

"Devotion to Saint Philip Neri in Mexico City, 1659-1821:
Religion, Politics, Spirituality and Identity"

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Introduction

Good afternoon, and thank you to everyone here for taking the time to come out for this presentation at such a busy time in the semester. I want to take a moment to thank Susan Tiano, Vickie Nelson, Frances Rico, Chris Lopez and everyone else at the Latin American and Iberian Institute, who have made my visit this month so pleasant, and generously invited me to participate in university life here in New Mexico. I also want to thank Nancy Brown, Ann Massman, and the entire staff of the Anderson Reading Room for all their help with my research and creating such a warm and relaxed work environment. And all of these opportunities, of course, would not have been possible without the generosity and support of Dr. Richard Greenleaf. In addition to the fellowship program that allowed me to come to work here, Dr. Greenleaf's public sharing of his research in the archives of the colonial Mexican Inquisition has been an invaluable resource for which I cannot honestly be thankful enough.

I want to begin my presentation with a quick road-map of my presentation. I will begin my discussion of the history of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in Mexico City by first outlining the history of Philip Neri in Italy, since that history is not as well-known within the field of Latin American studies. I will then move to the context of Mexico City in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Oratorian devotion spread throughout Latin America. Since this is a research project very much in progress, my narrative will be necessarily uneven, much more detailed at

the beginning and more general towards the later dates included. I will then discuss and conclude with a variety of scenarios of Oratorian cultural memory, where I see different uses of the local power structures of society in Mexico City by Oratorians, and where the themes of religion, politics, spirituality and identity intersect. I hope that this work to date will prove interesting and provocative, and look forward to your reactions, questions and comments.

Philip Neri and Oratorian Spiritual Culture

Philip was born in 1515 in Florence, where he was first exposed to Dominican spirituality at the church of San Marco, a stronghold of Savonarolan ideals of Catholic reform. In 1533 his parents sent him to live and be educated through apprenticeship with a wealthy cousin in Naples, but before a year had passed Neri disavowed a future as a businessman and moved to Rome alone, living mostly as a hermit within the metropolis and dependent on the charities of fellow Florentine emigrants to the capital.

At the encouragement of his confessor Persiano Rosa, Neri established the Confraternity of the Most Holy Trinity in 1548 to bring some institutional form to his practice of urban pilgrimage among the city's major churches, and visits to its public hospitals. Three years later, in 1551 he additionally submitted to Rosa's direction to seek ordination. As a confirmed priest Neri moved to reside at the church of San Girolamo della Carità, where he and his growing number of followers and friends popularized several pious devotions that would later define the institutional practices of the Congregation of the Oratory. Neri controversially promoted frequent communion and confession, which he advocated four to five times a week, often putting him at odds with fellow clerics in residence. He championed the Milanese Devotion of the Forty

Hours as a memorial device for Catholics to identify with Jesus' time entombed, and thereby provide reason for communion.

During the mid-1550s, other Roman clerics who identified with Neri's spiritual conduct began a process of standardization of behaviors and the composition of documented guidelines for the services conducted at Neri's oratory. From dawn to mid-day, the Oratorian church services closely resembled those of many others, with different affiliated clerics delivering masses at regular times and at prescribed chapels within the larger edifice. In the afternoon hours, however, Neri famously gathered together his clerical followers and interested laymen to participate in informal conversations about Catholic history and current events and issues. "The meetings began with a reading, often a devotional work or the life of a saint or even a letter from a Jesuit missionary. Anyone in attendance, including laymen, could be asked by St. Philip [sic] to share his reflections on the subject. Another might then comment further, often in dialogue with the speaker. A prepared discourse followed, usually presented sitting down and without the rhetorical flourishes of Renaissance sermons."¹ On Sundays more inclusive and lengthy services brought Oratorian devotion into the lives of the larger urban community. "[T]he meetings were open to women and children and often included an organized walk to various churches, singing, perhaps a sermonette by a child, and a visit to a hospital to distribute sweets. Sometimes as many as four thousand people joined the procession."²

While his Oratorian followers moved their center of operations from the oratory near San Girolamo to the Florentine church of San Giovanni dei Fiorenini in the mid-1560s, and then to a newly constructed church at the site of the elder Santa Maria in Vallicella in 1577, Neri remained in residence at San Girolamo until 1583, when he too

apparently joined his fellow Oratorians as their constitutionally acknowledged superior.³ Neri notably disavowed his being scripted as the founder of the Congregation, and especially opposed transforming their informal meetings and collaboration into a structured religious order. Neri's behavior in the face of increased regulation provides a telling counter-point to the sense of order suggested by the documentary record, and it is indeed this spirit of tension between free will and scripted guidelines that best defines the character of the Oratorians' spiritual culture. After his death in 1595, conflicts over the procedures of governance between the Roman and Neapolitan Congregations (where Neri had deployed two of his most influential affiliates, Antonio Talpa and Cesare Baronio, both of whom ascended to posts as Cardinals during the late sixteenth century) escalated until 1612, when a joint decision by Pope Paul V and a special commission of cardinals "decreed a second and permanent separation of the Rome and Naples Oratories. Henceforward," writes Donnelly, "every Oratorian community was to be self-governing, including those already founded. Communities that later took the name of the Congregation of the Oratory were independent and under the jurisdiction of the local bishop but were expected to model their constitutions on those of the Roman Oratory."⁴ The development of two other famous Oratorian communities in Naples and Paris subsequently, each of which followed sets of rules distinct from the other two, more elaborately and persuasively suggest that the guiding principle of the Oratorian faith rested in local, organically-constituted articulations of imitation of Neri's example.

As John Patrick Donnelly has argued, Neri's spirituality was markedly different from the founders of the other new religious orders of the era. Neri "did not leave a significant corpus of writings as a spiritual legacy. He did not even write a rule for his

followers. In the strict sense, he did not found a religious order or congregation. What he left was a shining example and an apostolic thrust--an emphasis on the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist and a peculiar set of devotional practices..."⁵ The heritage of the oratorio apparently conflates both the broader range of devotional practices Neri was known to practice in Rome, as well as the specific practices hosted in semi-public chapels known as oratorios. As a result, "the ambiguity of the Oratorian lifestyle and canonical status allowed the Oratorians to enjoy some advantages of both the diocesan and regular clergy."⁶ While they lived together in community and enjoyed the support of companionship and fraternity that the solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were supposed to foster through enforcement within the regular orders, the Oratorians were able to remain personal patrimony and private property.

Oratorian Expansion and Corporate Development in Mexico City

Following Neri's canonization in 1622, more than 150 Oratorian communities were established in Catholic cities worldwide.⁷ In Mexico City, the development of Oratorian devotion began in 1657 with a promise from the Creole priest Antonio Calderon Benavides to found a Congregation in the style of the Roman Oratory in exchange for divine intercession and cure while he was sick.⁸ He was apparently convinced of the effectiveness of intercession on his behalf, for during the next ten years Antonio Calderon and thirty-three like-minded associates gathered at the Iglesia de San Bernardo, where one member Pedro Díaz de Arévalo was a sacristán, and initiated the legal requirements for claiming the rights and privileges of a Congregation of the Oratory in the style of their Roman predecessors.

The following year, the acting secretary Gregorio Martín de Guijo drafted a set of constitutions that, in the absence of an authentic copy of the Roman documents of

1612, the Mexico City Oratorians could obey in an approximate observance. They were approved by the Ordinario of the Archbishopric, Montes de Oca, who named their organization the "Venerable Unión de Presbíteros Sacerdotes de San Felipe Neri" and himself took the role of "Protector of the Union." In 1659, the Venerable Union held their first elections, naming Antonio Calderon as *Prepósito*, or Superior, Gregorio Guijo as secretary, and several other members as Deputies and Consultores. Antonio Calderon Benavides additionally consecrated an altar in the Capilla de la Soledad in the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Balvanera with a small painting of Philip Neri further adorned with an image of the Virgin Mary and Christ-child. His subsequent prayers there to the image swayed popular devotion, and before long the chapel was commonly known as the *Capilla de San Felipe Neri*.⁹

By 1660, the Oratorians began to broaden their efforts to spread their devotions in the city beyond their subordinate chapel within the Iglesia de Balvanera. In January and February of 1660, the notarial registers of Phelipe Fajardo and Ventura de Cardenas indicate that the Union members pooled their resources to purchase two adjacent buildings near the city's center and there erected a hospice dedicated to the care of infirm clerics, as well as another *capilla de San Felipe Neri* within its walls the following year.¹⁰ In the hospice, Union members cared for up to a dozen priests at a time, and also began a tradition of gathering for theological seminars led by the well-known preacher and theology professor at the Royal University, Isidro de Sariñana y Cuenca.¹¹

In possession of their own building, the Oratorians began a legal process of identification with the Roman Congregation in 1661. Their efforts comprised solicitations of the local provisor of the Archbishopric of Mexico to perform additional

rosary chants and devotional services, a request for written authorization from the Roman Oratory to authenticate their aggregation and enjoyment of the same privileges, and an effort to consolidate the Union members in residence at the hospice. The Oratorians received local authorization to conduct a wide range of devotional services from the diocesan authorities, so much that in November they appointed Diego del Castillo Márquez as "Prefecto de ejercicios," and moved all of their members into modest apartments within the hospice by 1663.¹² Their petitions for recognition by the Roman Oratory, however, were not only unsuccessful, but ultimately alerted Crown authorities of an earlier procedural error.

The solicitations of the Roman Oratory were rejected twice during the 1660s, first in 1663 for the submission of the request without accompanying notarized documents from the local ecclesiastical Ordinary testifying to the adequacy of their church, chapel and dormitories, and secondly in 1665 because their constitutions differed significantly from those in Rome.¹³ Perhaps in efforts to force the Roman authorities to recognize their mutual possession of Oratorian rights, the Mexico City Union then filed a petition with the Council of the Indies for a *Rescript*, effectively a command of juridical over-writing, to command the Viceroy and diocesan Prelates to "defend and protect" the Union's rights and privileges. The response from the Council's secretary Juan Dias de la Calle remarked that upon receipt of the request and conducting some investigation, no material could be found in their archives indicating any gestation for the initial founding of the Union. This essentially suggests that the Secretariat found that the Union had overlooked an important step of permission upon its first foundation in 1658 by only soliciting approval from the local Ordinary.

Legally correcting this early oversight took over 35 years from the 1665 notification, and tensions between ecclesiastical and royal jurisdictions flared again in 1699 when the Council of the Indies stalled transmission of the Pope's confirmation of the Mexico City Oratorians' status as a Roman congregation for two years, flexing the metaphorical muscle of the Crown's right to grant the *pase regio* to cargo transfers across the Atlantic. Despite these nuances of imperial power and procedure, the Oratorians clearly felt ever since their initial petitions in the mid-1660s that their Union possessed the necessary qualities to function as a Congregation. While many of their late-seventeenth century activities demonstrate a willingness to comply with the requirements of both civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions, in other respects the Union was already behaving as though there were not institutional obstacles to their Congregation status. The concurrent pursuit of confraternity and other corporate affiliations reflect both the local character of Oratorian politics and the curious penchant of this particular religious society to successfully navigate between the sacred and the worldly, to borrow Nancy Van Deusen's phrase.

In January of 1677, for example, Alfonso Alberto Velasco submitted documents requesting that the Union's aggregation to the Archicofradia de la Doctrina Christiana, which was approved in September of the following year.¹⁴ In 1679, the Union established its own Cofradía de la Doctrina Christiana, and cultivated subsequent erections of new confraternities by the same name in the metropolitan cathedral, the parishes of San Miguel, Santa Catarina and Santa Veracruz, the Hospital de Jesús, and the Iglesia de la Misericordia.¹⁵ In 1698, Archbishop Francisco Aguiar y Seijas (who joined the ranks of the Union in January of 1682, soon after taking possession of the See) authorized the creation of another confraternity within the Union church, called

the Cofradía de San Justo y San Pastor, which served "niños y aprendices de todos oficios."¹⁶ By the 1720s, the Congregation's status had been recognized, and perhaps emboldened by their successes, the Oratorians sought to aggregate their Church to the constitutions of the Iglesia de San Juan Letran in Rome in 1722. Although such a motion was technically illegal on two accounts, since there was already another church of the same affiliation in Mexico City and because of their existing affiliation with the Cofradía de la Doctrina Christiana, the Oratorians "laid plain their obstacles" with a flurry of petitions and written recommendations on their behalf and enjoyed successful aggregation according to a Bull of Pope Benedict XIII in December of 1725.¹⁷

The achievement of Congregation status did, however, mark several significant changes in how the Union members could operate as fully-fledged Oratorians. Upon receiving their papal Bull of Erection in November of 1701, Oratorians joined the religious orders in the production of licenses for the printing of documents in Mexico City relevant to Oratorian spiritual culture. The production of novena and rosary texts during the eighteenth century, and the re-production of earlier texts by Union members in new editions, significantly diffused the cultural memory of spirituality cultivated in Oratorian ceremonies and gatherings. In particular, Diego del Castillo Márquez's use of the popular rosary chant called "La Camandula," and Alfonso Alberto Velasco's rosaries to the Virgin Mary enjoyed dozens of reprintings during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Oratorians' most prized publication came in 1736, Julián Gutiérrez Dávila's 850 folio-sized page chronicle *Memorias históricas de la Congregación del Oratorio de San Phelipe Neri de la Ciudad de México*.

The early eighteenth century was also the formative era for three iconic members who shared a common source of spiritual inspiration. According to Antonio

Rubial Garcia, Gutiérrez Dávila wrote that Domingo Pérez de Barcia, founder of the Recogimiento and Colegio de Niñas de San Miguel de Belem, Pedro de Arellano y Sossa, the famous "other" confessor of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Salvador Rodríguez de la Fuente, an ecclesiastical notary and long-time Prefect of the Oratorians, all named Gregorio López as their spiritual mentor.¹⁸ López, originally from Madrid, became a well-known hermit in the "desierto de Santa Fe" near Mexico City in the late sixteenth century. He was well-known for his hands-off policy regarding approaches to evangelization of indigenous peoples (when asked what to do about the era's "Indian Question," he reportedly said: "lo único es dejarlos"), which dovetailed with the Oratorians' mission of clerical reform: these priests commonly argued that the most compelling evangelical tool was the creation of model priests whose piety and radiant example of Christian devotion would draw souls from great distances to observe and imitate their behavior.¹⁹ It is telling to note that, according to the Newberry Library's Ayer MS 1121, before his days as a desert hermit López worked for the first Viceroy Luis de Velasco as a secretary overseeing the first bureaucratic attempts at indigenous Congregations, an urban re-settlement plan that sought to remediate the difficulties of collecting tribute and administering Christian doctrine among dispersed communities that had been ravaged by the earliest epidemics. The devastated indigenous communities of Mexico's central valley were violated once again by forced migrations to new sites suitable for Spanish-style *pueblos*, where grid patterns and rectilinear streets could be constructed (through forced Indian labor). The minimal success of this program, coupled with countless legal pleas for mercy by the communities themselves, likely contributed to López's evangelical position.

The accretion of Oratorian fame and fortunes continued largely unabated for the first half of the eighteenth century. Then, in April of 1768, disaster literally struck the Oratorians and their church in the form of a massive earthquake. According to one of the city's leading scientists, José Antonio Ramírez de Alzate, the earthquake was caused by the shifting of subterranean plates and volcanic materials traveling from the North to the South of the city, which he determined by accompanying the city's civil relief efforts and collecting damaged clocks around the city (interestingly, a similar method used by the independently financed teams assessing the levy breaches of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005).²⁰ To assess the damage, and deputize efforts to begin reconstruction, charity for the needy and other necessary social services in the wake of disaster, the Mexico City *cabildo* formed a Real Junta to produce decisive action. The Oratorians, whose church was devastated by the tremors, were among their considerations.

While the immediate aftermath is unclear, a document of the Real Junta from two years subsequent survives, and reports that "considering that the Congregation of Felipenses are in a state of total deterioration, caused by the earthquake of the 4th of April, 1768, it is esteemed that the Congregation could provisionally use the edifice of the Casa Profesa under [certain] conditions..."²¹ The Ex-Jesuit Casa Profesa had been vacated the year prior to the earthquake when all Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish Empire, and was apparently undamaged or in a far better state than the Oratorian church. The Oratorians moved in 1771, but the use-rights of the new building came with a price.²²

In the most literal sense, the Junta sold the use of the Casa Profesa to the Oratorians for \$70,000 pesos in addition to the surrender of all rights and ownership to

their former collective properties, including their church and residences. The Junta stipulated fourteen points of condition that shaped the current and future state of Oratorian corporate identity by limiting the scope of their possession of Jesuit property and articulating those limits as permanent markers of growth. A most telling sign of the changes lies in their name: the third point states that "this Congregation will be called "Real de Felipenses" and the church remain under royal patronage, with the title of San Jose el Real."²³ While the Crown declared several of the confraternities and their attendant pious works extinct with the 1767 expulsion, the contract with the Oratorians required them to maintain other activities associated with La Profesa, and also required them to keep many of the decorations related to Jesuit history and spirituality maintained and in the same position within the church. In sum, the 1768 earthquake significantly compromised the nuanced corporate identity that the Oratorians had forged from the vantage of their church on the calle Felipe Neri. The Oratorians survived as a distinct social institution in Mexico City, although their status as an object of royal patronage kept their dependence upon paternalistic charity at the foreground of their religious identity for the remainder of imperial rule in Mexico. Like the religious orders of the city, the Oratorians too succumbed to the exigencies of royal liquidation of their assets to finance war against the British in the early nineteenth century prior to the Crown's forced abdication of sovereignty in the Americas to Napoleon in 1808.²⁴

Research Method

This institutional history helpfully delineates the limits of the Oratorian archive, which mysteriously disaggregated sometime between the writing of José Mariano Beristain y Souza's *Biblioteca Hispano-Americana Septentrional* and José María Marroqui's *La ciudad de México* (the former was first published between 1816-1821, and the latter

between 1900-1903). My dissertation research is essentially an effort to imagine the scope and possibilities of an Oratorian archive in the absence of a real one. This research practice breaks with traditional institutional history by recognizing the Oratorian's living, fluid history as a corporate body constantly aggregating and separating from individual members, identifying their worship with other churches and religious societies, and acquiring corresponding rights and responsibilities.

In order to collect and organize data along these lines, I have primarily collected the names of affiliated members of the Congregation of the Oratory from Gutiérrez Dávila's chronicle, the recently published *Estudio-biobibliográfico de la Congregación del Oratorio de San Felipe Neri de la ciudad de México* by Luis Ávila Blancas, and José María Marroquí's study of the history of Mexico City's street names.²⁵ From these sources, I have collected over 130 names of Mexico City Oratorians, and subsequently run those names through the search engines of WorldCat and libraries with major Latin American collections in the United States, Spain, Mexico and Chile. I am using the resulting database of books and manuscripts as a sort of Oratorian political geography. I am arguing that knowing and following Oratorian affiliations renders visible a project of cultural memory pursued through publications, legal procedures and a shared discourse of spirituality that runs through Oratorian cultural production. Creating and demonstrating connection is important since, in most cases, Oratorians do not overtly announce their collaborative works.

Oratorian Cultural Memory

Awareness of common Oratorian affiliation shows how extensively Creole members filled the ranks of the major institutions of colonial society: Oratorians often held many positions on the Mexico City cathedral's governing council, or *cabildo*, taught

courses in theology, scripture, arts and literature, and canon law in the Royal University, and served as judges of the Real Audiencia, the Juzgado de Indios, and the Tribunal de la Santa Cruzada. As priests and chaplains, Oratorians also staffed the major urban parishes, and worked as chaplains and treasurers for the male and female convents of the city's religious orders. From these diverse vantages, Oratorians were privy to multiple circuits of knowledge traveling the city, and used those same circuits to draw together and promote cultural production related to local sacred history. I think the Oratorians used their skills and networks to configure the history of New Spain within the criteria used by Oratorians in Renaissance Italy.

Recent scholarship in history and theology has emphasized the importance of Cesare Baronio, a Roman Oratorian and Philip Neri's immediate successor as superior, in shaping a new era of Catholic historical writing.²⁶ Responding to the massive *Magdeburg Centuries*, a thirteen-volume Christian history written by German Protestants suggesting that the Catholic Church had systematically perverted christianity across the ages, Neri encouraged Baronio to compose his *Annales Ecclesiastici*, a counter-argument based on intensive research in the Roman archives, documents solicited and collected from regional churches and towns across the historic Roman Empire, archaeological evidence unearthed from the subterranean tombs of Rome and transcribed oral testimony taken from towns whose textual sources lacked what oral tradition preserved. John Donnelly writes that "[i]f both the *Centuries* and the *Annales* have a polemical slant, they nevertheless raised the level of historiography by building on a solid base of documents. Too much of Renaissance humanist historiography had neglected archival investigation in favor of rhetorical effects."²⁷ More recently, Simon Ditchfield's in-depth study of Pietro Maria Campi's contributions as what he calls a

"local Baronio" to the regional history of Piacenza's as a particular example of the universal features of Catholic history.²⁸ It is no surprise, in this context, that in his approbation of the Oratorians' chronicle, Baltasar Sánchez refers to its author, Gutiérrez Dávila, as a "Baronio Mexicano."²⁹

Although this text is an important milestone in Oratorian historical writing in the Americas, from my research to date I would argue that the execution of Baronio's historical methods reaches far beyond Gutiérrez Dávila's chronicle to the work of other Oratorians writing before and after 1736. In the seventeenth century, Oratorians worked behind the scenes of other prestigious posts as ecclesiastical judges and chapter members of the Cathedral's cabildo to promote sacred people, places and events in New Spain. Now for a few examples: in 1665, shortly after the death of the first Creole archbishop, Alonso de Cuevas y Davalos, four Oratorian lawyers used their positions on the Cathedral cabildo to quickly move forward with the collection of depositions from each of the major religious orders (including from Miguel Sánchez, then a member of the Venerable Union) and several extremely old indigenous people, in order to submit a petition for the canonization of Juan Diego for his miraculous experiences related to the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe while their council held the interim authority of an archbishop during the time known as *sede vacante*.³⁰

A few years later, in 1676, Oratorians Isidro de Sariñana y Cuenca and Diego de Malpartida y Centeno joined the famous Jesuit preacher Antonio Nuñez de Miranda to celebrate what was popularly called "*el milagro de los panecitos*," wherein María de Poblete, a wealthy Creole noblewoman and incidentally a relative of the Oratorians Juan and Juan Millán de Poblete, claimed to be able to produce reconstituted miniature bread loaves stamped with the image of Saint Teresa after having burned and crushed them

into dust following a popular if unorthodox method of healing a variety of ailments.³¹ As Antonio Rubial Garcia, María de Jesús Díaz Nava and Martha Lilia Tenorio have shown, the milagro de los panecitos drew a great deal of skeptical criticism from clerical figures in the city, and was quietly denounced and de-authenticated by the Inquisition after the death of María's powerful brother Miguel.³² While the testimonies solicited by skeptics ultimately showed María's miracle to be a carefully constructed forgery, the case nevertheless underscores the urgency with which Creoles worked to legitimate local cults and popular devotions.

During the initial litigation of the cause of the milagro de los panecitos, the Carmelite Fray Juan de la Ascensión collaborated with his convent's Oratorian chaplain and trained lawyer, Alfonso Alberto Velasco, to compose seven essential questions to discern the veracity of the miracle. Velasco played a similar role in at least two other cases for authenticating sanctity in the late seventeenth century. He collaborated with fellow Oratorian José de Torres y Vergara to coordinate the procedure of the beatification process of Gregório López, the sixteenth-century model for Oratorian spiritual practice in Mexico City.³³ In 1688, Velasco published the first of several editions of a biography of a crucifix brought to the mining town of Mapethé in 1545, which witnesses swore had begun to groan and twitch, to cry and sweat blood, and ultimately become miraculously restored to an unblemished, beautiful Christ-figure during the mid-seventeenth century. As William Taylor has noted in his recent study of the "Christo Renovado de Ixmiquilpan," Velasco's narrative reads like "like a digest of one of the extended legal reports called *informaciones jurídicas* that were prepared for episcopal courts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico to evaluate cases for beatification of a holy person or recognition of a miraculous image," and in 1689 the

Archbishop Francisco Aguiar y Seijas (an Oratorian in his own right, if you remember) "examined a full set of depositions supporting the tradition of supernatural restoration and declared it to be an authentic miracle."³⁴

One final case of sanctity surrounds the history of "the Martyr of Japan" Felipe de Jesús. According to contemporary Catholic chronicles, Philip first joined the Reformed Franciscans by taking minor vows in his home town of Mexico City in the late sixteenth century, but left the order in 1589 to pursue a mercantile career in the Philippines. By the 1590s he had again changed his mind, and boarded a ship to return to Mexico in 1596 to be ordained by the Archbishop there, but after a storm ran his ship aground in Japan, where the ship's passengers were imprisoned and suspected of secretly planning to overthrow the local authorities. Philip, along with sixteen other Franciscan tertiaries, were killed in February of 1597, and celebrated as Christian martyrs thereafter. While the Franciscans were somewhat reticent to adopt Philip as one of their own given his own waivering profession and lack of formal profession before his death, the Oratorians claimed him as their own "Proto-martyr of Japan" by way of birth. The Oratorians claimed that the house and street where Felipe de Jesús was born were demolished and encompassed by the construction of the Oratorians' first church on the *calle el Arco*. Although by the early eighteenth century, when Gutiérrez Dávila wrote the Congregation's history, all documentary evidence had long vanished, he noted that a "certain Lady" and a nameless "virtuous Churchman" who had known Philip's uncle, had told their first Prefect back in 1701 that the location of his birthplace lay within the Church's walls. In addition to the oral testimony, Gutiérrez Dávila also wrote that a *lienzo* bearing Felipe's image in a niche along the Church along the wall that his historic home would have shared, and mysteriously returned there several times

after Oratorians had attempted to move it.³⁵ The Oratorians' interest in Phelipe de Jesús continued to develop throughout the eighteenth century. The historian José Antonio Pichardo, better known for his treatise on the boundaries and limits of Texas and Louisiana, was a member of the Mexico City Oratorians and compiled an extensive manuscript relating his life first published in 1934 by Carlos Eduardo Castañeda.³⁶

After having received Papal confirmation as Congregation in the eighteenth century, however, the energy of Oratorian politics seems to have shifted somewhat from the pursuit of beatification and sanctity cases to the reproduction of Oratorian cultural patrimony. Significantly, many of the publications were either attributed to the work and memory of deceased Oratorians, or published in partial anonymity, as the examples from the Center for Southwest Research illustrate. Rosary texts produced by Alfonso Alberto Velasco and Diego del Castillo Márquez enjoyed over 25 reprintings during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, suggesting that their use value and public image increased after the deaths of their sponsors. During the same time span, the printed record shows a similar gravitation toward the publication of novena texts, nine-day cycles of prayers to the Virgin Mary, to Jesus, or to a variety of saints, in supplication for divine intercession and aid. Both media for Catholic devotion are notable for their popular appeal and extra-liturgical position within the contemporary practice of worship.

The work I have been able to do this past month within the special collections of the Center for Southwest Research has been a great help towards amassing the archive of materials published by and about Oratorians in Mexico during Spanish imperial rule. By way of conclusion, I want to share the beginnings of my research in manuscript archives that I will use to counter-balance the polished vision of Oratorian history and

culture that emerges from the published record. I was very fortunate to begin here working with the research papers of Dr. Greenleaf within the Inquisition books of the Archivo General de la Nación de México. His meticulous and reliable transcriptions of Spanish paleography, the often dizzying and highly varied handwriting styles created by the Inquisition's notaries have been a great aid to my research, and to my pleasant surprise I have found records of Oratorians living and working in Mexico City. Unfortunately, the case files are extensive, so I have not been able to read them in depth yet, but I can share some preliminary findings.

Some scenarios correspond with the hagiographical depictions of Oratorians as conscientious, orthodox priests and confessors. In a trial against Juan de Santa Anna, for claiming to have visions of the future, the Oratorian Francisco Xavier Velasco appears as a witness explaining that Juan had come to him asking for some religious clothes to borrow and a place to stay overnight, but reported his suspicious behavior when after cordially offering him space to say Mass the next day, Juan replied that he could not because either a Demon or his own sins had sealed his throat, preventing him from uttering a word.³⁷ Velasco, of course, noted the contradiction of Juan de Santa Anna relating the story in his own voice.

In other cases, however, Oratorians seem to be more hopeful of finding local holy women within their pastoral flocks than many of their neighbors. From 1686-1698, the Inquisition and Mexico City's criminal courts conducted trials against Antonia de Ochoa, who sometimes called herself Antonia de Jesús, who was accused of sustaining lies and feigning spiritual visions, deceiving the faithful in Mexico City for many years. Antonia apparently lived for several years with in the private homes of Oratorians Francisco de Romero y Quevedo and Juan de Narvaez y Saavedra, and confessed to both

of them while in their residences.³⁸ Neither priest was part of the denunciation process, which suggests that they may not have supported the allegations against her. Moreover, these were no minor figures in the social climate of Mexico City. Juan de Narvaez, for example, was rector of the Royal University for many years, and held several prestigious teaching positions there while also working for the city's cathedral as a cabildo member.³⁹

The precarious, un-fixed position of Oratorian identity that emerges between the prescriptive forms of hagiographic and published literature, and the practical narratives of social history contained in the Inquisition's archives, both enhances and reflects the findings of other recent historical research taking a new, critical look meanings of institutional history within the Spanish American Empire. What new stories can Oratorian history offer to Latin Americanists more broadly? I think that reading these seemingly contradictory narratives simultaneously reveals a common structuring element that actually pervades the organizational design of empire in Latin America. Whether exalting their own local members, monitoring, guiding or chastising parishioners or their own fellow members, Oratorian discourses universally recognize imperial subjects as souls above all else. While the soul has long been recognized as the core of Christian identity by scholars across the disciplines, its history as a legal category of universal identity within the Spanish Empire has largely evaded the attention of scholarly investigations.

As my work progresses, I plan to borrow tools from from literary critics and anthropologists to address the concept of the soul as a legal discourse used to account for exemplary, vulnerable and morally wayward citizens alike. Through the lens of Christian animism, a concept developed by the Spanish literary critic Juan Carlos

Rodríguez to (in the shortest of short-hand descriptions) organize and analyze the language and metaphors used in early modern Christianity for the purposes of discerning the nature and quality of spirits - in other words, differentiating between divinely inspired sanctity and the interferences of diabolic tricks and illusions.⁴⁰ The ability of scholars of early Latin America to account for the simultaneous possibilities of acquiring new freedoms and liberties through the discourses of the soul forged in the Americas, and the violence attendant to such a broad, universalizing category of identification that swallowed and disappeared important differences (between the many distinct indigenous peoples of the Americas, or the varying levels of understanding and exposure to Christian ideas and beliefs among Africans and African-descended peoples, for example) will be well worth the effort. The examples produced by and about Oratorians helpfully juxtaposes the idealized images of model "clérigos Presbíteros" and their star parishioners alongside local candidates for sanctity and cases of religious deviancy and heterodoxy. They will also provide a network of examples that demonstrate a modern facet of Spanish imperial bureaucracy that has long been overlooked by scholars interested in the history of international law, human rights, and the role of Catholicism in shaping the globalized world in which we find ourselves today. I look forward to pursuing leads for investigating this lost history provided by the rich ethnographic materials of Oratorian history.

¹ John Patrick Donnelly, S. J. "The Congregation of the Oratory" in *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation in Honor of John C. Olin on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*. ed. Richard DeMolen, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994): 194.

² Ibid.

³ Meriol Trevor, *Apostle of Rome: A Life of Philip Neri, 1515-1595*, (London: Macmillan, 1966): 66-68.

⁴ Donnelly, "The Congregation of the Oratory," 201-202.

⁵ Ibid, 189.

⁶ Ibid, 196.

⁷ Ibid, 202; de la Maza 1970.

⁸ Julián Gutiérrez Dávila, *Memorias históricas de la congregación del oratorio de la ciudad de México*, (México: En la Imprenta Real del Superior Gobierno, 1736): Part I: 2.

⁹ Ibid, I: 1-3.

¹⁰ Ibid, I: 6.

¹¹ José María Marroqui, *La ciudad de México*, México, D.F: Tip. y Lit. "La Europea," de J. Aguilar Vera y C^a. (S. en C.), Calle de Santa Isabel num. 9, 1900, II: 416.

¹² Gutierrez Davila, *Memorias históricas*, I: 7-8.

¹³ The Center for Southwest Research's copy of the *Constituciones de la congregación del oratorio de Roma, fundada por el glorioso patriarca San Felipe Neri, con la bula de su confirmacion, por las que se gobiernan todas las congregaciones del oratorio* (1780), translated and published by the Oratorian community in Michoacán, will enable a detailed comparison with the original document produced by the Venerable Union, which was recently published by Luis Ávila Blancas.

¹⁴ Ibid, I: 13.

¹⁵ Marroqui, *La ciudad de México*, II: 433.

¹⁶ AGN-M, Bienes Nacionales, Vol. 1028, Exp. 44.

¹⁷ Gutierrez Davila, *Memorias históricas* I: 37; Marroqui, *La ciudad de México*, II: 433.

¹⁸ Antonio Rubial Garcia, *La santidad controvertida. Hagiografía y conciencia criolla alrededor de los venerables no canonizados en la Nueva España*, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999): 121.

¹⁹ Ibid. I hope to complicate and challenge this declared position in the course of future research using two clusters of lawsuits between indigenous communities in the Toluca valley and the Coyoacán region and the locally established "haciendas de San Felipe Neri" over land and resource rights, as well as three manuals reflecting Oratorian methods for discerning and prosecuting idolatry. For lawsuits in the Toluca region, see AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 938, Vol. 2214, Exp. 1 (358 fojas), 1702-1801; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 795, Vol. 1830, Exp. 2 (34 fojas), 1712-1721; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1367, Vol. 3180, Exp. 1, 1730-1782; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1197, Vol. 2850, Exp. 3 (20 fojas), 1732; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 982, Vol. 2340, Exp. 1 (274 fojas), 1770-1791; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1363, Vol. 3172, Exp. 1, 1783-1791; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1362, Vol. 3171, Exp. 1, 1783-1791; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 739, Vol. 1680, Exp. 8 (20 fojas), 1790; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1540, Vol. 3538, Exp. 16, 1791; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 725, Vol. 1646, Exp. 5 (32 fojas), 1793-1794; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 983, Vol. 2344, Exp. 6 (196 folios), 1793-1810; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1196, Vol. 2847, Exp. 1 (30 fojas), 1796-1810; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1019, Vol. 2449, Exp. 5 (130 fojas), 1799-1804. For the Coyoacán area, see AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 704, Vol. 1600, Exp. 2 (15 fojas), 1688-1689; AGN-Mexico, Tierras, Cont. 1367, Vol. 3180, Exp. 1, 1730-1782. For the treatments of idolatry, see Francisco de Aguilar's manuscript *Doctrina Otomí*, ca. 1632-1662, in the Princeton University Mesoamerican collection, Jacinto de la Serna's "Manual de ministros de indios para el conocimiento de sus idolatrías, y extirpación de ellas," in *Tratado de las idolatrías, supersticiones, dioses, ritos, hechicerías y otras costumbres gentílicas de las razas aborígenes de México*, ed. Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, (México, D.F.: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1953), and Diego Ricardo Jaime Villavicencio, *Luz, y methodo, de confesar idolatras, y destierro de idolatrías, debajo del tratado siguiente. Tratado de*

avisos, y puntos importantes, de la abominable seta de la idolatria; para examinar por ellos al penitente en el fuero interior de la conciencia, y exterior judicial. Sacados no de los libros; sino de la experiencia en las aberiguaciones con los rabbies de ella, (Puebla: Impr. de D. Fernández de León, 1692).

²⁰ José Antonio Ramírez de Alzate, *Gaceta literaria de México*, 4: 30.

²¹ AGN-M, Real Junta, Vol. Unico, Fs. 16-21, 27 de Noviembre de 1770.

²² Marroquí, *La ciudad de México*, II: 437.

²³ AGN-M, Real Junta, Vol. Unico, Fs. 16-21, 27 de Noviembre de 1770.

²⁴ Virginia Guedea, "The Old Colonialism Ends, The New Colonialism Begins" in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, Ed. Michael Meyer, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 284-285.

²⁵ Luis Ávila Blancas, *Estudio bio-bibliográfico de la Congregación del Oratorio de San Felipe Neri de la ciudad de México*, (México: Miguel Ferro editores, 2008).

²⁶ Donnelly, "The Congregation of the Oratory;" Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)*, Leiden: Brill, 2003): especially 326-382; and Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁷ Donnelly, "The Congregation of the Oratory," 200.

²⁸ Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History*.

²⁹ Gutiérrez Dávila, *Memorias históricas*, np10.

³⁰ See Ana María Sada Lambretón's facimile edition of the *Informaciones jurídicas de 1666*, composed by Francisco de Siles.

³¹ Isidro Sariñana, *Sermón que a la declaración del milagro de los panecitos de santa Teresa de Jesús predicó en la iglesia de los carmelitas descalzos de México el 2 de enero de 1678*, (México: Imprenta de la Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1678); Antonio Núñez de Miranda, *Sermón de santa Teresa de Jesús en la fiesta que su muy observante convento de San Joseph de carmelitas descalzas de esta corte, celebró por auténtica declaración del milagro de la prodigiosa reintegración de sus panecitos. Domingo 2 de enero de 1678*, (México: Imprenta de la Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1678). No known copy of Diego de Malpartida y Centeno's sermon has survived. See Martha Lilia Tenorio, *De panes y sermones. El milagro de los panecitos de Santa Teresa*, (México: El Colegio de México, 2001): 29n6.

³² Antonio Rubial García and María de Jesús Díaz Nava, "'La santa es una bellaca y nos hace muchas burlas:' El caso del milagro de los panecitos de Santa Teresa en la sociedad novohispana del siglo XVII" *Estudios de historia novohispana* 24 (enero-junio 2001): 53-75; Tenorio, *De panes y sermones*.

³³ The Huntington Library in San Marino, California, holds a manuscript copy of Velasco's instructions for the examination of witnesses in the case. See MSS. 131214 ANAL, pp. 207-224.

³⁴ William Taylor, "Two Shrines of the Christo Renovado: Religion and Peasant Politics in Late Colonial Mexico" *American Historical Review* 110.4 (October, 2005): 950.

³⁵ Gutiérrez Dávila, *Memorias históricas*, I:6-7.

³⁶ *Vida y martirio del protomártir mexicano San Felipe de Jesús de las Casas, religioso del hábito y Orden de San Francisco de Manila*, (Guadalajara: Tip. y Lit. Francisco Loreto y Diéguez suc., 1934. The manuscript is part of the José Antonio Pichardo Papers at the

Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection of the University of Texas Austin (Benson MS - Genaro García).

³⁷ Richard E. Greenleaf Papers, University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research. Transcription of AGN-Mexico, Inquisición Vol. 680, Exp. 33.

³⁸ Richard E. Greenleaf Papers, University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research. Transcription of AGN-Mexico, Inquisición Vol. 538, Exp. 1.

³⁹ See Enrique González González, "Mecenazgo y literatura: los destinos dispares de Juan de Narváez y Sigüenza y Góngora" in *Carrera, linaje y patronazgo. Clerigos y juristas en Nueva España, Chile y Perú (siglos XVI-XVIII)* (Mexico: UNAM/CESU/Plaza y Valdés, 2004): 17-38.

⁴⁰ Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *Theory and History of Ideological Production*, Trans. Malcolm K. Read, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002). The works of Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1891) and James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, (1911-1914), 3rd ed. (Evanston: American Theological Library Association, 1992), first articulated and popularized the notion of animism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Ranjana Khanna argues, the flexibility of Tylor's model for comparing cultures across space and time based on their perceived positionality on a spectrum of civilization appealed to Sigmund Freud's needs when constructing psychoanalysis as a social science. See Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): especially 68-78. Anthropologists have continued to modify and adapt the notion of animism to describe the spiritual cultures of indigenous peoples, mostly focusing on groups in Africa and Asia. See Nurit Bird-David, "Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology [andComments and Reply]" *Current Anthropology* 40 (February, 1999): S67-S91, and Martin Stringer, "Rethinking Animism: Thoughts from the Infancy of Our Discipline" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5.4 (December, 1999): 541-555). For an examination of the role of animism in the history of ethnography in mesoamerica, see Jill Leslie McKeever Furst, *The Natural History of the Soul in Ancient Mexico*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). For important new research on the soul and discerning spirits in early Latin America see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Nancy Van Deusen, *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of an Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula de Jesús*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004). On the production of liberty and freedom for Afro-Latin Americans through engagement with the Catholic legal system, see Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Jane Landers, "Cimarrón and Citizen: African Ethnicity, Corporate Identity and the Evolution of Free Black Towns in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean" in *Slaves, Subjects and Subversives*, ed. Jane Landers and Barry Robinson, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006, 111-146, and "Southern Passage: The Forgotten Road to Freedom in Florida" in *Passages to Freedom*, ed. David Blight, (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institute in association with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, 2004). Regarding the importance of priests for the construction of legitimate new Indian communities in the Spanish empire, see Arij Ouweneel, "Altepeme and Pueblos de Indios. Some Comparative Theoretical Perspectives on the Analysis of the Colonial Indian Communities," in *The Indian Community of Colonial Mexico. Fifteen Essays on Land Tenure, Corporate Organizations, Ideology and Village Politics*, ed. Arij Ouweneel

and Simon Miller, (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990): 1-39; Stephanie Wood, "Corporate Adjustments in Colonial Mexican Indian Towns: Toluca Region, 1550-1810," Ph.D. Diss., University of California-Los Angeles, 1984, especially pp. 24-65 and 212-237; Brian Owensby, *Empire of Law and Indian Justice in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008): especially pp. 130-166.