter: "other details confirm that this painting is not simply a representation of the evangelical episode. Not all of them are easy to explain…"[16] Other art historical studies such as *Querétaro, ciudad barroca* by Rogelio Ruiz Gomar and the exhibition catalogue *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici* have published paintings included in this chapter but make no mention of its unusual subject matter.[17] In her study of Gabriel José de Ovalle's 1749 Passion series, also located in Zacatecas, Clara Bargellini briefly mentions the *Last Supper* painting's connection with *Mystical City of God* but focuses her attention on other paintings in the cycle.[18]

Mystical City of God's Last Supper

While *Mystical City of God*'s account of this episode in Christ's life follows the traditional narrative of announcing Judas's betrayal and instituting the Eucharist before the twelve apostles, Sor María also portrays the Virgin Mary as a protagonist in the story. Specifically, the account highlights the Virgin's unparalleled understanding of Transubstantiation, her visions that allowed her to witness the events in the Cenacle despite her physical absence, and her reception of the consecrated bread and wine prior to the apostles.[19] By pivoting back and forth between Christ

[16] "Otros detalles confirman que no se trata simplemente de una representación del episodio evangélico. No todos son fáciles de explicar." Elisa Vargas Lugo, *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte* (Mexico City: UNAM and CONCACULTA, 1994), 280.

[17] Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, "La pintura barroca en la ciudad de Querétaro," in *Querétaro, ciudad barroca*, ed. Juan Antonio Isla Estrada, et. al. (Querétaro: Secretaría de Educación y Bienestar Social, 1988), 199–200; Luisa Elena Alcalá, et. al., "Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: *Pinxit Mexici*," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, exh. cat., ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 22, 39.

[18] Clara Bargellini, "'Amoroso horror': arte y culto en la series de la Pasión de Gabriel de Ovalle de Guadalupe, Zacatecas," in *Arte y violencia: XVIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1995), 501–2

[19] See Part Two, Book Five, Chapter Eleven as well as Part Two, Book Six, Chapters Ten and Eleven in *Mystica Ciudad de Dios,* vol. 2 (Madrid: B. de Villa-Diego, 1670), 517–524, 752–783.

and Mary, Sor María elaborates on the traditional sequence of events but also includes the Virgin's perspective.

Part Two, Book Five, Chapter Eleven introduces Mary's knowledge of the sacraments for the first time: Mary's particular understanding of the Eucharist "manifested in her supernaturally […] Humanity and Divinity of her Most Holy Son would be under the species of Bread and Wine, the virtue of words, to consecrate the Body and Blood, passing and turning one substance into another."[20] Sor María describes the Virgin's unparalleled knowledge as the law of Grace stamped into her body in the same manner as her son and justifies the comparison as necessary "since in his absence she would be the teacher of the Church."[21] Comparing the Virgin's knowledge of the sacraments with Christ's, Sor María not only elevates Mary's station as the mother of God, but as the future leader of the Church, equally judicious and capable of steering its survival.

In addition to underscoring Mary's erudition, Sor María portrays the Virgin as a witness to the Institution of the Eucharist in Part Two, Book Six, Chapter Ten. In the Gospels, the Virgin Mary is not mentioned during the Last Supper, but according to Sor María, "the great Lady from her retirement, and Divine contemplation looked at everything her Most Holy Son was working on in the Cenacle."[22] Although she occupies a non-descript setting apart from the chamber, "a clear vision" allowed her to behold the table set with a plate and chalice "as though she were

[20] "Llegó la Prudentissima Señora a la particular inteligencia del Soberano Mysterio, y Sacramento de la Eucharistia; y desta maravilla entendió, y conoció con grande penetración, mas secretos, que los Superemos Serafines." Ibid., 519.

[21] "pues en su ausencia avia de ser Maestra de la Iglesia." Ibid.

[22] "La gran Señora desde su retiro, y Divina contemplación miraba todo lo que su Hijo Santissimo iba obrando en el Cenaculo." Ibid., 768.

present […] as co-redeemer."[23] In addition to seeing her son consecrate the host, she also witnesses God the Father and the Holy Spirit descend into the chamber "so that the Eternal Father would not look at his Only Son alone, but always in the company of his Mother." Sor María highlights God's perspective as one that sees Mary as Christ's constant companion throughout the Last Supper. Therefore, God's descent into the Cenacle allows Sor María to substantiate Mary's active role during the Institution of the Eucharist: although the Virgin is physically removed from Christ, God, according to Sor María, views them together.

In Chapter Eleven, the Virgin Mary receives the sacrament. Before administering Communion to the twelve apostles, Christ "broke another particle of the consecrated bread and gave it to the Archangel Saint Gabriel so that he could take it and communicate it to the Blessed Mary."[24] Gabriel arrives with a flock of angels and "from the hand of the Holy Prince [she] received it first after her Most Holy Son [and] the Blessed Sacrament was deposited on the chest of the Blessed Mary."[25] Earlier in Book Two, Sor María records a conversation between Christ and the Virgin that underscores the importance of Mary receiving Communion: Mary says, "My chest will be your dwelling and tabernacle,"[26] to which Christ responds, "because it will be my continuous room in the rest of your most candid and loving breast."[27] Sor María's revisionist account of Mary receiving the sacrament along with the dialogue between mother and son re-

[23] "Estaba Maria Santissima en su retiro levantada en altissima contemplación, donde lo miraba todo con la misma distinción, y clara visión, que si estuviera presente; y a todas las obras de su Hijo y nuestro Redemptor cooperaba y correspondia en la forma, que su admirable sabiduría la dictaba como Coadjutora de todas ellas." Ibid., 756.

[24] "partió otra partícula del Pan consagrada y la entregó al Arcangel San Gabriel para que la llevase y comulgase a María Santísima." Ibid., 777.

[25] "de la mano del Santo Príncipe la recibió la primera después de su Hijo Santissimo […] Quedó depositado el Santissimo Sacramento en el pecho de María Santissima y sobre el corazón como legitimo Sagrario y Tabernáculo del Altissimo." Ibid., 778.

[26] "Será vuestra morada y tabernáculo mi pecho." Ibid., 520.

[27] "porque será mi habitación continua en el descanso de vuestro candidissimo y amoroso pecho." Ibid.

frames the Last Supper from a strict focus on Transubstantiation to one that re-affirms the Virgin's role as sanctuary.

According to *Mystical City of God*, the Virgin is not the only atypical character to receive Communion along with the apostles. In Chapter Eleven, Sor María states that Mary witnesses Peter administering the sacrament to two more figures in the Cenacle: Elijah and Enoch. These characters originated in the Hebrew Bible. Enoch appears in Genesis 5:21–24 as a man who "walked with God: and he was no more; for God took him." This passage was interpreted by the Catholic Church as God transporting Enoch to heaven alive. Elijah, meanwhile, was a prophet who lived as a hermit on Mount Carmel. In I Kings 19:4–8, Elijah is stranded in the desert on the brink of starvation when an angel miraculously appears with food and drink, a story that was seen by Catholics as prefiguring the Eucharist. In II Kings 1:9–15, Elijah is separated from his disciple Elisha and delivered to heaven in a chariot of fire without experiencing death. According to *Mystical City of God*, Elijah and Enoch inhabited the Cenacle during the Last Supper: "Then Saint Peter, by order of Christ our Lord, took other consecrated particles and communicated to the two ancient Fathers Enoch and Elijah."[28] With this anachronism, Sor María characterizes these figures as "ancient Fathers of the natural and written law" whose participation in the "new wonder"[29] further reinforces the significance of the sacrament.

Chapter Eleven concludes with the Virgin explaining her distinctive role within the Last Supper directly to Sor María. Mary explains that she merited receiving her son's sacred body in the form of the Eucharist given that she, "had greater science than all the Saints; I exceeded in

[28] "Luego San Pedro, por mandado de Christo nuestro Señor, tomo otras partículas consagradas y comulgó a los dos Padres antiguos Enoc y Elías." Ibid., 778.

[29] "Fueron traídos por los mismo Ángeles al Cenáculo Enoc y Elías del lugar donde estaban disponiendo el Señor que estos dos Padres de la Ley natural y escrita se hallassen presentes a la nueva maravilla y fundación de la Ley Evangélica y participasen de sus misterios admirables." Ibid., 768–9.

love the Supreme Seraphim; I never committed actual sin […].”[30] The Virgin then turns her attention to the laity and asks Sor María: “what should the Priests feel and do and the Faithful who attend it?”[31] In response to her own question, she instructs Sor María to “Open [her] eyes amid the dense darkness and the blindness of men and raise them to the Divine light, to know these mysteries.”[32] Here the Virgin Mary directs Sor María to learn the sacraments directly from her and then to transcribe this knowledge for the readers of *Mystical City of God*. Sor María’s book does not just document Christ and the Virgin’s lives, therefore, but serves as a model for the laity to emulate. Thus, this section of the book maintains the Virgin’s role as co-redeemer by way of the Eucharist. As this passage intimates, Christ shares himself with humanity, but it is the Virgin who is tasked with the responsibility of caring for his body by instructing the laity through Sor María’s mediation to partake in the ritual.

How was Sor María’s version of the Last Supper received and disseminated throughout Mexico? Chapters Ten and Eleven from Part Two, Book Six were two of the most frequently referenced and excerpted sections from *Mystical City of God* in the viceroyalty. I have identified three widely distributed Mexican publications that cite these passages to varying degrees: *Compendio de la sagrada passion, y muerte de N Señor Jesu-Christo, sacado de la Mystica ciudad de Dios…* (1693); *Aurora alegre del dichoso dia de la Gracia Santissima digna Madre de Dios. Mes de vida, donde hallarán las almas, pasto saludable, y dulce para cada dia. Epitome de los libros Mystica Ciudad de Dios, y Vida de la Virgen Madre de Dios* (1727); and

[30] “Tube mayor ciencia que todos los Santos; excedí en amor a los Supremos Serafines; nunca cometí culpa actual.” Ibid., 782.

[31] “qué deben sentir, y hacer los Sacerdotes, y los Fieles que la frequentan?” Ibid., 783.

[32] “Abre tu los ojos entre las densas tinieblas, y ceguedad de los hombres, y levantalos a la Divina luz, para conocer estos Mysterios.” Ibid.

Peregrinación christiana por el camino real de la celeste Jerusalen (1756).[33] Together, these texts endorse Sor María's revisionist Last Supper by quoting or citing passages that state God the Father witnessed the Institution of the Eucharist, Gabriel administered Communion to the Virgin, and Elijah and Enoch were present in the Cenacle with the apostles.

Paintings

Now that we have outlined the history of the Last Supper's iconography and analyzed *Mystical City of God*'s version of the narrative, we can return to the paintings and consider the following question: How do artists in Mexico transform canonical representations of the Last Supper by citing Chapters Ten and Eleven of Sor María's text? The works under review in this chapter can be broken down into three categories. The first examines Antonio de Torres's painting which cites Sor María's book visually and textually; the second group of works includes paintings that picture the Virgin Mary, Elijah, and Enoch as recipients of Communion flanking the Last Supper; and the final ensemble of paintings excludes Elijah and Enoch but keeps the Virgin as a participant within the scene.

Returning to Torres's painting, we can recognize the degree to which the artist builds upon the traditional iconography. Although I am not interested in pinpointing an exact iconographic source from which Torres modeled his composition, I will focus on its irrefutable

[33] José de San Antonio y Flores, *Compendio de la sagrada passion, y muerte de N Señor Jesu-Christo, sacado de la Mystica ciudad de Dios, y Historia divina de Nuestra Señora, qve escrivio la venerable madre Maria de Jesus de Agreda, de la segunda parte, libro quarto, desde el capitulo nono hasta el vigessimo quarto de dicha historia: añadidas las oraciones, que pertenecen â cada meditación* (Mexico City: Francisco de Ribera Calderon, 1717); Francisco Antonio de Vereo, *Aurora alegre del dichoso día de la gracia María Santíssima digna Madre de Dios: Prosiguen los diez y seis últimos días de el mes de vida . . . epítome de los libros Mystica ciudad de Dios y Vida de la Virgen Madre de Dios* (Mexico City: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1727); Joachín Osuna, *Peregrinación christiana por el camino real de la ce- leste Jerusalén: dividida en nueve jornadas, con quatro hospicios, que son unas estaciones devotas al modo del Via-Crucis, guirnaldas a la sagrada Passión de Christo, y dolores de su santíssima Madre: añadida al fin una refección espiritual de oraciones para antes, y despues de recibir los santos sacramentos de la penitencia, y comunión* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Mexicana, 1756).

similarities with Rubens's *Last Supper* in order to identify how Torres inventively adhered to and engaged with certain pictorial conventions while simultaneously upending them. Although Torres would not have witnessed Rubens's painting firsthand, he likely came into contact with prints modeled after the work, possibly the engraving by Boetius Adams Bolswert dated circa 1632–3 (fig. 2.16). To start, both works anchor their subjects around a sparsely set table. Christ sits in the center with his lower body obscured by a white tablecloth, his gaze directed upward, his torso twisted in a three-quarter view, and his arms raised as he blesses the Eucharist held in his left hand and the wine-filled chalice propped immediately before him. The apostles gather around the table in an analogous manner to the Rubens painting. Their bodies squeeze together and lean in toward the center transfixed by what they witness. The bearded elderly apostle to the right, for example, unmistakably resembles Rubens's apostle in the same position. Facing away from the viewer, both lean on the table bowing toward Christ and furrow their brows conveying their unwavering attention to the Eucharist. Additionally, both paintings depict two figures seated in the foreground; the one to the left follows his colleagues in witnessing the sacrament, while his neighbor, Judas, turns away from Christ, legs crossed, and his right hand grazing his chin as he stares outward making eye contact with the viewer.

Not only are the two paintings' respective assemblages of figures comparable, but the setting also shares a number of design features. The figures gather in a dark space draped with a curtain and bedecked with an altar displaying two candles flanking an open book. The theatrical setting coupled with the intimate gathering of apostles intensifies the scenes' magnetic focus on Christ as he converts the bread and wine into flesh and blood. Through repeating a design conceived by Rubens's model, Torres upholds his Last Supper as one that extols the Institution of the Eucharist.

And yet, if we expand our gaze beyond Torres's table, the scene veers away from tradition and complicates the singular focus on the presentation of the first Communion. Most notably, Torres enlarges his Last Supper to include supplemental figures and apertures. The lunette opens up the Cenacle's ceiling to reveal God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and putti. Torres also adds a gathering of four individuals to the right edge and an alcove brimming with figures to the left. In addition to the central canvas, two side panels flank the Last Supper and picture St. Francis and St. Bonaventure. Thus, Torres chooses to emulate Rubens's representation of Christ and twelve apostles but experiments in the spaces circumscribing the Institution of the Eucharist.

Torres does not shy away from crediting his inspiration for this elaborated, revisionist Last Supper. Radiating against the dark backdrop in the bottom left corner, a white cartouche encircled in a golden frame and inscribed with black text identifies his source: The Venerable Mother María de Jesús de Ágreda, Part Two, Book Six, Chapter Eleven (fig. 2.17). Summarizing the chapter, the inscription reads:

> The night of the Dinner in which the August Sacrament of the Altar was instituted, the Eternal Father and the Holy Spirit appeared in the Cenacle. Blessed Christ took Communion himself and gave a part to Gabriel so that he could give Communion to Blessed Mary who was accompanied by the three Marys and by her thousands of guardian angels, and then Christ and the Apostles communed, and then Saint Peter gave Communion to the Holy Father Saints Enoch and Elijah who were taken by angels from the place where they were to the Cenacle.[34]

Notably, Torres's summary of the chapter outlined in the cartouche highlights the key sacred figures, traditional and nontraditional, involved in the sacrament. Further, Torres repeats Sor María's transgressive chronology of events in which the Virgin Mary received the Eucharist

[34] "La noche de la Cena q[ue] se instituyó el Augugustissimo Sacramento del Altar, aparecieron la persona del Eterno P[adre] y la del Espiritu Sancto en el Cenaculo. Christo S[eñor] N[uestro] se comulgó assi mismo, y dio otra particula a S. Gabriel para que comulgase a Maria S[antisi]ma q[ue] estaba acompañada de las tres Marias y de su mil Angeles de guarda, y luego conmulgó Christo a sus Apostoles, y después S. Pedro a los dos S[an]tos Padres Henoch, y Elías q[ue] fueron traídos por los Angeles del lugar donde estaban al Cenaculo."

before the apostles. The cartouche therefore elucidates the picture's anomalous iconography by associating its account with Sor María de Ágreda's book.

Why would Torres cite *Mystical City of God*'s passage in his painting? This work was commissioned for the sacristy of the Propaganda Fide de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Zacatecas, a mission founded by Fray Antonio Margil who encouraged his followers to practice the teachings put forth in Sor María's writing.[35] According to the signature, the painting was completed in 1720, one year before the church's dedication. Although we do not have patronage documents detailing the painting's history, the date suggests it was commissioned in anticipation of the Propaganda Fide de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe's new building. Furthermore, the painting's monumental scale fits perfectly with the wall's dimensions suggesting the work was designed for this exact location. Given how central Sor María was as a model missionary and spiritual author to the curriculum established at the Propaganda Fide, it is possible that the friars commissioned Torres to follow Sor María's precepts in his rendering of the Last Supper. A second Last Supper painting completed in 1749 by Gabriel José de Ovalle also housed in the missionary college in Zacatecas includes a similar iconographic program, which strengthens the argument that the friars within the apostolic college were keen to behold Sor María's version of the Last Supper (fig. 2.18). Torres himself was a devoted acolyte of the abbess independent of the Propaganda Fide's patronage, made evident by his will in which he contributed funds to Sor María's canonization. He left "two *tomines*… for the [canonization] of the venerable mother María de Jesús de Ágreda, whose alms are paid from my goods."[36] Torres's will, therefore,

[35] Anna Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 197.

[36] "Dos tomines… para la [canonización] de la venerable madre María de Jesús de Agreda, cuyas limosnas se paguen de mis bienes." Archivo de Notarías, Ciudad de México, Felipe Muñoz de Castro, Libro 2577, fs. 275–278v,

operates not only as testimony to the artist's familiarity with her ideas but also portrays him as a staunch advocate of her holiness.

In addition to archival documentation, the painting's dramatic signature substantiates Torres's affinity for Sor María's writings. Within the cartouche he transcribed her words, signed her name, and subsequently, just beyond frame to the immediate right, he signed his own: "Antonio de Torres. Fecit 1720" or "Antonio de Torres. He made it 1720." By situating his signature outside of the privileged space of the gold cartouche but in close proximity with Sor María's, Torres both identifies himself as the one who renders the image but also relegates himself to the subservient position, espousing Sor María's writing as the foundation for his Last Supper. This double signature crediting the iconographic source as well as the artist's hand is unusual within the context of colonial painting. Applying Michel Foucault's seminal essay "What is an Author?" to this case study helps clarify why the inscription is noteworthy. Foucault argues that "the function of the author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within society."[37] By highlighting Sor María in his painting, Torres differentiates his *Last Supper* as a particular interpretation worthy of reading and beholding: Sor María's authorial presence on the canvas corroborates a new discourse that enriches the original scriptural narrative and elevates the Virgin Mary. And yet, by adding the word "fecit" next to his name, Torres recognizes himself as the maker of the work. Thus, *Mystical City of God* presents a new discourse that allows the artist not only to promote Sor María's text but also to rethink and transform the standardized iconography associated with the Last Supper.

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originally cited in Mina Ramírez Montes, "Documentos: el testamento del pintor Antonio de Torres," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 15, no. 59 (1988): 268.

[37] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 305.

Building on his use of the word "fecit," how then does Torres create his painting? Attending first to the lunette, the novel insertion of a heavenly realm splits the composition. God and the dove fly above one another with their arms and wings outstretched, blessing the scene below and bathing the dark space in light. Their presence, therefore, evokes Sor María's text describing God's descent into the chamber. In contradistinction with Leonardo's *Last Supper*, for example, whose one-point perspective intensifies the picture's sense of depth and thrusts the viewer's attention toward Christ's centrality, the space in which Torres's Christ sits is conspicuously shallow, ushering the viewer's attention between the upper and lower limits of the picture from Christ, to the Holy Spirit, and to God the Father.

Within the Cenacle, Christ is the only one to look upward toward God. Although Christ is still rooted to earth, his gaze links him to the heavenly realm and establishes the Holy Trinity across the vertical axis of the composition. Words emanating from Christ's and God's mouths augments this exchange. Jesus utters the final lines of the Memorial Acclamation, the words recited after the Institution of the Eucharist: "As often as you shall do these things you shall do them in remembrance of me."[38] His gaze and prayer, therefore, underscore Christ's dual focus: via text he beckons the viewers into the picture by encouraging them to witness and ruminate on the sacrament's significance while simultaneously concentrating his eyes on God the Father. From the lunette, God recites Psalm 22:5 which states, "To you they cried out and were saved,"[39] stressing humanity's redemption as he addresses his son. It appears that Jesus's body is both physically palpable as the facilitator of the sacrament but also as a symbol. The insertion of the lunette creates a new constellation of sacred figures aligning Christ as part of the Trinity,

[38] "Haec quotiescumque feceritis, in mei memoriam facietis."

[39] "Parasti in conspectus meo mensam."

abstracting his body into the Eucharist before our eyes, connecting the Last Supper to his eventual ascendance, and emphasizing the eschatological in addition to the sacramental.

But the work does not simply upend iconographic convention by oscillating the viewer's attention between heaven and earth along the vertical axis of the composition. Instead, the picture continuously mobilizes the viewer so as to pivot up and down, side to side, around and across: movement between the turbulent, metamorphosing clouds, undulating folds of the curtain, sinuous textual inscriptions, and the flickering candles. This is not a still picture with a single focal point embellished by a few novel appendages, but rather a kinetic one that ushers our attention from one occurrence to the next. For example, the text unfurling around Christ's head and the spotlight emanating from the Holy Dove guide the viewer's attention toward the lower, right corner of the composition. Furthermore, if we attend to the apostles at the table, we notice that there are only eleven instead of the traditional twelve, prompting the viewer to scan the picture in search of the missing disciple.

We find that Peter has excused himself from the table to administer the Eucharist to two supplementary individuals in the lower right corner. The men kneel before Peter facing the center of the composition. The one in the foreground clasps his hands in prayer and stares at the apostle who delivers the wafer. The second looks down at the floor patiently awaiting his turn. Who are these men and why have they been invited to participate in the first Communion? Inscriptions tagging their bodies name each figure: Elijah and Enoch. Although the cartouche outlines the sequence of events that expands the Last Supper to include these individuals as subsequent recipients of the Eucharist, the spelled-out names underscore a level of apprehension on the part of the artist concerned that an onlooker would be unfamiliar with these strange attendees. A fourth figure, the angel, rests his left hand on Enoch's shoulder and thrusts his right

hand toward the open book, which reads "Man ate the bread of the angels."[40] The repeated representation of Christ's followers receiving Communion develops the ritual beyond the original Institution of the Eucharist. As Sor María wrote, "And being given to the two Holy Men Enoch and Elijah who were alive in mortal flesh, this participation was extended to these two of the natural law."[41] By inserting figures from the Old Testament, Torres's Last Supper becomes pliable, opening up his painting of the feast to anachronistic newcomers.

Although they do not appear together in the Hebrew Bible, Elijah and Enoch are both known as holy figures who were transferred to Heaven through God's intervention without experiencing death. While Enoch was not a frequent subject of sacred art in colonial Mexico, Elijah was relatively popular.[42] The seventeenth-century painting by Juan Salguero, for example, pictures Elijah transported by angels as his disciple Elisha watches from the ground (fig. 2.19).[43] In line with Sor María's narration, Torres lifts these figures out of the Old Testament and inserts them into the Cenacle to receive the Eucharist from Peter. Looking backward to historical sacred figures whose corporeal transferal to Heaven predated Christ's elevates the significance of the body that consumes the Eucharist. Playing with anachronistic figures, as the art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have argued, "points away from that moment, backward to a remote ancestral origin, perhaps, or to a prior artifact, or to an origin outside of time, in divinity. At the same time, it points forward to all its future recipients who will activate and

[40] "Panem angelorum manducavit homo."

[41] "Y dándoseles a los dos Varones Santos Enoc y Elías que estaban vivos en carne mortal, se extendió esta participación a los de esta dos de la ley natural." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Diós*, 768.

[42] Four painted examples are illustrated in *Arte y mística del barroco*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Colegio de San Ildefonso, 1994), 226–9, 251–7.

[43] For more information on the painting's iconography, see Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, "Elías arrebatado por el carro de fuego," *Arte y mística del barroco*, 256–7.

reactivate it as a meaningful event."[44] Considering Nagel and Wood's theory in relation to Torres's painting, we can see how Elijah and Enoch, two characters who reference ancestral time predating the Last Supper, catapult the picture into the present. If Christ can reveal himself via the Eucharist to individuals from the Hebrew Bible, he too can commune with his contemporary followers who behold this picture. The viewer, then, is invited in to join the congregation of Christ's acolytes represented by Elijah and Enoch.

Torres does not just transform the Last Supper with one additional scene of Communion, but two. Across the Cenacle to the left side, the Virgin Mary receives the Eucharist from Gabriel. The archangel, Virgin Mary, and her followers populate a recessed alcove to the immediate left of the table and above the cartouche. Kneeling on a platform, Mary clasps her hands together and stares at Gabriel who presents her with the host. Behind the Virgin, the three Marys and a chorus of angels witness the sacrament, as Sor María described. But this third instance of Communion, I will argue, operates differently than Elijah and Enoch's. First, the Virgin occupies her own space removed from the Cenacle as opposed to a contiguous one in the foreground. Second, she is surrounded by a congregation of witnesses. And lastly, she is aligned with the cartouche, creating an irrefutable partnership between the Virgin, Sor María, and *Mystical City of God*.

The Virgin's reception of the Eucharist contrasts even more sharply with Elijah and Enoch's when we consider two earlier canvases by the artist Juan Correa, which are also located in Zacatecas and inspired by Sor María (fig. 2.20).[45] At first glance, the compositions are similar: the Virgin, Elijah, and Enoch all kneel; Peter and Gabriel deliver the wafer elevated above their respective recipients; and an angel accompanies the scene in the foreground. The settings,

[44] See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 9.

[45] Elisa Vargas Lugo was the first to connect these paintings to *Mystical City of God* in *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra,* vol. 2 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1985), 389. See also Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, *Arte y mística del barroco*, 226–9.

however, are dissimilar. Just behind the Virgin and the angel, the three Marys wait patiently, and the sky opens up to the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, behind Elijah and Enoch, a smaller scene in the upper right corner incises the flat backdrop. Upon closer examination, we realize that Elijah and Enoch's bodies are doubled and the picture represents not only their Communion, but their bodies summoned to heaven by angels. This doubling of bodies in the foreground and background suggests that the Eucharist is incumbent for Elijah and Enoch's ascent. The Virgin, on the other hand, stays rooted to the ground alongside her followers. The revisionist account of the Last Supper that includes the Virgin receiving the Eucharist, therefore, relates to something else other than her salvation and ascent to heaven.

How does picturing the Virgin Mary receiving Communion disrupt the Last Supper? A second painting by Juan Correa predating Torres's work elucidates this question (fig. 2.21).[46] Unlike Torres, Correa monumentalizes the administration of the Eucharist and relegates Christ and the apostles to the background. The painting, upon first glance, resembles early modern Spanish works of Saint John the Evangelist giving Communion to Mary as exemplified by Alonso Cano (fig. 2.22).[47] However, Cano's depiction of the Virgin receiving Communion represents the Virgin in the moments after Christ's Ascension. Correa's work, on the other hand clearly follows Sor María's narrative that states she first partook in the ritual during the Last Supper. Gabriel descends into the center of the composition atop a celestial cloud and his body bifurcates the composition. Kneeling before Gabriel on the canvas' left-hand side, the Virgin Mary stares at the wafer raised to her lips. She wears a blue head covering and pink dress and holds a swatch of striped cloth to catch the crumbs that escape the ritual. Although Gabriel's

[46] Manuel Trens was the first to connect this work to *Mystical City of God* in *La eucaristía en el arte español*, 111. See also Vargas Lugo, *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra*, 126; Vargas Lugo, *Arte y mística del barroco*, 106–7.

[47] Ibid., 110.

hands are occupied administering the Eucharist, his billowing red cape and right wing frame the right side of the canvas in which the space recedes backwards revealing a dining room inhabited by the apostles and Christ. They sit around a glowing circular table bearing the chalice, plate, and two candlesticks. Christ holds the Eucharist and stares upwards beyond the candelabra dangling from the ceiling. By consigning the Institution of the Eucharist to an alcove and centering the Virgin Mary receiving Communion, Correa insists that the viewer behold the new encounter between the Virgin and Gabriel as a fundamental episode within the story of the Last Supper.

Correa uses the established compositional strategy of a split picture that originated with the artist Pieter Aertsen and was subsequently popularized throughout early modern Europe, particularly in Spain.[48] For instance, Diego Velazquez's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (1618) depicts two women in the foreground preparing a meal while the background illustrates Chapter Ten from the Gospel of Luke (fig. 2.23). Similar to the Correa picture, Velazquez's work is composed of two levels: the traditional biblical scene in the background and novel characters in the foreground. Focusing on the background, Victor Stoichita summarizes, "The figures are miniaturized and logically arranged in the space. What we see through the window is an *historia*, taken from the Gospel."[49] He adds "In Velazquez's work, the frame of the 'recessed' picture stands out sharply from the wall in the background. The cut is so evident that one could quite justifiably ask oneself if it is still a genuine 'aperture' in the wall or whether it is not in fact a 'painting.'"[50]

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[48] Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 3.

[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] Ibid.

Correa adopts the split picture genre and plays with the relationship between foreground and background in a manner that innovatively amalgamates the two scenes: Correa's recessed alcove is not isolated but in dialogue with the foreground. The tiles underneath Mary's body mimic the floor of the Last Supper; the angel's gesture mirrors that of the apostle seated opposite Christ; and the Virgin's robes echo the salmon and blue hues of her son's. Merging the spaces probes the question, why include the Virgin Mary receiving the Eucharist in conjunction with the Last Supper? First, these formal similarities develop a parallelism between the two scenes, conjoining the otherwise divorced spaces and re-asserting a connection between the Virgin and Christ despite their physical separation. Second, the aperture concedes the iconography's unorthodoxy. By including the Last Supper, the artist situates the new encounter between the Virgin and Gabriel alongside a more familiar temporal context. While this dialectic clarifies the unorthodoxy through the allusion to a more familiar iconography, it also boldly argues for something new: Correa asserts, by inserting the Virgin as an adjoining but key player, that she does not just receive Communion autonomously, but prior to those at the Last Supper. Thus, although the apostles witness the consecration of the host in the background, Correa re-stages the Institution of the Eucharist by bringing the Virgin to the foreground as the first to receive the sacrament preceding Christ's followers.

A final pictorial element joining the foreground with the background is Gabriel's wing. Moving from the archangel's body toward the canvas' corner, the limb transforms from feathers to a velvet red curtain draping the Last Supper's interior. This method of framing the picture within a picture contrasts sharply with Velazquez's definitive cut between kitchen and biblical scene. The curtain bordering the upper threshold of the Last Supper morphs into the feathers of Gabriel's wing, sewing rather than severing. This pictorial change transforms the relationship

between the foreground, frame, and aperture: the wing/curtain is deployed as an exterior framing device for the background but simultaneously operates as the central subject in the foreground,[51] becoming a locus of experimentation. As the wing converts from fabric to flesh, Gabriel's pictorial conversion resonates with the material conversion from bread and wine into body and blood. Similar to the doctrine of concomitance, which asserts that Christ was wholly present in multiple places at once, the wing/curtain's dual presence in the foreground and background performs holy matter's potential to change. Thus, the picture utilizes the curtain/wing as a device to expound upon that which is in flux, and the potential of one thing to vanish and convert into another.

Such material transformations resonate with the Eucharist's own conversion and evokes Mary's unique connection to Christ's flesh and blood. When considering the Virgin's corporeal relation to her son's body, she is typically characterized as a vessel that delivered Christ into the world. But through participating in Communion, the Virgin re-ingests Christ and shelters his body once again. Correa, Torres, and other artists uphold such a comparison by borrowing certain pictorial conventions from scenes of the Annunciation. In New Spain, the Annunciation typically takes place in a room teeming with divine characters, whether it be the Holy Spirit, God the Father, or angels. Moreover, Gabriel swoops into the room carrying lilies and hovers above the Virgin Mary on a cloud. The Virgin kneels just below Gabriel either staring at him or eyes gazing toward the floor listening to the angel's message. Correa's painting appropriates a similar physical interaction between the two figures. Torres further infuses the dark chamber with a

[51] For further discussion on the parergon, see the pivotal text by Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," in *Truth in Painting* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Also see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

celestial quality by positioning the small angel in the foreground and Gabriel floating on a cloud. Instead of the messenger, though, Gabriel fulfills the role of the priest.

Correa's second painting of the Virgin's Communion not only adapts a similar posture but also carries a lily—an attribute that signifies her immaculate body in Annunciation pictures. Such visual allusions to the Annunciation suggest a kinship between the two episodes from the Virgin's life. As the Virgin states in *Mystical City of God* upon receiving the Eucharist, "My chest will be your dwelling and tabernacle, where you rest."[52] Given Mary's Immaculate Conception, she does not need to consume the Eucharist to access heaven like Elijah and Enoch, but rather uniquely offers her body as a sanctuary. The picture corroborates the Virgin as protectress of the Eucharist by illustrating her holding a napkin to catch the fallen crumbs. Thus, despite the crumbliness of the host, the Virgin safeguards every particle and incorporates Christ's flesh into her own body.

The Correa painting is an outlier when it comes to placing Mary and Gabriel as the central figures and transferring the Cenacle in the background. While I have not found any sources explaining why this compositional model failed to resonate, the work's lack of influence suggests the possibility that it may have challenged orthodoxy too aggressively. Paintings such as Torres's, meanwhile, hint at a more careful negotiation between tradition and experimentation: by inverting Correa's model and consigning the Virgin to the aperture, her presence is not as confrontational. And yet, even though she is ancillary, the ideas proposed by Correa's painting still endure in the work by Torres since the artist insists that the viewer behold her physical presence as a core part of the composition.

[52] "Será vuestra morada y tabernáculo mi pecho, donde descanséis."

Torres's decision to insert the Virgin as separate but present distinguishes her from the apostles and from Elijah and Enoch. She is not at the table nor in the corner of the Cenacle. This separation alludes to her unique experience taking Communion as a mother ingesting, sheltering, and re-uniting with her son after having had him in her body during pregnancy. This singular bond stands apart from the apostles, Elijah and Enoch who all receive the Eucharist in a collective setting. Further, the three Marys and angels congregate around her and witness the sacrament. Surrounding the Virgin with her own acolytes creates a pictorial parallel between mother and son each with his/her congregation of followers. As *Mystical City of God* states, the sacrament was "deposited on the chest and over the heart of the Blessed Mary" who was the "legitimate tabernacle and reliquary."[53] The Virgin is featured here as the future leader modeling the act of receiving Communion but also as the protectress of the body of the Church.

While Antonio de Torres's painting is the only Last Supper I have identified that textually cites Sor María as a source for its atypical iconography, other paintings created in the eighteenth century also feature the Virgin Mary, Elijah, and Enoch. These works follow a similar compositional model as Torres's by flanking the central meal with the Virgin Mary on the left and Elijah and Enoch on the right. It is unclear whether these artists knew that the iconography originated from *Mystical City of God* and violated doctrine. Either way, the sheer number of works demonstrate an interest in these iconographic innovations that resonated throughout the viceroyalty.

[53] "quedó depositado el Santissimo Sacramento en el pecho de María Santissima, y sobre el corazón, como legitimo Sagrario, y relicario del Altissimo y duró este deposito desde aquella noche hasta después de la Resurrección que dijo la primera Missa San Pedro, ordenó el todo Poderoso esta maravilla, assi para consuelo de la gran Reyna, y también para cumplir la promessa hecha a su Iglesia, que estaría con los hombres hasta el fin del siglo…" Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 778.

A painting by Manuel de Arrellano completed in 1721 and located in the Franciscan Parroquía de Santa María de la Visitación in Xochimilco visually resembles Torres's painting but lacks a cartouche to link its iconography with Sor María (fig. 2.24).[54] Both pictures depict the Last Supper taking place in dark interiors with God the Father and the Holy Spirit bursting through the ceiling. Further, the two works anchor the composition around a luminous table and flank the central scene with illustrations of the Virgin Mary, Elijah, and Enoch receiving Communion. Arellano re-arranges the figures, however, creating a different composition from that of his predecessor. Elijah and Enoch no longer kneel in the foreground but occupy a recessed niche in which the two men hover above Peter carried by angels. Whether they are in the act of ascending from or descending toward heaven, their floating postures invoke Correa's painting which connects their act of receiving the sacrament with salvation. On the opposite side, the Virgin Mary faces away from the viewer and accepts the Eucharist from Gabriel. Arellano's work, therefore, presents a similar dichotomy between the Old Testament characters who receive the Eucharist as a means toward salvation whereas the Virgin stays rooted to the ground.

A final and significant difference distinguishing Arellano's painting from Torres's is the central scene which not only represents the Institution of the Eucharist but also depicts the apostles receiving Communion. Christ gazes downward toward the sacrament while two apostles to either side of him hold the consecrated host as they feed their colleagues who kneel in anticipation. Most curious, though, is the representation of Judas stationed in the foreground to the right. At first glance, it appears as if an angel were flying toward him to administer the sacrament. But comparing the illustration to *Mystical City of God* reveals that the artist in fact

[54] For more information on Manuel de Arellano, see Mirta Asunción Insaurralde Caballero, "La pintura a inicio del siglo XVIII novohispano: estudio formal, tecnológico y documental de un grupo de obras y artífices; Los Arellano," PhD diss. (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2018).

visualizes the angel taking the host away from him.[55] Toward the conclusion of Chapter Eleven, Sor María writes of a "very secret miracle [that] happened in the Communion of the Apostles" in which, "the Queen ordered her angels to successively remove the bread from Judas's mouth, and return it to where the rest of the Sacraments were; because on that occasion she had to defend the honor of her Most Holy Son…"[56] Arellano's painting is the only example I have found that visualizes this particular excerpt from *Mystical City of God*. It is more common to find Judas gazing outward toward the viewer or witnessing the elevation of the host. Thus, the work illustrates either the patron's or Arellano's familiarity with Sor María's revisionist Last Supper and the intention of highlighting the Virgin Mary's centrality in the scene. Although she remains sequestered in the background, her actions alter the events taking place in the composition's center and espouse her role as protectress.

A third example is a painting attributed to Miguel Cabrera currently housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (fig. 2.25).[57] Cabrera also takes up the multiple representations of Communion but organizes the space in a different manner. Two windows on the right side and one on the left puncture the walls framing the central scene. To the right, the stacked windows depict Elijah and Enoch twice. The lower window renders Peter administering the Eucharist and the upper one renders angels lifting their bodies toward heaven. Juxtaposed with this scene of flight, the Virgin Mary kneels on the ground as a heavenly spotlight descends toward her from

[55] Ibid., 216–19.

[56] "Otro milagro muy secreto sucedió en la Comunión de los Apóstoles […] Reyna mandó a sus Ángeles que sucesivamente sacasen a Judas de la boca el pan, y vino consagrado y lo restituyesen a donde estaba lo demas Sacramentado; porque en aquella ocasion le tocaba defender la honra de su Hijo Santissimo…" Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios*, 779.

[57] Thank you to Mark A. Castro for sharing high-res images of this painting.

the upper right corner. Although the angels' wings are outstretched, they do not lift Mary toward heaven but leave her on earth.

Overall, Arellano paints a turbulent Last Supper compared to the more contained painting by Cabrera. Rather than situating Christ and the apostles in a single room, Arellano's space meanders, ebbs and flows into the recesses of hallways and alcoves. Doric columns guide the viewer to a room beyond view. Two openings on either side disclose additional groups of figures; the ceiling opens up to the heavens with God the Father, from where the holy dove and putti are descending into the dining room. In contrast, Cabrera's composition centers around Christ. By picturing multiple acts of receiving Communion, however, these works solicit questions about embodiment, gestures, flesh, and transformation by expanding on the original event and depicting multiple iterations of the ritual. Additionally, they juxtapose the Virgin's reception of the Eucharist with Elijah's and Enoch's. By representing the men's ascent, the artists home in on Mary's earthbound position.

Other paintings produced in eighteenth-century Mexico depict the revised Last Supper with the Virgin Mary receiving Communion but exclude Elijah and Enoch. One such example is a painting in Puebla that maintains a tripartite composition but replaces Elijah and Enoch with two servants preparing food (fig. 2.26). The Virgin appears to the left but receives Communion from Peter rather than Gabriel. A second by José Rodríguez Carnero follows a vertical format and places Mary, Gabriel, and a group of angels above the apostles in a large room just behind the central dining table (fig. 2.27). Unusually, Carnero depicts Mary as nearly the same size as the foregrounded figures, heightening her visibility despite being placed in the background.

One final painting by Manuel Pérez de la Serna also eliminates Elijah and Enoch but continues to insist on the Virgin's participation in the sacrament (fig. 2.28). This painting was

completed in 1783 for the Convento de Santa Clara in the city of Querétaro. Spatially, the work is similar to the painting by Torres: Pérez de la Serna situates his Last Supper in an elaborate Cenacle with pilasters, high ceilings, a cupola, an altar, and the Virgin Mary situated in a niche on the left-hand side. But Pérez de la Serna modifies the composition so that the Institution of the Eucharist is no longer situated along the central axis: he relocates the Trinity from the middle of the ceiling to the left and shifts the meal to the composition's right-hand side. This altered arrangement newly incorporates the Virgin into the composition with the barrel-vaulted ceiling culminating at Mary's alcove, the table placed on a diagonal extending toward her, and Christ seated to the side facing her direction. While the Virgin stays outside of the Cenacle, the principal scene around her has been adjusted to create a more continuous space, one that establishes Mary as an integral part of the ritual.

The most unusual component of this painting, however, is the cluster of female saints and nuns kneeling along the canvas' lower edge. Pérez de la Serna arranges these newcomers into two distinct groups that asymmetrically flank the Last Supper. Pérez de la Serna also writes each woman's name above her head so as to avoid any confusion about the identities of the sitters: Cunigunde, Salome, Isabel, Ines, Claire, and Lucy kneel just below the Virgin Mary's raised alcove while two unidentified female monastics occupy the opposite corner in line with the Last Supper.[58] These inscriptions reveal the unorthodoxy of the women's presence; after all, neither the apostles nor Christ receive labels identifying their names. Not even the Virgin Mary receives an inscription since by the late eighteenth century her presence in the Last Supper had become routine. Situated in the composition's lower corners, their placement harkens back to Torres's

[58] Guillermina Ramírez Montes, *Niñas, doncellas, vírgenes eternas: Santa Clara de Querétaro (1607–1864)* (Mexico: UNAM/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2005), 252.

Elijah and Enoch. In a parallel manner, they occupy a contiguous space with the apostles and face Christ as he blesses the bread and wine. Although their gaze is directed toward the table, the women's kneeling postures as well as their robes visually resemble Mary's stance and garments. The Virgin seemingly serves as an impetus for opening up the Last Supper to inviting additional female subjects into the room to follow her exemplary model.

The painting is housed in the sacristy of the Franciscan Convento de Santa Clara de Jesús, a convent founded in the seventeenth century for the daughters of Querétaro's elite families. These women lived in a vast complex that occupied over four city blocks and comprised ten chapels and sixty individual cells.[59] One nun, in particular, named Francisca de los Ángeles, described the transformational experience of receiving Communion as one of ecstasy in which angels "pulled the curtains" and her soul "saw and adored the host with the loving master hidden in it."[60] She portrayed the experience as one in which she was consumed by divine fire and made her feel "so strengthened that I was left more satisfied than if I had eaten the most substantial and delicate delicacies."[61] Cherishing the daily ritual of mass, confession, and Communion as strongly as she did, Francisca claimed that the Lord gave her the grace of attending them by means of bilocation from within her cell where she would experience visions of entering a church and finding herself physically in front of the sacrament. In addition to her own visions of receiving the host, she was also inspired by Sor María. She possessed books

[59] Ellen Gunnarsdóttir, *Karismata: The Baroque Vocation of Francisca de los Ángeles* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 31.

[60] Manuel Septien y Septien, *Historia de Querétaro desde los tiempos prehistóricos hasta el año de 1808* (Querétaro: Gobierno del Estado, 1967), 169, cited in Gunnarsdóttir, *Karismata*, 126.

[61] Gunnarsdóttir, *Karismata*, 125–6.

authored by the Spanish mystic and claimed to have bilocated to New Mexico where she baptized and administered sacraments to newly converted Indigenous people in the region.[62]

Although Pérez de la Serna completed the painting thirty-nine years after Francisca's death and did not depict this particular nun, the work suggests an enhanced emphasis on the relationship between female monastics and the Eucharist. A textual inscription running along the bottom edge of the canvas details the identity of the patron and intensifies the association between gender and the sacrament: "The fabrication of the sacristy's material and canvas was completed in the royal convent of Santa Clara de Jesús, in this city of Querétaro, the current abbess (the second to serve a three-year term) being Reverend Mother Sister María Gertrudis de Señor San José y Guevara."[63] Maria Gertrudis de San José was the abbess of the convent from 1787 to 1790.[64] Although there are no patronage records for this particular painting, her name is listed amongst the signatures of six other nuns on a different document commissioning an organ for the convent.[65] Furthermore, she was also involved in commissioning the convent's new *retablo mayor* in 1784,[66] just one year after Pérez de la Serna signed his painting.

Listing both the convent and abbess as the work's patrons suggests the institution's commitment to the sacraments. It is also likely that Pérez de la Serna pictured these female saints within the Last Supper at the behest of the abbess and nuns. Notably, though, these holy women

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[62] Ibid., 70, 94–96.

[63] "Se concluyó la fábrica material y lienzo de esta sacristía en el real convento de Santa Clara de Jesús, de esta ciudad de Querétaro, siendo abadesa actual que es el segundo trienio la muy reverenda madre sor María Gertrudis de Señor San José y Guevara."

[64] Ramírez Montes, *Niñas, doncellas, vírgenes eternas*, 77. Further research needs to be done on María Gertrudis de San José. *Libro de cuentas de la madre María Gertrudis de San José* (1781) is housed in the Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Franciscana de Michoacán's Fondo Santa Clara, but I did not have a chance to visit and examine it in person during my fieldwork due to COVID 19.

[65] Ibid., 248.

[66] Ibid., 196.

are not rendered receiving the host themselves and instead operate as witnesses, harkening back to Francisca's transformational experience of beholding the sacramental bread. Thus, these monastics from various regions and time periods that gather together in the Cenacle are bestowed the privilege of witnessing and accessing the sacred event.

Conclusion

The Last Supper traditionally represents a coherent space with the twelve apostles and Christ gathered around the table. Historically, scholars have gone about studying this canonical theme of sacred art by identifying the exact episode represented: the betrayal, Institution of the Eucharist, or Communion of the apostles. But these paintings produced in Mexico achieve something entirely new: they adapt *Mystical City of God*'s revisionist account of the Last Supper as described in Chapters Ten and Eleven of Part Two, Book Six and transform the canonical iconography. Specifically, these paintings add supplementary figures such as the Virgin Mary as well as Elijah and Enoch. As the eighteenth century progressed, artists continued to experiment with these new characters, eventually dropping the Hebrew Bible figures altogether but continuing to render Mary present. The enduring representation of Mary as a participant in Last Supper scenes insists on her kinship with Christ as well as her role as sanctuary and co-redeemer.

The visual record presented in this chapter found that artists responded openly to Sor María's revised account of the Last Supper. Antonio de Torres quoted her book in his painting's inscription; Arellano pictured Mary's involvement with the central scene by depicting the angel taking away Judas's host at the behest of the Virgin; and multiple artists noted the distinction between the Virgin Mary's reception of the Eucharist versus Elijah and Enoch's. Over time, the Virgin Mary appears to have become an accepted and regular participant in the Last Supper even

as the two figures of the Hebrew Bible faded away. In their place, female monastics were invited into the space, signaling an open and malleable Cenacle that was continuously re-imagined by Mexican artists.

CHAPTER THREE

The Surrogate Body: The Virgin Mary and Passion Paintings

José Joaquin Magón's *Christ in the Prison of Caiaphas and the Flagellation* (mid-eighteenth century), located in the Templo de Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Puebla, depicts a tableau of suffering (fig. 3.1). The composition pictures Christ imprisoned in the left half of the canvas and flagellated to the right: occupying the center of each scene, he is first bound in metal chains and subsequently mangled by brutal lashes inflicted by torturers. Perhaps most peculiarly, Magón inserts the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist into the composition—a revisionist interpretation that defies the traditional narration. The window located in the upper left corner punctuates the dark enclosure of the prison cell, opening the space to these two additional figures and enabling the Virgin to press her head between the bars so as to behold her tortured son. In spite of his agony, Mary exudes radiance and restraint; and while her eyes well up with tears, the Virgin's body is not visibly overtaken by torment.

Magón's work typifies an iconographic change in colonial Mexico that altered canonical representations of Christ incarcerated and flagellated. These scenes of torture leading up to the Crucifixion were popular subjects of sacred art throughout the early modern Hispanic world. Typically, they portrayed Christ surrounded by adversaries either inflicting violence, as exemplified by Juan de Sevilla (fig. 3.2), or recovering his garments after the Flagellation, as modeled by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (fig. 3.3). Such pictures traditionally emphasized Christ's humanity and reinforced an affective devotional identification with the Passion. In contrast to the standardized iconography, however, the collection of paintings to be analyzed in this chapter complicate Christ's Incarceration and Flagellation. Despite differences in scale and

style, these paintings consistently expand the traditional narrative by opening up the composition to include the Virgin Mary. I will argue that Mary's unorthodox presence in these paintings was spurred by *Mystical City of God*'s radical departure from the conventional Passion. In defiance of the Gospels' account which omits the Virgin, Sor María introduces Mary as a critical actor present at every episode leading up to the Crucifixion.

This chapter examines the representation of Mary in relation to episodes of the Passion including Peter's denial, the Flagellation, and Angels Consoling Christ, coupling visual evidence with textual analysis of *Mystical City of God*. It will consider the following questions: How do artists experiment with Sor María's revisionist account of the Passion? And how does the Virgin Mary's newly valorized role alter representations of Christ's torment? I consider how the Virgin Mary's unusual closeness to the Passion propels a new way of beholding this theme in sacred art that bestows a kind of sanctifying power. I argue that these works uphold Mary as an active force whose gaze and presence disrupts canonical representations by portraying the Virgin as a spiritual advisor, compassionate witness, and omniscient guardian. Consequently, as an exemplar for beholding the Passion, Mary's adoring gaze recuperates her son's abject body and transforms the scene from one of stark corporeal disdain to one of conferred love and visionary knowledge.

Iconographic history of the Passion

The story of the Passion recounted in the Gospels comprises multiple episodes including Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Betrayal, Christ's seizure, Peter's denial, the Flagellation, the Crucifixion, Pieta, Entombment, and Resurrection, among others. These episodes were frequently depicted in sculpture and individual paintings as well as larger cycles of consecutive scenes. While visual works emerged as early as the fifth century, they became an

especially popular subject throughout Europe in the thirteenth century partly as a consequence of the Franciscan Order's promotion of asceticism.[1]

In early modern Spain, the Passion only became a common subject of religious imagery in the late fifteenth century. Cynthia Robinson argues the paucity of Passion artworks reflected a Spanish viewership reluctant to view Jesus's suffering body, a resistance that contrasts with the rest of Europe's intense fixation on Christ's torments. Instead of representations of the Passion, Spanish paintings representing Christ's divinity, such as the Transfiguration and Resurrection, were more frequent.[2] Additionally, Robinson notes that it was only in the final decade of the fifteenth century that devotional literature centering on Christ's Passion such as *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, Bonaventure's *Lignum*, and Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* were translated into Castilian. In place of these texts, Robinson identifies an alternative fifteenth-century source written by the Catalan Franciscan tertiary, Françesc Eiximenis, titled *Vida de Cristo* (ca. 1400), which she argues played an earlier and more influential role in late-medieval Iberia. Eiximenis presents a "Christ who is almost exclusively divine and all-powerful,"[3] and as such, his description of the Passion avoided "detailed or prolonged treatment of the specific physical indignities and sufferings inflicted upon the human Christ during the passion, themes that figured largely in meditations authored and disseminated in other European contexts."[4] It was only with the rise of the Inquisition, monastic reform, and a doubling down on orthodoxy that Spanish artworks started to focus on Jesus's suffering.

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[1] For more information on the iconographic history of the Passion, see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconographic of Christian Art: The Passion of Christ*, vol. II, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1972).

[2] Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in Multi-Confessional Castile: The Virgin, Christ, Devotions, and Images in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2013), 7.

[3] Ibid., 13.

[4] Ibid..

By the seventeenth century, representations of the Passion were ubiquitous throughout the Spanish Empire. Art historians frequently contextualize such images within the history of reform spurred by the Counter Reformation. John Moffit, for example, examines these "pathos-ridden" paintings depicting Christ after the Flagellation by Murillo, Francisco de Zurburán, and Diego Velázquez (figs. 3.3, 3.4, 3.5).[5] The cropped compositions illustrate Jesus's decrepit body in a tight, sparse room recovering after being scourged. Considering the Gospels only mention this episode briefly, Moffit argues that these works are beholden to other textual sources including artist treatises such as Francisco Pacheco's *Art of Painting* (1649) and mystical texts by Pseudo-Bonaventure, Diego Alvarez de Paz, Francisco Arias, and Francis de Sales,[6] which provide extended discussions of Christ's torture detailing his wounds, spilled blood, and accompanying angels.[7]

Alena Robin has looked at representations of Christ's suffering in New Spain as a phenomenon "inherited from the Spanish spiritual climate of the Golden Age."[8] Citing Pacheco's *The Art of Painting* (1649) and Juan Interian de Ayala's *The Christian and Erudite Painter* (1730), Robin analyzes how these sources prescribe proper ways of rendering Christ during the moments leading up to the Crucifixion. For instance, Pacheco criticized artists who indecorously painted Christ's body covered in wounds, castigating the ignorant painters "who with no

[5] John F. Moffit, "The Meaning of 'Christ After the Flagellation' in Siglo de Oro Sevillian Painting," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 52 (1992): 139.

[6] Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ, An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Isa Ragusa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 327–330; Diego Álvarez de Paz, "Meditación XIV," in *Opera Omnia* (Lyon: 1623); Francisco de Arias, *Libro de la Imitación de Christo Nuestro Señor* (Granada: Casa de Clemente Hidalgo, 1599); Francisco de Sales, *Introduccion a la Vida Devota de S. Francisco de Sales*, trans. Don Francisco de Cuvillas Donyague (Barcelona: Imprenta de Matevar: 1683).

[7] Moffit, "The Meaning of 'Christ After the Flagellation' in Siglo de Oro Sevillian Painting," 139–54.

[8] Alena Robin, "The Wound on Christ's Back in New Spain," *RACAR Revue d'art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* XXXII, 102 (2007): 80.

compassion throw lashes and blood, so as to erase the painting or to cover its defect."[9] Instead of overwhelming Christ's body with carnage, Pacheco recommended that the suffering be limited to his back, a direction that was picked up by the aforementioned Spanish artists. Almost a century later, Interián de Ayala wrote "Jesus Christ is to be painted cruelly and harshly whipped, shedding a lot of blood, his flesh swollen, and covered with visible open wounds."[10] Based on these excerpts, Robin concludes that Christ's back was identified by artists in New Spain as the appropriate part of the body to convey his dignified pain and encourage worshippers to internalize his suffering. Interián de Ayala's adamant insistence on external signs of violence, however, perhaps suggests a gradual shift toward a more exaggerated representation of Christ's torture.

In contrast to the more restrained paintings from seventeenth-century Spain, artworks in eighteenth-century Mexico exhibit a heightened attention to violence. Robin deploys multiple examples that illustrate Christ's open wounds including *The Flagellation* (1729) by Nicolás Enríquez (fig. 3.6), which renders a host of adversaries lacerating his skin so incessantly his ribcage is exposed. Robin also highlights an unusual double-sided engraving (mid eighteenth century) by Baltasar Troncoso portraying Jesus after the Flagellation (fig. 3.7). The front of the print displays a bloodied Christ wearing the crown of thorns while the verso side presents his battered back with two gaping wounds. The print not only invites the viewer to meditate on the Ecce Homo but also goes to unusual lengths by highlighting Christ's disfigurement through

[9] "sin piedad arrojan azotes y sangre, con que se borra la pintura o cubren sus defectos…" Francisco Pacheco, *El arte de la pintura*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda I Hugas (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990), 301, originally quoted in Robin, "The Wound on Christ's Back in New Spain," 80.

[10] "Hase, pues, de pintar a Jesu-Christo, azotado cruel, y acerbísimamente, derramando mucha sangre, hinchada, y muy acardenalada su carne." Juan Interián de Ayala, *El pintor christiano y erúdito, ó tratado de los errores que suelen cometerse freqüentemente en pintar, y esculpir las Imágenes Sagradas* (Madrid: Joachín Ibarra, 1782), 385–86, originally quoted in Robin, "The Wound on Christ's Back in New Spain," 80.

representing his body from both the front and back.[11] Despite this tendency toward graphic illustrations of torture, however, Kelly Donahue Wallace's archival research exploring the Mexican Inquisition's regulation of prints uncovers an enduring anxiety surrounding representations of back wounds. For example, in 1776 Fray Andres presented the inquisitors a print of Christ's injury, which the *calificador* Fray Francisco Larrea described as false and inflammatory.[12] The print, therefore, underscores an ardent fixation on this devotion but simultaneously reveals an effort to restrain its graphic and potentially deviant subject matter.

Mystical City of God's Passion Theology

Now that we have established how the Passion narrative developed textually and visually, let us turn to Sor María's revisionist account. Sor María revises the traditional sequence of events by describing the Virgin's central role and perspective throughout the entire Passion. Part Two, Book Six of *Mystical City of God* details Christ's arrest, trial, torture, and crucifixion, but also audaciously portrays the Virgin Mary as a key actor. Deviating from the Gospels and the aforementioned devotional texts, *Mystical City of God* transforms the narrative by expanding Mary's traditional involvement at the foot of the Cross and imagines a mother actively engaged in every aspect of the Passion starting with her son's arrest and concluding with his murder. Specifically, Sor María asserts that the Virgin Mary witnessed the denial of St. Peter and was actively involved in his repentance, watched Christ's Incarceration and Flagellation, underwent the same physical torture as her son, consoled him following the Flagellation, and understood the

[11] Ibid., 82–3.

[12] Kelly Donahue Wallace, "Prints and Printmakers in Viceregal Mexico City, 1600–1800," Phd Diss. (University of New Mexico, 2000), 306–7.

significance of every episode of the Passion. These revisionist accounts of the Virgin Mary's role will be explored more in depth later in the chapter.

*Mystical City of God'*s account of the Passion builds upon a long history of Marian devotion that developed in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iberia. As stated earlier, Robinson comments, in *Imagining the Passion in Multi-Confessional Castile,* on the region's reluctance to confront Christ's suffering body, which contrasts with the rest of Europe during the fifteenth century. Robinson argues that the emphasis on both Christ's and the Virgin's divinity was utilized as a strategy to inspire devotion but also as a means of appealing to recently converted Jews and Muslims. Focusing specifically on the influential text by Eiximenis, Robinson notes that his description of the Virgin Mary during the Passion was "an interior experience that allowed her to transcend physical pain in order to encounter mystical ecstasy and enlightenment."[13] Instead of conceiving of the Virgin as a means through which devotees could attain deeper comprehension of Christ's humanity, she served as a model that would "lead them to union with the divine."[14]

Jessica Boon addresses a transformation in Castilian theological devotion that took place at the turn of the sixteenth century when texts such as Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* were translated, ushering in a new focus on the pain inflicted on Christ's body. Along with these translations, Boon analyzes Castilian Passion treatises, the *Fasciculus myrrhe* (1511?), the *Passio duorum* (1526) by Francisco Tenorio and

[13] Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in Multi-Confessional Castile*, 247

[14] Ibid., 159.

Luis de Escobar, and *Primer abecedario espiritual* (1528) by Francisco de Osuna.[15] All three Franciscan texts recount Christ's Passion but also elaborate on the Gospels' limited discussion of the Virgin. Boon asserts these meditations elevate Mary to a type of "costar" whose "sufferings take center stage in a number of ways." [16] Specifically, the texts emphasize Mary's embodied anguish, asserting that she felt the same physical torture as was inflicted upon her son during the Crucifixion. Boon concludes that Mary was reconceived as the primary focus in which her body displaces Christ's during the Passion as the locus of "transformation of suffering from bodily to spiritual."[17] By imagining Mary's own physical distress, these Castilian treatises reconfigured her as the ultimate means to salvation.

Analyses of the divine and suffering Virgin put forth by Eixemenis and sixteenth-century Passion treatises resonate with Sor María's revisions. Sor María's Mary resembles Eixemenis's presentation of an omnipotent Virgin who is "the recipient of divine revelations and celestial knowledge independent of her more traditional role as the human vessel in which God's divine son was incarnated."[18] Throughout Part Two, Book Six of *Mystical City of God*, Sor María upholds the Virgin as an all-knowing visionary who singularly understands and ruminates on God's sacrifice. Moreover, Sor María emphasizes the Virgin's interiority that triumphs over physical imperfections: "But the Queen of virtues was undefeated, and her magnanimous Heart with the utmost pain never fainted, nor did she suffer the imperfections of discouragements and

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[15] *Fasciculus myrrhe: El qual trata de la passion de nuestro redemptory Jesu Christo* (Valladolid: Nicolás Tyerri, 1526); Francisco de Tenerio, *Passio duorum* (Seville: Juan Varela de Salamanca, 1539); Francisco de Osuna, *Primer abecedario espiritual*, ed. José Juan Morcillo Pérez (Madrid: Editorial Cisneros, 2004).

[16] Jessica Boon, "The Agony of the Virgin: The Swoons and Crucifixion of Mary in Sixteenth Century Castilian Passion Treatises," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 13.

[17] Ibid., 16.

[18] Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in Multi-Confessional Castile*, 13.

delusions that others faced."[19] Sor María contrasts the Virgin's exemplary strength to the weaker and more emotional responses of others who beheld Christ's mangled body.

At the same time as Sor María expounds upon the Virgin's interior experience, she also describes the embodied suffering in the same vein as Castilian Passion treatises. In Chapter Sixteen, Sor María writes, "all these insults, outrages, and abominable opprobrium, which the Savior suffered, His Blessed Mother felt, with the pain of the blows, and of the wounds in the same parts, and at the same time, that our Redeemer received them."[20] In Chapter Seventeen she goes on to stress, "the same pain and sorrow hurt the Son and the Mother, and a knife pierced them; differing in that Christ suffered as the Son of God, and the sole Redeemer of men; and Mary Most Holy as a pure creature, and Co-Redeemer of her Most Holy Son."[21] These two excerpts highlight Mary's exceptional connection to Christ as a co-redemptrix who is endowed through visions the same physical consternation. Through their mutual embodied torment described as a knife that pierces like a miraculous echo, the Virgin's suffering is magnified as comparable to Christ's and thus elevates her from compassionate mother to co-redeemer.

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[19] "Pero la Reyna de las virtudes estuvo invicta, y su magnánimo Corazón con lo sumo del dolor sobre todo humano discurso, nunca desfalleció, ni desmayó no padeció las imperfecciones de los desalientos y deliquios que los demás." María de Jesús de Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios: Milagro de su omnipotencia, y abismo de la gracia, historia divina, y vida de la Virgen madre de Dios, reyna, y señora nuestra Maria santissima, restauradora de la culpa de Eva, y medianera de la gracia*, vol. 2 (Madrid: B. de Villa-Diego, 1670), 894.

[20] "Todas estas afrentas, baldones, y abominables oprobrios, que padecía el Salvador, los miraba y sentía Su Santísima Madre, con el dolor de los golpes, y de las heridas en las mismas partes, y al mismo tiempo, que nuestro Redentor las recibía." Ibid., 836.

[21] "Un mismo dolor y pena hería al Hijo y la Madre, y un cuchillo los traspasaba; diferenciándose en que padecía Cristo como hombre Dios, y Redentor único de los hombres; y María Santísima como pura criatura, y Coadjutora de su Hijo Santísimo." Ibid., 845.

Sor María's Passion in New Spain

Primary sources testify to the widespread popularity of her depiction of the Passion outlined in Part Two of *Mystical City of God*. In 1732, the *Gaceta de México* announced a series of paintings located in the Convento de Religiosos Betlemitas in Mexico City that followed Sor María's account: "The Passion of the Lord [is] depicted according to the Venerable Agreda, in large canvases by the valiant brush of the celebrated Ybarra, surrounded by admirable frames, carved and gilded with care."[22] Although I have not been able to locate Ibarra's paintings illustrating Christ's suffering, the article evidences a Mexican audience aware of Sor María's impact on artworks.[23] By noting Ibarra's brushwork, the large scale of the canvases, and the ornate golden frames, the newspaper article reveals how Sor María's account of the Passion was promulgated and extolled through artistic production and display.

In addition to the *Gaceta*'s announcement of Ibarra's paintings, a plethora of devotional texts published in the viceroyalty prove that Sor María's version of the Passion was one of the most popular sections of *Mystical City of God* in Mexico. Pairing textual analysis of *Mystical City of God* with an examination of books published in Mexico elucidates which parts of Sor María's iteration of the Passion resonated most acutely. Given their abbreviated formats, these publications reveal how Sor María's ideas were introduced to a broader audience that did not

[22] "En toda su circunferencia la Pasión del Señor, historiada, según la V. Agreda, en corpulentos lienzos del valiente pincel del celebre Ybarra, ceñidos de admirables marcos, tallados, y dorados con todo esmero," *Gaceta de México*, December 1732.

[23] Paula Mues Orts has identified six works by Ibarra currently housed in the Claustro de San Francisco, Celaya, Guanajuato that she argues likely formed part of this original series. These works include *The Birth of the Virgin*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *Lamentation of the Body of Christ*, *Assumption of the Virgin*, *Virgin of the Apocalypse*, and *The Virgen Announcing to Saint Steven His Martyrdom and Glorification*. Despite Mues Orts's argument, only one of the six depicts a scene from the Passion. I have not been able to locate the other paintings that would have constituted the rest of Ibarra's original series. See catalogue numbers 68 through 73 in Paula Mues Orts, "El pintor novohispano José de Ibarra: imágenes retóricas y discursos pintados," PhD Diss. (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009).

have access to the cumbersome three-volume text. These works all explicitly cite Part Two, Book Six, which, as stated earlier, details Christ brought to the House of Annas and concludes with the Crucifixion.

The *Compendio* de la *sagrada passion*, y *muerte* de *N Señor Jesu-Christo*, *sacado* de la *Mystica ciudad* de *Dios* (1693) is the earliest work to re-print excerpts of Sor María's magnum opus in the viceroyalty.[24] The book is divided into abridged meditations that follow *Mystical City of God*'s organizational structure and narrative. Aligning with the original chapter organization, the meditations open with a description of each episode of the Passion and concludes with a dialogue between the Virgin Mary and Sor María. Curiously, the work also takes liberties in modifying certain aspects of the original. Most significantly, the text introduces the Passion from the perspective of the Virgin Mary, an editorial decision that diverges from *Mystical City of God,* which leads with Christ's experience: "The sorrows that the Queen of Angels, Holy Mary suffered during the Most Holy Passion, and the Death of her Most Holy Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, so that her devotees may accompany her following the painful steps of Jesus."[25] By opening with the Virgin Mary's suffering, the *Compendio* prioritizes her experience of the Passion from the outset.

In 1727, Bernardo de Hogal published *Aurora alegre del dichoso dia de la Gracia Santissima Digna Madre de Dios. Mes de vida, donde hallarán las Almas, pasto saludable, y*

[24] José de San Antonio y Flores, *Compendio de la sagrada passion, y muerte de N Señor Jesu-Christo, sacado de la Mystica ciudad de Dios, y Historia divina de Nuestra Señora, qve escrivio la venerable madre Maria de Jesus de Agreda, de la segunda parte, libro quarto, desde el capitulo nono hasta el vigessimo quarto de dicha historia: añadidas las oraciones, que pertenecen â cada meditación* (Mexico City: Francisco de Ribera Calderon, 1717), originally cited in Anna Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 106.

[25] "Los dolores que la Reyna de los Ángeles María Santísima padeció en la Santísima Pasión, y Muerte de su Hijo Santísimo Jesu-Christo Nuestro Señor, para que sus devotos le acompañen siguiendo los dolorosos passos de Jesús." Ibid.,

dulce para cada dia; epitome de los Libros Mystica Ciudad de Dios, y Vida de la Virgen Madre de Dios. Written by Fr. Francisco Antonio de Vereo, Predicador of the Franciscan Provincia Santo Evangelio, the book was published for those who did not have access to the three-volume version of *Mystical City of God*: "it is necessary to give them the same light of common acceptance that the most learned have."[26] The introduction's "Razon de la Obra" explains that the work is an epitome of *Mystical City of God* and conceived to be read every day for a month.[27] Days nine through thirteen of the month discuss Sor María's version of the Passion, recounting how the Virgin volunteers to participate in the pain and suffering of her son, how she sends the angels to ingratiate and adore Christ as he is imprisoned, her singular ability to understand Christ's pain, and the tunic she delivers via angels to cloak Christ's naked body.

Lastly, *Modo de Andar la via-sacra, sacado de la Mystica Ciudad de Dios, part. 2, lib. 6, cap. 12* was published in 1763 by the Colegio de la Santa Cruz in Querétaro.[28] The text is a guide to the Stations of the Cross, a fourteen-step devotion that focuses on specific events of Christ's last day on earth starting with his condemnation and concluding with his entombment. Although Sor María includes the Virgin Mary as a constant presence leading up to the Crucifixion, *Modo de Andar la Via-Sacra* omits any mention of the Virgin Mary's unusual presence in favor of following a more conventional narrative. Consequently, the text only alludes to the Virgin Mary when she appears at the Fourth Station when Jesus meets his mother just after falling while

[26] "para que les falta ciencia, necesario es darles alguna luz, de la común aceptación, que entre los mas Doctos, tiene esta Obra." Francisco Antonio de Vereo, *Aurora alegre del dichoso día de la gracia María Santíssima digna Madre de Dios: Prosiguen los diez y seis últimos días de el mes de vida . . . epítome de los libros Mystica ciudad de Dios y Vida de la Virgen Madre de Dios* (Mexico City: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1727).

[27] "que se resuelva con determinada voluntad, a dedicarse un mes a leer cada dia." Ibid.

[28] Ágreda, *Modo de andar la via-sacra, sacado de la Mystica ciudad de Dios* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Mexicana, 1763).

carrying the cross. Even though the title explicitly cites the exact passages from *Mystical City of God* that elaborate on the Virgin Mary's amplified role, this book represents a more conservative interpretation that glosses over the unorthodox sections revolving around Mary's bodily experience of the Passion.

The texts published in Mexico not only demonstrate the degree to which Sor María's telling of the Passion pervaded local devotional practice, but also highlight the diverse ways in which authors and publishers re-printed her writing. The *Compendio* supplants Christ's experience of the Passion with the Virgin's account, *Aurora Alegre* reprints excerpts that highlight the Virgin's active role in supporting her son during the moments leading up to the Crucifixion, and *Modo de Andar* cites *Mystical City of God* but evades the unorthodox sections that elevate the Virgin in radical ways. The varied ways in which Sor María's *Mystical City of God* was cited, quoted, and edited also further complicates the simple connection between an original iconographic text and visual work. These publications compel us to think outside of and between prescriptive dogma and to consider a more nuanced negotiation between texts and images that create new iconographic possibilities.

Literature Review

Of all the artworks examined in this dissertation, the Passion paintings inspired by Sor María have received the most scholarly attention. Francisco de la Maza's article "Los Cristos de México y la Monja de Ágreda" is one of the earliest art historical studies to argue for *Mystical City of God*'s role as a source for Passion iconography in colonial Mexico.[29] He identifies Sor María's version of Christ's torture recounted in Part Two, Book Six, Chapter Twenty as a

[29] Francisco de la Maza, "Los Cristos de México y la Monja de Ágreda," *Boletin INAH* 30 (December 1967): 1–3.

particularly well-known excerpt of *Mystical City of God*. In this section, Pilate orders Christ to be whipped, coronated with thorns, and mocked. Sor María's version of the flogging is particularly brutal. She writes of six torturers who used cords, reins, and animal hides to bruise Christ's body, spill his blood, and tear his flesh.[30] De la Maza notes that this passage promulgated the image of the bloody Christ.[31] Clara Bargellini has built upon de la Maza's scholarship and analyzed two Passion paintings through the lens of Sor María's theology. In her study of a 1749 Passion series located in Zacatecas by Gabriel José de Ovalle, Bargellini argues that the graphic depiction of Christ's Flagellation is based on Sor María's description of 5,115 lashes he endured.[32] Bargellini also analyzes Juan Patricio Morlete's *Christ Consoled by Angels* (mid-eighteenth century) identifying not only his thrashed back, but also Sor María's description of the angels who bring him a tunic to cover his aggrieved body and collect Christ's blood and flesh.[33]

Jaime Cuadriello recently connected the chain wrapped around Christ's body as he is incarcerated with Sor María's description of Caiaphas's dungeon. In Chapter Fifteen, Book Six of Volume 2, Sor María writes, "they bound him with a heavy iron chain with such ingenuity, that it encircled as well the waist as the neck. The two ends of the chain, which remained free

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[30] "De dos en dos le azotaron…los dos primeros al inocentísimo Señor con unos ramales de cordeles muy retorcidos, endurecidos y gruesos […] otros dos con ramales de coreas como riendas durísimas […] rompiendo todas las ronchas y cardenales que los primeros habían hecho y derramando la sangre divina […] Los terceros…[con] unos ramales de nervios de animales […] ya no herían su virginal cuerpo sino a las mismas heridas que los primeros habían dejado […] derribando al suelo muchos pedazos de ella y descubriendo los huesos en muchas partes de las espaldas…" Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 882.

[31] de la Maza, "Los Cristos de México y la Monja de Ágreda," 2.

[32]El número ajustado de los azotes…fue 5115, desde las plantas de los pies hasta la cabeza." Clara Bargellini, "Amoroso Horror: Arte y culto en la serie de la Pasión de Gabriel de Ovalle de Guadalupe, Zacatecas," in *Arte y violencia: XVIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas), 506.

[33] Bargellini, "Jesús consolado por los ángeles," in *Arte y Mística* (Mexico City: CONACULTA), 64.

[…] manacled the hands of the Lord."[34] Cuadriello argues that this detailed account of Jesus's imprisonment contributed to the growing devotion of the divine prisoner in New Spain.[35] Subsequent scholars including Ricardo Fernández Gracia and Anna Nogar have also cited these works as evidence of *Mystical City of* God's influence on Passion imagery in Mexico.[36] Despite the many art historians who have studied the link between *Mystical City of God* and Passion paintings, they tend to focus on Sor María's descriptions of Christ. De la Maza and Bargellini highlight the vivid language detailing bodily disfigurement while Cuadriello attends to the instruments of imprisonment. They have not, however, recognized the Virgin Mary's unusual appearance throughout these works.

Passion Paintings

This chapter brings together paintings in which the Virgin Mary has been inserted, unconventionally, as a witness to Christ's suffering. It is not a comprehensive survey of every work in Mexico that falls under this theme, but rather a selection from a range of churches, museums, and cities that advances the notion that the Virgin Mary was present by visualizing her body in the act of beholding her son. I am not arguing that *Mystical City of God* was consciously cited by each artist whose work is discussed in this chapter. Instead, the sheer number of paintings responding to these themes testify to the way in which Sor María's theology became so

[34] Jaime Cuadriello, "*Christ Taken Prisoner and the Nuns of St. Bernard,*" in *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, exh. cat., ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 462.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Fernández Gracia, *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda* (Soria: Caja Duero, 2003), 53–5; Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 140.

widespread that her revisions were embraced and transformed to such a degree that the Virgin Mary's exalted image became normalized.

Comparing these works to seventeenth-century European ones underscores their divergent iconography. Prints illustrating the 1708 and 1722 editions of *Mystical City of God* by the Flemish engraver Hieronymous Wierix include the Virgin Mary during the Incarceration and Flagellation (fig. 3.8) but in a strikingly different way from the paintings in Mexico.[37] She is relegated to the background and either in conversation with St. John the Evangelist or accompanied by the three Marys. The extreme perspective situates her entirely removed from her son, unaware of what is taking place within immediate view of the reader. Additionally, her small scale presents Mary as a minor character amidst a sea of people. Peter Paul Rubens, whose prints circulated widely throughout New Spain, also could have been a possible source of inspiration for these Mexican paintings (fig. 3.9). Curiously, Rubens's depiction of the Flagellation includes a barred window but follows the conventional iconography that excludes the Virgin Mary from view. Considering the Virgin Mary is present in numerous eighteenth-century Mexican paintings depicting St. Peter, the Incarceration, Flagellation, and Consolation of Angels, I propose that these works be analyzed beyond the focus of Christ's wounds.

Through the Window

Situating the Virgin Mary within a window bearing witness to her son's torture was one of the most prevalent pictorial innovations in New Spain. Paintings depicting Christ incarcerated, flagellated, and consoled upend traditional representations by arguing that the Virgin Mary was

[37] For more information on this series of prints, see Jerome Nadal, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels, Volume II, The Passion Narratives*, trans. Frederick A. Homann (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University, 2007).

not just in attendance at the foot of the cross, but a critical actor during the preceding moments. Her presence within these scenes not only attests to her heightened visibility but amplifies the significance of bearing witness to the Passion. And yet even though these paintings are emphatic in their proclamation that the Virgin Mary was a consequential witness, they simultaneously calibrate this radical departure from orthodoxy by framing her body within a window just outside the cell walls. The architectural restraints curbing the Virgin's access provoke questions related to presence and absence, visions and embodiment, and interiority and exteriority.

Mystical City of God does not locate Mary's exact physical whereabouts during the Passion, but Sor María insists that she is knowledgeable of every episode as it transpires. For example, when Christ is flagellated, she notes that Mary did not witness the torture through her own eyes but, "through a very clear vision she saw all of the lashes and torments that our Savior suffered. And although she did not see him with her bodily eyes, nothing was hidden from her, no more than if she had been standing close by."[38] According to Sor María, the visionary experience enables Mary to both behold Christ, collapsing the physical distance between mother and son and centering her within the narrative. The Virgin's orientation to the Flagellation is further honed when the Sor María contrasts Mary's knowledge with that of St. John and the three Marys who accompany her: "Regarding the natural love of a mother and the supreme charity of Christ, she alone knew […] the innocence of Christ, the dignity of his Divine Person, and the weight of his injuries."[39] Distinguishing Mary as the sole visionary beholding the Flagellation, she does not dwell on her own pain, but ruminates on God's creatures, Christ's innocence, and

[38] "vio por visión clarísima todos los azotes y tormentos, que padecía nuestro Salvador. Y aunque no vio con los ojos del Cuerpo, nada le fue oculto más que si estuviera mirándole muy de cerca." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Diós*, 883–84.

[39] "Y sobre el amor natural de Madre, y el de la suprema caridad de Cristo, ella sola supo, y pudo ponderar sobre todas las criaturas, la inocencia de Cristo, la dignidad de su Divina Persona, y el peso de las injurias." Ibid., 884.

eternal death. Thus, she supplants the immediate horror of witnessing the torture with divine knowledge to deliberate on the greater significance of the Passion.

Turning our attention to the paintings, how do artists pictorialize the Virgin Mary's visions of the Passion? Afterall, how can they visually convey the unrepresentable, which is, in this case, the Virgin Mary's divinely inspired knowledge of her son's incarceration and torture? Typically, she stands in the upper corner of the composition accompanied by St. John the Evangelist, hands clasped in prayer, and face peering through the window down onto the foregrounded scene. Consequently, these paintings instantiate the Virgin Mary's divinely inspired knowledge by rendering her physically present as an eyewitness but bar her from the cell Christ inhabits. Further, she is always accompanied by St. John the Evangelist, alluding to Sor María's passages describing him as her constant companion. However, he is consistently situated just behind her, privileging Mary's greater proximity to the foregrounded scene.

This new compositional strategy diverges from traditional conventions portraying visions utilized in seventeenth-century Spanish paintings and studied by Victor Stoichita. Stoichita examines how artists illustrated the visionary experience by stratifying the picture's spatial configuration according to a vertical composition that located the visionary in the lower part of the painting and the vision in the upper part.[40] He also notes that within the verticalized composition artists incorporated pictorial elements such as clouds and light to operate as visible signs that embody the vision.[41] But unlike Stoichita's discussion of visions conveying an interior theophany, the visions undergone by the Virgin Mary did take place outside of her mystical

[40] Victor I. Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaction Books 1995), 27.

[41] Ibid., 85.

experience: she envisioned an event that was also visible to bystanders' outer eye—a distinct type of vision that deviates from Stoichita's discussion.

How do these paintings in Mexico convey both the episodes of the Passion as they took place and the Virgin Mary's visionary knowledge of the events? They transport Mary into the composition but break the scene into two spatial intervals: the interior space of the foreground below and exterior world which the Virgin inhabits above. Unlike standard visionary paintings which place the subject in the composition's lower register staring upward, these works in Mexico situate the visionary raised up and bridge the divide between interior and exterior space through Mary's gaze. For example, Juan Correa's work places her body in the upper corner of the picture (fig. 3.10), while other examples such as the painting by Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas (1721–1815) in the Templo de San Juan de Diós, Puebla place her at the threshold between the Incarceration and Flagellation (fig. 3.11). From an exterior vantage, she opens up the interior prison and reconfigures the network of gazes so that she is the authoritative witness peering in. This elevated stance harkens to Sor María's consistent depiction of the Virgin's knowledge as superior to all other creatures. Thus, her prominence yokes together beliefs in Mary's superior ability to see and in her exceptional intellect that she perceives internally through God.

The paintings' representation of the window further calibrates the Virgin's corporeal presence. On the one hand depicting the Virgin's body in a spatially coherent architectural frame without dramatic lighting or clouds promulgates the veracity of the Virgin Mary's visions by depicting her as though she were truly there. But the recessed space moderates such overt unorthodoxy by placing her outside. The window therefore amplifies and restricts the Virgin Mary: she is not granted full access to the foregrounded scene, but she is visible to the viewer as a witness attentive to the events unfolding before her. While this pictorial decision may placate

the unorthodoxy of the visions, it could also be argued that Mary's separated stance endows greater perspective that evokes her omniscience.

Peter's Repentance

Juan Correa's *Allegory of the Precious Blood of Christ* (late seventeenth century) depicts Christ at the center of the composition tied to a freestanding column (fig. 3.10). The upper half of his body twists away from the column exposing his torso and ropes wrap his hands together digging into his wrists. Streams of blood run down his chest and legs marring his porcelain skin. At his feet, two angels flank Christ and fixate downward on the amalgamating puddles of blood, intensifying the horror of corporeal violence. The left angel holds a chalice and uses a rag to sop up the remaining bodily fluids while the second angel presses his face to the red pools and instruments of torture that rest idly. Peter, the fourth figure in the foreground, does not join the angels in their labor nor is he attentive to the extracted entrails strewn on the ground. Instead, he kneels in an upright position with his hands in prayer. Lips slightly apart and eyes upturned, Peter's expression conveys intense grief and horror.

Following the Counter Reformation, the repentance of Peter became a frequent subject in Spanish art. According to the Gospels, Peter refutes that he is a disciple of Christ after Jesus is arrested. But upon hearing the rooster crow, he bursts into tears as he realizes Jesus's earlier prophecy of the denial had in fact transpired. El Greco's *The Tears of Saint Peter* exemplifies devotional images that emerged in early modern Spain which propagated the sacrament of Penance. His body subsumes the composition so that viewers behold a close-up view of the saint's exemplary remorse. Other works such as *Saint Peter before Christ Attached to the Column* (1650) housed in the Palacio Arzobispal in Seville depicts the disciple kneeling before

Jesus asking for forgiveness. Instead of focusing on Peter's weeping, this painting evokes penance through an exchange of gazes between redeemer and sinner.

While Juan Correa's painting follows this tradition of situating Peter before Christ, he inserts additional figures into the composition including angels, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist. In her catalogue raisonné of the artist, Elisa Vargas Lugo focuses on the sacramental aspect of the painting, highlighting the attention on Christ's blood. She also comments on the novelty of the scene highlighting the angels as well as the strange combination of Peter paired with the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Evangelist. However, she does not probe the picture's possible inspiration.[42]

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen of *Mystical City of God* may elucidate Mary's unconventional presence in the painting. These sections recount the denial of St. Peter through the lens of the Virgin Mary who witnessed the incident. According to Sor María, when Peter heard the rooster crow, Mary "knew the denials, as well as the way and causes with which the Apostle had made them."[43] However, the Virgin did not just see Peter's repudiation, but guides the apostle to repent:

> The most pure Mother and Queen of Heaven sent one of her Angels to secretly console him, and move him with hope of forgiveness […] The Angel did everything for him without Peter seeing him, and the great Penitent was left comforted and consoled with the inspirations of the Angel and forgiven through the intercession of the Most Holy Mary.[44]

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[42] Elisa Vargas Lugo, *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra,* vol. 2 (Mexico: UNAM, 1985), 262. 9

[43] "conoció las negaciones, y el modo, y causas con que el Apóstol las había hecho." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 839.

[44] "La Purísima Madre, y Reyna del Cielo envió uno de sus Ángeles, que ocultamente le consolase, y moviese con esperanza, del perdón […] Todo le ejecutó el Ángel, sin que Pedro le viese, y quedó el gran Penitente confortado, y consolado con las inspiraciones del Ángel, y perdonado por intercesión de María Santísima." Ibid., 840

Although he cannot see the source of his newly found consolation, Sor María's readers are aware of Mary's consequential intervention. Additionally, Mary's omniscience falls into relief through Sor María's juxtaposition of Peter's blindness and Mary's ability to see. Through her visionary power that endows her the faculty of sight, she operates as an omniscient witness and as an active agent of forgiveness, consolation, and redemption.

In Correa's painting, the Virgin watches as Peter's body bends under the weight of sorrow. Crouched on his knees with his hands clasped above his chest, he leans toward the center of the composition and gazes upward to behold Christ. The diagonal vector constituted by Peter's gaze travels past Christ and extends to the Virgin Mary whose look downward aligns seamlessly with the apostle's. In addition to their mutual stares, their bodily postures mirror one another. Both of their heads tilt in three-quarter view, their inner shoulders dip toward the composition's center, and each pair of hands is clutched together. Their analogous positions evoke Sor María's direction to consider the Virgin Mary as though she were a mirror:

> When we look at Mary – as into a mirror – we know the Most Holy Mother participated in our redemption by taking the flesh of the Son of God into her womb […] In partaking of man's redemption, it seemed to me that the Most Holy Mary helped to restore man's resemblance to God, and in doing so by virtue of her own immaculate purity, she acts as a mirror in producing the most genuine likeness of God.[45]

Through portraying the Virgin as a mirror, Sor María encourages her followers to behold their Holy Mother. Peter's line of sight adheres to such counsel. Only through the act of modeling himself after her can he truly observe and recognize Christ.

Their parallel figuration and unique kinship are set into relief when juxtaposed with the painting's other characters. In contrast to Mary's and Peter's reciprocating gazes, Christ looks

[45] Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Ágreda: Writing, Knowledge, and Power* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1994), 187.

beyond the upper edge of the painting, eschewing their presence. Meanwhile, the angels fixate on the fragments of flesh and pools of blood that have been strewn on the floor. Their multiple points of attention beholding pieces of flesh and blood calls to mind the Virgin Mary's guidance to Sor María in *Mystical City of God*; she writes, "I want you to remain with the written word [because] neither flesh nor blood can teach you."[46] The Virgin Mary's warning of the limitations of flesh and blood corresponds with Correa's renderings of Mary and Peter. Peter does not fixate on the spectacle of carnage like the angels but does the more challenging act of facing Christ himself, whom he had previously disavowed, and recognizes this ideal, albeit brutalized, body. And yet, the scene of Peter apprehending Christ does not just demonstrate individual repentance; Mary provides a model of sorrow to emulate and imbues the painting with a sense of shared grief and compassion.

A second painting located in the Ex-Convento Dominico de la Asuncion, Amecameca renders Peter, Jesus, and Mary in a triangular configuration (fig. 3.12). In this work, the angels have been omitted thereby concentrating attention on the constellation of three bodies. Peter kneels to the left of Christ, just below Mary's window. He and Jesus gaze at one another while Mary looks adoringly onto the scene. Compared to Correa's painting, this work places Mary in a more removed stance: neither man acknowledges her presence, and the smaller scale of her body suggests a greater perspectival distance between the window and the cell interior.

But positioning Mary and Peter vertically aligned with one another operates in two decisive ways: first, it concretizes the idea that Mary is behind Peter and second, it thematizes vision as a form of knowledge. In this example, Mary's window opens up the left corner of the

[46] "Quiero que quede en el escrito […] que la carne ni la sangre ni te pueden enseñar." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 842.

canvas and Peter stands just in front of its lower edge. Although his back is to Mary, his position of prayer conforms with hers. Moreover, by aligning the two figures vertically, the artist brings them closer together and creates a direct link between apostle and Virgin. Thus, this work furthers Sor María's argument for Mary's authoritative role as a spiritual guide. Finally, positioning Peter turning toward Christ and away from Mary evokes *Mystical City of God*'s account of remorse and visualizes the notion that she was invisible to him. The organizational logic of the picture builds upon the traditional, intimate encounter between apostle and Christ who gaze at one another, following the notion that Peter sought redemption from Christ not Mary. Although he is blind to the Virgin's intercession, the painting's viewers behold Mary's presence. Thus, Mary does not demand credit for her intervention, but nevertheless oversees and endows the scene with the maternal love that asks for nothing in exchange.

These paintings therefore expand the canonical episode by centering the Virgin's body alongside Christ's as a means to redemption. Peter is unaware of the Virgin's intercession, but she and the viewer can see. Thus, both of these paintings promulgate the theme of the Virgin as spiritual guide. While neither illustrates angels engaging directly with St. Peter, as recounted in *Mystical City of God*, they instead augment the Virgin Mary's significance by inserting her into the scene. By visualizing the Virgin Mary as there, witnessing Peter, the artist impresses the magnitude of the Virgin's role as a spiritual guide.

Incarceration

The Divine Captive in the House of Caiaphas by an unnamed artist currently located in the Palacio de la Editora Buena Prensa in Mexico City represents the moment leading up to the Flagellation and Crucifixion in which Christ is taken prisoner (fig. 3.13). In this painting, Christ

and an angel occupy a dark, cramped cell littered with debris. A jarring chain directs the viewer's gaze through the composition: from Christ's hands tied behind his back, to his waist fastened to the wall, around his neck like a noose, and down to the floor where the remaining metal links coil on the ground. At Christ's feet, a small angel kneels staring at the chain. Just below the angel along the bottom edge of the painting an inscription reads "The painful position in which our Redeemer was tormented in the Caiaphas Prison. Venerable Agreda Part 2, Chapter 17."[47] This painting is the only work I have encountered that incorporates an inscription that explicitly cites Sor María as the author and the exact passage from *Mystical City of God*'s Passion. Why would the artist reference Sor María? How does the artist respond to the textual description of Christ's Incarceration? Are there other elements of this passage that resonate with and are transformed by the picture? To consider these questions, we must re-visit this section of Sor María's text.

Chapter Seventeen of Part Two, Book Six entitled "What happened to the Savior Jesus after the denial of St. Peter until the morning, and the pain of his Blessed Mother" recounts Christ as he is imprisoned. The chapter first describes the space as a "dark cell that hardly had any light, and so filthy, and with a bad smell that it could infest the house."[48] Sor María goes on to describe Christ as he is restrained: they bound him "in a ruthless manner by leaving him standing, they put him in such a way that his body was inclined, without being able to sit, nor

[47] "Dolorosa postura que fue atormentado Nuestro Redemptor en la Carcel de Cayfas. Venerable Agreda Parte 2 Cap. 17."

[48] "Era esta cárcel tan oscura que casi no tenia luz, y tan inmunda, y de mal olor, que pudiera infestar la casa." Ibid., 845.

able to stand up straight to give the body some relief."[49] Once the torturers leave, Christ does not dwell on his physical anguish but addresses his mother by way of angels: "You will say to my Mother that she can be consoled in this tribulation until the day of joy arrives and I rest, that she now accompanies me in the working and suffering of men, that from her compassionate affection and from everything she does I receive pleasure and complacency."[50] In response, the angels depart from the prison and notify the Virgin Mary of her son's message.

Returning to the painting, the representations of space and bodies fall further into relief. First, Sor María's description of darkness and enclosure resonate with the representation of the prison cell. Christ's pale skin and light grey robe radiate against the black wall that closes in on him. The ceiling's rafters intensify the claustrophobic sense of confinement, suggesting that even if Christ were released from bondage, he would still be forced to hunch over. While the debris covering the floor seemingly alludes to Sor María's description of filth, the artist takes liberties in depicting strewn matter in an orderly way that perhaps is more fitting for a space inhabited by Christ. Lastly, the grilled doorway opens the cell to a light-filled room outside the confines of the prison, highlighting a dialectic between exterior world beyond and the interior space of dark captivity.

Turning to Christ, we see his hunched body unable to stand upright as described in Chapter Seventeen, but we also notice a jarring chain referenced in the preceding chapter of *Mystical City of God*. Chapter Fifteen describes Christ's adversaries, who "bound him with a

[49] "Ataron y amarraron a Christo nuestro bien con los estremos de las sogas, pero con un modo desapiadado, porque dexandole en pie, le pusieron de manera que estuviesse amarao, y juntamente inclinado el cuerpo, sin que pudiera estar sentado, ni tampoco levantado derecho en cuerpo para aliviarse." Ibid., 846.

[50] "A mi Madre direis que se consuele en esta tribulacion mientras llega el dia de la alegria y decanso que me compañe ahora en el obrar y padecer por los hombres, que de su afecto compasivo y de todo lo que hace recibo agrado y complacencia." Ibid., 847.

chain of large iron links with such artifice that they were encircled at the waist and the two ends were left over around the neck, and on them were rings, or handcuffs, with which they also chained the hands of the Lord."[51] Although the artist must have turned to this passage, it is curious that the inscription excludes any mention of it. One possible explanation is that the artist chose to focus on Christ's subjectivity rather than his adversaries' actions. Afterall, the painting's inscription highlights Christ's posture and the ensuing pain. By pulling Chapter Fifteen's description of the chain into the composition, the painting intensifies the theme of physical bondage but prioritizes Christ's suffering as opposed to the actions of the jailers. Alongside the grilled door, the chain highlights the theme of incarceration: it both arrests Christ but also arrests the viewer's gaze so that she may fixate on and empathize with Christ's entrapped body.

While the artist's representations of cramped space and chains fit within a tradition of representing Christ's suffering body, albeit in new ways, the angels' presence is complicated and transformed by the text. Upon first glance it appears as though the smaller figure is in front of Christ and operates as a model for the beholder. However, through *Mystical City of God*, we come to recognize the angel as a mediator between Jesus and his mother. The end of the chain falling from Christ's neck vertically links the two figures and signals this line of communication. Thus, the inscription and pictorial elements not only emphasize Christ's bodily pain, but also stresses what is not featured in the painting: the Virgin Mary's presence. The angel's outstretched wings positioned in front of the doorway evoke mobility and flight, suggesting that even though we cannot see the Virgin Mary, we can imagine the angel escaping the cell to notify

[51] "Ataronle con una cadena de grandes estabones de hierro con tal artificio, que rodeándosela a la cintura, y al cuello sobraban los dos extremos, y en ellos había unas argollas, o esposas, con que encadenaron también las manos del Señor." Ibid., 826.

Mary of her son's torture. Thus, the Virgin Mary becomes a part of the scene despite her absence.

Flagellation

The pictorial theme of Christ incarcerated and wrapped in chains inspired by Sor María and typified by the anonymous painting just discussed was prevalent throughout Mexico. This scene from the Passion was often coupled with representations of Christ's Flagellation. For example, the eighteenth-century paintings by José Joaquin Magón (fig. 3.1) and Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas (fig. 3.11) combine both Passion episodes with the Incarceration constituting one half composition while the Flagellation comprises the other. Although neither painting includes an inscription citing *Mystical City of God,* their iterations of Christ incarcerated resemble the anonymous work's (3.13) depiction of his stooped posture, the heavy chains binding his body, the accompanying angels, and the dismal prison cell.

The second half of these two paintings depict Christ's Flagellation, which I will argue was also inspired by Sor María. The Flagellation depicts Christ in the midst of being tortured or in the moment immediately after the perpetrators have disbanded. They emphasize palpable agony through Christ's beaten body which contorts in a manner that displays frailty and bloodshed. While this painting genre has previously been studied, art historians of colonial Mexico argue that these works emphasize Christ's back to shock the viewer and stimulate empathy.[52]

[52] Ilona Katzew, "Francisco Antonio Vallejo, *Christ after the* Flagellation," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2017), 212.

As noted earlier, Clara Bargellini was one of the earliest art historians to conduct a close textual and visual analysis connecting *Mystical City of God* to eighteenth-century colonial Passion paintings. Specifically, she analyzed the 1749 series by Gabriel José de Ovalle and argued that Sor María's text operated as its primary iconographic source (fig. 3.14). When examining Ovalle's *Flagellation*, she writes "the bloodiness of Ovalle's Flagellation fully corresponds to Ágreda's narration."[53] Specifically, Bargellini connects the *Mystical City of God* passages that recount the pieces of Christ's flesh that fall to the ground revealing the bones in his back as well as the 5,115 lashes that struck Christ's entire body from the soles of his feet to his head. After linking the quotations with pictorial details, Bargellini asserts that the relationship between Sor María and Ovalle serves as a jumping off point to consider the nun's broader influence throughout the viceroyalty: "The relationship between Sor María and Ovalle widens the circle of the nun's influence in New Spanish art […] The centrality of the theme of Christ's suffering in art and post-Tridentine religiosity came to encompass the entire life of Jesus."[54] Although these *Mystical City of God* passages highlighted by Bargellini are crucial to identifying which of Sor María's ideas were embraced by viceregal artists, they focus solely on Christ's torment. But if we follow Bargellini's suggestion and analyze a broader collection of works that represent Christ's bloodied back, his visible bones, and loose pieces of flesh, we realize that artists were also consistently visualizing Mary's corporeal presence as recounted by Sor María.

[53] "Lo sangriento de la Flagelación de Ovalle corresponde plenamente a la narración de la monja de Agreda." Bargellini, "Amoroso horror: arte y culto en la serie de la pasión de Gabriel de Ovalle de Guadalupe, Zacatecas," 504.

[54] "La relación entre sor Maria y Ovalle viene a ampliar el circulo de la influencia de la monja en la plástica novohispana […] La centralidad del tema del sufrimiento de Cristo en el arte y en la religiosidad postridinetina llegó a abarcar toda la vida de Jesús." Ibid.

Returning to the painting by Magón, Christ's arms are tied, and his body is violently thrown backward as two men slash him to a pulp. Lacerations in his limbs and back reveal blood, flesh, and bones in a similar manner to the one described by Bargellini. While his body is in profile, Christ's head gazes over his shoulder and directly faces the viewer. The whites of his eyes pierce the canvas and his pupils drift toward the back of his head, conveying such deep physical pain that he is unable to connect with the viewer whom he faces. A cluster of angels descending on clouds open up the dark space to the heavens. These three figures intensify the sense of anguish through their postures that resist beholding Christ: one covers his eyes, the other holds up a handkerchief, and the last brings his hands to his heart conveying insurmountable horror.

The graphic brutality of this scene, like the Ovalle painting, responds to Chapter Twenty of Part Two, Book Six of *Mystical City of God.* Sor María describes torturers whipping Christ two by two, first with branches, then with cords, and finally with animal hide, imprinting 5,115 lashes into his skin and spilling divine blood on the floor. However, in addition to the focus on Christ's torture, Sor María also highlights the Virgin Mary's experience of the Flagellation. According to Sor María, Mary did not witness the torture through her own eyes but through visions. And yet the author describes how Mary's body contemporaneously undergoes the same pain as her son: "How many were the pains and afflictions that the great Queen and Lady of the Angels suffered on this occasion, because the lashes that they gave her Most Holy Son she felt in all parts of her Virginal body."[55] Christ's afflictions are therefore re-inscribed within her physical body, so that the Virgin takes center stage alongside her son during the Passion both as a witness

[55] "Cuantos fueron los dolores, y aflicciones que en esta ocasión padeció la gran Reyna y Señora de los Ángeles, porque los azotes que daban a su Hijo Santissimo lo sentía ella en todas las partes de su Virginal cuerpo." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 893.

and co-sufferer. But Sor María's description of the Virgin Mary's suffering does not solely revolve around corporeal distress: "In addition to the pains of the body, those that she suffered in her Most Pure Soul were ineffable, because science was added."[56] By transitioning from Mary's bodily pain to the pain emanating from her soul, Sor María augments the account of the Flagellation from a story that evokes compassion through attention on Christ's humanity to one that also valorizes the Virgin Mary's unparalleled wisdom and love for her son.

How then does Magón pictorialize the Virgin Mary's visions of the Flagellation? The Virgin's enigmatic placement calls into question whether she is physically present during the Flagellation. While the window bars reinforce a sense of exclusion, divorcing her from the Flagellation, the clouds surrounding the Virgin's window evoke revelation as pictorial forms that both expose and conceal.[57] Additionally, the mysterious and immaterial manner in which the Virgin is presented suggests the picture's process of wrestling with its unorthodoxy. The circular window illogically hovers between the celestial clouds and the prison as if it were drifting toward the viewer away from the walls. Such a suspended position depicts the Virgin as transcending space and defying the rules of architectural cohesion that the rest of the figures adhere to. The window's ambiguous suspension also presses the Virgin toward the foreground and in proximity with Christ in a manner that attests to her spiritual wisdom which disrupts the traditional, clear division between earth and heaven. In this example, Mary's visionary knowledge seems to situate her in a liminal space between the sobbing angels and her tortured

[56] "A más de los dolores del cuerpo fueron inefables los que padeció en su Purísima Alma, porque allí fue donde añadiendo la ciencia." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de* Dios, 885.

[57] Victor Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 28 and 85.

son. Her enigmatic position also makes visible artistic calibrations involved in expanding the Virgin's role.

In Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas's work, also located in Puebla, Mary is farther removed from the Flagellation (fig. 3.4). Relegated to the painting's left edge, she appears in the recesses of the background and surrounded by negative space. Despite her physical distance, however, she continues to gaze downward onto the violence. In contrast to the Magón's portrayal of Jesus, this Christ returns her gaze. Upon first glance, we might assume the sheer pain compelled this expression, but concomitantly we must acknowledge that the contortion enables him to glimpse at his mother. The Virgin does not only engage with the tortured iteration of her son but joins forces with the Christ in the upper picture as two figures who behold the Flagellation. Thus, the Virgin Mary is not only associated with the Flagellation, but also with Christ's Incarceration in Caiaphas's dungeon.

A number of other paintings located in the Estado de México, Puebla, Querétaro, and Zacatecas testify to the popularity of representing Christ and the Virgin Mary during the Flagellation as an independent subject divorced from scenes of the Incarceration (figs. 3.15, 3.16). Throughout these pictures, Christ's posture varies: at times he bends over, other times he turns away from the viewer, and occasionally he drops to his knees. His gaze also fluctuates from looking at his perpetrators, directly at the viewer, or down at the floor. The Virgin Mary's posture is far more consistent than Christ's with her head visible peering inward from a window. The repetition of the Virgin Mary's grief-stricken but consistently composed presence therefore attests to a new Flagellation. Her loving eye creates a novel and intimate encounter that shifts attention from the wretched body and provides a sense of solace.

For example, the *Flagellation* held in the Convento de San Gabriel, Cholula, exemplifies the Virgin's Mary's vaunted role as a participant in the Passion who uplifts the scene from one of terror to one of shared love and sacrifice (fig. 3.16). The painting's lower register adheres to traditional iconography: two soldiers flank Christ's body, one binding Christ's hands with ropes while the other raises his whip moments before he slashes his victim's back. Flanked between his torturers, column and pilaster, Christ stands in the center of the composition. His ribcage is thrashed, his back exposes a deep gash, and blood runs down his legs, amalgamating on the floor—a gruesome portrait that evokes Sor María's textual passages. But, Christ's stare, accentuated by the vertical orientation of the pilaster and column, usher our attention to the painting's upper edge where we encounter the Virgin Mary who meets her son's gaze from a window.

How does the painting function differently when Christ and the Virgin are vertically aligned and return one another's gaze? First, the Virgin's placement in the center of the composition usurps pictorial convention utilized for sacred art in which God or Holy Spirit occupies this upper stretch of the painting. Mary's shift in orientation centralizes her role and places her within the authoritative position of the divine. Second, by organizing the composition along a vertical axis, the painting splits the focus between flesh and vision, with the lower section attentive to matters of the body while the upper highlights vision. Narrowing in on Christ, we gain a new appreciation for the bizarrely rendered body that disproportionately divides his head from the rest of his body. Christ's contortion emphasizes two ideas: the corporeal pain anchored to the ground and the simultaneous psychological connection he has with his mother beyond the confines of the cell. Thus, Christ's floating head is not just an artistic inconsistency, but connects formally with the fragmentation of Mary's body, intensifying their

union. Their expressions are both remarkably subdued and do not convey turmoil or pain, suggesting Mary's presence provides solace and, as a guardian, she enables Christ to withstand his own corporeal suffering. Thus, their joint fortitude heightens the necessity of both figures: his tortured body brings to the fore his corporeal role as God incarnate, but the single line of vision formed by the Virgin and her son also model piety, sacrifice, endurance, and virtue in the face of turmoil.

Christ Flagellated in the Capilla de la Tercera Orden of the Templo Conventual del Carmen in Puebla, is a final example that represents the Virgin Mary's witnessing her son's torture (fig. 3.17). This work distinctly organizes the composition around an actual window, thematizing interiority/exteriority and vision/embodiment in a manner that envelops the viewer into the scene. The Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist are located behind bars to the left of the window; to the right, Christ is on his knees tied to the column enduring lashes inflicted by his tormentors; above and below, angels are convulsed with emotion covering their eyes, turning away, and sobbing in reaction to the violence. The window prompts viewers to consider our own positionality vis-a-vis the painting. Like the Virgin, the window disrupts any illusion that we are co-extensive with the space of the Flagellation. However, unlike the Virgin Mary who stands outside looking in, we are inside beholding both the prison and the outside world from below. Thus, the architecture compels us to witness Christ's suffering immediately before us, but, in the same vein as Mary, to consider the world beyond by simultaneously meditating on the effect of Christ's sacrifice for humanity.

Christ Consoled by the Virgin Mary and Angels

Following the Flagellation, Christ's torturers leave their victim to waste away alone in the desolate dungeon, but angels swoop into the scene to provide physical and spiritual relief. This theme is ubiquitous throughout the early modern Hispanic world. For example, Juan Morlete Ruiz satiates the composition not with one or two angels, as was typical with Spanish artists such as Velázquez and Murillo, but with a host of angelic bodies who take on multiple tasks including collecting blood in chalices, propping up Christ's body, and sobbing in reaction to the gore (fig. 3.18).

Additionally, colonial paintings posit that the Virgin Mary was there looking after her son, enlarging her role and presence once again inspired by *Mystical City of God*. In Chapter Twenty of Part Two, Book Six, the Virgin orders Lucifer and the torturers to disband and subsequently directs angels to bring Christ a tunic to cover his ailing figure: "Using the power of the Queen, she ordered Lucifer to leave with his Ministers, and later ordered the angels to restore the Holy tunic to her Son […] so that he could dress his Blessed and wounded body."[58] Here, Sor María abides by the traditional narration that excludes the Virgin from physically penetrating the space of torture but elevates Mary as a protector who forces the adversaries to flee and instructs the angels to deliver a robe so that Christ can cover himself.

Christ Attached to the Column in the Parroquia de San Jose (fig. 3.19), Puebla and *Christ Consoled by Angels* in the Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas (fig. 3.20) visualize the Virgin Mary's involvement by rendering her presence either through the window or in an ambiguous space separated from her son—as discussed above. The two paintings delegate the responsibility

[58] "Usando de la potestad de la Reyna mandó a Lucifer se desviase de aquel lugar con todos sus Ministros, y luego dio orden, que por mano de los santos Ángeles, fuese restituida la túnica de su Hijo Santísimo […] para vestir su Sagrado y lastimado Cuerpo." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 884.

of delivering the tunic to the archangel Michael who is identifiable through his blue and red attire. Considering the Virgin's close alignment with Michael as co-protector, their partnership intensifies Mary's active and pivotal role as an omniscient guardian. The tunic signals to the viewer Mary's simultaneous absence and presence: although she herself cannot physically come to the aid of her son, the fabric wraps itself around Christ, bestowing his mother's warmth and refuge.

As a whole, these paintings depict Sor María in scenes of the Passion, biblical episodes from which she was traditionally excluded. Peering through a window, Mary gazes downward onto Peter repenting and onto Christ incarcerated, flagellated and consoled. While I only mentioned a few exemplary case studies, paintings throughout the viceroyalty, but particularly in Puebla and Zacatecas, insist on the Virgin Mary's presence. I argue that these works either directly or indirectly correspond with Sor María's revisionist account of the Passion in which the Virgin Mary understood and participated in every episode through visions bestowed by God. While these paintings never portray her as the central subject, her novel presence insists upon her role as co-redeemer alongside Christ.

Epilogue and Conclusion: Witnessing the Passion in Mexico

Antonio de Torres's *Christ Taken Prisoner* re-thinks this genre of devotional painting inspired by Sor María (fig. 3.21). The work offers a clear example of how artists did not use *Mystical City of God* as a dogmatic text, but rather as a resource that enabled them to reimagine certain theological ideas in new contexts. Specifically, this painting appropriates Sor María's depiction of a long chain binding Christ's body, as we have seen in numerous cases discussed throughout the chapter. However, in this version, the artist circumscribes the imprisoned Christ with five

eighteenth-century nuns from Mexico. By replacing the angels and the Virgin Mary with figures contemporaneous to the painting's creation, Torres localizes the work, collapsing the spatial and temporal distance between the life of Christ, Sor María's seventeenth-century theology, and the eighteenth-century viceregal laity.

Jaime Cuadriello was the first to connect *Christ Taken Prisoner* to *Mystical City of God*'s Part Two, Book Six Chapter Fifteen, which describes Christ's Incarceration. He argued that "the chain used to pull and secure him to the wall of Caiaphas's dungeon is derived from [Sor María] Ágreda's revelation […] the imaginative powers of Ágreda's writings gave rise to these iconographic corrections showing him as a defenseless Nazarene."[59] Cuadriello extrapolates from this connection that the nuns assume the role of angels in the text who "assist the prisoner" and "show reverence."[60]

Beyond pairing the textual chain to the visual one and conflating the nuns with Sor María's account of angels, how does this painting transform the theme of Christ taken prisoner? Five nuns flank Christ and kneel in prayer. Dressed uniformly in white habits and black mantles, their bodies take on different poses. One figure in the background crosses her arms over her chest, another raises her hands to her chin, a third in the foreground presents a bouquet of flowers, and the other waves a censor. The quiet movement evoked by the varied hand gestures and the smoke emanating from the censor contrasts with Christ's immobilized body. Standing in the center of the composition with his hands strapped behind his back, he is still and locked in place. His detached gaze and downturned mouth convey a forlorn expression. Although the women uniformly gaze at him, he does not reciprocate their attention.

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[59] Cuadriello, "*Christ Taken Prisoner and the Nuns of St. Bernard,*" 462.

[60] Ibid.

The women's adoring eyes evoke Mary's commitment to see her son despite the pain. Although Cuadriello compares these women to angels who traditionally share the interior space with Christ, the female monastics do not look away, hold handkerchiefs, bolster his body, or express agony in the same manner. Instead, they elude physical contact in favor of engaging with him through vision while maintaining their composure in the face of anguish and suffering. Consequently, the nuns follow the Virgin's proposal to "imitate" her experience of the Passion.[61] Notably, they are represented as taking on the responsibility of witnessing Christ just as the Virgin was. They do not follow the angels who shudder in response to the torture but resolutely behold Jesus and endow the scene with love and grace.

Torres also possibly fashioned these women in emulation of the Virgin Mary's physical experience of the Passion. According to Sor María, the Virgin was not tortured like her son but still suffered the same physical agony. Similarly, nuns in colonial Mexico also sought bodily pain as a devotional exercise dedicated to the Passion.[62] Flagellation, for example, constituted an important part of asceticism through which nuns could express their piety. Countless biographies of female monastics detail extreme acts of self-mortification, such as the sixteenth-century Conceptionist, Sor María de Jesús de Tomellín, who was renowned for the blood that covered her body as a result of the intense discipline to which she subjected herself.[63] The eighteenth-century Franciscan Sor Sebastiana Josefa of the Convento de San Juan de la Penitencia was

[61] "Por la Pasión sentida, y meditada subirás a lo alto de la perfección, y granjearás el amor de Esposo. Imitame en esto segun tienes la luz, y la obligación en que te pongo." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 809.

[62] See Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[63] Francisco Pardo, *Vida y virtudes heroicas de la Madre María de Jesús, religiosa en el convento de la Limpia Concepción de la Virgen Maria. N. Señora de la ciudad de Puebla* (Mexico City: Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1676), 23v, cited in Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 152.

considered an exemplary penitent for her self-abuse which included making a cross on the ground with her bloody tongue and scourging herself with a steel-pinned belt.[64] Even though self-mortification was not a ritual universally practiced in convents, the culture of pain and sacrifice was essential to purifying the soul. In 1733, the conventual chronicler Sor María Teresa counseled novitiates, specifying that, "God wished to gain a bride truly married to his wounds."[65] While Sor María Teresa does not insist upon flagellation, she does prescribe a commitment to Christ's bodily suffering.

One particular method of self-inflicted pain that resonates with this painting was the use of *cilicios*, devices made of rope or metal designed to be worn under the mantle to induce pain by wrapping around the individual's bare skin.[66] A seventeenth-century woman named Sor Maria Ana de los Angeles became famous for her iron chains, which her biographer characterized as, "ornaments that enriched her life."[67] Following her death, the penitential instrument was alleged to have pierced her flesh so deeply it was impossible to remove.[68] Sor Maria de Ana conveyed her piety through incorporating the *cilicios* as a permanent fixture of her body that guaranteed a physical connection with Christ. The painting's prominent chain, therefore, evokes ascetic practices within colonial Mexican convents. While the work does not

[64] Kelly Donahue-Wallace. "'Bajo de los tormentos del tórculo': Printed Portraits of Male and Female Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New Spain," *Colonial Latin American Review* 14, no. 1 (June, 2005): 125. See also Joseph Eugenio Valdés, *Vida admirable y penitente de la v[enerable] m[adre] sor Sebastiana Joseph de la Santísima Trinidad…* (Mexico City: Biblioteca Mexicana), 1765.

[65] Alonso Calvo, S.J., *Compendio de las ejemplares vidas del P. José de Guevara de la Compañia de Jesús de su tía, la Sra. Doña Leocadia González Aranzamendi* (Madrid: S.N., 1754), 34–35, cited in Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 149.

[66] Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 505.

[67] Augustín de Vetancurt, *Chronica de la Provnicia del Santo Evangelio de Mexico*, in *Teatro Mexicano de los sucesos Religiosos* (Mexico: Doña Maria de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1697), 71, cited in Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 521.

[68] Ibid.

visualize the nuns undergoing parallel acts of physical torment, we as viewers can imagine these women wearing *cicilios* underneath their white mantles. Just as the Virgin endures the physical pain without collapsing under the pressure, the nuns also evade any sign of physical distress despite self-imposed acts of binding their bodies.

The representation of nuns also mobilizes the painting in new ways, heeding the Virgin's recommendation to imitate her in the world in which they live and know: the flowers and censor summon eighteenth-century rituals that attest to the present moment. Their contemporary garb composed of rosaries, habits, and nun badges also attest to the temporal presence of the painting. Therefore, through emulating the Virgin and applying her example to their contemporary life—sporting eighteenth-century regalia and practicing local rituals—these nuns testify to women's central and sacred roles within the Church in Mexico. They embody the Virgin Mary, who gains access to this sacred space by dutifully taking on the responsibility of beholding the Passion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seeing Double: The Virgin Mary's Passage to Heaven

Within Antonio de Torres's series depicting the life of the Virgin Mary, painted in 1719, the artist renders an unusual representation of the Assumption (fig. 4.1). Dressed in billowing white and blue robes, Mary gazes toward the Trinity as her body soars upward. A gathering of angels and apostles congregate around the lower half of the composition creating a framework of witnesses. Along the lateral edges, four angels clasp their hands in prayer; three of them behold the Virgin while one makes eye contact with the viewer. Peter and John occupy the canvas' lower corners flanking a female figure and foregrounding a cluster of other onlookers.

In comparison to contemporaneous Mexican and Spanish Assumptions by artists such as Juan Correa and Mariano Salvador Maella (figs. 4.2, 4.3), this painting represents a pared down scene: the Virgin Mary's body occupies a tight space that occludes a horizon line and lacks the definitive cut between the celestial and earthly realms characteristic of early modern Assumption paintings. Here, she subsumes the vertical picture plane while the ancillary bodies are either miniaturized or cropped. Most unusual, however, is the enigmatic female figure situated between Peter and John. Art historians have not formed a consensus around who this woman is. According to the Museo de Guadalupe in Zacatecas, she portrays the Mary Magdalene. More recently, however, scholarship has identified her as a second rendition of the Virgin and has argued that the painting illustrates Mary twice so as to represent her body and soul.[1]

[1] Luisa Elena Alcalá, "The Assumption of the Virgin, 1719," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, exh. cat., ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 217–18.

Based on visual evidence found in this particular painting as well as Torres's larger series, Chapter Four will build upon this latter interpretation, linking the decision of representing the Virgin's body twice to Sor María's text that describes Mary as being in multiple places at once as her soul ascends to heaven. Further, it will consider Torres's work in tandem with other paintings depicting Mary's ascent to heaven which, I will contend, were also inspired by *Mystical City of God*. While the works differ from one another, I will argue that these artists transformed traditional iconographic conventions associated with the Assumption by responding to Sor María's revisionist theology which casts Mary's rise to heaven as an equally momentous occasion as Christ's. These works shift away from singularly focusing on Mary's departure from earth and present her as co-redemptrix. Furthermore, I will argue that New Spanish artists adapted these new Marian iconographies to modify depictions of Christ in representations of the Ascension.

Unlike the previous two chapters which revealed how Sor María's revisionist Last Supper and Passion narratives were initially embraced by artists and later integrated to such a wide degree that they became commonplace, this chapter identifies a pictorial change that did not develop into a standardized iconography. In this chapter, only four works depicting the end of the Virgin Mary's life will be reviewed and linked to Sor María. The initial two painted by Torres and Luis Berrueco (fig. 4.4) were created in the first half of the eighteenth century and experiment with the practice of doubling Mary's body. They also constitute parts of a larger paintings series and will be examined within the context of the other works. The latter two by Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas and an unknown artist render the Virgin Mary on her deathbed in a more traditional manner but continue to play with conventions related to the multiplication of space and text (figs. 4.5, 4.6).

This small selection of paintings testifies to the fact that certain theological ideas inspired by Sor María were less prevalent than others. As a consequence of the Assumption's relative lack of popularity, we can approach these works as case studies of artists engaging with Sor María's theology in disparate ways. These examples counter a teleological model that otherwise might lead us to believe that all unorthodoxies conceived by Sor María and picked up by artists were eventually incorporated and standardized into the mainstream visual vocabulary. Ranging in style, format, and iconography, this chapter counters such an assumption. Instead, these works exemplify how artists developed a pliable relationship with *Mystical City of* God, one in which they responded to the text in varying ways that yielded innovative and diverse pictorial results.

History of the Assumption in Sacred Texts and Art

The Assumption celebrates the Virgin Mary's passage from earth to heaven following her death. Celebrated on August 15th, the Virgin of the Assumption's feast day was one of the most popular advocations in colonial Mexico. Despite its widespread acceptance, however, it does not appear in scripture and was only declared dogma in 1950. Originally celebrated within the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox Church, the Assumption gained traction toward the end of the fifth century in part because of the circulation of apocryphal literature, particularly the Protoevangelium of James, which recounted Mary's death and resurrection.[2] By the twelfth century, the Assumption had also gained ground within the Western Catholic Church, but theologians continued to debate whether Mary's body was assumed along with her soul. Those in favor of her bodily assumption turned to the Song of Songs in an attempt to corroborate their argument using sources beyond apocrypha. The Franciscan bishop, Bonaventure (1221–1274), for example, cited the Song of

[2] Hilda C. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, 1985), 133.

Songs 8:5 as a way of arguing that Mary's beatitude would be incomplete unless her body and soul were both in heaven. The argument in favor of the Assumption centered on the belief that Mary's body, like her son's, was not subject to physical decay but was instead elevated into heaven as a result of its immaculacy.[3]

One of the most widespread accounts of Mary's bodily assumption was published in *The Golden Legend*, a popular collection of saints' lives written by the Italian preacher Jacobus de Voragine in the late thirteenth century. Using Protoevangelium as its basis, *The Golden Legend* recounts Mary's bodily ascent, which set her apart from the other saints featured in the publication. In the days leading up to the Virgin's death, angels summoned the apostles to return to Jerusalem to see the Virgin Mary for a final time. The following morning, the Virgin's soul departed Mary's body and fled toward the arms of her son in heaven. The narrative culminates with her soul reuniting with the body: as the apostles gather around the Virgin's tomb, Christ and the archangel Michael appear with Mary's soul, which merged with the body and together rose toward the heavenly chamber accompanied by a congregation of angels.[4] As we will see later on in this chapter, there are a number of overlaps between *The Golden Legend* and *Mystical City of God*.

In tandem with the Assumption's growing prevalence in popular devotional literature, the pictorial representation of this biographical episode also emerged as a frequent subject in sacred art. In medieval Spain the Assumption often appeared in portals of churches dedicated to the Virgin such as the Iglesia Catedral-Basílica Metropolitana de la Asunción de Nuestra Señora in

[3] Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 298; Rachel Fulton Lee, "The Virgin Mary and the Song of Songs in the High Middle Ages," (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 1994), 282.

[4] William Granger Ryan, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 462–83.

Valencia (fig. 4.7) as well as countless altarpieces such as the one in the Iglesia del Salvador by the artist known as Master of Palanquinos (fig. 4.8) and the 1492 painting by Diego de la Cruz currently located in the Prado (fig. 4.9).[5] These works typically render the Virgin as a celestial figure, standing in mid-air or enthroned and carried by choirs of angels.

The question of how to properly render Mary's Assumption remained unresolved through the sixteenth century. As Victor Stoichita has outlined, the Assumption was a controversial issue due to the lack of consensus of whether her body was resurrected along with her soul. Consequently, artists chose to err on the side of caution. Juan Correa di Vivar, for example, situated the Assumption in the window frame of the bedroom where the dying Virgin rests (fig. 4.10). Stoichita interprets the framing device as an innovative method of walking a fine line between those who were in favor of her corporeal ascent and those who were opposed. Afterall, there are two ways of interpreting the scene: either the window frames Mary's soul or it contains Mary's assumption, body and soul.[6]

By the seventeenth century, however, artists definitively represented the bodily assumption. Francisco Pacheco's artist treatise, for example, took the side of her bodily ascent: "There is no doubt that the Virgin was resurrected on the third day and rose to heaven in body and soul and although the Church has not defined this as dogma, its truth is acknowledged through the celebration of Our Lady with the festival known as the Assumption, and established by the doctrine of many holy men…"[7] Commenting on the proper iconography, Pacheco adds

[5] For more examples of Castilian altarpieces dedicated to the Virgin of the Assumption, see Paul Vandenbroeck, "The Virgin Triumphant and Her Ministry of the Incarnation and Salvation in Castilian Altarpieces c. 1480–1560," in *Born to be Glorified: Assumptionist Altarpieces in the Final Phase of the Spanish 'Reconquista*' (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2022), 11–117.

[6] Victor Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (Reaktion Books, 2011), 39.

[7] Francisco Pacheco, *On Christian Iconography: Selections from the Art of Painting (1649)*, trans. Carles Gutiérrez Sanfeliu and José Solís de los Santos (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2017), 175.

that, "when painting the Virgin's ascent surrounded by angels that appear to be helping and raising her body, it should be noted that this is not because she was raised by the virtues of the angels or was this necessary, for a glorious body can do so by its virtue and gifts, but so as to make it understood that these divine spirits accompanied her in the ascent with the glory and pomp her majesty deserved."[8] By the early modern period, therefore, it was typical to represent a two-part composition with the Virgin Mary's empty tomb below encircled by a gathering of astonished apostles and her bodily assumption above. Pedro de Orrente's painting, for instance, accentuates the vacuous tomb with the apostles gathered around it checking to see if the Virgin's body is truly missing (fig. 4.11).[9]

Assumption Paintings in Mexico

The Virgin of the Assumption was one of the most important Marian advocations in the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The Virgin of the Assumption's popularity during the early colonial period emerged in part because the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan fell to Spanish invaders on August 13th, just two days before the August 15th feast day.[10] Mexico City's cathedral, the *Catedral de la Asunción de María de México*, further testifies to the viceroyalty's staunch devotion. Decorated with relief sculptures picturing the Virgin on the building's façade and filled with sculptures and paintings in the interior, the Assumption plays a central role in Mexico's most important house

[8] Ibid., 176.

[9] For a more elaborated analysis on Orrente's painting, see Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, 42–44.

[10] Cristina Cruz González, "Mexican Instauration: Devotion and Transformation in New Spain," *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014): 99.

of worship. Additionally, numerous artworks commissioned by the Franciscan Order and dedicated to the Assumption populate churches through Mexico.[11]

Despite its popularity, there is no thematic study on representations of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Mexico. There are, however, a number of case studies and catalogue entries that discuss individual examples including Elisa Vargas Lugo's book on Juan Correa, Ilona Katzew's entry published in *Painted in Mexico 1700–1790*, and Juana Gutierrez Haces's entry on Cristóbal de Villalpando's painting of the Assumption.[12] The latest publication to address the subject is Charlene Villaseñor Black's *Transforming Saints*, which discusses the early history of the Assumption. She writes that the sixteenth-century *posa* chapel located in Calpan, Puebla exemplifies the emergence of the devotion (fig. 4.12).[13] The work was created by Indigenous artists at the Franciscan mission and would have been viewed by recent converts as they traversed the outdoor atrium. A second work created about a century later for the church of Santo Domingo in 1624–25 by the artist Alonso López de Herrera divides the composition into two tiers (fig. 4.13). Villaseñor traces the possible pictorial sources to two European artists. First she credits the palette's warm red hues to Titian's color scheme found in the Assumption of the Virgin in the Church of the Frari and second she links the painting's cerebral tone with that of El

[11] Francisco Morales, "Santoral franciscano en los barrios indígenas de la Ciudad de México," *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 24 (1994): 371.

[12] Elisa Vargas Lugo, *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra,* vol. 2 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1985), 84, 113–120; Ilona Katzew, "The Assumption of the Virgin, 1744," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici*, ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 186–187; Pedro Ángeles, "La Asunción de la Virgen," in *Cristóbal de Villalpando, ca. 1649–1714; catálogo razonado* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1997), 168–169.

[13] Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Transforming Saints: From Spain to New Spain* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2022), 100.

Greco's 1570 painting representing the same subject in the Church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo.[14]

Another recent book-length study published in 2021 discussing the Assumption of the Virgin is Aaron Hyman's examination of Rubens's influence on colonial Latin American art. In the introduction's opening pages, Hyman notes that "no less than Cristóbal de Villalpando, one of the most celebrated and well-studied painters of Mexico City set about recrafting, in oil on canvas, an engraving depicting the Virgin's Assumption that had also been designed by Rubens."[15] From there, he identifies additional artists including the González brothers, Juan Correa, and Nicolás Enriquez who converted Rubens's printed composition into different media at varying scales (figs. 4.14, 4.15, 4.16).[16]

While these two publications trace the iconographic connections between paintings of the Assumptions and pictorial precedents established by European artists, there is only one catalogue entry that links the Assumption iconography to a different source: *Mystical City of God*. As mentioned in the chapter's introduction, Luisa Elena Alcalá's essay for *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici* examines an unusual rendering of same subject by Antonio de Torres in which the Virgin is depicted twice. The work is one of a series of fourteen pictures representing the life of the Virgin completed in 1719 for the Colegio Apostólico de Propaganda Fide of Guadalupe in Zacatecas. Alcalá identifies the unusual iconography within this work, along with the *Birth of Christ* and *The Baptism of the Virgin*, as inspired by Sor María.[17] She

[14] Ibid., 102.

[15] Aaron Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat: The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin American Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2021), 5.

[16] Ibid., 6–7.

[17] Torres's *Birth of Christ* features the archangels Gabriel and Michael, following *Mystical City of God*'s text. Further, Sor María describes Christ baptizing the Virgin Mary, an event that does not appear in Scripture. A painting

writes, "*The Assumption of the Virgin* […] may owe its originality to Agreda's text. Instead of following the canonical sources for portraying the subject, such as prints after Peter Paul Rubens, Torres depicts the Virgin twice: below, between Saint Peter and Saint John, and again in the center rising to meet the Trinity above."[18] Unlike most art historical studies of the Assumption which connect Mexican paintings to European artworks, Alcalá identifies a textual source.

Before this interpretation, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia had identified the woman on the ground as the Mary Magdalene. But Alcalá cites Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One from Book Eight of Volume Three from *Mystical City of God* as a pictorial source of inspiration due to its emphasis on the Virgin's duality as body and soul, the characterization of the Virgin Mary's youthful beauty, and description of Christ welcoming her to heaven. Alcalá notes, though, that the painting is "not a literal visual translation of Ágreda's description. The very nature of this text—abstract, devotional, and visionary—would preclude such usage."[19] Highlighting the painting's perspective and elimination of a horizon line, Alcalá writes that Torres's work captures the essence of Sor María's Assumption and offers an interpretation that resembles a vision rather than an event.[20]

Building on Alcalá's reading, I will analyze the painting in conversation with the rest of the series so as to demonstrate that the woman in the lower register of the painting is in fact the Virgin Mary. I will also argue that this work does not just duplicate the Virgin as a way of stressing the dual nature of body and soul but as a method of underscoring her twofold status as

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by José Joaquín Magón also depicts the Virgin's baptism. See Ricardo Fernández Gracia, *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda* (Soria: Caja Duero, 2003), 50–3.

[18] Alcalá, "*Assumption of the Virgin*, 1719," 217–8.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

both the leader of the Church on earth and as an immaculate queen of heaven. In doing so, the painting underscores her place in both realms as a means of highlighting her role in man's redemption. But before delving into the painting itself, let us first examine Sor María's text in which she describes the final episodes of Mary's life. While these chapters do not dictate Torres's painting, they likely did inform how he thought about the final section of the Virgin's biography given that he was such an avid follower of Sor María's writing.

Mystical City of God's Assumption of the Virgin

Sor María details the end of the Virgin Mary's life in Chapters Nineteen through Twenty-Two of Volume Three, Book Eight in *Mystical City of God*. Throughout these chapters, Sor María oscillates between dualities: she alternates her attention between the soul's three days in heaven and the grieving apostles in the cenacle; she stresses the Virgin's temporary splitting between body and soul, as Alcalá highlights in her catalogue entry; and lastly, she stresses Mary's unique sanctity while carefully maintaining her secondary status to Christ.

Sor María introduces Chapter Nineteen with the apostles arriving in Jerusalem from disparate corners of the globe to see the Virgin one final time. Upon entering the cenacle, they observe Mary's sacred body which, despite her old age, bore the appearance of a thirty-three-year-old woman. Sor María characterizes the Virgin's physical "immutability" as a privilege uniquely bestowed on Mary as a consequence of her "purest soul" and her "immunity from the sin of Adam."[21] Consequently, she did not experience "the effects of the years of old age, nor did

[21] "La inmutabilidad en esto fue privilegio único de María Santísima, así porque correspondiera a la estabilidad de su alma purísima, como porque en ella fue correspondiente y consiguiente a la inmunidad que tuvo de la primera culpa de Adán." María de Jesús de Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios: Milagro de su omnipotencia, y abismo de la gracia, historia divina, y vida de la Virgen madre de Dios, reyna, y señora nuestra Maria santissima, restauradora de la culpa de Eva, y medianera de la gracia*, vol. 3 (Madrid: B. de Villa-Diego, 1670), 467.

she have wrinkles on her face or body, nor did she become weaker, thinner, or leaner."[22] Addressing the apostles directly, the Virgin Mary refers to them as her "dearest children" and assures that she will "go to the eternal mansions, where I promise you as a Mother I will look upon you by the clearest light of the Divinity…"[23] In these passages, Sor María first characterizes Mary's death as exceptionally sacred due to her immaculacy and subsequently stresses her care for the apostles even after her death.

Sor María then shifts her focus to the celestial sphere. Christ descends from heaven accompanied by saints and angels who form a procession as they sing verses from the Canticles of Solomon and strum musical instruments. Turning to Mary, he says: "My dearest Mother, whom I have chosen for my dwelling-place, the hour is come in which thou art to pass from the glory of my Father."[24] In response, her body was inflamed with the fire of divine love,[25] and her soul "passed from her Virginal Body to the right hand of the throne of her Most Holy Son where in an instant she was placed with immense glory."[26] In this chapter, Sor María depicts Mary as a place of refuge for both her followers and Christ; Mary's words to the apostles as well as Christ's comments to his mother emphasize the Virgin's dual commitment to her divine and earthly children.

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[22] "La disposición natural de su Sagrado y Virginal Cuerpo y Rostro era la misma que tuvo e treinta y tres años; porque desde aquella edad nunca hizo mudanza del natural estado, ni sintió los efectos de los años ni de la senectud o vejez ni tuvo rugas en el rostro, ni en el cuerpo, ni se le puso mas débil, flaco, y magro." Ibid.

[23] "Carísimos hijos mios […] me voy a las moradas celestiales donde os prometo como madre, que os tendré presentes en la clarísima luz de la divinidad." Ibid., 468.

[24] "Madre mía carísima, a quien yo escogí para mi habitación, ya es llegada la hora, en que habéis de pasar de la vida mortal y del mundo a la gloria de mi padre." Ibid., 469

[25] Ibid., 470.

[26] "Pasó aquella Purísima alma desde su Virginal cuerpo a la diestra, y Trono de su hijo Santisimo, donde en un instante fue colocada con inmensa gloria." Ibid.

In Chapter Twenty Sor María once again focuses on the mournful apostles: "everyone was left without her, as without a soul, and breathless to live, lacking such protection and company."[27] Overcome with grief, two of Mary's former servants attempt to anoint her body, but as they enter the sepulcher they are blinded by an effulgence of light and pleasant odor that conceals her from view. Following this first encounter, the apostles Peter and John step in and successfully raise the Virgin by holding on to the sides of her tunic and placing her in the coffin. Mindful of the potentially suggestive nature of coming into physical contact with the Virgin's body, Sor María highlights that Peter and John entered the oratory with reverence and the intelligence of divine will. Moreover, she stresses that they could only witness her hands and face and could not even feel the weight of her body as they carried her to the Valley of Josaphat.[28]

Chapter Twenty-One recounts Mary's soul rising to heaven, the soul's eventual reunification with her body, and the Assumption. Celebrating his mother's arrival, Christ turns to God and says, "Your beloved Daughter, and Gifted Spouse of the Holy Spirit comes to receive the eternal possession of the crown and glory (…) This is the one that was born among the children of Adam, like a rose among the thorns, intact, pure, and beautiful, worthy of us receiving her in our hands."[29] Just three days following her arrival, Mary's soul travels from heaven back to earth to "resuscitate her Sacred Body, uniting with it so that in Body and Soul she

[27] "todos quedaron sin ella, como sin alma, y sin aliento para vivir, careciendo de tal amparo, y compañía." Ibid., 474.

[28] Ibid., 485–6.

[29] "vuestra Hija querida, y Esposa regalada del Espíritu Santo viene a recibir la posesión eterna de la corona y gloria, […] Esta es la que nació entre los hijos de Adán, como rosa entre las espinas, intacta, pura, y hermosa, digna de que la recibamos en nuestras manos." Ibid., 482–3.

might be raised at the right hand of her Most Holy Son."[30] Without removing the sepulcher's stone, "the most blessed Mary arrived body and soul at the throne of the most Blessed Trinity."[31] Throughout this chapter, Sor María describes the Virgin Mary using characteristics that are typically associated with Christ: she stresses her immaculacy and outlines her bodily Assumption in a manner that is parallel to her son's Ascension.

This chapter also oscillates between Mary's singular holiness and subservience to Christ. For example, when describing the passage of Mary's soul from earth to the Trinity's royal throne, Sor María notes that, "the Most Holy Soul of Christ exceeds without measure the gifts of his Mother."[32] Curiously, Sor María seems to contradict herself when she pens the following quotation uttered by Christ, "My flesh is your flesh; and she cooperated with me in the works of Redemption: and thus I must raise her as I rose from the dead; and may this be at the same time, at the same hour; because I want to make her my equal."[33] Here, Christ explicitly proclaims that his mother is equivalent to him as co-redeemer by evoking their mutual bodily substance: Mary, after all, created Christ from her own flesh, and therefore merits the same treatment after death. Sor María tactfully places the most exalted and possibly transgressive praise for the Virgin Mary in the mouth of Jesus himself, presenting her as the only figure other than Christ who rises bodily instead of waiting for Judgement Day.

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[30] "resucitase su Sagrado Cuerpo, uniéndose con el para que en Cuerpo y Alma fuese otra vez levantada a la diestra de su Hijo Santísimo." Ibid., 484–5.

[31] Ibid., 487.

[32] "la alma Santissima de Christo excede sin medida a las dotes de su Madre." Ibid., 484.

[33] "Mi Carne es carne suya; y ella cooperó conmigo en las obras de le Redención: y así debo resucitarla como yo resucité de los muertos; y que esto sea al mismo tiempo, y a la misma hora; porque en todo quiero hacerla mi semejante." Ibid., 485.

Lastly, Chapter Twenty-Two recounts the Virgin's arrival into heaven. She was placed on the throne with the Trinity. And while the saints did not see Divinity with their "bodily eyes" they did with "those of the soul."[34] Together, these chapters present the Virgin Mary as a guardian and leader of Christ's disciples, but also one who is uniquely positioned to bilocate between heaven and earth.

Antonio de Torres's *Assumption of the Virgin*

Returning to Antonio de Torres's painting, we can now better appreciate the work in light of the text. As Álcala states, Sor María dedicates multiple chapters to the three days in which Mary's soul exists apart from her body, and presumably the painting corresponds with these passages. The chapter's central characters of Mary, Christ, God, Peter, and John align with the painting's primary subjects; with outstretched arms, God and Christ welcome her to heaven; angels flock to the scene as witnesses; and Peter and John are the first to arrive to see Mary one last time and lead the apostles in mourning.

Sor María's physical description of the Virgin Mary also corresponds with Torres's painting as he illustrates her likeness as beautiful and youthful. Moreover, her dress bears a radiating roundel that evokes a passage from Chapter Twenty-Two in which Sor María writes, "On the chest of the great Queen, in her glorious Body, a shape of a small globe […] of singular beauty and splendor was manifested to the Saints," communicating her significance as "a dignified tabernacle."[35] Although Torres depicts what appears to be a sun instead of a globe, the

[34] "Y los Santos no ven la Divinidad con ojos corporales sino con los del alma; pero como le miran en alguna para determinada." Ibid., 490.

[35] "En el pecho de la gran Reyna en su glorioso Cuerpo se manifestó a los Santos una forma de un pequeño globo […] como en Sagrario digno." Ibid., 493–4.

motif echoes the placement and luminosity described by Sor María. By electing a radiating disk, Torres aligns himself with Sor María's exaltation of the Virgin Mary as a place of shelter, but ingeniously depicts this notion by transforming the Virgin's body into a kind of monstrance, elevating her as a vessel of protection but also as the bearer of her son's body to her followers.

Taking a closer look at the painting, we see that Torres used *Mystical City of God* as a source of theological inspiration rather than a treatise. For example, in comparison to Sor María's vivid descriptions of thousands of angels, apostles, and sacred figures who witnessed Mary's Assumption, this painting is comparatively spare. Torres strips the witnesses down to the Trinity, four angels, John, Peter, and a cropped view of a few other apostles in the background. Limiting the number of bodies in the composition makes the doubling of the Virgin Mary all the more interesting. In doing so, Torres amplifies the attention allotted to the Virgin. But why would Torres do this given that it could confuse viewers when identifying the woman on the ground?

Let us turn to other paintings in the series in an attempt to probe this question further. The series consists of fourteen works of square and rectangular formats and likely formed part of an altarpiece housed in the Colegio Apostólico de Propaganda Fide de Guadalupe. As this dissertation has outlined in earlier chapters, the apostolic college was one of the principal patrons of sacred artworks inspired by Sor María. Additionally, the dissertation has also demonstrated Torres's personal support for Sor María's canonization. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the patron and artist would turn to *Mystical City of God*'s account of Mary's life. The paintings depict episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary as a child, mother, and spiritual leader, including the Immaculate Conception, the Birth of the Virgin, the Betrothal of Mary and Joseph, the Visitation, the Annunciation, Pentecost, and her Coronation—all scenes that were typically

included in Virgin Mary cycles in colonial Mexico. It also features more unusual episodes including the Virgin Mary's Baptism and a depiction of the Nativity in which archangels congregate around the Christ child. Similar to her analysis of Torres's *Assumption*, Alcalá has connected these novel subjects to passages from *Mystical City of God* in which Sor María contends that Christ baptized Mary and that Michael and Gabriel were present in the manger.[36] Considering Torres chose to include multiple scenes inspired by Sor María furthers the close link between the Virgin in both his Assumption and the *Mystical City of God.* At the same time, the series is not a one-to-one translation of the publication. It instead interweaves these novel subjects with a traditional breakdown of scenes and subjects.

Torres mobilizes the colors of Mary's garments to convey her role as immaculate spiritual leader and Queen of Heaven. Traditionally, colonial artists either dressed the Virgin in red/pink and white or blue and white. Torres maintains this trend considering no other woman featured wears blue and pink or blue and white. In *Birth of the Virgin*, for example, the two female helpers placed in the foreground are clothed in more subdued earth tones such as green, grey, and ocher (fig. 4.17). Meanwhile, Torres restricts the Virgin Mary's dress to one of the two options that are both visible in the Assumption. When representing Mary's life on earth, such as in the Visitation or the Nativity, she wears the same blue and pink robes (figs. 4.18, 4.19). In these works, she routinely drapes the blue cloak over her head in a parallel fashion to the Assumption. On the other hand, paintings such as the Immaculate Conception and the Coronation, which depict her as a celestial figure against a backdrop of silvery clouds and sky,

[36] Alcalá, "*Assumption of the Virgin*, 1719," 218. Torres was not the only viceregal painter to depict the Baptism of the Virgin Mary. A painting by José Joaquín Magón located in Tecamachalco also depicts Christ baptizing the Virgin Mary. For more on the subject, see Fernández Gracia, *Iconografía de Sor María de Ágreda*, 52–4

cover her in the same blue and white windswept vestments that we first saw in the Assumption's celestial Mary (figs. 4.20, 4.21).

There are two exceptions to this otherwise consistent pattern of dress: *Mary Entering the Temple* and the *Dormition* (figs. 4.22, 4.23). The first work illustrates the moment in which the three-year-old Mary arrives at the Temple of Jerusalem where she learns to needlepoint and read scripture. Following the conventional iconography of the time, Torres paints the young child as she climbs the stairs and is greeted by the priest Zacharias. Although this event takes place during Mary's childhood, Torres depicts her in blue and white as he does in the Assumption. Flanked by her parents Anne and Joachim, these colors might serve as an important reminder of her immaculacy. Afterall, Torres would not have wanted there to be any questions related to whether or not she was conceived by her parents. Given that blue and white were the prescribed colors associated with the Immaculate Conception, Torres likely applied the same combination to Mary as an indicator of her sinlessness in the presence of her parents.

A second painting that goes against the otherwise straightforward categorization between earthly and heavenly garments is Torres's painting of the Virgin's Dormition, the moment when her soul departs from her body and ascends to heaven. In this work Mary reclines with her hands crossed over her chest, her mouth agape, and eyes upturned as though enraptured in a vision. While she continues to wear a blue cloak, her dress underneath has transformed from a monochromatic pink to a brilliant white. Here Torres covers the dress with a floral motif so that the original pink seemingly dissolves into winding patterns, giving way to white fabric underneath. Therefore, this painting marks a break in the otherwise coherent color combinations that designate a distinction between the earthly and the celestial Mary. By decorating the dress' surface with a new design, Torres signals the transformation of Mary's very nature. Torres was

not the only artist to paint her vestments with a gilded design, as is evident in the *Dormition* housed in the Templo Conventual de Santo Domingo de Guzmán in Puebla (fig. 4.24), nor was he the only one to apply these defining color combinations. And yet, in this series he innovatively uses pattern and color within the series as a way of navigating the challenge of representing the Virgin Mary's bodily transformation. By creating a rupture between the cloth's uniform pinks and whites, Torres beckons the viewer to pay attention to Mary's conversion from an earthly figure to one of celestial radiance.

Another important distinction that the *Assumption* signals to the viewer is the contrasting handling of dark and light space. In the same vein as the Virgin's garments, the rendering of space breaks down into two categories: the representations of Mary's life on earth and those in heaven. In the representation of the first scenes Torres situates his subjects within sober interiors. In all of these works the sky opens up and radiates against the shadowy gathering below. In Torres's *Nativity*, for example, the figures are lit from below by Christ's body while the upper part of the composition is punctured with an opening in the sky from which God emerges (fig. 4.25). By contrast, the spaces of the Immaculate Conception and Coronation are bright and airy. Meanwhile, in the Assumption, each of the two Marys occupies her respective light and dark setting. In comparison to the assumed Virgin's porcelain skin, Torres's depictions of Peter, John, and the lower Mary are darkened and ruddier. Juxtaposing John and Peter to the similar composition of the Immaculate Conception, Anne and Joachim appear fairer. Thus, there seems to be an effort on Torres's part to use shading and color to create a dichotomy between the celestial and earthly realms. Even Mary herself, once assumed, emerges out of the shadows and into the light.

One final comparison to make between the Assumption and an additional work within the series highlights Torres's method of doubling Mary's body. Torres's *Birth of the Virgin Mary* also illustrates the infant twice: first in the arms of Gabriel as God the Father blesses her and second in the arms of her mother Anne. While the two paintings represent different events, there are certain instances of overlap. All four figures stare toward God; they wear haloes; and one occupies the celestial realm while the other the earthly one. Even the grey robes of the infant in Anne's arms appear darker than those of the swaddled baby held by Gabriel, echoing the variation in complexion between the Marys of the Assumption. In the *Birth of the Virgin,* however, the infant held in her mother Anne's arms is the primary focal point whereas the Assumed Mary takes center stage supplanting the cropped rendering of the earthbound Mary. Thus, it seems that these two paintings work in tandem as a kind of framing device that precede and follow the Immaculate Conception and Coronation. While the first and last work represent her as entirely celestial, the corporeal duplication in the birth and Assumption conveys a kind of liminality that locates her body in both realms at once but also illustrates her passage from heaven to earth and back again.

Torres's *Life of the Virgin* series, therefore, uses color, light, and space to differentiate between the Virgin Mary's earthly and celestial existence. The novel Assumption painting amplifies this trend by doubling her body as a means of maintaining her commitment to her subjects on earth and also her devotion to God.

Luis Berrueco's *Ascension of Christ* and *Assumption of the Virgin*

Now that we have discussed Antonio de Torres's *Assumption* at length, let us turn to a different set of paintings by the Puebloan artist Luis Berrueco. Two large canvases depicting the

Assumption of the Virgin and the Ascension of Christ cover the side walls in the apse of a church that once formed part the Convento de Santa Clara in Atlixco, Puebla (figs. 4.4, 4.26). Both works are monumental with Christ and the Virgin Mary occupying the center of each composition and ancillary characters overtaking the celestial and earthly realms. Neither work has received much scholarly attention: Berrueco's *Assumption* was published in the exhibition catalogue *Painted in Mexico*, but it was only briefly featured as representative of the many colonial paintings in situ that are in need of conservation.[37] Buerrueco's *Ascension*, meanwhile, has never been published, and neither work has ever previously been linked to *Mystical City of God*. I will, therefore, be the first to propose that Berrueco, like Torres, gravitated towards Sor María's unusual discussion relating to the doubling of the Virgin Mary's body. However, I will argue that he visualized Mary's body twofold in the Ascension rather than the Assumption.

Although we do not know the paintings' commission history, primary sources shed light on the community for which these works were produced. Founded in 1617, the Franciscan convent was originally made up of eight nuns, but its membership grew to surpass sixty by the end of the century.[38] The Franciscan historian, Augustín de Vetancurt (1620–1700), extoled the female monastics' dedication to poverty, commitment to God, and their deep humility. Additionally, he highlighted the nuns' mystical lives and holy deaths. For example, the venerable mother Leonor de San Juan from Cholula entered the convent in 1619 where "God communicated soft heavenly favors to her in ecstasy."[39] On the Virgin of the Assumption's feast

[37] Katzew, *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790*, 18.

[38] Augustín de Vetancurt, *Chronica de la Provnicia del Santo Evangelio de Mexico*, in *Teatro Mexicano de los sucesos Religiosos* (Mexico City: Doña Maria de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1697), 114.

[39] "Dióse a la contemplación, donde le comunicó Dios nuestro Señor en éxtasis suaves favores celestiales." Augustín de Vetancurt, *Menologio franciscano de los varones mas señalados, que con sus vidas ejemplares, perfección*

day, she witnessed a priest administer communion, which enabled her to live until she was eighty years old.[40] A second nun, Beatriz de San Buenaventura, was so "devoted to the sacred passion" that "she melted into copious tears and remained ecstatic."[41] On her deathbed, she asked to die "on Friday and it was granted at the same time that Christ Our Lord died..."[42] And finally, the venerable mother Catalina de San Juan practiced a life of asceticism in which she would fast and macerate herself. In 1678 she announced to her servant that after receiving the sacrament she experienced a vision in which God spoke to her directly and said, "separate yourself […] you have to go accompany me."[43] As God instructed, Catalina passed away just a few days later.

These anecdotes illustrate a community of women dedicated to leading a virtuous life that would ensure their peaceful death and their salvation. All three members of the Convento de Santa Clara excerpted above experienced visions in which they communed directly with God. Additionally, all three biographical entries center around death, albeit differently. Leonor's story emphasizes the Feast of the Assumption as the consequential day in which she received the holy sacrament, enabling her to live until eighty years old; Beatriz wished to die at the same time as Christ so that her passing would be modeled on his example; and Catalina wished to depart from her body so that she could follow God into heaven. The convent's emphasis on the passage from a holy life on earth to communion with God in heaven possibly explains Berrueco's large-scale

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religiosa, ciencia, predicación evangélica, en su vida, y muerte ilustraron la provincia de el Santo Evangelio de México, vol. 4 (Mexico City: Imprenta de I. Escalante y Ca., 1871), 389.

[40] Ibid.

[41] "devota de la sagrada passion; con tanto fervor […] se derretía en copiosas lagrimas y se quedaba extática…" Ibid., 412.

[42] "Pidióle a nuestro Señor fuese su muerta en viernes, y fuéle concedido, a la hora en que Cristo nuestro Señor murió..." Ibid.

[43] "Prepárate también, que me has de ir a acompañar. Dentro de pocos días murió, como se lo previno." Ibid., 85–6.

paintings depicting the Virgin's and Christ's bodily. Thus, it is likely that the nuns commissioned Berrueco to complete this unusual pairing of paintings to evoke the monastic community's focus on eschatological concerns.

It is also possible Berrueco turned to *Mystical City of God* as inspiration at the behest of the nuns in the Convento de Santa Clara, but it is also conceivable that he was familiar with Sor María's ideas of his own accord. The most prominent artist in a dynasty of Puebla-based painters, Berrueco completed multiple works for Franciscan churches throughout the region.[44] A separate series titled *Life of Saint Francis*, also housed in the Convento de Santa Clara, proves Berrueco's knowledge of the Spanish author.[45] Within this cycle, he painted *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception* and pictured Saint John the Evangelist, Duns Scotus, and other Franciscan theologians surrounding the Virgin (fig. 4.27). In the left corner the only female witness pictured is Sor María, identifiable through her open book, quill in hand, and Conceptionist regalia. The representation of Sor María provides undeniable proof that both the artist and convent were familiar with the Spanish mystic.

Returning to Berrueco's *Ascension* (fig. 4.26), how does the artist experiment with Sor María's ideas? The *Ascension* represents a colossal scene brimming with life-size figures. At the composition's summit, God the Father bursts from clouds, hands outstretched welcoming the arrival of his son. Surrounding him, a sea of angels and sacred figures including Anne and Joachim swarm the upper half of the canvas and enclose the central subjects. Down below, the

[44] For more information on Luis Berrueco, see Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en Mexico*, 3rd ed., ed. Xavier Moyssén (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990), 180; Francisco Pérez de Salazar, *Historia de la pintura en Puebla*, ed. Elisa Vargas Lugo (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1963), 83–5; and Paula Mues Orts, "Saint Francis before the Cross at San Damiano," in *Painted in Mexico, 1700–1790: Pinxit Mexici*, exh. cat., ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), 465–6.

[45] For more information on Berrueco's series, see Elisa Vargas Lugo and Marco Díaz, "Historia, leyenda y tradición en una serie francsicana," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 12, no. 44 (1975): 59–82.

apostles and disciples tightly pack together around the Mount of Olives gazing upward in awe as they witness Christ hover above. Although Berrueco's *Ascension* follows the two-part composition typical of canonical renderings of the theme, there is one stark difference: the Virgin Mary, who normally accompanies the apostles on the ground, floats mid-air alongside Christ instead.

In early modern Spain and Mexico, artists such as Antonio Lanchares traditionally illustrated the Ascension by casting Christ as the central subject catapulted above ground while the apostles and Virgin Mary witness the departing figure from earth (fig. 4.28). These paintings illustrate the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:9-12) in which Christ ascends to heaven from the Mount of Olives forty days after his Resurrection: "As they watched, he was lifted up, and a cloud removed him from their sight." Although the Gospels do not mention the Virgin as present, early modern artworks typically feature her as a witness standing on the ground.[46] For example, Juan Rodríguez Juárez's painting from 1720 depicts Christ as he soars into the sky (fig. 4.29). Just below his feet, an angel's wing ushers the viewer's gaze between the celestial and the earthly realms, and along the painting's lower edge, the Virgin Mary, Peter, John, and other apostles gaze toward Christ.

Berrueco follows certain precedents: he depicts Christ airborne, bearing the stigmata, and rising toward God; he situates the scene on the hilltop of the Mount of Olives with the barren earth mound anchoring the lower half of the composition. However, given the Ascension's consistently singular focus on Christ, Berrueco's decision to pair the Virgin Mary next to him is unusual. What is the Virgin Mary doing here? Why have angels removed her from the ground?

[46] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 34.

While neither scripture nor pictorial precedent explains this inconsistency, Chapter Twenty-Nine of Volume Two, Book Six of *Mystical City of God* elucidates such queries. In this passage, Sor María makes the unorthodox argument that the Virgin accompanies Jesus into heaven during the Ascension: "The new and hidden sacrament that the right hand of the Most High performed on this occasion was to take his Most Holy Mother with him, to give her in Heaven the possession of the glory and the place that as a true Mother had been indicated to her and that she, with her merits, acquired and forewarned."[47] Following this quotation, Sor María acknowledges how unusual her version of the Ascension is and even notes that she experienced "doubt when I met this mystery for the first time."[48] But she argues that if the Virgin had already been raised to heaven during her Immaculate Conception, it is much more credible that she would be raised now that she had already "created human form from her pure blood, fed from her breasts with milk, and raised her True son…"[49] By the chapter's conclusion, the Virgin Mary ultimately returns to the world to console the Congregation of the Faith waiting down below on the Mount of Olives.[50] Stressing Mary's dual nature, this chapter characterizes the Virgin as a queenly mother of God whose singular status endows her the privilege of ascending to heaven before her own death and as a committed leader of the Church on earth.

[47] "El nuevo y oculto sacramento que la diestra del Altísimo obró en esta ocasión fue llevar consigo a su Madre Santísima, para darle en el Cielo la posesión de la gloria y del lugar que como a Madre verdadera le tenia señalado y ella con sus méritos adquirido, y para adelante prevenido." María de Jesús de Ágreda, *Mystica ciudad de Dios: Milagro de su omnipotencia, y abismo de la gracia, historia divina, y vida de la Virgen madre de Dios, reyna, y señora nuestra Maria santissima, restauradora de la culpa de Eva, y medianera de la gracia*, vol. 2 (Madrid: B. de Villa-Diego, 1670), 1004.

[48] "Me ofreció la duda, cuando conocí este misterio la primera vez." Ibid., 1005.

[49] "dadole forma humana de su purísima sangre, alimentadole a sus pechos con su leche, y criandole…" Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 1014.

In light of Sor María's account, the Virgin Mary's elevated and central position in Berrueco's *Ascension* becomes clear. In contrast to Christ, whose body floats autonomously in midair, the Virgin is carried by a "cloud on which she had ascended" toward her son.[51] If Berrueco places Mary slightly below her son to acknowledge her deferential status, the artist also gravitates towards passages that highlight the duo's parity. Her subservience is noted in *Mystical City of God*, where Mary is described prostrated "at the base of the royal throne annihilated in the consciousness of being a pure and earthly creature."[52] But Sor María also emphasizes that "choirs of angels and saints gave supreme honor to each respectively and both together."[53] Instead of placing Mary in an overt posture of humility, Berrueco aligns his two central figures, presenting them as a pair on near equal footing. In addition to their placement, Berrueco fills the corners of the canvas with angels creating a mirrored configuration of holy bodies surrounding the central subjects. By treating Jesus's and Mary's peripheral spaces in a similar manner replete with figures and clouds, Berrueco establishes an analogous set of conditions for beholding the central subjects as corresponding and inseparable protagonists.

While the arrangement of bodies is similar, the characters situated just behind Christ and the Virgin Mary differ. Seated on clouds to the right of Christ are four naked bodies—two men and two women—who gaze toward the center. According to *Mystical City of God*, Christ was "in the company of angels and saints from Limbo and Purgatory,"[54] and while these figures do not depict saints or angels, the nude bodies resemble contemporaneous works representing souls

[51] "desde la nube, en que ascendia." Ibid., 1014.

[52] "a la peana del trono real desecha en su propio conocimiento de pura y terrena criatura." Ibid., 1010.

[53] "Y puestos a dos Coros Ángeles, y Santos, pasaron Christo Nuestro Redentor, y su Beatissima Madre, y todos por su orden les dieron suprema adoracion a cada uno, y a los dos respectivamente." Ibid.

[54] "La compañia de los Angeles, y Santos, que salieron del Limbo, y Purgatorio…" Ibid., 1002.

awaiting salvation as in Miguel Cabrera's *Christ's Blood Eliminating the Flames of Purgatory* (eighteenth century) (fig. 4.30). By associating Christ's Ascension with these nude figures, Berrueco promotes not only Christ's divinity but also his role as redeemer.

Meanwhile across the composition, Anne and Joachim huddle behind Mary. While Sor María mentions Mary's parents during her own Assumption, she does not name them in this chapter. Therefore, Berrueco seemingly inserts them of his own volition as a way of orienting the viewer to Mary's unusual presence. Moving across the painting from right to left along the horizontal axis, Berrueco transitions from Mary's parents, to the Virgin, to Christ, and concludes with the souls. This genealogical configuration that starts with Anne and Joachim presents Mary as a key player in humanity's salvation. Moreover, by dressing her in blue and white and placing her in the company of her parents, Berrueco alludes to the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, which after all, was the original reason she garnered her holy status. Thus, the painting emphasizes her immaculacy as a means of justifying Mary's unusual ascent: she merited the glory she received in large part because of her evasion of original sin, which enabled her passage to heaven with Christ and participation in man's redemption.

Turning to the lower half of the composition, Berrueco's illustration of the Mount of Olives initially appears to follow precedent more closely. The apostles gather around a small hill depicting the sacred ridge where Christ's Ascension took place. In the foreground to the right, a bearded saint Peter dressed in white robes drops to his knees as he witnesses the miraculous event. Standing behind him, apostles also gaze toward heaven animating the scene through varied postures of disbelief. The sheer number of figures gathered on the ground, however, exceeds the traditional assemblage of eleven apostles and the Virgin Mary. Turning to *Mystical City of God*, we again find an explanation for the iconographic novelty: "In order to celebrate

this festive and mysterious day, Christ our Lord selected as witnesses the hundred and twenty persons, to whom as related in the foregoing chapter, He had spoken in the Cenacle."[55] By multiplying the number of bystanders, Berrueco enlarges the scene so that it is as much about the importance of beholding as it is about elevation of Mary and Christ.

But one witness on the ground diverges from the rest: an angel kneeling across the ridge from Peter (fig. 4.31).[56] Unlike the putti welcoming Christ and Mary from heaven, she is the only angelic figure situated in the lower half of the composition. While it is fairly standard to encounter angels stationed on the Mount of Olives with the apostles, artists typically position these characters as interlocutors between heaven and earth addressing the crowd with their arms and wings protracted outward and gesturing toward Christ. For instance, Johannes Wierix's 1593 engraving of the Ascension, which illustrated early editions of *Mystical City of God*, depicts two angels just below Jesus consoling the apostles (fig. 4.32). In contrast, Berrueco's angel is stationed across from Peter and integrated with the collection of onlookers.

Another anomalous feature concerning this particular angel is its gender. Typically, these angels appear androgynous or as young men. Francisco Pacheco writes, "the appearance and face that is taken from divine writings and approved by the councils and saints is a male one, and not a female one […] they are beardless youths […] with beautiful and graceful faces, lively and gleaming yet manly eyes, with thick and lustrous hair, blond and chestnut, gallant figure and graceful shapely limbs, an argument for the beauty of their being."[57] Counter to Pacheco's

[55] "Para celebrar este día tan festivo y misterioso eligió Christo nuestro bien por especiales testigos las ciento y veinte personas a quien juntó y habló en el Cenaculo." Ibid., 1002.

[56] My sincere thanks to Tacho Juárez Herrera for calling attention to the angel and suggesting the link between this figure and Sor María.

[57] Francisco Pacheco, *On Christian Iconography*, 105–7.

prescription, Berrueco renders his angel as an adult woman with breasts, long blonde hair, blue and white robes, and positioned amongst rather than separated from her fellow onlookers. Deferentially kneeling to the side of the Mount of Olives opposite Peter, she prompts the questions who is she and what is she doing here?

Once again, *Mystical City of God* potentially clarifies these queries. Following her description of Mary accompanying Christ into heaven during the Ascension, Sor María writes that,

> The Divine power worked in a miraculous and admirable way, enabling the Blessed Mother to be in two parts; staying with the children of the Church, following them to the Cenacle, and assisting with them, and going up in the company of the Redeemer of the world, and on his very Throne to Heaven; where she spent three days with the most perfect use of powers and senses; and at the same time in the Cenacle with less exercise of them.[58]

Sor María justifies this revision by maintaining that God enabled Mary to bilocate: so as not to completely usurp the conventional narrative, Sor María insists that while Mary did accompany her son into heaven, the apostles were unaware of the Virgin's departure. And in line with tradition, she also stayed on the ground providing comfort and guidance in the wake of Christ's absence. *Mystical City of God*, therefore, endows its readers with a privileged intelligence of the Virgin's ability to occupy two places at once, knowledge that not even the original witnesses possessed.

Is this enigmatic angel inserted into the foreground a representation of the Virgin Mary bilocating? Focusing on her likeness and posture, the hypothesis becomes more feasible. Both the assumed Mary and the angel are placed in three-quarter view and don the same blue cloak

[58] "obró el poder Divino por milagroso y admirable modo, que Maria Santisima estuviese en dos partes; quedando con los hijos de la Iglesia, siguiéndolos al Cenaculo, y asistiendo con ellos, y subiendo en compañía del Redentor del mundo, y en su mismo Trono a los Cielos; donde estuvo tres días con el mas perfecto uso de las potencias, y sentidos; y al mismo tiempo en el Cenaculo con menos ejercicio de ellos." Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 1004.

and white dress. Moreover, their features are identical including the ovular head, porcelain skin, flushed cheeks, and blonde wavy hair that falls down their backs. The primary difference between the two figures is the depiction of wings fastened to the lower Mary's back. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that Berrueco knew it would be too bizarre to duplicate the body twice when he was already going against the canon by having Mary assumed with Christ. Adding wings to the lower Virgin Mary might have been a way for the artist to navigate the unorthodoxy, integrating her into the scene so as not to transgress the limits of acceptability too openly.

Another more plausible explanation is that Berrueco not only turned to this chapter but spliced an additional passage from *Mystical City of God* in which the Virgin Mary's body is actually replaced by an angel. In Volume III, Book Eight, Chapter Six Sor María describes Mary ascending to heaven before her death yet again. After celebrating the first mass with the apostles, she retreats to her room where "by order of the Lord his angels raised her up […] to take her body and soul to the Empyrean Heaven, leaving an Angel substituting her figure, so that the apostles in the cenacle would not miss her."[59] As in the previous chapter, Sor María emphasizes the need to fill the void left by Mary's absence as she temporarily rises to heaven. Here, however, Sor María deploys an angel as her replacement instead of doubling her body. Either way, Sor María presents an exalted Virgin Mary who traversed heaven and earth during her lifetime without ever abandoning her role as the spiritual leader upon whom the apostles and disciples relied.

[59] "y luego por mandado del Señor la levantaró sus Ángeles, y los demás que allí asistían para llevarla en alma y cuerpo al Cielo Empíreo, quedando un Ángel sustituyendo por ella en su figura, para que en el Cenáculo no la echasen menos los apósteles que allí estaban" Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, vol. 3, 325.

Berrueco's manner of painting the two women arouses a consideration of both these textual passages. On the one hand, the lower figure's physical likeness and dress echo that of the Virgin's above, leading the viewer to identify her as the second Mary described in Volume Two's account of the Ascension; on the other, the wings propose a clear distinction between the two, suggesting the body of an angel as recounted in Volume Three. But rather than affirmatively pointing to a singular moment from Sor María's text, Berrueco resists an easy interpretation and instead embraces both. Thus, he seems to use *Mystical City of God* not as source from which to pull discrete, novel episodes from Mary's life, but instead as a means to grapple and experiment with how to illustrate the unorthodoxy of picturing the Virgin's polysemous body. By fusing the two passages, Berrueco simultaneously replaces and doubles Mary.

This question of presence and absence comes to the fore to an even greater degree when we consider the angel in relationship to Christ's footprints impressed upon the hilltop of the Mount of Olives. In accordance with the traditional rendering of Christ's Ascension, Berrueco depicts the impression of Christ's feet directly below his elevated body as a marker of where he once stood. As Stoichita has explained in his analysis of Juan de Flandes's *Disappearing Christ*, this indexical sign evidences Christ's incarnation and former corporeal presence (fig. 4.33).[60] Christ rises into heaven while the apostles and the painting's beholders are left to consider a void. Meanwhile, the sign marking the Virgin Mary's absence is not an impression but the opposite, a second figure. Berrueco therefore amplifies this idea of the doubled or absent body by contrasting the hallowed ground left by Christ with the Virgin Mary's enduring company.

[60] On the imprints of Christ's feet during the Ascension, see Stoichita, *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, 36. See also, Meyer Schapiro, "The Image of the Disappearing Christ," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts XXIII* (1943): 135.

Thus, Berrueco delivers to the viewer a double imperative: to behold the Virgin Mary as Christ's accomplice, but also as a key witness on the ground.

Across the apse, Berrueco's second painting, a monumental *Assumption of the Virgin*, subsumes the wall (fig. 4.2). This work follows a similar compositional structure as the *Ascension*. The canvas is divided into two sections: scores of angels and holy figures surround the periphery, the Virgin Mary and Jesus hover in the center, and the apostles and disciples occupy the ground level. Although virtually no scholarship exists on this painting, Aaron Hyman has linked Berrueco's *Assumption* with a print of the same subject by Rubens (fig. 4.34). In line with European precedent, Berrueco's figures on the ground replicate the disciples' gestures of surprise depicted in the print: Peter analogously turns his back away from the viewer, John stands to the left, two handmaidens bend over as they unfold the white shroud, and two more figures open the coffin. It is important to highlight, though, that the sheer repetition of Rubens's composition in paintings by artists such as Cristóbal de Villalpando and Miguel Gónzalez suggests a more complicated relational dynamic between Berrueco and Rubens. As Hyman himself notes, "One-to-one correspondences gave way to networks of objects sharing a given composition."[61] Therefore, it is impossible to know whether Berrueco adapted this composition from the print or if he came across a painted version completed by one of his contemporaries.

In contrast to the visual overlap between Rubens's and Berrueco's earthly figures, the upper half of the composition departs from the printed prototype and more closely aligns with painting precedents in Mexico. In the Rubens print, the Virgin Mary rises up gazing beyond the limits of the picture plane as she is carried by clouds teeming with putti and bathed in beams of divine light. In contrast, Mexican artists frequently embellished the Virgin's ascent. For example,

[61] Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat*, 9.

Juan Correa's painting located in the sacristy of the Mexico City cathedral renders the celestial realm engulfed by angels crowding together around the Virgin. Three thrones run along the canvas' upper edge with God the Father seated to the right, Christ in the center, and a third, vacant throne waiting to be filled. As the Virgin Mary ascends, the archangel Gabriel along with innumerable angels play instruments and usher her upward. Berrueco's inclusion of three thrones and gathering of celestial bodies huddled together in the upper half of the composition resembles this precedent typified by Correa (fig. 4.2).

And yet even with these iconographic parallels, Berrueco's work still appears different. In comparison to Correa's painting, Berrueco's Christ not only stands up from his throne but descends so that he is level with his mother. On equal footing, they gaze toward one another taking each other's hands. The angels who hugged closely to Mary's body in Correa's work withdraw from the center to the periphery so that the two protagonists float against a backdrop of golden light. Lastly, the figures converging around Christ and the Virgin are constituted by a more diverse group of holy figures than just angels: Adam and Eve, members of the holy family, and saints enter the scene.

Based on textual and visual analysis, Berrueco's pictorial alterations might also have been inspired by *Mystical City of God*. For instance, Sor María describes how "the three divine Persons received her"[62] and the way in which, "Christ our Savior Himself descended from Heaven bringing with Him at His right hand the soul of His most Blessed Mother and accompanied by many legions of the Angels, the Patriarchs and ancient Prophets."[63] These excerpts highlight Sor María's emphasis on the Trinity's reception as well as Christ's descent.

[62] "Y las tres Divinas personas la recibieron…" Ágreda, *Mystica Ciudad de Dios*, 496.

[63] "Descendió del Cielo el mismo Christo nuestro Salvador, llevando a su diestra la Alma de su Beatisima Madre, con muchas Legiones de Angeles, y los Padres, y Profestas antiguos." Ibid., 495.

Sor María also expounds on the attendees in heaven noting, "Those that especially distinguished themselves in their thanksgiving were our first parents Adam and Eve, St. Anne, St. Joachim and St. Joseph, as being the closer partakers in this miracle of His Omnipotence."[64] Consistent with the text, Berrueco features these same characters. The Trinity is depicted through the tripling of Christ's body, all sporting triangular haloes; two of them remain seated while the one originally positioned to the left has traveled to the center of the composition to take his mother's hand. By removing the third Christ, Berrueco creates an opening for Mary to ascend and take her rightful place as the enthroned Queen of Heaven. Berrueco also places Adam, Eve, Joachim, Anne, and Joseph to the left of Mary. Adam and Eve are identifiable as the nude figures in prayer, Anne and Joachim hover just behind, and Joseph carries a bouquet of lilies. Berrueco adds to this congregation, balancing out the other side of the composition by inserting Saint John the Baptist and other saints next to Christ.

Instead of simply translating textual passages into a painted composition, however, Berrueco transforms Sor María's theology by presenting Christ's Ascension and Mary's Assumption as a comparable pair. While it is customary for artists to situate the Ascension and Assumption within cycles visualizing Christ's and Mary's lives, as we have seen with Antonio Torres, I have never encountered the merging of the two as a complete set. Locating the paintings opposite one another brings to the fore unmistakable parallels that seem to equate the Assumption and Ascension with one another.

First, Berrueco consistently couples Christ and Mary regardless of whose ascent to heaven the episode actually renders. Moreover, the uniform handling of space with the

[64] "Y los que especialmente se señalaron fueron nuestros primeros Padres Adan y Eva, y después de ellos Santa Ana, San Joachin, y San Joseph, como quien tenia particulares títulos, y razones para engrandexer al Señor en aquella maravilla de su Omnipotencia." Ibid.

undulating clouds and gathering of earthly witnesses, saints, holy figures, and angels emphasize a sense of parity between the two. And lastly, Berrueco's decision to situate the saved souls next to Christ during the Ascension and couple Mary with Adam and Eve in the Assumption associates both figures with salvation. In view of the considerable visual overlap between the two, both paintings also depend on the composition's lower register to identify the scene. The Mount of Olives marks Christ's ascension while the tomb indicates Mary's Assumption. Despite the distinctive settings, Berrueco prompts the viewer to consider the parallels between each figure's absence on earth through the footprints and the white shroud.

Finally, both thematize the multiplication of the central figure's bodies. In the Ascension, Berrueco doubles Mary's body by placing a second, winged Virgin kneeling on the ground. As noted earlier, their physical likeness and identical garments clue the viewer into Berrueco's unusual iconographic alteration. In the Virgin's Assumption, Berrueco triples the representation of Jesus's body to convey the Trinity. They too are painted with identical physical features and robes, but Berrueco distinguishes between the three by fastening a different attribute on each chest: a lamb, a heart, and a dove. Berrueco seems to again equate the two by signaling both figures' ability to occupy multiple places at once.

By pairing the paintings together, Berrueco creates a corresponding exaltation of Christ and the Virgin Mary's bodily Assumptions. As a consequence of taking up the flesh of his mother at Incarnation, Christ also takes her up with him as he rises to heaven. Mary is therefore treated with equal reverence not just at the moment of her ascent to heaven but during his own. By juxtaposing the two scenes, Berrueco visualizes a congruous relationship between the two figures' arrival to heaven while also rendering an indissoluble bond between mother and child in which one is always with the other. Rather than Mary paralleling Christ, however, he in fact

parallels his mother. Through the appropriation of pictorial devices typical of the Assumption—increasing the number of figures, the composition's overfullness, soaring movement, and multiple focal points—that are then applied to the Ascension, the viewer reads Christ as following his mother's model. Thus, even if viewers did not know about *Mystical City of God*'s unusual exaltation of the Virgin Mary, they would see the painted series as one that establishes an analogy between mother and son by adopting a pictorial language that was originally associated with Mary.

Mary's Dormition

Unlike the previous paintings in this chapter, which multiply the Virgin Mary's body in unusual and divergent ways, the final works to be discussed double the figure in a more traditional mode. Together, these paintings depict the Virgin's Dormition, Mary's final moments on earth before her bodily Assumption. The first painting was completed in the second half of the eighteenth century by the artist Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas (fig. 4.3). Situated in an interior setting flanked by columns, apostles and acolytes gather around Mary while angels, biblical figures, and saints inundate the barrel-vaulted ceiling above. In the center of the grand interior, Mary reclines on a bier as the soul, pictured as a tiny body, frees herself from her corporeal vessel and flies toward Christ.

Rendering the body and soul as two distinct figures, Zendejas built on a centuries-long convention that was particularly popular in Dormition paintings from medieval Spain and Europe more broadly. For instance, a detail from a late-fifteenth-century altarpiece located in Valencia visualizes the soul as if she were a tadpole-like creature with a black line extending from Mary's mouth to the white tail of the soul's robes (fig. 35). Capturing the soul's passage from earth to

heaven, the swaddled figure occupies the liminal space between Mary's body and celestial queen's coronation pictured above. A second work by Zendejas, *The Death of Saint Augustine* (1777) represents this same trope by rendering the soul as a youthful small body diving towards the Trinity and surrounded in a pale filmy substance emerging from the corpse's mouth (fig. 4.36). In his representation of the Virgin's Dormition, Zendejas again utilizes this method but draws a different parallel between the body and soul's likeness. Augustine's corpse appears sallow and lifeless in comparison with his blonde-haired soul. By contrast, the Virgin Mary's body maintains its beauty and resembles the soul who soars upward into the cavernous space.

While the representation of the Virgin Mary does not stand out for its unorthodoxy, the painting is in fact unusual for the lower register: two figures flank the painting's cartouche holding open their books and presenting their quills as they transcribe the central scene. Dressed in blue and white Conceptionist robes, the female author can be identified as Sor María, while her counterpart is likely Duns Scotus. Although we have seen numerous instances in which Sor María and figures of the Church surround the Virgin Mary as advocates of the Immaculate Conception, this is the first time that we have seen her likeness inserted into an episode from the Virgin Mary's life.

A possible explanation for the author's presence in this late-eighteenth-century picture is the growing popularity of Sor María's account of the Assumption that emerged during the same period. Although excerpts from *Mystical City of God* were published and circulated throughout Mexico as early as the late 1600s, it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that her writings on the Virgin Mary's death started to be published as an autonomous theological principle. Anna Nogar has identified the *Triduo mariano mensual en honor, y reverencia del Felicissimo Transito, entierro y assumpcion de la Reyna del Cielo y tierra María Nuestra*

Señora, para alcanzar mediante su Protección una dichosa muerte as an example of meditations on the Virgin Mary's death, burial, and Assumption derived from *Mystical City of God* that were aimed to help readers achieve a happy death. Published for the first time in 1761 in Puebla, the *Triduo mariano* became one of the most frequently printed texts reproducing Sor María's writing in Mexico. It was published on multiple occasions by two publishers in Puebla (1774, 1790, 1796, and 1817) and two additional publishers in Mexico City (1783, 1790, and 1817).[65] This relatively delayed adoption of Sor María's Dormition and Assumption narratives might explain a corresponding pictorial trend. Whereas Sor María was always associated with the Immaculate Conception through imagery and text, the visual link between the author and the end of the Virgin Mary's life appears to be a subsequent and less popular development perhaps because it was too learned.

A second version of this painting testifies to at least one example in which associating Sor María with paintings of the Virgin's Dormition resonated beyond Zendejas (fig. 4.4). This work by an unknown artist and currently housed in the Museo Andrés Blaisten in Mexico City is certainly inspired by Zendejas. Like the former, this painting follows a similar iconographic and compositional template. The Virgin Mary reclines, her soul floats toward Christ, and Jesus is perched on a cluster of putti with his hands outstretched in anticipation of receiving his mother in heaven. A gathering of witnesses occupies the lower and upper recesses of the painting creating a cascade of bodies.

Despite these similarities, the anonymous work allots more attention to Sor María than the Zendejas painting. In comparison to Zendejas who incorporates two mystic authors, this second work extricates the male cleric and invites the viewer to look through the mediation of

[65] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 122.

Sor María who functions as the singular figure presenting the central image. Additionally, this painting emphasizes the closeness between the author and Mary through the compression of space and the constriction of figures. In contrast with Zendejas who uses the one-point perspective of the tiled floor to create a sense of depth, this second picture condenses the interior so that Mary's body lies flat against the picture plane in close proximity with Sor María. Moreover, Zendejas includes what looks like contemporary bystanders who are possibly the painting's patrons while this version limits the figures on the ground to the apostles and disciples, casting Sor María as the only modern-day witness. Lastly, while the column clearly excludes Sor María from the cenacle, the text reading "Tota pulchra es Maria"[66] slips past the architectural barrier penetrating the central area and grazing the bier upon which the Virgin Mary rests. Therefore, she is presented not just as a privileged witness transcribing what she sees but as one whose words infiltrate and shape the central scene.

Sor María's text scroll primes the viewer to pay attention to other visual elements that highlight the Virgin's immaculacy interspersed throughout the Dormition. The Virgin Mary's body is framed by a crescent moon and a twelve-star halo. Anne, Joachim, and Joseph are brought to the fore of the composition's upper right corner. And even the miniature soul wears blue and white robes echoing the Immaculate Conception's traditional color scheme.

Sor María's text also constitutes a constellation of inscriptions emanating from the mouths of the angels, Mary, and Christ presenting the painting as a dialogical space. While Zendejas includes a cartouche that circumscribes a prayer dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the second painting releases the inscription from the frame so that it unfurls from figures' mouths, borders architecture, and undulates throughout the picture plane creating an almost ripple-like

[66] "You are all beautiful, Mary."

effect. Curiously, none of these texts actually cite Sor María's publication. Rather, they cite scripture including the Song of Songs and emphasize the love between Jesus and Mary. Christ utters words from Canticles beckoning his mother: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, and you shall be crowned," while angels stacked above Sor María utter "Hail Mary full of Grace" and Mary's body says "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Beyond what the text actually says, however, it also operates as a concrete form of ornamentation. At the center of the composition, the streams of words cascade downward and float upward curling around and framing Mary's soul. The text thus forms a luminous halo through the power of utterance, facilitating Mary's passage to heaven. What becomes unorthodox then is not the theological ideas transcribed but the words themselves that escape the page, shield the Virgin's soul, and animate the scene.

Conclusion

In comparison to the previous chapters that examined unorthodox iconographies inspired by *Mystical City of God* that transformed canonical scenes from the Virgin Mary's life, the works under review here exemplify how artists also turned to less popular passages and resisted pictorial standardization. When illustrating the Virgin's passage to heaven, these paintings grappled with the question of doubling Mary's body: Torres depicted her rising toward the Trinity but simultaneously rooted to the ground flanked by apostles; Berrueco illustrated the Virgin twice in his iteration of the Ascension but also juxtaposed this scene with the Assumption, multiplying the number of times she was bodily assumed; and the final two works by Zendejas and the unknown artist follow a more conventional representation of the Dormition by splitting the soul from the body while insisting on Sor María's presence as a visionary author.

There may very well be other works that are inspired by Sor María's Assumption, but the different case studies that I identify here attest to the potential *Mystical City of God* provided to artists. It did not prescribe but rather lent itself to pictorial interpretation and innovation. As a grouping, these works transgress into the radical realm of insisting on the Virgin Mary's status of co-redeemer. This bold proclamation in which the Virgin Mary is equal to Christ might very well explain why these iconographic interventions did not resonate more widely throughout the viceroyalty.

CONCLUSION

While conducting archival research in the Archivo Nacional de México, I came across a ream of Inquisition documents that involved an unpublished 1763 engraving depicting Sor María de Ágreda (fig. 5.1). In May of 1776, the Mexican Holy Office of the Inquisition implicated a man named Jesús Vicente Menocal for committing "notoriously heretical blasphemies."[1] Menocal had denied the holiness of Saints Joseph and Anne, rejected the efficacy of the sacraments, and repeatedly refuted the Virgin Mary's wisdom as well as her role as Christ's immaculate mother. Coming to the Virgin's defense against Menocal's outbreak, a witness pulled out a printed portrait of Sor María arguing that the Spanish visionary wouldn't have been the beneficiary of such extraordinary divine revelations were it not for Mary's instruction. Menocal responded, "Mary did not know a quarter of what the Mother Ágreda wrote" and insisted that "[Sor María] knew more than the Virgin."[2] Using the print as evidence to support his own point, Menocal gestured to the "Holy Spirit placed above the head of the aforementioned Mother Agreda"[3] in order to argue that she in fact was not a disciple of the Virgin but of God. Such an allusion to Sor María is revealing: by the end of the eighteenth century, she had become a household name, upheld as a paragon of Marian devotion, and celebrated for her divine knowledge.

Additionally, the archival record demonstrates that Sor María was so beloved, her likeness was taken up by Mexican printmakers as a subject for loose-leaf prints and carried in the pockets of her loyal followers. As such, this engraving merits closer consideration. Most printed

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[1] "Blasfemias notoriamente hereticales." AGN, Inqusición, vol. 1110, exp. 12.

[2] "[L]a Virgen no supo la quarta parte de lo que dexo escrito la Madre Agreda." Ibid.

[3] "[S]olo discipula del espiritu santo colocado encima y sobre la cabeza de la citada Madre Agreda." Ibid.

portraits of Sor María circulating throughout Mexico were frontispieces fastened to European editions of *Mystical City of God*. Typically, these engravings render Sor María as an author seated at her desk in the act of writing. This print, by contrast, elevates Sor María beyond the confines of her study. Her body hovers amidst an entangled surface of banderoles, clouds, and light. These elements playfully unfurl, offering the author her inkwell and supporting her open book. Sor María's corporeal presence dwarfs the two architectural structures, presumably a church and a cloister, situated next to and below her. The cloister in particular is anchored to the ground while Sor María looms above, freed from the laws of gravity and seemingly occupying the celestial rather than the earthly realm. The portrait's representation of such an indomitable vision, ambiguous setting, and Sor María's formidable stature establishes an image that breaks with convention and elevates its sitter to an unprecedented degree.

Novel iconographic elements also transform the portrait. As Menocal highlighted, Sor María is not only accompanied by the Immaculate Conception but also by a dove signifying the Holy Spirit. In comparison to the European author portraits, which portray Sor María's vision stemming solely from the Virgin Mary, this print amplifies Sor María as a privileged conduit who receives her knowledge from more than one divine source. Second, in her hand she holds a crozier, a staff carried by high-ranking clergyman that symbolized their roles as the shepherds of God's flock. This is the first and only artwork that I have seen of Sor María in which she carries such an item, and it likely alludes to her claims of mystically traveling the globe as a missionary. Thus, the print exemplifies how artists in colonial Mexico diverged from precedent and reimagined Sor María as an author and mystic who traveled beyond the confines of her convent. It also highlights how viewers beheld the print and interpreted the iconography in varying ways. For the witness, the print espoused Sor María as a privileged disciple of the Virgin. For Menocal,

the novel presence of the Holy Spirit implied that Sor María's knowledge derived from God and not from Mary.

This final case study reflects the dissertation's overall contributions. What emerges most clearly from the visual record is an immense corpus of artworks that testifies to the transmission of Sor María's theological ideas throughout colonial Mexico. Similar to the 1763 engraving, the paintings examined in the previous four chapters demonstrate how artists cited Sor María's biography of the Virgin Mary and in doing so radically broke with iconographic convention. When representing canonical subjects such as the Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, Last Supper, Flagellation, and Assumption, these artists turned to the very textual passages within *Mystical City of God* that were flagged by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Rome. In contrast with their European counterparts, artists in the viceroyalty interpreted and affirmed Sor María's vaunted account of the Virgin Mary's life. Using iconography and semiotics as methodological frameworks as well as theoretical texts on translation and visions, I analyzed how colonial artists did not just inherit visual forms but gravitated toward novel ideas with a flexible approach that generated artistic innovation.

After working in archives, reading through primary printed sources, and visiting museums, churches, and convents, I identified four different ways artists cited Sor María. Two works explicitly reference the mystic author by inscribing quotations from *Mystical City of God*. Other examples picture her as a character within the composition beholding the painting's central scene. The majority of the works discussed, however, forge a connection with Sor María through their unusual visual forms that correspond with unorthodox passages from *Mystical City of God*. In early works, such as Juan Correa's *The Virgin's Communion* (fig. 2.21), artists clearly cited directly from Sor María's writings whereas later versions such as José Rodriguez Carnero's *Last*

Supper (fig. 2.27) likely picked up their novel iconographic elements from other paintings. In works depicting scenes from the Passion, we also observe how the Virgin Mary's novel presence opened up the picture to the possibility of including new characters, particularly female monastics, who are represented beholding Jesus instating the Eucharist or bound in chains (figs. 2.28, 3.21).

While artists incorporated some of these iconographic innovations to such a wide degree they became part of the mainstream lexicon of sacred imagery, other pictorial motifs were not as popular. For instance, by the mid-eighteenth century, representations of the Last Supper routinely inserted the Virgin Mary into its compositions following Sor María's account. Meanwhile, other examples of iconographic experimentation such as Villalpando's angel-infused *Annunciation* (fig. 1.3) and Luis Berrueco's *Ascension* (fig. 4.26), which featured the Virgin Mary accompanying Christ to heaven, did not reverberate perhaps due to their extreme unorthodoxy. Regardless of the paintings' resonance or lack thereof, the works unanimously elevate the Virgin Mary to the role of co-redemptrix. By carefully considering each object through the lenses of iconography and semiotics, we can appreciate how Sor María's ideas were unleashed, reinterpreted, and re-envisioned in innovative ways that transformed canonical renderings of the Virgin Mary.

The Inquisition documents analyzed above also raise questions about the political and social underpinnings that contributed to the production of these artworks. This dissertation unearthed records highlighting the large quantity of *Mystical City of God* volumes shipped across the Atlantic from Spain, numerous texts published in Mexico citing Sor María's book, local support in the viceroyalty for Sor María's canonization, as well as notes scribbled in the book's margins revealing clues about eighteenth-century Mexican readers. Such primary sources illustrate Sor

María's prominence as a spiritual author in the viceroyalty. With the exception of a few glimpses of the Propaganda Fide friars and female monastics, however, little is known about who commissioned and created the artwork. Thus, each painting merits a closer examination of its patrons, artists, and viewers. For example, were other artists in addition to Antonio de Torres sending financial contributions in support of Sor María's canonization? Were artworks inspired by Sor María informing the ways in which missionaries converted Indigenous populations in Mexico's northern frontier? Addressing these questions will involve combing through notarial archives, a project I was unable to undertake during fieldwork due to the pandemic but one that I hope to undertake in the future. Moreover, the limited consideration of patronage and viewership included in this thesis concentrated on the Franciscan Order. However, the print described in the aforementioned Inquisition case sheds light on laypeople's close relationship with Sor María. Future research should also focus on the connection between how a wider audience beyond monastics understood and interpreted these novel subjects.

Closer consideration of the theological fabric that facilitated such an embrace of Sor María's ideas would also enhance our understanding of the paintings. We know, for example, that *Mystical City of God* was used as a devotional guide for daily prayer during Stations of the Cross and incorporated into novenas. Mass attendees would also hear Sor María's theology as she was cited in sermons.[4] It would be productive to compare these works with other sermons and theological writings published in colonial Mexico in order to gauge how polemics related to the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin as co-redemptrix, and other spiritual tenets were understood at the time.

[4] Nogar, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands*, 103.

Lastly, this dissertation is by no means a survey of all the works within Mexico or Latin America that cite Sor María's revisionist theology. Certain paintings such as José Joaquin Magón's eighteenth-century *Baptism of the Virgin Mary* located in Tecamachalco, Puebla and José Rodrigo Carnero's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1.28) were not the subject of deep analysis in this dissertation when compared to other works. Future studies that incorporate artworks from cities such as San Luis Potosí and other regions beyond Mexico such as Guatemala, Bolivia, and Peru would tell a fuller story of Sor María and the unusual artworks her writing inspired.

Ultimately, this project has examined the relationship between an extraordinary seventeenth-century Spanish mystic author and the colonial Mexican artists who translated her unorthodox text into painting. Sor María never left her small town of Ágreda and yet despite the temporal and geographical distance, her writing had a seminal impact on sacred art in colonial Mexico. The artists who took up her writing would go on to transform canonical iconography, creating works that thought outside of and between pictorial tradition and authority.

FIGURES



Figure 1.1. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Mystical City of God*, 1706. Oil on canvas, 73 1/4 × 42 15/16 in. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.2. Pedro de Villafranca, *Mystical City of God,* 1668. Engraving on paper, 7 × 5 in. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid



Figure 1.3. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Annunciation*, 1706. Oil on canvas, 73 1/4 × 42 15/16 in. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.4. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Tree of Life*, 1706. Oil on canvas, 73 1/4 × 42 15/16 in. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.5. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Holy Family*, 1706. Oil on canvas, 73 1/4 × 42 15/16 in. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.6. Juan de Juanes, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1535–1540. Oil on panel, 86 × 72 7/16 in. Fundación Banco Santander, Mexico City.



Figure 1.7. Francisco Pacheco, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1615–20. Oil on canvas, 55 1/2 × 30 in. Palacio Arzobispal, Seville.



Figure 1.8. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *The Immaculate Conception of Los Venerables*, 1660–65. Oil on canvas, 108 × 75 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 1.9. Unnamed artist (Fray Juan de Alameda?), *Tota Pulchra*, 1547–71. Fresco. Convent, Huejotzingo, Puebla.



Figure 1.10. Baltasar de Echave Ibía, *Immaculate Conception*, 1620. Oil on canvas, 99 × 67 in. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 1.11. Unnamed artist, *Immaculate Conception*, seventeenth century. Oil on canvas. Cathedral of Texcoco de Mora, Estado de México.



Figure 1.12. Juan Sánchez Salmerón, *Immaculate Conception*, second half of the seventeenth century. Oil on wood, 74 1/2 × 66 1/8 in. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 1.13. Antonio de Torres, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, 1719. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.14. Attributed to Manuel de Echave, *Immaculate Conception*, seventeenth century. Oil on canvas, 94 1/8 × 66 1/8 in. Colección Fomento Cultura Banamex, Mexico City.



Figure 1.15. Basilio de Salazar, *Franciscan Exaltation of the Immaculate Conception,* 1637. Oil on canvas, 47 × 30 in. Museo de Arte de Querétaro, Querétaro.



Figure 1.16. Unnamed artist, *Immaculate Conception with Saint John, Duns Scotus, and Sor María de Ágreda*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-convento de Santa Mónica, Puebla.



Figure 1.17. Unnamed artist, *The Immaculate Conception with Saint Francis, Duns Scotus, and Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda*, late eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Colegio de Propaganda Fide de San Fernando, Mexico City. Photo by Luis Javier Cuesta.



Figure 1.18. Unnamed artist, *Immaculate Conception*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Ex-convento de San Francisco, Pachuca.



Figure 1.19. Unnamed artist, *Triumphal Cart with the Immaculate Conception*, eighteenth century. San Martín Texmelucan, Puebla.



Figure 1.20. Unnamed artist, *Tree of the Franciscan Order*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Templo Conventual de San Francisco, Puebla.



Figure 1.21. Façade of Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 1.22. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1680–89. Oil on canvas, 81 1/8 × 55 7/8 in. Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Inmaculada Concepción, Puebla.



Figure 1.23. Martin de Vos, *Saint John Writing the Apocalypse*, 1500. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 1.24. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Annunciation*, late seventeenth/early eighteenth century. Oil on canvas, 90 7/8 × 55 7/8 in. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 1.25. Juan Correa, *Immaculate Conception*, seventeenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo Municipal de Antequera, Málaga.



Figure 1.26. José Rodríguez Juárez, *Immaculate Conception*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 1.27. Juan Correa, *Expulsion from Paradise*, seventeenth century. Oil on canvas, 90 1/2 × 49 3/16 in. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Adoración de los pastores por José Rodríguez Carnero del templo de San Antonio de Padua de Puebla

Figure 1.28. José Rodríguez Carnero, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Templo de San Antonio de Padua, Puebla.



Figure 1.29. Juan de Villalobos, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, late seventeenth/eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de la Basilica de Guadalupe, Mexico City.



Figure 1.30. Unnamed artist, *Annunciation*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Convento de San Gabriel, Cholula, Puebla.



Figure 1.28. Juan Correa, *Allegory of the Holy Sacrament*, c. 1690. Oil on canvas, 64 1/2 × 41 5/8 in. Denver Art Museum, Denver.



Figure 2.1. Antonio de Torres, *Last Supper*, 1720. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.

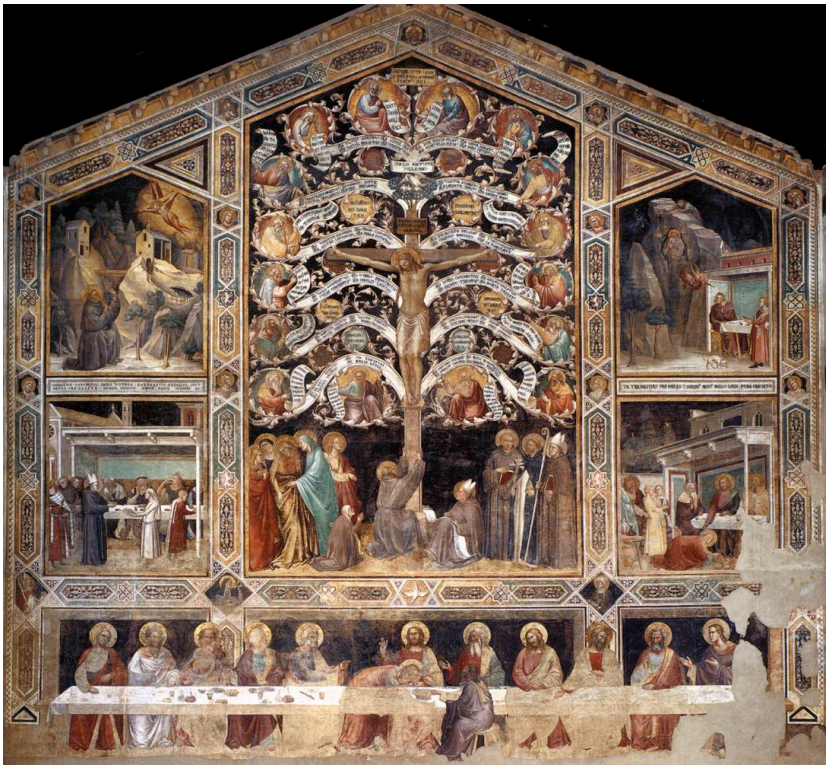

Figure 2.2. Taddeo Gaddi, *Last Supper*, 1330s. Fresco. Santa Croce, Florence.



Figure 2.3. Andrea del Castagno, *Last Supper*, 1447. Fresco. Museo di Cenacolo di Sant'Apollonia, Florence.

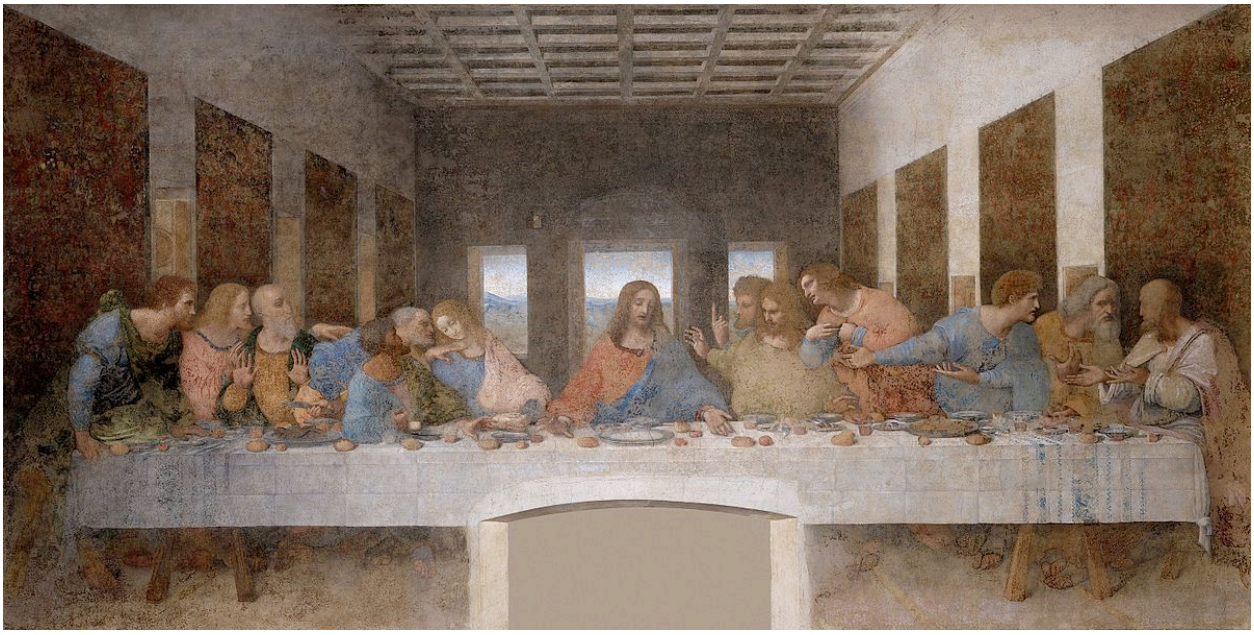

Figure 2.4. Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*, c. 1495–1498. Fresco, 181 × 346 1/2 in. Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

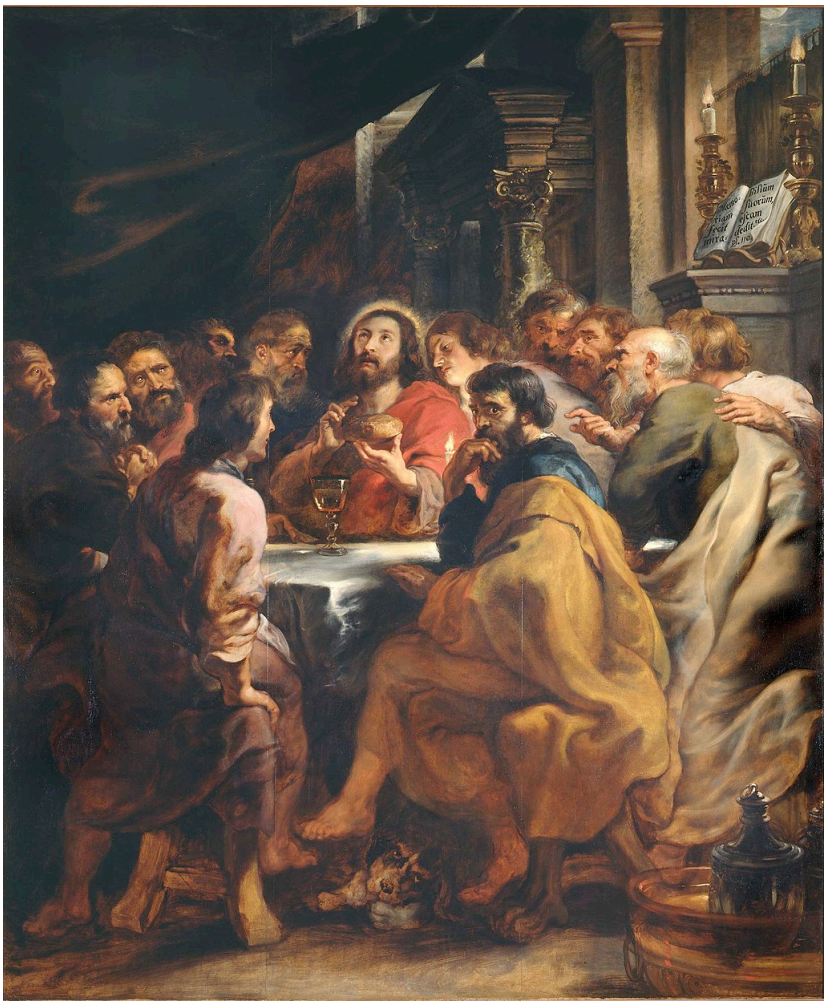

Figure 2.5. Peter Paul Rubens, *Last Supper*, 1630–1631. Oil on canvas, 120 × 98 in. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.



Figure 2.6. Juan de Juanes, *The Last Supper*, c. 1562. Oil on panel, 45 5/8 × 75 1/8 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



Figure 2.7. Pablo de Céspedes, *Last Supper*, c. 1595. Oil on canvas. Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba, Córdoba.



Figure 2.8. Francisco de Ribalta, *Last Supper*, 1606. Oil on canvas. Colegio de Corpus Christi, Valencia.



Figure 2.9. Attributed to Alonso Vázquez, *Last Supper*, late sixteenth century. Catedral de Texcoco, Estado de México.



Figure 2.10. Cornelis Cort, *Last Supper*, 1578. Engraving on paper, 20 15/16 x 13 7/8 in.



Figure 2.11. Gerard de Jode, *The Last Supper*, sixteenth century. Engraving on paper, 8 1/16 × 5 5/16 in.



Figure 2.12. Juan de Vera, *Last Supper*, 1618. Oil on canvas, 166 × 69 in. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 2.13. Artist unknown, *Last Supper*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, Puebla.



Figure 2.14. Lorenzo Zendejas, *Last Supper,* eighteenth century. Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, Puebla.



Figure 2.15. Miguel Cabrera, *Institution of the Wine*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 2.16. Boetius Adams Bolswert, *Last Supper*, 1632–3. Engraving on paper.



Figure 2.17. Antonio de Torres, *Last Supper* (detail), 1720. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 2.18. Gabriel José de Ovalle, *Last Supper*, 1749. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 2.19. Juan Salguero, *Saint Elijah Taken Away*, 1646. Oil on canvas, 58 1/2 × 83 1/4 in. Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 2.20a. Juan Correa, *Gabriel Administering the Eucharist to the Virgin Mary*, late seventeenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas

Figure 2.20b. Juan Correa, *Peter Administering the Eucharist to Elijah and Enoch*, late seventeenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 2.21. Juan Correa, *The Virgin's Communion*, early eighteenth century. Zacatecas.

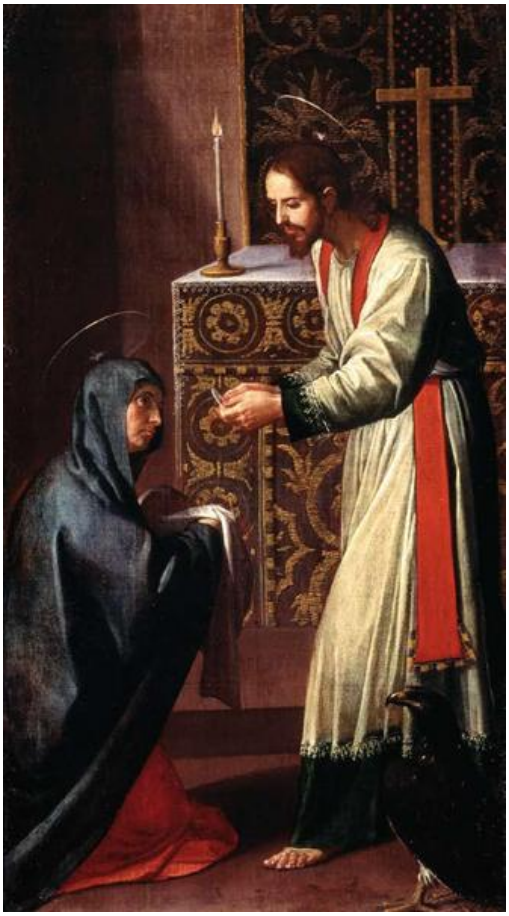

Figure 2.22. Alonso Cano, *Saint John Giving Communion to the Virgin Mary*, seventeenth century. Oil on canvas, 32 × 18 in. Museo de San Carlos, Mexico City.



Figure 2.23. Diego Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, c. 1618. Oil on canvas. 23 1/2 × 40 3/4 in. National Gallery, London.



Figure 2.24. Juan de Arellano, *Last Supper*, 1721. Oil on canvas, 157 1/2 × 196 7/8 in. Parroquía de Santa María de la Visitación, Xochimilco, Mexico City.



Figure 2.25. Attributed to Miguel Cabrera, *Last Supper*, after 1719. Oil on canvas, 65 1/8 × 44 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



Figure 2.26. Unnamed artist, *Last Supper*, eighteenth century. Puebla.



Figure 2.27. José Rodriguez Carnero, *The Last Supper and Communion of the Virgin*, eighteenth century. Oil on copper, 18 1/2 × 13 in. Private collection.



Figure 2.28. Manuel Pérez de la Serna, *Last Supper*, 1783. Oil on canvas. Convento de Santa Clara, Querétaro.



Figure 3.1. José Joaquín Magón, *Christ in the Prison of Caiaphas and the Flagellation*, eighteenth century. Templo de Nuestra Señora del Carmen, Puebla.

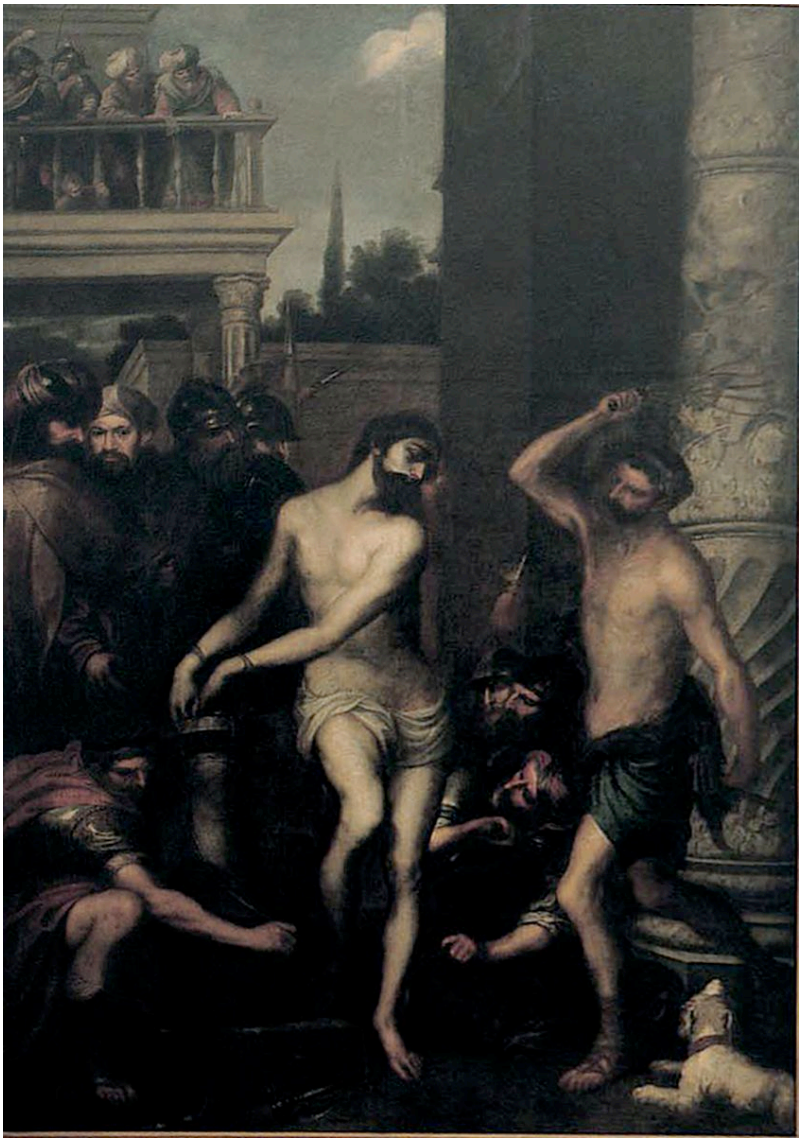

Figure 3.2. Juan de Sevilla, *The Flagellation of Christ*, late seventeenth century. Oil on canvas, 132 1/2 × 99 in. Museo de Bellas Artes de Granada, Granada.



Figure 3.3. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Christ After the Flagellation*, after 1665. Oil on canvas, 44 1/2 × 58 in. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston.



Figure 3.4. Francisco de Zurbarán, *Flagellated Christ Recovering His Garments*, 1661. Oil on canvas, 65 1/4 × 42 in. Iglesia de San Juan Bautista, Jadraque.



Figure 3.5. Diego Velázquez, *Christ Contemplated by the Christian Soul*, 1628–9. Oil on canvas, 65 × 81 1/4 in. National Gallery, London.



Figure 3.6. Nicolás Enríquez, *Flagellation*, 1729. Oil on copper, 11 × 18 1/4 in. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 3.7. Baltasar Troncoso, *Christ Helper of the Souls in Purgatory*, front and back, n.d. Engraving, 5 7/16 × 3 3/4 in. Museo Soumaya, Mexico City.



Figure 3.8. Hieronymous Wierix, *Allegory of the Precious Blood of Christ*, seventeenth century. Engraving on paper. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Figure 3.9. Peter Paul Rubens*, The Flagellation of Christ*, seventeenth century. Engraving on paper, 24 5/8 × 17 3/5 in. British Museum, London.



Figure 3.10. Juan Correa, *Allegory of Christ's Precious Blood*, early eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de la Basilica de Guadalupe, Mexico City.



Figure 3.11. Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas, *Scenes of the Passion,* eighteenth century. Templo de San Juan de Dios, Puebla.

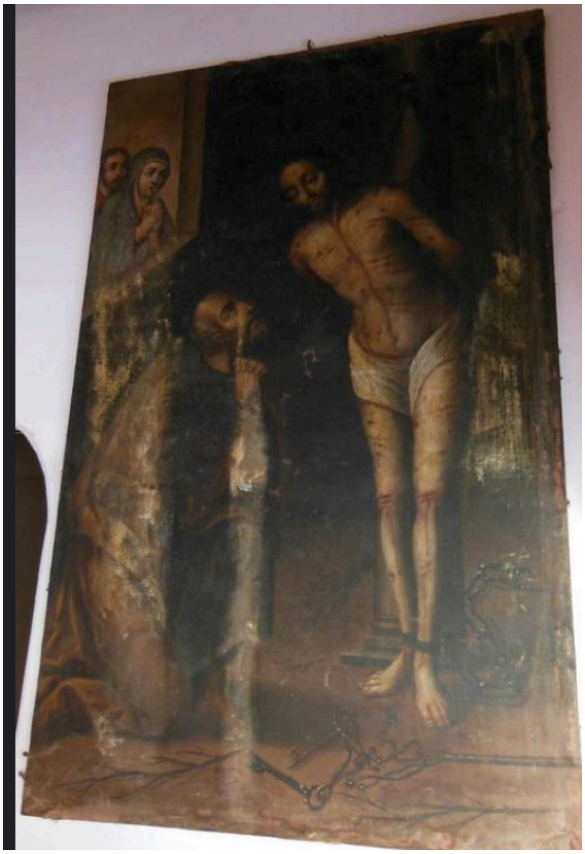

Figure 3.12. Unnamed artist, *Christ Flagellated with Saint Peter*, eighteenth century. Ex-convento Dominico de la Asunción, Amecameca, Estado de Mexico.



Figure 3.13. Unnamed artist, *The Divine Prisoner in the House of Caiaphas*, eighteenth century. Palacio de la Buena Prensa Editorial, Mexico City.



Figure 3.14. Gabriel José de Ovalle, *Flagellated Christ*, 1749. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 3.15. Unnamed artist, *Flagellation of Christ*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Capilla de los Dolores, Querétaro.



Figure 3.16. Unnamed artist, *Flagellation*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Convento de San Gabriel, Cholula, Puebla.



Figure 3.17. Unnamed artist, *Christ Flagellated*, eighteenth century. Capilla de la Tercera Orden of the Templo Conventual del Carmen, Puebla.



Figure 3.18. Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz, *Christ Consoled by Angels,* eighteenth century. Oil on copper, 33 × 25 1/2 in. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 3.19. Unnamed artist, *Christ Attached to the Column*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Parroquía de San José, Puebla.

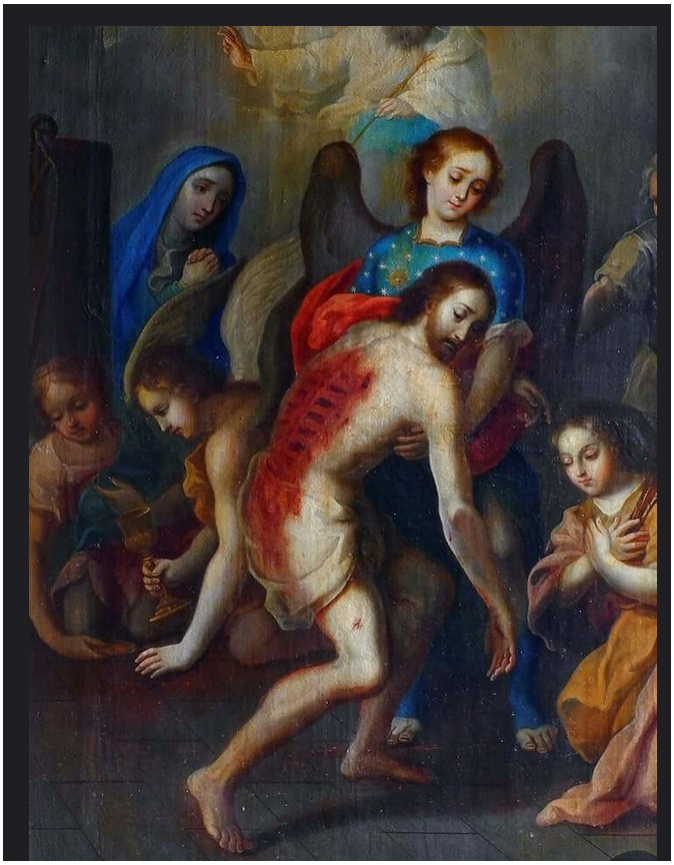

Figure 3.20. Unnamed artist, *Christ Flagellated and Consoled by Angels*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 3.21. Antonio de Torres, *Christ Taken Prisoner and the Nuns of Saint Bernard*, 1717. Oil on canvas, 48 7/8 × 37 1/2 in. Museo de Bellas Artes de Toluca, Toluca.



Figure 4.1. Antonio de Torres, *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, 1719. Oil on canvas, 52 3/4 × 27 15/16. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.2. Juan Correa, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1685. Oil on canvas. Catedral Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México, Mexico City.



Figure 4.3. Mariano Salvador Maella, *Assumption of the Virgin*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas, 53 3/4 × 28 3/4 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.4. Luis Berrueco, *Assumption of the Virgin*, first half of the eighteenth century. Oil on canvas, 200 3/4 × 236 1/4 in. Convento de Santa Clara, Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico.



Figure 4.5. Miguel Jerónimo Zendejas, *Dormition of the Virgin*, first half of the eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Private collection.



Figure 4.6. Unnamed artist, *The Dormition of the Virgin According to Mystical City of God*, c. 1780. Oil on canvas, 22 7/16 × 18 1/8 in. Museo Andrés Blaistein, Mexico City.



Figure 4.7 Iglesia Catedral-Basílica Metropolitana de la Asunción de Nuestra Señora in Valencia, Spain.



Figure 4.8. Master of Palanquinos, *Altarpiece of the Assumption*, c. 1498. Iglesia del Salvador, Mayorga de Campos, Valladolid.



Figure 4.9. Diego de la Cruz, *The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1492. Oil on panel, 59 × 81 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.10. Juan Correa de Vivar, *The Death of the Virgin*, 1546–1550. Oil on panel, 100 × 57 7/8 in. El Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.11. Pedro de Orrente, *Assumption of the Virgin*, ca. 1620–25. Oil on canvas, 49 1/4 × 36 5/8 in. The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan.



Figure 4.12. Unnamed artist, *Assumption of the Virgin*, posa chapel #2, sixteenth century. San Andrés, Calpan, Puebla.



Figure 4.13. Alonso L.pez de Herrera, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1622. Oil on panel, 134 × 89 in. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City.



Figure 4.14. Designed by Peter Paul Rubens and printed by Schelte Adams Bolswert, *Assumption of the Virgin*, late sixteenth/early seventeenth century. Engraving on paper, 24 7/8 × 17 3/8 in.



Figure 4.15. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *Assumption of the Virgin*, late seventeenth century/early eighteenth century. Oil on canvas, 78 × 66 1/4 in. Museo Regional de Guadalajara, Guadalajara.



Figure 4.16. Miguel González and/or Juan González, The *Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1700. Oil on panel with inlaid mother-of-pearl, 36 1/2 × 29 in. Private collection, Mexico.



Figure 4.17. Antonio Torres, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.18. Antonio Torres, *Visitation*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.19. Antonio Torres, *Circumcision*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.20. Antonio Torres, *Immaculate Conception*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.21. Antonio Torres, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.22. Antonio Torres, *Mary Entering the Temple*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.23. Antonio Torres, *Dormition*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.24. Unnamed artist, *The Dormition of the Virgin*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Capilla de los Mixtecos, Templo Conventual de Santo Domingo de Gúzman, Puebla.



Figure 4.25. Antonio Torres, *Nativity*, 1710. Oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, Zacatecas.



Figure 4.26. Luis Berrueco, *Ascension of Christ*, first half of the 18th century. Oil on canvas, approx. 200 3/4 × 236 1/4 in. Convento de Santa Clara, Atlixco, Puebla. Photo by Tacho Juárez Herrera.



Figure 4.27. Luis Berrueco, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, early eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Convento de Santa Clara, Atlixco, Puebla.



Figure 4.28. Antonio Lanchares, *Ascension of Christ*, c. 1620. Oil on canvas, 64 1/8 × 39 3/4 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.29. Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *Ascension of Christ*, 1720. Oil on panel, 114 9/16 × 63 in. Pinacoteca del Templo de San Felipe Neri "La Profesa," Mexico City.



Figure 4.30. Miguel Cabrera's *Christ's Blood Eliminating the Flames of Purgatory*, eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Iglesia de San Francisco Javier, Tepotzotlán.



Figure 4.31. Luis Berrueco, *Ascension of Christ* (detail of angel), first half of the 18th century. Oil on canvas. Convento de Santa Clara, Atlixco, Puebla. Photo by Tacho Juárez Herrera.



Figure 4.32. Johannes Wierix, *Johan Ascensio Christi in Coelvm*, 1593. Engraving on paper. Printed in Jerónimo Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*.



Figure 4.33. Juan de Flandes, *The Ascension*, 1514–1519. Oil on pine panel, 43 5/16 × 33 in. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4.34. Unnamed artist, *Dormition and Coronation of the Holy Virgin* from *Altarpiece of the Immaculate Conception* (detail), 1496–1505. Convento de la Puridad, Valencia.



Figure 4.35. Miguel Gerónimo Zendejas, *Death of Saint Augustin*, 1777. Oil on canvas. Museo de Arte Religioso Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, Puebla.



Figure 5.1. J.M.R.S., *R. de la V.M. Maria de Jesus de Agreda. Esriptora de la Divina Historia de la Mistica Ciudad de Dios*, 1763. Engraving on paper. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. Photo by Miranda Saylor.

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