ABSTRACT

The *Ars moriendi* manuals were instrumental in the late medieval Church’s discourses of confession and penance. This genre, which developed as a reaction to the Black Death and other social and natural disasters of the fourteenth century, produced many vernacular versions in Europe which varied in content and length. Though the message was the same and promoted the Church’s emphasis on confession for the soul’s salvation, the genre continued to evolve in the sixteenth century under the Humanist movement and the Reformation of the Church. As a result, the *Ars moriendi* manual, which had been popular because of its brevity and concision, was chosen by the Franciscan Order as an essential text for promoting the Christian doctrine in New Spain and for re-organizing the funerary practices therein.

The sixteenth to eighteenth-century Mexican versions of the *Arte de bien morir* reiterate the discourse of the Church regarding the salvation of the soul (live well to die well); however, they also address important and specific issues that were of concern to the Church of New Spain; chiefly, religious syncretism and idolatry. This dissertation makes use of documents from the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City, the Biblioteca Nacional de México, the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City. Studies by scholars such as Rowe and Schelling, Todorov, Gruzinki, Mignolo, Weckmann and Duverger, are also drawn upon to highlight these pressing issues of the Mexican Church and to identify the official and unofficial discourses that link the Old World to the New.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Juan, Ruth and Patricia Bastante for all of their support.
Chapter I
Introduction

Antonia Morel d’Arleux notes in “Los tratados de preparación a la muerte: Aproximación metodológica”, that the discourse of death has always been at the center of the Christian Church’s dialectic (719). The purpose of this dissertation is to show the evolution of the theme of death in the official discourses of the Church from medieval Spain to eighteenth-century Mexico in the tradition of the Arto de bien morir (Ars moriendi). In the late-Middle Ages and in the sixteenth century, the Church used the theme of death specifically to reinforce official Catholic doctrine in Europe and to establish it in the New World. The Arto de bien morir, a text written in the fifteenth century to prepare Christians for a good death, was instrumental in establishing the Christian funerary tradition and the Church’s official position on confession, penance and salvation in Nueva España. At its height, the Ars moriendi in Latin and vernacular versions (including many in Spanish) numbered more than 318 extant manuscripts and more than 67 incunable editions (Adeva Martín 298).

Scholars who have examined the medieval versions (O’Connor [1942], Adeva Martín [2002], Vivanco [2004], Gago Jover [1999], Martínez Gil [2002], and Sanmartín Bastida [2006]) have conducted important studies on the Arto de bien morir and the Ars moriendi tradition in Europe. They have explored the origins of the texts as well as their structure, themes, characters, socio-historical and socio-political importance. Though these studies are invaluable for an understanding of the tradition and its development as a genre in religious literature, they are limited to fifteenth-century versions produced in Europe and do not analyze the Church’s official discourses or explore any possible trans-Atlantic connections.

1 Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida has just published a critical study on the Arto de bien morir in fifteenth-century Spain. As it was released very recently by Veuvert Press, I was unable to consult it for this study.
The theme of death in Mexico’s pre-Hispanic, colonial, revolutionary and modern periods has also been widely explored by scholars. Although most critics agree that there are medieval and pre-Hispanic connections in the literary and plastic representations of death in Mexico, they have not conducted a systematic study to demonstrate their conclusions. In recent years, María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Álvarez (2001) and María Concepción Lugo Olin (2001) have dealt with the Mexican colonial funerary tradition. They have examined burials, wills, sermons and religious texts that were used to prepare Christians for the afterlife. In their books, they look briefly at the Arte de bien morir tradition in New Spain, but because their corpus is so extensive and the Arte is not the main object of their studies, it has been overshadowed by other traditions and texts.

Tzvetan Todorov writes in “Intertextuality” that in order to define a discourse as original, it must be able to dialogue freely with other discourses (61). Is it possible to apply this theory to the religious texts produced in the Middle Ages and New Spain in order to identify original discourses? Can dialogues be established between the medieval versions of the Arte de bien morir and its variants from New Spain? By applying Todorov’s theory to the versions of the Arte de bien morir produced in Spain, this dissertation intends to show that it is indeed possible to identify specific discourses of the medieval and sixteenth-century Church in Spain by establishing dialogues with other discourses found in a variety of contemporary texts: historical, literary, plastic and musical. As a result of the Conquest of New Spain and the Franciscans’ importation of some of these texts, it is also possible to extend the dialogue between the discourses from the Old World to texts from the pre-Hispanic tradition as well as those that were produced in the Mexican colonial period (sixteenth to eighteenth century). In order to identify the discourses of the Artes de bien morir written in New Spain and to examine the manner in which they establish dialogues with their European predecessors, for the purposes of this dissertation I have carefully assembled a collection of texts from sixteenth to eighteenth-century Mexico that include archival documents, codices,
religious texts, literary texts, plastic arts, and a musical manuscript, that will demonstrate the continued evolution of the Church’s official discourse in the New World and its ties to the Old World.

The present study was conducted in order to call attention to some of the Mexican *Artes de bien morir* that were produced from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. In order to understand the text’s discursive evolution and properly identify the official discourses of the Catholic Church in New Spain during these three centuries, I have presented a preliminary historical study of the medieval tradition of the *Arte de bien morir* in Chapter 1. This tradition can be traced back to the Black Death (1347-1349) that forced individuals, and the Church, to rethink the official policy on confession and penance. Until that devastating event, the Church based its requirements for confession and penance on Canon 21 (*Omnis utriusque sexus*), promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). This Canon made it compulsory for all Christians to confess their sins at least once a year at Easter-time. The sudden death of countless Christians without confession during the plague years obliged the Church to amend this decree. As a result, the texts that were produced in the fifteenth century, such as the *Danse macabre* and the *Ars moriendi*, were written to prepare Christians for death by requiring them to reflect on their bodily mortality and on the immortality of the soul. Salvation could be obtained rapidly provided Christians were familiar with the content of the *Ars moriendi* manuals and had a priest present at their deathbed.

In addition to looking at the medieval origins of the *Ars moriendi* tradition, I examine two important texts from the sixteenth century in Chapter 2 of this dissertation to show the changes in the Church’s official discourse. The rapid-style salvation emphasized in the medieval *Ars moriendi* manuals is criticized by Erasmus of Rotterdam in the *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir* and by Alejo Venegas in the *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte*. As a result of the controversies surrounding the Church’s doctrine and the purchasing of indulgences for the soul’s
salvation, Venegas and Erasmus show, through some cleverly articulated arguments, that to prepare the Christian for a good death, they should be encouraged to live a good life. Although they believe that faith and good works are important elements in each Christian’s life, they argue that loyalty to the Catholic Church, not necessarily dependence on indulgences, will play an instrumental role in the salvation of the soul.

In order to understand the socio-historical and socio-political contexts in which the Mexican versions of the *Ars moriendi* were written, we need to outline specific elements of the indigenous religion and Catholicism. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the origins of the religious syncretism that took place in New Spain are explored, as well as the challenges and problems that occurred in communicating Christianity to the natives. The Spaniards had brought with them a religious background and beliefs that had been woven into every aspect of their lives; as a result, it was difficult for them to understand and accept the religion of the indigenous people. At the same time, this argument can be applied to the natives of New Spain, who also had ingrained knowledge of their own religion, which was the main foundation of their society. As a result of the contact between these two religions, the natives and the Spaniards reinterpreted each others’ religion based on their own previous background. The Spaniards rejected the natives’ religion and the subsequent religious syncretism, referring to the latter as “idolatria”, while the natives reinterpreted Catholicism and re-contextualized it to make it fit into their own background. William Rowe and Vivian Schelling note in *Memory and Modernity* that religious syncretism took place in Mexico because of the coexistence of three different religious expressions: official Catholicism, sixteenth-century popular Catholicism, and the indigenous religion (68-69). Because popular Catholicism allowed for cult-followings, such as those of the Virgin Mary and of the saints, it was possible for elements of the pre-Hispanic religion to filter into popular beliefs and rituals; for example, the
veneration of the Virgin Mary (Our Lady of Guadalupe/Tonantzin), and the ceremonies involved in the Day of the Dead celebrations.

Chapter 4 examines two important texts from the *Arte de bien morir* tradition in New Spain. Although there are many more versions in Mexico, these two texts by authors from different religious orders and centuries, highlight the issues and concerns that were present in the Church of New Spain. Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Mexico's first bishop, wrote an *Arte de bien morir* entitled “De la memoria y aparejo para bien morir.” This text, which was likely addressed to Spaniards living in New Spain, emphasizes the need to remain faithful to the Catholic Church, and adamantly rejects idolatry. He warns his readers that a bad death is assured for individuals who are not spiritually prepared and for those who choose to doubt the Church’s teachings and accept idolatry.

Zumárraga’s point of view is contrasted in Chapter 4 to that of Fray Martín de León, a Dominican friar who wrote the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” in 1611. This text is destined for natives and Spaniards and shows a more tolerant discourse with regard to the phenomenon of religious syncretism. In addition, Fray de León’s text foreshadows the decline of the tradition of the *Arte de bien morir* when he mentions increased responsibility for physicians and hospitals in the process of death.

Chapter 5 examines the period of transition in the eighteenth century and the substitution of the *Arte de bien morir* manuals by confraternities. The *Congregación de la Buena Muerte*, at the church of La Profesa in Mexico City, is not the only one that was established to oversee its members' preparations for a good death; nevertheless, this one is of particular interest since it produced a manual that served as an *Arte de bien morir*. This text, published in 1743, was issued to all members and explained how they could obtain indulgences that would guarantee their souls a
place in Heaven. It also includes the requirements that had to be fulfilled in order to inspire other members to live good Christian lives which would assure them a good death.

In addition, this Chapter will examine some eighteenth-century iconographic representations of the colonial macabre. It is hoped that this brief look at these representations of Death in a Choral Manuscript from 1713 (03.RMS782.3F IGL3) will provide greater insight into the reasons why scholars deduce that there is a medieval connection with the modern-day iconographies of Death in Mexico, for example, the Calaveras by José Guadalupe Posada.

It is surprising that little work has been done on the Ars moriendi tradition in New Spain. Some scholars, such as Robert Ricard (1947, 2004), Lugo Olín (2001), and Rodríguez Álvarez (2001), mention in passing the medieval connection to the tradition of catechisms and the Arte de bien morir in New Spain, but these connections have not been fully explored. Their analyses have not established a clear link with the medieval sources and do not look into the changing discourses of the Church regarding salvation, confession, idolatry and religious syncretism in the Spanish or Mexican versions of the Artes de bien morir. It is hoped that this present study will provide clearer insight into the use of the Artes de bien morir in New Spain as well as highlight some official and unofficial discourses that the Church employed in these texts.

Many of the texts that have been chosen in the corpus for this dissertation have been overlooked by critics; nevertheless, they provide valuable information regarding the theme of death in Mexico’s literature and plastic arts that will gradually shape the Mexicans’ ability to laugh at death. Although there are many more examples of the Arte de bien morir produced in New Spain than those studied here, it is hoped that this dissertation will stimulate interest in the uncovering and study of other versions which can be added to the identified corpus of religious literature in Mexico.
Chapter II
Confession, Penance and Death in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: Are You Prepared for the Day of Judgment?

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then suddenly destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child and they shall not escape. But ye brethren are not in the darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief. (1 Thessalonians 5: 2-4)²

Our fascination with death and what happens to the body and to the soul after death has led to innumerable studies and theories. During classical Antiquity and to some extent the early centuries of Christianity, a commonly held belief was that the dead should not be buried too closely to the living in order to avoid the interaction between different realms. Cemeteries were therefore not built within city walls until the fourth century A.D. when the veneration of saints and their relics became an important component to the Christian faith. Burying these “special” dead within city walls and housing their remains in the great churches of Europe permitted Christians to commune easily with the realms of the divine. As saints were being buried in the churches and relics were put on display for the viewing of the faithful, a demand grew for burials close to a church’s patron saint. Faith in the miraculous power of the martyrs of the Church or in the healing power of their relics provided the Christian with hope that the saint would mediate on their behalf in the Final Judgment. As Paul Binski explains, even fragments of a saint (relics) were believed to embody their whole presence and consequently could heal diseases or save someone from premature death (66). In The Autumn of the Middle Ages, Johan Huizinga describes how bishops, abbots and other important figures in late-medieval France explicitly requested in their testaments to be buried at the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris because its soil was miraculous; the body could decompose to

² All biblical quotations in this dissertation are taken from the Authorized King James Version.
bare bones in approximately nine days (Huizinga 170) thus allowing for the rapid exhumation of their bones and in turn providing others with the same privilege of burial in the cemetery. As a result of unusual miracles, such as the one at the Cemetery of the Innocents, attributed to the relics of saints and martyrs of the Church, another social hierarchy developed for burial practices. Individuals who possessed economic and social influence in life could purchase the much coveted place of burial, close to the relics, and therefore benefit from the saint’s intercession after death. Even though death is supposed to be the equalizing element in humanity, the manner in which a Christian was buried demonstrated the power that they continued to hold beyond the grave (Illustration 1.1).

According to the New Testament, any believer in Christ can reach Heaven by means of their faith and good deeds regardless of their social position. The clergy preached that equal treatment for all people would finally be realized in death and in the Last Judgment when it would be possible for a poor individual to surpass a wealthy one, based on their good deeds and faith. The biblical story of Lazarus finally being rewarded for his suffering on earth, after enduring extreme poverty and lesions, was contrasted in the medieval sermons to the wealthy man who was condemned to hell for his pride and vanity (Luke 16: 19-31). The allegory of the Christian’s spiritual “journey” on earth was also a popular topos preached by clerics and found in the ecclesiastical writing tradition, as can be seen in Gonzalo de Berceo’s thirteenth century text, the Milagros de Nuestra Señora. Berceo, who spent many years at the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, was familiar with the pilgrim trails to Santiago de Compostela since San Millán

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3 The monastery, in addition to being a popular rest-stop for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela boasted its own miraculous relics, of San Millán, San Felices and Santa Oria. With the donations of pilgrims and those wanting to be buried close to these relics, San Millán de la Cogolla flourished during the thirteenth century. According to Juan Olarte, Brian Dutton has identified three primitive sepulchres which confirm the importance of burial near saints and their relics (26-27). These sepulchres at the Yuso monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla belong to three Navarran
happened to be a popular rest-stop on the French route to the famed city. Berceo uses the metaphor of the physically difficult and treacherous journey to Compostela to draw a parallel with the spiritual journey of the Christian on his “earthly pilgrimage” toward Heaven. As Bronislaw Geremek notes in “The Marginal Man”, the medieval traveller was familiar with the dangers that the road could bring.

Although the traveler would seem to be the perfect realization of the Christian ideal of the viator in this earthly life, an element of alienation, or at least the risk of alienation, was inherent in the concept of the voyage. Travelers who abandoned their own natural milieu and exposed themselves to the perils of the road were sure to have relations with unknown persons and to encounter the insidious perils of nature. (348)

Because Compostela was a popular pilgrim trail in Berceo’s time, his audience or reader would also be familiar with the perils of the road. Berceo demonstrates in his Milagros the dangers that the pilgrim could encounter en route to a shrine. They were vulnerable to faith-based and physical attacks by demons and vandals. Berceo cautioned the receptors of his Milagros by writing about his clerical protagonists who were deceived by the devil and who were saved from their iniquities as a result of their devotion to the Virgin Mary, who intervened on their behalf. Berceo shows that if the Christian remains true to the Virgin, she will intercede on their behalf before God and Christ in the Judgment, thus resulting in the soul’s salvation and eternal rewards in Heaven. This message of Marian devotion, from the thirteenth century, continues to be relevant in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; however, an emphasis on penance and confession will play a stronger role in the late-medieval Church’s discourse of salvation.

Because of humanity’s predisposition to sin, an inheritance from Adam and Eve, it was impossible to make the journey through life without an encounter with Satan’s deceptions. The

queens: Doña Toda, wife of Sancho Garcés (902-924); Doña Elvira, wife of Sancho III (1000-1035); and Doña Jimena, wife of García Sánchez el Temblón (994-1000).
Church gradually began to stress the importance of a contrite confession, penance and communion in its sermons and written texts, as dying without these sacraments guaranteed condemnation of the soul in the Last Judgment.

The Solution for a Sure Salvation: Canon 21 “Omnis utriusque sexus”

In 1215 the Roman Catholic Church convened the Fourth Lateran Council under the leadership of Pope Innocent III. In addition to educating the clergy and reforming such problems within the Church as drunkenness, concubinage⁴ and simony, the Council crafted Canon 21, “Omnis utriusque sexus”, which was “perhaps the most important legislative act in the history of the Church” (Lea 1: 230). To solve the dilemma of poor and infrequent confessions and penance, this decree required all Christians to confess and atone for their sins once a year at Easter-time if their journey to Heaven was to be completed successfully. Canon 21⁵ amended the use of the Canonical Penance (emerging in the mid-second century) which was feared for its extreme severity and for its public nature. The terrifying ordeal of being a penitent in the early Middle Ages accounted for the poor numbers of Christians confessing their sins as they saved their confession until the very last

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⁴ According to Américo Castro and to Peter Linehan, these problems were widespread in the Spanish church and there were numerous unsuccessful attempts at eradicating them (Castro 355, Linehan 3). The Church in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, was particularly rebellious since its clergymen carried arms, did not wear habits, and did not shave their beards as decreed in the Council of Compostela (1060 and 1063). Compostela’s archbishop, Diego Gelmírez (1100-1140), also rebelled against Rome’s “authority” as he would greet pilgrims to Compostela with the Pope’s greeting of “Apostolico more”, and named cardinals who would later wear purple robes. Since Compostela was as important a pilgrim destination as Rome, Gelmírez believed that he had the right to rule his archbishopric his own way (Castro 262). In addition to Compostela’s clergy’s rebellious nature there was also a strong resistance, and in other parts of Europe, to the abolition of concubinage and excessive drinking. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) convened in order to seek solutions to these problems and to create uniformity within Church ranks.

⁵ In the text Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader, a chapter has been dedicated to the decrees established at the Fourth Lateran Council. These highlights have been translated into English. There are many canons covered, ranging from amendments made to Church doctrine to establishing rules for rebellious clerics. Canon 21 reads as follows,

All the faithful of both sexes shall after they have reached the age of discretion [i.e., fourteen] faithfully confess their sins at least once a year to their own [parish] priest and perform to the best of their ability the penance imposed, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the eucharist, unless penance at the advice of their own priest they may for a good reason abstain for a time from its reception; otherwise they shall be [barred from entering] the church during life and deprived of Christian burial in death (11).
possible moment, before death. This delay in the confession of sins and a monitored Canonical Penance did not allow parish priests to keep a close eye on their flock and as a result they were unable to separate the loyal Christians from any possible heretics within their parish (Gurevich 79).

In the early centuries of the Church, clerics justified the singular serving of a Canonical Penance with the sacrament of baptism, as it was only permitted once during each Christian’s lifetime. The reasoning behind this practice was that the Christian could only be baptised once with Christ in His death in order to become a new creation (Romans 6: 3-4). To repeat this sacrament would be sacrilege and was considered unthinkable. As Enrica Julia Ardemagni notes, the harshness and often embarrassing public penance began with the penitent wearing the *cilicium*, a special penitential dress made from goat’s hair, followed by other severe exclusions from all social activity.

As the penitent was excluded from the faithful, he had to sit at the back of the church. He was recognized by a special penitential dress made of goat’s hair, known as the *cilicium*: it symbolized his separation from the sheep of Christ’s flock. The *cilicium* was sprinkled with ashes, which commemorated Adam’s expulsion from Paradise. During the penance, men’s heads were kept shaven, and women’s were veiled; bathing was forbidden. The penitential exercises included fasting, prayers, almsgiving and an open demonstration of sorrow by weeping. The penitent also had to suffer the renunciation of pleasures of the body and mind, curtailing sleep, and abstaining from sexuality and the pursuit of worldly honors. (Ardemagni 13)

The confession done under this system did not completely erase the sin from the memory of the Church, as the clergy imposed certain permanent restrictions on the penitent. Depending on the nature of the sin, the penitent could not enter the clergy, could not hold public office, could not belong to the military, could not marry, and if they were married, they were denied their conjugal rights (14). These severe restrictions and the ones we have seen above were the reasons why most parishioners chose to postpone their Canonical Confession until the very last moments of their lives.
In *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, Aron Gurevich shows that the parish in medieval Europe played a crucial role in enforcing the penitential exercises of those who were undergoing a Canonical Penance. Although the priest heard his flocks’ confessions and did not break his vow of secrecy, his parishioners were equal participants in the completion process of the confessed subject’s penance.

Parishioners were kept under strict control by their parish priest. But there was also a collective social control in the community. D. Sumption (1976) registered that the notion that everybody’s sin was a common concern of all the parishioners was a tacitly accepted premise among medieval people. Of course, almost the whole life of every villager passed in front of the eyes of his fellow-parishioners, who kept a close watch on one another. (79) In other words, all parishioners were responsible for the salvation of a member of their community. In addition to supervising the penitent, parishioners were also indirectly responsible for helping the priest monitor all occult practices and pagan traditions which could put in danger the souls of his flock (79). While the parishioners were viewed as helpers in monitoring the penitent, they were also responsible for the conservation of certain “pagan” practices in a now Christianized culture. Gurevich addresses this religious syncretism in popular medieval Catholicism by looking at the contents of penitential manuals. These manuals tell of some pagan superstitions related to the harvest, magical practices and healings, love magic, and fertility magic, but also of certain funerary rituals. In one case he mentions that a slain man was buried with ointment in his hand because the townspeople believed that it could heal his wound after death (87). He states that “this was no reference to the resurrection of the body, but rather an assumed active life after death” (87). Although parishioners were regular church-goers and participated fervently in Church rituals, popular superstitions and remedies still existed which the Church feared could lead to the corruption of its flock. Some of these “pagan” elements were never successfully removed from Catholicism and were even incorporated into its own rites and
iconographies. Examples of the survival of these elements can be found in the cults of the saints, of the Virgin Mary and in the flagellant movement of the fourteenth century. These individuals believed that by martyring their bodies, they could remove the sins from their communities and thus stop the spread of the Black Death.

The creation of Canon 21 resulted in a more “forgiving” penance for the Christian as the yearly confession at Easter-time allowed them to serve penance during Lent and thus be restored to the flock by Easter Sunday. Depending on the degree of contriteness for the sin and its severity, the confessor determined the length of time that the penance would be served and the appropriate exercises. While allowing priests to keep a close control over their flock with frequent confessions and lighter penances, they were able to detect and direct their attention to parishioners who were in danger of becoming heretics, as well as saving souls. Even though Canon 21 permitted more opportunities for confessions, Canonical Penance still existed in the thirteenth century and can be observed in texts like the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. With the decree that all Christians should confess their sins at least once a year, writers and mendicant preachers stressed the urgency of confession. In keeping with the thirteenth-century Church’s official discourse on penance and confession after the Fourth Lateran Council, Berceo shows in *milagro XX*, “De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el Diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo”, his protagonist’s high degree of contrition.

In the text, Berceo clearly outlines the steps required for a Canonical Confession when the protagonist, Teófilo, signs a contract with Satan in order to improve his position in the Church and thus increase his social influence. Teófilo’s sin is of the worst nature as he denied God and the Virgin Mary and pledges his allegiance to Satan. His situation is precarious as his sin will surely condemn his soul to the eternal fires of Hell if he should die without confession and penance.
According to Ardemagni in *The Influence of Penitential Documents on Medieval Spanish Literature*, the first step in the process of Canonical Penance is the realization of the nature of the sin committed and the sinner's degree of contrition. Berceo shows Teófilo's anguish, followed by tears, at recognizing the gravity of his sin: his denial of God and of the Virgin Mary. In addition to the shedding of tears, he inflicts himself with blows to the head (Stanzas 852-53). The second step in a Canonical Penance is to confess one's sin in a detailed manner before their community, which Teófilo accomplishes. The third step is to undergo a penitential exercise, imposed by a priest, and completed in an allotted time frame. Since Teófilo had previously fasted and martyred his body to regain the Virgin Mary's favour and intercession (Stanza 852), he does not require more penitential exercises. Although Teófilo's penance was arranged and overseen by the Virgin, he has to confess his guilt to his parish and is required to produce the contract that he signed with Satan and to burn it in front of all the townspeople. The fourth and final step in a Canonical Penance involves the sinner receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist and being fully accepted back into the fold, which Teófilo and his community celebrate with great joy. And as in most cases of Canonical Penance,

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6 Ardemagni quotes Thomas N. Tentler's *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* as the source for the descriptions made of each step to a proper confession according to the Fourth Lateran Council's Canon 21.

7 All references taken from the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are from Michael Gerli's edition which was printed by Cátedra in 1996.

Fizo su confession pura e verdadera  
Cómo fizo su vida de la edat primera  
Descend cómo envidia lo sacó de carrera  
Que lo fizo cegar de extranna manera.

[...]  
Rendieron todos gracias, mugieres e varones,  
Fizieron grandes laudes e grandes processiones,  
Plorando de los ojos, dizieron oraciones  
a la Madre gloriosa, buena todas sazones  
(Stanza 879-891)

8 Desent mando el bispo fazer muy grand fogueira,  
veyéndolo el pueblo que en la iglesia era;  
Echó aquesta carta dentro de la calera,  
Arrió tomó cenisa pargamino e cera.  
(Stanza 894)
which were reserved until the last moments of an individuals’ life, Teófilo dies three days later purified from his great sin (Stanzas 894-895) and with the renewed favour of the Virgin Mary, his intercessor before Christ in the Judgment.

The Black Death: Changes Attitudes toward Death

From 1347 to 1349 the Black Death swept through Europe with great force and eliminated a third to half of the population.\(^9\) As a result of this mass devastation to medieval society, the Church preached the Salvation message with even more fervour than before. Before the Plague, an individual’s death had usually taken place peacefully in the family home with the counsel and the administration of the last sacraments by the parish priest.\(^10\) Burials were carried out shortly after the Christian’s death in the parish cemetery provided that they had not been excommunicated or if they had died while on pilgrimage. Laura Vivanco states in *Death in Fifteenth Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elite* that information on the burial customs of late-medieval Spain’s lay hierarchy is difficult to obtain since it is mostly confined to the nobility or to the clergy (39). According to her, there were two forms of testaments in late-medieval Castile: those that were spoken and those that were written. Since a spoken testament is not usually preserved over time, unless it was later recorded by a priest, little is known about this tradition. Vivanco notes that most individuals who had oral testaments were members of the *laboratores* class; being unable to write, they were forced to speak their will to a priest or notary (39). As a result, the information that we possess regarding the burial traditions of medieval Spain is reduced to a specific and privileged

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\(^9\) It remains unclear how much of Europe’s population was wiped out by the Black Death, however most historians agree that it was either a third of the population or as high as half of the population during the peak years (1347-1349). Because of other factors which coincided with this phenomenon, such as wars and famines, and poor records, it has been difficult to determine the exact number of people affected by the Plague itself.

\(^10\) O’Connor states that before the creation of the *De Scientia Mortis* in the fifteenth century, which we will look at later in this chapter, priests still counselled the dying; however, an established system had not yet been determined.
level of Spanish society. The testaments provide interesting facts of where these men and women wished their bodies to be buried, how their corpses should be handled and transported if they had died outside their parish, how their assets should be divided, and who would inherit these material goods.

Agostino Paravicini Bagliani states in “The Corpse in the Middle Ages” that monarchs and important Church leaders sometimes left specific instructions in their testaments on the removal of their entrails from the body and that their flesh be separated from the bones, so that each could be buried elsewhere (329-30). The dismemberment of the corpse was followed by boiling it in a mixture of wine and spices until the bones turned white and could be easily separated from the flesh. This disturbing practice was common throughout Europe until September 27, 1299 when Pope Boniface VIII condemned it in the decree “Detestande feritatis” and threatened excommunication of anyone who violated the dictate (333). Paravicini Bagliani states that Godfrey of Fontaines believed that only the bodies of the saints could be divided “for the common good” (333). Before this decree, the dismemberment of a corpse was a common and preferred practice among the nobility that spread to all parts of Europe. Some nobles defied the pope’s decree and were dismembered for their burial(s). In order not to disturb the decomposition process of a noble who had been buried away from his requested final resting place, an exhumation of the bones could take place once the full decomposition had occurred. The exhumation of bones and placing them in an ossuary was a popular option and became a common practice that solved the problem of overcrowding in the cemeteries, as was the case in the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris.

Philippe Ariès states in Western Attitudes toward Death that the medieval person experienced a taboo-free familiarity with death and thus they accepted it as a natural process of life
without any fear. Although the death of an individual in the early Middle Ages had generally taken place in the home, surrounded by family, friends and a parish priest, we cannot suppose that the individual did not fear their physical death or for the Last Judgment which would take place afterwards. Huizinga notes that the mendicant preachers’ sermons of the terrors of death coupled with the powerful representation of death as a decaying corpse or as a skeleton, allowed the “late medieval mind [to] see no other aspect of death than that of decay” (156). Michel Vovelle criticizes Ariès on what he believes to be a poor generalization and argues that the fear of death is innate and cannot be avoided since our very human nature rejects death and fights to live (Vovelle 4-5). In Judeo-Christian belief, the first encounter between death and humans appears in the Creation Story in the book of Genesis. To create man, God formed him from dust and He breathed the ruah, the soul, into Adam to give him life. The breath of God within his creation is what gave Adam and Eve a divine characteristic, and up until their sin, the ability to live forever. When God cautioned Adam not to eat from the forbidden fruit, he explained that the penalty for his disobedience would be death (Genesis 2:17). God punished Adam and Eve, and their descendants, with death as a result of their defiance, thus claiming back His holy breath. Upon death, humanity experiences a separation of the body from the soul as the body returns to dust and the soul returns to God for judgment.

11 Ariès states that the taboo of dying in the family home surrounded by one’s family began in the eighteenth century and has progressed with time. Exposing children to a dying grandparent for example, is now considered taboo and should never take place. In order to avoid offending one’s family with one’s death has led to displacing the dying person to a neutral and sanitary place such as a hospital to die alone (87).

12 A person dying surrounded by his family and friends was a regular occurrence up until the creation of the Ars moriendi tradition in the fifteenth century. The Ars moriendi requested the exclusion of these living “temptations” in the final moments of the person’s (moriens) life as these people could lead moriens to sin and thus condemn him/her to an unfavourable afterlife.

13 I have adapted Huizinga’s statement for grammatical flow in my sentence. It should read “late medieval mind could see no other aspect of death than that of decay” (156).

14 The King James Version states: “And the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis 2:7)
The medieval Church believed that the soul would undergo a pre-judgment which would help determine its “holding” place (Hell, Purgatory and Heaven) until the day of the Last Judgment when it would be judged by Christ (according to the book of Revelation) and be placed in the lake of fire or in Heavenly Paradise. In the preliminary judgment those who had been exceptionally bad were condemned to hell while those who had led exemplary lives became saints. The saints were classified as the “special dead” since they held unusual powers and were able to perform miracles on Earth (even though they were physically dead) while accessing Heaven during their duties as mediators on behalf of humans. Since most people did not belong to either category, their souls waited in Purgatory until the Last Judgment when Christ would determine their final placement; the reeking lake of fire where Satan and his demons would be condemned and tormented for all eternity (Revelation 20:14; Revelation 21: 8) or the Heavenly Jerusalem where the soul would spend a peaceful and joyous eternity (Revelation 21: 9-Revelation 22: 5). The fear of physical death is therefore natural and justified since there was always a possibility of obtaining a frightening and irreversible outcome in the Last Judgment. Since souls were weighed according to deeds and faith, prayers and alms offered by relatives and the clergy on behalf of the soul in Purgatory or the deceaseds’ accumulation of indulgences throughout their living years, did not always guarantee that Christ would judge them in a positive light in the Judgment (Illustration 1.2).

15 According to John Bowker in The Meanings of Death in Judaism, the soul is returned to God when an individual dies and the body is kept in a “holding” place, Sheol, until it will be raised to life again. Sheol is a cool, dark place that does not permit communication between the body and God (50-52).

16 In Berceo’s Milagro X, the “Los dos hermanos”, Stanza 251, Pedro, a cardinal in the service of the pope, was guilty of avarice (a mortal sin) when he died, therefore his soul went to Purgatory. There it asked for the pope to say mass for him.

Mas si el apostólico con la su clerecía
cantasse por mí misa solamientre un día,
fió en la Gloriosa, madre Sancta Marí,
que me darí Dios luego alguna mejoría.
The artistic representation of death prior to the Plague can best be exemplified by the carvings done on the stone sarcophagi of nobles and high-ranking Church representatives. The effigy of the deceased was carved in a sleeping state to represent the Scriptural promise of the resurrection of the dead with the second triumphant return of Christ as Judge (Illustration 1.1). The Old and New Testament each promise that the dead will someday rise again and be reunited with the soul. The resurrection of the dead is recorded in the Bible in several instances. In the New Testament, Christ, the Saviour and the Conqueror of Death, brings Lazarus back to life four days after his death (John 11: 43-44). The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the first sign of Christ’s power over Death. Since Christ was raised from death three days after His crucifixion and ascended to Heaven with His earthly body, Christ showed that He was the conqueror of Death and thus the Scriptural promise was fulfilled; that His followers will rise from the dead like Lazarus when they are called in the Last Judgment.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15: 20-26)

The promise of the resurrection of the dead chronicled in the Apostle Paul’s epistles, in Christ’s second coming, and the Apostle John’s visions of the Last Judgment in the book of Revelation were stressed by the clergy in order to prepare the living for their physical death since the avoidance of the spiritual death could only be achieved in life.

The unknown moment of one’s own death or of Christ’s return as predicted in the New Testament became an important element in the message of salvation and reminded the parishioner that a pure life and frequent confessions would bring just rewards in the Last Judgment.
In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15: 52-57)

The concept of raising of the dead and Christ’s thousand year rule on Earth were used to inspire Christians to live well, yet at the same time permitted the Church to emphasize a negative element that the Judgment would be fair and could condemn a Christian’s soul. As a result it was imperative for every believer to receive the last sacraments before their death and to confess all sins which could contribute to their eternal damnation. Final Judgment scenes on church murals, such as the one found in Salamanca’s old cathedral (Illustration 1.2) represented the terrifying reality of what could happen to the soul that did not die in Christ’s favour.

José Fernández Ubiña notes in “Orígenes y tendencias del milenarismo cristiano” that most of the sources about the Last Judgment that the Church relied upon for its interpretations and production of sermons and texts came from two sources: the Apostle John’s book of Revelation and the apocalyptic writings of the Old Testament (158-59). The book of Revelation outlines how the end of the world is to take place with the return of Christ as Judge. According to this biblical book, Satan and his demons, humanity’s mortal enemies since the fall of Adam and Eve, will be cast into a reeking lake of fire and sulphur because of their deceiving nature, where they will be tormented for all eternity. The souls of their followers will be judged for their sins and for their misguided faith, and also be cast down to the same lake (Revelation 20:10). Since Revelation is considered to be the most complicated biblical text to interpret because of its symbolic passages of what will take place in the Last Judgment and in the Last Days, it has provided countless artists and preachers with ample material for their crafts (Binski 174). Hell is a greatly flawed and
terrifying place which emulates the ugliness of Lucifer’s sin. Because of his sin, which is repulsive in God’s sight, he could no longer be the most beautiful archangel and consequently was transformed into a horrifying creature associated with darkness, disorder, noise, foul smell, fire and terror. The book of Revelation, like the other prophetic biblical texts, does not give a specific outline of when these events will occur nor does it decode the complex symbols for us. In keeping with its difficulty and cryptic nature, the book of Revelation has provoked controversy and differing interpretations among Church scholars.

When the Black Death (1347) appeared in Europe, coinciding with the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), and famines due to disastrous problems with crop rotation and weather, people believed that the End Times and Last Judgment were upon them. The problems which were befalling Europe and which had not appeared on such a grand scale before were alarmingly similar to the signs which the clergy had predicted in their sermons and texts for the End Times. In order to seek God’s forgiveness and mercy for the sins they had committed and those of their society, the flagellants made their mark as a popularly-supported phenomenon which occurred in the Northern countries. These men and women, wearing sackcloth, walked along the trails of Europe in large groups as if on pilgrimage from town to town flagellating, themselves in the hope that God would

Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, thus saith the Lord God, Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore will I cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be anymore.

17 Ezekiel 28: 11-19 tells of Lucifer’s sin and eventual fall. Lucifer was cast out of Heaven because of his pride and because he started a rebellion against God.
withdraw his punishment for their sins. The best known cases of flagellants in Europe were from the Lowland states, Belgium in particular. Although the Church supported penance in a public manner, it did not support the flagellant movement since it was not imposed by its priests, could not be regulated properly, and could lead to superstition. These penitent men and women were certain that their efforts would serve as pleas to God that He would have mercy for their sins and forgive them and in time, stop the spread of the Plague.

The "punishment" of the Black Death was visible in its horrible symptoms: fevers, vomiting and buboes. People who died of the plague were believed to have been guilty of sin and consequently had been punished in a severe physical manner. The population began diminishing quickly and therefore a problem arose from the demand for burials in church cemeteries. Parish cemeteries filled up quickly and therefore new cemeteries on church lands had to be consecrated (Blanco 38). In many cases the deaths were too numerous to provide each person with their own grave so mass graves had to be excavated to accommodate the decaying corpses. Priests were unable to meet the rapidly increasing demand of the people for the administration of the Last Sacraments, and therefore many individuals died without confession and without the certainty that they would reach Heaven. As a result of the horrifying reality of the Black Death, the artistic representation of death changed from an individual sleeping peacefully to a terrifying skeleton or a decomposing cadaver.

The Triumph of Death and the Genesis of the Danza general de la Muerte

The early artistic representations of Death appeared in Books of Hours, Psalters and in church paintings with the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead (Binski 135). This legend puts in visual form a dialogue between three young and healthy noblemen and three corpses in different
stages of decomposition. The noblemen meet the corpses while hunting in a forest, a place associated with mystery and probabilities of danger, as this place is away from the safety of their parish. The three corpses reveal to the noblemen that they are their mortal equivalents thus forcing the viewer or reader to ponder on their own mortality. The encounter with something unwanted and supernatural away from the safety of one’s community reminded the viewer that death could arrive at any moment.

It is unknown when the *Danse macabre* tradition appeared in Europe; however most critics believe that it originated in the early fifteenth century in France. The painted murals of the *Danse macabre* in the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris are believed to be the first visually artistic representations of what would arguably become the best-known written and plastic tradition of the late medieval European period. Huizinga describes the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris as an important gathering place in which markets were set up and celebrations took place (170). He states that hundreds of people would walk through the grounds and be exposed to the horrifying paintings of the *Danse macabre* which portrayed a skeleton (death) leading away its victims, who were representatives of the clerical and the lay hierarchies (165). Death’s victims were called to participate in his dance in descending hierarchical order and alternating between the clergy and the laity. The message preached in these images was the equality of all humans in death, no matter what their rank had been in life. The frescoes of the Cemetery of the Innocents (1424), which were in the atrium and close to the charnel houses, are believed to have inspired the written commentary in verse of the characters in each scene of the murals. This commentary would later be printed in

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18 The forest was believed to be a portal of the supernatural on Earth and therefore encounters with fabled beings or with demons was possible. An encounter with fairies and fabled beasts was assured in stories of errant knights who were hunting in the forest, as can be seen in some of Marie de France’s *Lais*. In the case of Gonzalo de Berceo’s *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, the forest presented dangers for all travellers who chose to enter it; generally demons (in some cases disguised as people or as saints) appeared to the traveller and attempted to misguide his soul. The encounter of a human with supernatural creatures in the forest was a topos in both courtly and clerical literature.
1485 by Guyot Marchant with woodcut engravings of the images depicted in the Cemetery of the Innocents.\footnote{We must note that the Danse macabre text printed by Guyot Marchant is anonymous like its European contemporaries. Guyot Marchant also printed a version of the De arte bene vivendi beneque moriendi tractatus by Jacob de Juterbogk, an early manual of the Ars moriendi tradition (Saugnieux 38).} Joël Saugnieux states that before the paintings of these famous frescoes and the text by Marchant, Jean, the Duque of Berry, had the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead sculpted in stone on the church’s portal in 1408 (17-18). The Danse macabre spread through Europe in written and plastic forms and in some cases initiated variations to the original form. Huizinga notes, as does Saugnieux, that Guyot Marchant printed a female version of the Danse macabre with verses by Martial d’Auvergne (Huizinga 167, Saugnieux 22). The Danse des femmes, as the title implies, has all female characters and emphasized the theme of the decaying of physical beauty. The women portrayed in this text were representatives of the life cycle of a woman: maiden, beloved, bride, newlywed, and expectant.\footnote{While the French Danse macabre does not have any female characters, the Danza general de la Muerte, the Spanish version of the text, has several female characters. The first victims that will be claimed by Death are two damsels. Like the Danse des femmes, the characters are portrayed young and beautiful and will be converted into ugly creatures that will have to trade in their latest gowns for a decomposing corpse (lines 73-80). It is interesting to note that Death in the Spanish text is female while in the Danse macabre it is male.} Unlike most European countries that produced murals and statuary of the Danse macabre, Spain did not produce a concrete artistic representation of the Danse macabre, it only produced a written tradition. The earliest Spanish version of the Danse macabre dates to the early fifteenth century: the Danza general de la Muerte. Although this text is the only surviving medieval manuscript of a Danse macabre in Castilian,\footnote{There is another Danza de la Muerte manuscript in Castilian; however it was printed in Seville in 1520. This sixteenth-century text, unlike the medieval version, includes a more extensive list of characters. This list includes different tradesmen, such as a surgeon, a lawyer, a physician, a moneylender, a porter, an herbalist, a silversmith, and a tavern owner. There is another medieval manuscript of the Danza de la Muerte, but it was written in Catalan in 1497 by Miguel Carbonell. Each of these texts has been reprinted in Joël Saugnieux’s Les Danses Macabres de France et d’Espagne et leurs prolongements littéraires.} its source text has proven to be impossible to trace.
Spain's lack of artistic representations of the *Danse macabre* in murals and in statuary, and the difference in content between the *Danza general de la Muerte* and the *Danse macabre*, have led some hispanists to claim that the *macabre* tradition in Spanish is from a learned background compared to the French text (Álvarez Pellitero 17), and dating before the *Danse macabre* printed by Marchant (Solá Solé 309). The evidence to supplement Solá-Solé’s claim that the *macabre* tradition was present in the Iberian Peninsula before other parts of Europe resides in the chronicle of King Fernando de Antequera’s coronation celebrations by Alvar García de Santa María (1414), in the “Ad mortem festinamus” of the *Lliber Vermell* (c. XIV Century) and in the Maundy Thursday procession of Verges. It is not my intention to prove or disprove his theory; however, it is interesting to note that the character of Death (a skeleton) appears in Alvar García de Santa María’s account of the coronation banquet of King Fernando de Antequera in Navarra in one of the evening’s *entremeses*. Because the coronation ceremony was in 1414, it is believed that the *macabre* tradition must have been present in the Iberian Peninsula in popular oral tradition long before the early fifteenth century. In the chronicle, a person dressed as Death performs a *danse macabre* for the royal audience and sets his sight on the court jester, Mosén Borrá. The jester, who is Death’s chosen victim, at the request of the Duke of Gandía, is filled with terror at the sight of its yellow skin and skull. Mosén Borrá screams and weeps as he unsuccessfully attempts to escape from Death’s grasp and is dragged away to the heavens. This theatrical representation coincides

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22 The French version which, like the legend of the *Three Living and the Three Dead*, counterpoints the living character with its deceased equivalent “le mort” but, as we see in the Spanish version, “La Muerte” is the same character to visit all its victims, and remains unchanged. In addition to these differences, social differences appear in the Spanish version since two characters are added to the list of death’s victims: the rabbi (*rabí*) and the imam (*alfaqi*), which demonstrates Spain’s uniqueness of cohabitation of ethnicities.

23 The account to which I am referring was reprinted in N. D. Shergold’s *A History of the Spanish Stage: From Medieval Times until the End of the Seventeenth Century*. The manuscript is housed at the *Bibliotheque Nationale* in Paris (MS. Esp.104).

E en esa sazon tenia el rrey de aragon un alvardan que dezian mosen borra e este hera muy graciosoa que no dezia mal de ninguno salvo que tenia gracia que le davan todos los cavalleros bien de vestir e plata e oro e dineros en manera que su fazienda hera llegada en grand rrenta pero hera omne de bien pequeno de cuerpo e
with the skeletal representation of Death in the *Danse macabre* frescoes, the text by Marchant, as well as the written descriptions in the *Danza general de la Muerte*.

¡O, homne mesquino!, que en grand ceguedad
Anduve en el mundo, non parando mientes
Cómo la muerte, con sus duros dientes,
Roba a todo omne de cualquier hedad

(Lines 157-160)

Yo vi muchas danças de lindas doncellas,
De duennas hermosas de alto linaje;
Mas, segunt me paresçe, no es ésta d’ellas,
Ca el thanedor trahe feo visaje

(Lines 201-204)

Yo era abastado de plata y de oro,
De nobles palacios e mucha folgura;
Agora la muerte, con su mano dura,
Tráheme en su dança medrosa sobrejo.

(Lines 219-223)

The descriptions of Death’s hard teeth, ugly face and bony hand leave a horrifying impression. Most of the characters that are faced with Death in the *Danza* express terror at her ugliness and in an attempt for pity, plead with her for forgiveness and more time to repent for their sins. Like the other *macabre* texts, Death does not pity its victims and chastises them for their lack of preparedness. Moreover Death remarks that she is not concerned for her victims’ loss of social standing and thus shows her ability to equalize all humans.

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bien gramatico e su renta dezian que hera mill e quinientos florines cada año afuera de muchas ropa e joyas que el tenia e este alvordan estava en la sala do comia la señora reyna e quando vino la muerte en la nube segund que fizo al rey segund que diximos mostrava grand espanto en la ver e dava grandes bozes a la muerte que no veniese e por ende el duque de Gandia envio decir al rey que estava en una ventana mirando el comer de la reyna que quando la muerte descendiese e el dieze bozes que el lo llevaria de yusio e que mandase a la muerte que le echase una soga e que lo subiria consygo e fue echo asy e quando la muerta salio en la nube ante la mesa comenzó mosen borra a dar bozes e el duque lo lleva alla de yuso e la muerte hecho la cuerda e ataron la al cuerpo al dicho borra e la muerte lo guindo arriba, aquí verdades maravillas de las cosas que mosen borra fazia e del llorar e del gran miedo que le tomava e subiendo fizo sus aguas en sus paños que corrió en las cabeças a los que yuso heran que bien tenia que lo llevavan al ynfiero e el señor rey miraba e obo gran plazer el e los que vieron e mosen borra fue en poder de la muerte a los cielos (121).
An earlier account used to justify the Spanish origin of the *macabre* tradition is the “Ad mortem festinamus” piece in the fourteenth-century musical manuscript of the *Lliber Vermell*. In the “Ad mortem festinamus” we find the same message of the brevity of life, the brief triumph of Death over life and Death’s piteless nature.

Vita brevis breviter  
in brevi finietur  
mors venit velociter 
quae neminem veretur.  
Omnia mors perimit  
et nulli miseretur.²⁴

It is interesting to note that Jordi Savall, the director of Hespèrion XX’s performance of the *Lliber Vermell de Montserrat*, explains in his introduction booklet to the CD that the “Ad mortem festinamus” is written in the form of a *virelai*. According to Savall, this form which is believed to have originated in Northern Africa and entered France by way of Spain, is re-introduced to Spain by means of the Provençal troubadours (4). Savall does not explain the origins of the “Ad mortem festinamus” but there are clear similarities in its doctrinal discourse with the *Danza general de la Muerte*, in that it stresses the importance of confession, equality in death, and being prepared for the Last Judgment, which is most likely tied to the enforcement of Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

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²⁴ The English translation of the passage from the “Ad mortem festinamus” is taken from page 21 of the *Lliber Vermell de Montserrat* CD’s booklet. The recording was done by Hespèrion XX under the directing of Jordi Savall. It reads as follows.

Short life shortens  
and shortly ends;  
death comes quicker  
than anyone thinks.  
Death destroys all  
and pities no one.
The final theatrical representation of Death which is believed to have originated in medieval times is the Maundy Thursday procession of Verges. The town of Verges in Gerona, Spain, is well-known for its procession in which people dressed as Death (skeletons holding different symbols of death – hourglasses, clocks, and scythes) dance to a marked beat down the town’s streets. The Dansa de la mort, which appears as part of the Holy Week events in Verges is said to be a component of the Passion play by Fra Antoni de Sant Jeroni.25 The Dansa de la mort has similar elements with the theatrical representation of Death in the entremés from Fernando de Antequera’s coronation banquet, as they both involve skeletons. However, the procession at Verges differs from the coronation banquet in its performance as the skeletons dance to a structured rhythm and do not interact with the spectators. In the late fifteenth century and in the sixteenth century a few more versions of the dance of death were written in Spain, such as the one in Catalan by Miguel Carbonell, Suite de la danse macabre (1497) and then the La dança de la Muerte of 1520 in Castilian.26

Since most of Spain’s macabre texts are from the North-Eastern part of the country, in the areas of Navarra and Cataluña, it is difficult to agree with Solá-Solé and Álvarez Pellitero that the macabre tradition originated in Spain and was widespread. Since there are few surviving manuscripts and printed versions of the Danza de la Muerte, no plastic artistic representations, or documentation to chronicle its readings or further theatrical productions elsewhere in Spain, we cannot state that it was a strong tradition and that it had a wide diffusion, as it did in the Northern countries. Since there is no written documentation about the history of the Danza general de la

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25 Most websites that discuss the Verges procession credit Fra Antoni de Sant Jeroni as the creator of the Passion play (1773) in which the “Dansa de la mort” appears. According to the website (www.cultura.gencat.net/cpctf/festes/FixaFesta.aspx?IdPack=2&IdPildora=110) on August 17, 2006, Fra Antoni de Sant Jeroni adapted his play from medieval sources. The website mentions Miguel Carbonell’s medieval Suite de la danse macabre (1497) as one of the sources for this friar’s adaptation.

26 This version in Castilian was printed by Juan Varela on January 20, 1520 according to the colophon.
Muerte, it could have been transmitted orally owing to Navarra’s and Cataluña’s geographic proximity to France; much in the same way as troubadour songs were transmitted. Álvarez Pellitero suggests in “La Danza de la Muerte entre el sermon y el teatro” that the Danza de la Muerte shows sufficient evidence in its syllabic structure and composition to possess “una marca de peculiaridad culta o semiculta” (17).

Because cultural and textual exchanges were common in ecclesiastical circles, and since many members of the clergy could read and write Latin, the Danza general de la Muerte could have been brought to the Iberian Peninsula in this language before being translated into Castilian and Catalan. She argues that the main difference between the Castilian version and the French and Catalan versions is the syllabic structure. Because the Castilian text possesses twelve-syllable monorrimic stanzas that were typical of the learned religious poetry of Spain in the fifteenth century, it was not as “popular” in tone and construction as the French and Catalan versions which employed octo-syllabic verses (17). As I will explain in the next section, it is my belief that the Danza general de la Muerte was read and not performed, thus suggesting a learned origin and making its background less likely to be from an oral source and more from a textual one. The Danza general de la Muerte appears at a crucial moment when the clergy was trying to reform its hierarchy and while it was recuperating from the horrors of the Black Death, thus prompting a revival in the attempt to save as many souls as possible from the second death.

Who was the Danza general de la Muerte’s Intended Audience? How and Why Did its Message Evolve?

The Danza general de la Muerte and a new familiarity with death helped the clergy to concentrate on preaching to its faithful the message of salvation and the urgency of confession in order to be spiritually prepared for death’s unexpected arrival, and therefore avoid the death of the soul.
Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council had stressed the importance of frequent confession and consequently was preached fervently by the clergy since its promulgation in the thirteenth century. With the new uncertainty caused by the events of the fourteenth century, the Church was badly in need of a new and rapid solution for confession in order to avoid losing the souls of the faithful to the fiery lake referred to in the book of Revelation. The new discourse of salvation focused on the importance of being prepared and to maintain loyalty to the saints and the Virgin Mary to avoid a bad death. The *Danza general de la Muerte* (Ms b IV, fols 109r-129r) was recorded in manuscript form and was bound together with Rabbi Shem Tov’s *Proverbios*, the *Revelación de un Hermitaño* and the *Tractado de la doctrina*. The *Danza* was compiled with these other religious texts thus suggesting that it was for a more learned audience and therefore we can assume that it was read by a small elite, probably of clerical background. The live performance of the written version of the *Danza general de la Muerte* is unlikely as there is no documentation to prove this; however, it is probable that the clergy read the text and used its content as material for their sermons.

Ana María Álvarez Pellitero states that the mendicant orders popularized religious topics, texts and fables in their sermons (21). They stressed the eternal damage that money and earthly possessions could cause to the Christian soul. If we take a close look at the content of the *Danza general de la Muerte* we find that most of its characters are from the ecclesiastical hierarchy and they are not prepared for Death’s arrival. These men are guilty of being seduced by money and are sharply criticized for their greed, thus showing the mendicant order’s condemnation of the corruption that was occurring within the Church’s structure. The *Danza general de la Muerte*, like most dances of death, appeared toward the end of the Middle Ages, a period when the Church was considering major reforms to its structure and religious orders. Since the criticism offered in the verses of the *Danza general de la Muerte* are directed to the abuses of wealth on behalf of certain
clerical characters, it is probable that the text was composed or translated by a member of the mendicant orders.

The rise of popularity among the mendicant preachers, especially the Franciscans, began the process of reforming the laws within these orders and thus returning to a more simple life, away from the wealth that they had begun to accumulate and which they felt had contributed to the decay of their original purpose and to the goals of Christianity (Ricard 26). In keeping with the goals of evangelizing others, the message of salvation became once again a central theme in their literatures and in their deeds. It was imperative to preach the brevity of life and the uselessness of accumulating wealth, which could not leave Earth. Accumulating riches in Heaven should be every Christian’s priority, as stated by St. Paul, and thus guarantee to all Christians a glorious outcome in the Last Judgment. One of the texts that would play an important role in preparing the believer for death was the *Ars moriendi*. It focused on the Church’s official discourse on confession and penance and was used by the mendicants to guide the Christian through the new steps that would guarantee them a good death. By means of these new manuals, the mendicants gained the opportunity to evangelize and save more souls.

**The *Ars moriendi*: the Passport from Life to Paradise**

Although the *Ars moriendi* manuals were composed anonymously in the fifteenth century they are believed to be a product of the Dominican order (Shinners 525), and explain with clear guidelines how a soul could be saved, no matter how grave the sin had been. The structure of the manual contained important information on how to conquer the Enemy’s temptations, appropriate forms of prayers, examples of God’s mercy and His forgiveness by giving examples from the Scriptures and specific steps that should be completed in order to receive the last sacraments. Because of its
concise structure and clear wording, the *Ars moriendi* became an important new component in the administering of the last sacraments as it was the final opportunity for a priest to prepare the individual for a good death. The role of the priest reading the manual was crucial since he had the knowledge and talent to guide his parishioner through each step of the text successfully by making certain that their answers were doctrinally correct and that their affirmations of faith were sincere in order to overcome the Enemy's final temptations. Although the reading of the *Ars moriendi* was conducted by a person skilled in the Church's teachings, the dying person's (*moriens*) salvation depended entirely on their full confession, admission and declarations of faith. They no longer required the vigilance of their community. The *Ars moriendi* instructed its recipient that to die well one had to be aware of the contents found in the text beforehand and thus learn all of the prayers and affirmations of faith. By living a good Christian life as well as being prepared for death and its challenges, they would be able to successfully avoid the devil's temptations.

**The *Ars moriendi*'s Origins**

The *Ars moriendi* tradition was not a spontaneous occurrence, as the Church had always preached salvation and counselled Christians through the process of death. The visit of a priest to the Christian's death-bed was not conducted in the same clear and structured manner which would later be achieved by the reading of the *Ars moriendi*; however, *moriens* was asked to do one or more of the following, depending on what the priest thought was necessary: to reconcile with God by confessing their sin, professing faith in Christ, by praying the Credo or by receiving the sacrament of penance or the *viaticum*. These necessary steps were to be performed during the time that *moriens* was still conscious, as they had to be of sound mind to be heard by God. In extreme cases when the priest could not attend *moriens* on time, he would simply request that they say "Jesus" softly. In the fifteenth century the *Ars moriendi* simplified the process by creating a
formula that everyone could follow. The priest would read from the manual prayers, affirmations of faith and a list of Satan’s final temptations, and reassurances for moriens’ benefit. This brief text was a contrast to the lengthy process of Canonical Penance and the annual confession and penance decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council in Canon 21.

The *Ars moriendi* or *Ars bene moriendi* began to circulate in central Europe shortly after the Council of Constance (1414-1417). Scholars such as O’Connor (1942) believe that the text was recognized there for its usefulness in counselling the dying and that its source text was Jean de Gerson’s “De Scientia Mortis”, a treatise that will be discussed later. From its first *Ars moriendi* version, two texts were generated. Although they were identical in content they differed in length: the longer text begins by the phrase “Cum de praesentis vitae miseria” (CP), and the shorter text begins with the phrase “Quamvis secundum Philosophum” (QS). The *Ars moriendi* became an instant success because of its brevity and also because it covered all of the important steps required for a good death. Owing to its conciseness, it became a favourite text among the clergy as well as the laity and was printed and diffused quickly throughout Europe.27 In order to accommodate all people, literate and illiterate, these manuals were written in the vernacular languages and some included woodcuts of the events covered in the written text. The Spanish *Ars moriendi* or the *Arte de bien morir* derived from the “Cum de praesentis vitae miseria” (CP) version and was translated into Castilian anonymously. The text was edited and printed in Zaragoza by Juan Hurus in 1489. This unique version, titled the *Arte de bien morir*, is housed in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (IQ.b.29). The Spanish version of “Quamvis secundum Philosophum” (QS) was published by his brother, Pablo Hurus, in Zaragoza circa 1479 to 1484, and like the CP version in Oxford, is a unique printed version that contains woodcuts. This particular version of the QS text is conserved

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27 Ildefonso Adeva Martín states that there are more than 318 manuscripts of the *Ars moriendi* and more than 67 incunable editions, not including the woodcut editions or the manuscripts found in Spain (298).
in the library of the El Escorial in Spain (32-V-19) and was bound together with the *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo con las glosas de Hernando del Pulgar*, *Pulgar's Cartas* and *Chaton traducido por Martin García*. The Castilian version of the QS text in this volume of "ethical and moralizing miscellany" is followed by a short confession manual, the *Breve Confessionario*, which was read following the *Arte de bien morir*. Before we look at the contents of the *Ars moriendi* manuals and the Castilian QS version, *Ars moriendi* in more detail, we must consider a text that critics believe to be the source text for all *Ars moriendi* manuals.

Before the *Ars moriendi* revolutionized and simplified the process of dying well, Jean de Gerson, the Dominican chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote the "*De Scientia Mortis*" in 1403, a treatise that was meant to help his students in the art of ministering to and counselling the dying. This text was included as part of a greater work, the *Opusculum Tripartitum*, a manual that outlined specific doctrinal truths and practices of the Church. The "*De Scientia Mortis*" like the *Ars moriendi* emphasized the importance of being prepared for death by learning the four parts which would help *moriens* prepare for death's sudden arrival: 1) the exhortation, 2) the interrogation, 3) the reading of five prayers, and 4) the final observations. In the exhortation, Gerson explains to his reader that *moriens* must be confronted with the reality of their imminent death and should accept it as part of God's Will. *Moriens* was in no manner to be encouraged to believe that there was a possibility of a miraculous recovery. Following the acceptance of their mortality, the priest should interrogate the Christian and lead them to a confession of their sins. Upon hearing their confession, the priest assured *moriens* that forgiveness would be guaranteed.

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28 E. Michael Gerli's comment was taken from his online introduction to an edited version of the *Arte de bien morir*. This edition was also done with his colleague Christopher McDonald. (www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/library/ib/texts/ars/intro.html) on 6 Jun. 2006.

29 Jean Gerson (1363-1429) was a theologian and the chancellor of the University of Paris. He was a disciple of Pierre d'Ailly and he played an important role in the Council of Constance (1415) to mend the schism within the Church. In addition to the *Opusculum Tripartitum*, he was the author of numerous theological works.
and that they should continue to trust in Christ for their soul’s eternal rest. The third part of the text includes five short prayers addressed to God, Christ, the Virgin Mary, the angels and the saints. These prayers requested their mercy and mediation on the Day of Judgment. The fourth and final part required that the priest reading the text have everything ready for moriens’ death. As Ildefonso Adeva Martín notes, the requirements could range from providing the last sacraments to keeping unwanted people from the individual’s death-bed.

These four steps to a good death which are clearly outlined in the “De Scientia Mortis” would later reappear as part of the content of the Ars moriendi manuals. For Gerson it was vital that moriens should not be given any hope of recovering from their illness or death as this could lead them away from the true focus of the text, which was to humbly prepare them for death and to accept God’s Will which would guarantee their forgiveness and eternal salvation.

The Individualization of Death with the Ars moriendi

The Ars moriendi guaranteed salvation to all those who sought it in its reading. Philippe Ariès has written extensively about the change in perceptions on death during the middle ages. He states that the medieval person’s surroundings profoundly influenced how they viewed themselves.

Beginning with the eleventh century a formerly unknown relationship developed between the death of each individual and his awareness of being an individual. Today it is agreed that between the year 1000 and the middle of the thirteenth century “a very important historical mutation occurred,” as a contemporary medievalist, Pacault, expressed it. “The manner in which men applied their thoughts to their surroundings and to their concerns underwent a profound transformation, while the mental processes- the manner of reasoning, of perceiving concrete or abstract realities, and of conceiving ideas- evolved radically. [. . .]
In the mirror of his own death each man would discover the secret of his own individuality. (51-52)

Canonical Penances had been opportunities for the whole Christian community to participate in overseeing an individual’s penance. With the thousands of deaths resulting from the Plague, and the emergence of such texts as the “De Scientia Mortis” and the *Ars moriendi*, a new discourse emerges with regard to an individual’s responsibility in their own soul’s salvation. *Moriens* had to individually answer the *Ars moriendi*’s questions honestly without the support of their family or friends as the text required that they be isolated from all possible distractions in order to be effective in saving their soul. The priest reading the manual to *moriens* facilitated their process of death; however, he was not directly responsible for the answers given during the reading. As Ariès states, the individualization of death resulted from changes in the structuring of the deathbed scene (34). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *moriens* awaited death in a room crowded with friends and family but by the fifteenth century, they were isolated from these individuals and moved to a sickroom to die alone (34). The isolation of *moriens* from their community in the fifteenth century would be the first step in leading up to what our modern-day society expects of death: a “sanitized” passing in the hospital where death can no longer offend the living.

**The Structure of the *Ars moriendi***

As seen, the *Ars moriendi* generated two different versions that in time had their own distinct variants. The longer version, “Cum de praesentis vitae miseria” (CP), was cultivated in clerical circles and most versions are in Latin although there are some in vernacular languages. These learned versions were also known as “Tractatus artis bene moriendi” or as “Speculum artis bene moriendi” and were read and reproduced in monasteries. It is interesting to note that these versions of the CP tradition and of the “De Scientia Moritis” were later taken with the mendicant orders to
New Spain (Nueva España) in the sixteenth century where they were housed in their libraries and used to counsel the Spaniards and to indoctrinate the Nahuas in the Catholic Church's teachings. The texts were used by Christians in the fifteenth century and in the sixteenth century as a mirror to analyze the state of their soul before death. The shorter version, "Quamvis secundum Philosophum" (QS), which usually contained woodcut images from the German School were read and purchased by individuals who were not necessarily from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The woodcut images tell of the supernatural and unseen battle between Heaven and Hell for moriens' soul at their deathbed. The dying man is surrounded by Satan and his army of demons as well as the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, saints and angels. As this version was usually the possession of the laity, it was translated into the vernacular languages of Europe. The Arte de bien morir printed by Pablo Hurus is a version of the QS tradition and contains woodcuts. It states that its purpose is to indoctrinate individuals who were not familiar with Latin so that their souls will not be excluded from the heavenly reward at their death.

Michael Gerli believes that this particular version was available to anyone who was able to read which, according to him, was an "increasing number of literate lay-folk", thanks in part to the Black Death as the nobility and the higher levels of the clerical hierarchy did not suffer that many

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30 Of the many Ars moriendi texts that were brought to Nueva España after the conquest, I was able to locate several that were printed in Spain. Some were translations of sixteenth-century theologians' interpretations of the Ars moriendi, while others were in Latin. A printed version of Jean de Gerson's De Scientia Mortis in Latin dating from 1514 and printed in Zaragoza by Jorge Coco Leutórico is among the collection of doctrinal texts that the Franciscan Order brought to New Spain and which was housed at the library of the Convento Grande de San Francisco. This text is now in the collection of the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City. This text and other Mexican versions of the Ars moriendi tradition will be studied in chapters 4 and 5.

31 The letters in italics appear as they do in the edition by Francisco Gago Jover.
losses to plague. Since this text was printed with pictures, even people who could not read would have access to its message of salvation and how to be prepared for Satan’s attacks. Gerli believes that this guide was a *speculum*, in which *moriens* would be able to see their own souls’ reflection thus prompting their contemplation of Christ’s death in order to save their soul from Satan’s destiny in the lake of fire (www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/library/ib/texts/ars/intro.html).

The reading of the *Arte de bien morir* like other *Ars moriendi* texts emphasizes that *moriens* must be of sound mind during its reading to be able to fight the temptations of the devil. As in other ecclesiastical texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that treated the theme of death, the *Ars moriendi* also warns Christians to make proper arrangements for their death, such as writing a testament, to avoid a bad death. The *Arte de bien morir* begins by quoting St. Augustine and expresses the urgency to protect the soul which is more precious than the body: “Mayor dapño es la perdición de una ánima que de mill cuerpos” (81). Since the death of the soul is irreversible and much more terrifying than the decomposition of the flesh, thus all individuals should be concerned for the state of their soul and be prepared for their deaths. The *Arte de bien morir*, like the “De Scientia Mortis”, states that *moriens* should never expect to recover from their illness, as this is one of Satan’s deceptions and can mislead them into not trusting in God’s Will.

Mas muy pocas vezes alguno se dispone bien quando la muerte le toma súbitamente; porque cada uno piensa de vivir muy largamente, non creyendo que tan aína aya de morir; lo qual es cierto que se faze por instrucción del diablo, por quanto muchos, por tal falsa esperanza engañados, mieren mal dispuestos; por lo qual en alguna manera non se deve dar mucha esperanza al enfermo que conseguirá la salud corporal, ea segund dize un famoso Doctor, Chanciller de París: “Muchas vezes por esta tal falsa consolation e simulada confiância de salud corporal, incurre el ombre en cierta condempnación creyendo que non ha de morir de aquella enfermedad.” (82-83)

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32 I will be using Francisco Gago Jover’s edition of the *Arte de bien morir*, the *Arte de bien morir y Breve confesionario* in this chapter.
In addition to ensuring that moriens accepts their mortality, they are encouraged to follow a series of requirements outlined in the prologue: believe and trust in the articles of faith, belong to the Church and respect its teachings, live a good life and, if they are given the opportunity to recover from their illness, to do a proper penance, to forgive all those whom they had sinned against and to forgive all those who had sinned against them, to return all borrowed things to their rightful owner. After all these requirements were discussed and affirmed with the priest presiding over the reading, he could proceed with administering the sacraments. The Arte de bien morir accentuates that moriens' soul could only be forgiven if their confession was contrite and if they admitted to accepting God's Will (84). Without a clear conscience, Christians would be unable to fight the devil's final temptations.

Instructions for Moriens on How They Can Fight Satan's Final Five Temptations

After the warnings and the outlines for preparing the soul of moriens in the prologue had been completed, the next ten chapters of the Arte de bien morir are divided into five temptations and five inspirations, each of which had woodcuts. The temptations are described in detail and show how the devil intends to deceive the moriens. Because the soul was at its weakest during the process of death or during illness, it was vital to remind individuals to be on guard against Satan's attacks and to reassure them of the power of prayer in the spiritual battle that would take place for their soul. Prayer could bring to moriens' bedside powerful allies such as saints, angels, the Virgin Mary and Christ. Once summoned, these figures remained by moriens' side to protect their soul, in its weakened condition, from the Enemy. The Arte de bien morir clearly outlines the devil's final five temptations and provides five solutions to avoid falling into his trap. The style of argumentation that is used in these chapters of the text follows the same format as the juridical

33 The Arte de bien morir y Breve confessionario gives examples of a Christian life: to sin no more, to no longer offend God, and to not offend one's neighbours (83).
debates which clerical writers employed in their texts (Curtius 1: 106-09, 223-24). The truth in the argument is discovered by means of a convincing comparison between good and evil.

The First Temptation: Placing Doubt on the Christian Faith

The first temptation begins with a reminder that the Christian's faith is “fundamento de todos los bienes e comienço de toda nuestra salud humana” (87) and that without it, Christians cannot be considered to be God’s children, “La fe es principio de la salud de los humanos; sin ésta non puede alguno pertenecer ni ser del número de los fíjos de Dios; sin ésta todo cualquier trabjo del omne es vano e inútile” (87). In other words, without faith human nature could not exist since it is what links humans with God. Upon the conclusion of these statements, the manual presents the devil’s false interpretation and how it is used to deceive moriens. He chides moriens and informs them that their faith, which has been cultivated by the Church and which it claims to be the only salvation of the Christian, is the deception. He puts into doubt the existence of Hell and suggests that everyone will be saved, even murderers and idolaters. No separation will be made between the good and the bad. The narrator warns that, although these statements are argued in a convincing manner, they are false and should not be considered. The devil wants to conquer moriens’ soul but he can only do so if he has their participation. To strengthen moriens through these trials, the Arte de bien morir offers a solution in Paul’s epistle of 1 Corinthians 10:13: “Fie les Dios el qual non consentirá que seáis temptados allende de lo que podréís suffrir et resistir, mas dará gracia e fortaleza de manera, que podáis sostener e aprovechar en ello.” (88)

The First Inspiration: Reinforcing Moriens’ Faith

Immediately following the first temptation, an angel counsels moriens’ weakened soul and reassures them of the truth. It advises individuals to ignore the devil’s false declarations and
reminds them of how he deceived Adam and Eve. The angel encourages moriens to remain strong in their faith and he argues in favour of his point by quoting St. Gregory, “la fe non ha merescimiento a la qual la razón humana da experimento e provança” (89). The angel also quotes Paul from the Epistle to the Hebrews 11:6, “Sin fe non es possible plazer a Dios” (89), and John 3:18 “Aquel que non cree, juzgado es” (89). The angel continues supporting its argument by enumerating biblical characters that showed great faith, for example, the Virgin Mary, Peter, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, and Rahab. The angel advises moriens to be strong in their faith and to place their trust in the Church’s commandments, for it cannot be mistaken, as the devil suggests, because it is guided by the Holy Spirit. If moriens is able to resist Satan’s temptation by reflecting on their faith and by believing Mark 9:22 that “todas cosas son posibles al creyente” (92), their faith will become stronger and better equipped to fight the next four temptations. The Arte de bien morir suggests that by reciting the Credo as many times as possible, following this chapter’s reading, moriens will inevitably force the demons out of their room.

The Devil’s Second Temptation 2: Despair

Once moriens is free from the first temptation they become susceptible to another. The devil is cunning and must find another way to win moriens’ soul as time is quickly expiring and he cannot continue his pursuit once they are dead. As a result, the second temptation is to cause moriens to despair. The text states that Satan will remind the Christian of all the sins they had committed, big and small, and make them doubt of God’s ability to forgive them. The devil will misinterpret Genesis 4:13 purposely to suggest that Cain’s sin, murdering his brother Abel, is unforgivable in God’s sight, “Mayor es la mi maldad que meresca perdón” (93). Because it is human nature to sin and moriens has broken many of the commandments, Satan tries to deceive them into believing that they did not show God enough love or respect in their actions. Therefore, God will not be
merciful toward their soul. The devil mentions that in addition to breaking all the commandments, *moriens* has neglected to take part in the seven works of mercy: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; visit the sick; clothe the naked; give the pilgrim a place to stay, eat and rest; redeem all captives; bury the dead. Since *moriens* is guilty of not fulfilling these obligations, Satan misquotes Matthew 25:41-3 to create a credible argument, “Id malditos en el fuego perdurable. Por quanto yo uve fambre e non me distes a comer; sed uve, et non me distes a bever” (94). Satan also reminds *moriens* from James 2:15 that Christ will judge them for all of their sins and that they will be condemned for their disobedience, “Juizio sin misericordia sera fecho a aquel que fue sin misericordia sobre la tierra” (94) Although the devil is convincing in his argument, the *Arte* states that trusting in God’s mercy and His forgiveness is the key to *moriens’* salvation. If they give into despair, they will surely lose God’s mercy: “Cada uno que es puesto en pecado si de la vania de perdón verdadero desesperare, este tal del todo pierde la misericordia de Dios” (94).

**The Angel’s Second Inspiration on how to Avoid Despair**

The angel’s counter-argument to the devil’s temptation reassures and comforts *moriens* by providing them with a solution to avoid despair. It suggests that by confessing their sins in a contrite manner, God will be merciful and forgive their faults. No sin can escape God’s forgiveness if confessed in the appropriate manner. Falling into despair will guarantee the condemnation of even the most pious individual. To support the angel’s warning, the *Arte* enumerates biblical men and women who had been great sinners but who were forgiven. The text gives examples of how Peter denied Christ but later went on to found the Church and how Paul persecuted the Church before he became an important advocate for Christ. Matthew and Zacchaeus were tax collectors, Mary Magdalene was an adulteress, Mary of Egypt was promiscuous, and the thief who was crucified beside Christ were all terrible sinners; however, they
were forgiven for their faults and came to be exemplary individuals whose lives were transformed because of God’s forgiveness. The angel states that Judas Iscariot’s despair led him to betray Christ and consequently his soul was condemned (97).

Satan’s Third Temptation: Impatience

As *moriens* has been able to resist Satan’s first two temptations successfully with the angel’s guidance, he attacks their soul with impatience. He attempts to convince *moriens* that they do not deserve to agonize during the process of death. God is not merciful and that no matter how grave their sins had been, they do not warrant extreme suffering. The devil suggests that the only compassion that *moriens* is shown comes from their friends and relatives. He reminds them that relatives and friends are only compassionate toward them because they stand to gain from their testament. He argues that these men and women will only grieve for them for a day before taking possession of their inheritance. The *Ars* warns *moriens* that they should not allow themselves to fall into self-pity, despair and impatience, rather they should accept their suffering and death as part of God’s Will. No matter how painful and lengthy the process of death should be, they must never turn away from God.34 Accepting one’s death and suffering will make their soul stronger and contribute to its salvation.

The Angel’s Third Inspiration on How to Remain Patient

The angel argues against the devil’s deception and advises *moriens* to fight against any feelings of impatience or anger as these can lead to alienating themselves from God at this crucial moment in their life. His argument is supported by quoting St. Gregory, who said that patience will save the

34 “Si alguno padesce o recibe la Muerte o enfermedad con dolor e impaciencia e pesar, señal es que non ame a Dios segund deve” (100).
soul and that impatience will destroy the soul (101). *Moriens* should accept their suffering with a
good heart and sound mind and be aware that the suffering endured on earth is only temporary
compared to the suffering that the soul will feel if it is condemned, “Misericordiosamente Dios da
la pena e tribulación temporal, por que non dé después la pena e vengança perdurable” (101).
Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit and therefore *moriens* should wear patience as a shield
against the Enemy’s attacks so that they will be victorious through their temptation. To further
inspire *moriens*, the angel reminds them that Christ and the saints were also patient in their
suffering and that they died well.

The Fourth Temptation of the Devil: Vainglory

Since the devil cannot derail the Christian who has been able to fight against the first three
temptations, he tries to tempt them to fall into sin by spiritual vanity or vainglory. Satan will tempt
the individual by praising their strength in resisting the first three temptations and for carrying out
good deeds in their lifetime. Because their spiritual strength has increased as a result of the reading
of the Arte de bien morir, Satan attempts to deceive *moriens* into believing that their entrance into
Heaven must be guaranteed. They should therefore be ready to accept their crown as they have
proven to be better than others. This cunning deception, by playing on *moriens’* ego, is even more
dangerous than if they had fallen into the first three temptations. Showing pride in their successful
endurance of the devil’s temptations will put the Christian into the same position as Lucifer before
the fall. *Moriens* is reminded that Lucifer was also proud and as a result was transformed from an
archangel to a demon. Vainglory is a grave sin since it makes the individual believe that they are
greater than God, which is impossible, and therefore guarantees their demise.
The Fourth Inspiration on How to avoid Falling into Vainglory

In order to avoid this terrible sin, moriens should heed the advice given in John 15:5 and not be proud of their efforts in resisting the first three temptations since the strength that was required to resist them did not come from within but from God himself, “sin mí non podéis fazer cosa alguna” (107). The angel cautions the Christian and reminds them that only the humble will enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 23: 12, Luke 14: 11). It argues that “El comienzo de toda perdición es soberbia” (109), therefore every believer should be humble. To resist vainglory, moriens should reflect on how Lucifer sinned and on all the angels who rebelled against God and were consequently expelled from Heaven and transformed into demons. These evil creatures will eventually reap eternal punishment for their disobedience and if moriens does not wish to be condemned also, they must avoid pride. The Arte de bien morir notes that the Christian should contemplate and be inspired by the Virgin Mary’s humility as she humbly accepted God’s Will and now she is reaping her reward in Heaven.

The Devil’s Last Temptation: Avarice

The last temptation that Satan will inflict on moriens before their eventual death is avarice, which as the Arte de bien morir warns, should be heeded by all those who possessed wealth in life. Wealth, the manual clarifies, can be economic, material or in relationships. Satan will try to shake the Christian by reminding them of the wealth that they gained in life and make them feel nostalgic for the life they are leaving. This is the last opportunity for Satan to claim the Christian’s soul and so he tries to distract them in their weakened condition before launching this final attack.
The Angel’s Fifth Inspiration: Advice against Avarice

Since Satan’s plan has always been to alienate moriens from God and to blind them with material wealth and nostalgia, the angel must demonstrate that this is the last opportunity for the devil to accomplish his goal. The Christian is asked to remember Christ’s words from Luke 14:26, when he asks that his followers give up their friends and relatives to follow him: “Si alguno viene a mí e non aborresce a su padre e madre e muger e fijos e hermanos e hermanas, aun non puede ser mi discípulo” (113). This statement should guide and strengthen moriens in their final moments since Christ requires complete devotion and attention. The poverty of Christ in his lifetime is also an example to moriens that worldly wealth is unimportant as it is transitory and cannot be enjoyed in the afterlife. Christ says in Matthew 5:3, “Bienaventurados son los pobres de spiritu, porque d’esos es el regno de los cielos” (115), indicating that wealth is not required to be saved. If moriens feels tempted by avarice, they must be reminded that this sin will separate them from God and from His love. In order to reach Heaven, they have to renounce all earthly possessions and be poor in God’s sight.

Final Observations in the Arte de bien morir y Breve confesionario

Once all of the temptations and encouragements have been addressed, the Arte de bien morir concludes by listing some observations that must be met by the recipient of the manual’s reading and by the priest overseeing their process of death. As in Gerson’s “De Scientia Mortis”, moriens is asked to fulfill certain criteria before they can be fully prepared for a good death. After overcoming Satan’s five temptations, and if they are still conscious, the priest should ask them to pray to God, begging Him to accept their soul by appealing to His mercy and referring to Christ’s Passion. Afterward, moriens should pray to the Virgin for her intercession during the Judgment, as
well as to their guardian angel, the angels, saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins. A special prayer addressed to their patron saint will follow while the priest ensures that the icons of the Virgin, favorite saints, and the Crucifix are kept close by. To guarantee the complete remission of sins, moriens has to repeat Psalm 115:16-17 three times and then the following prayer, another three times.

La paz de Nuesto Señor Ihesu Cristo e la virtud de la su Pasion, e la señal de la Santa Cruz e la integridad de la Señora Virgen Santa María, e la bendición de todos los escogidos sean entre mí e entre todos los mis enemigos visibles e non visibles, en esta hora de la mi muerte. Amen. (118)

Once completed, the Christian must surrender their spirit to God in the same manner as Christ in Luke 23:46. The Arte de bien morir concludes with some important observations. If moriens does not know these prayers, they must pray an equivalent, which will be decided by the priest reading the manual. When the priest has finished reading the text, he must choose someone who is strong in the faith to remain with moriens as they die isolated from the company of friends and relations. This individual is required to reassure the individual who is dying of the positive eternal outcome of their physical death and that Satan will no longer be able to deceive them. This helper should pray continuously for moriens’ soul and for a quick exit from Purgatory (118-19). With the utterance of their prayer, the Arte de bien morir is completed and moriens is now prepared for their death.

The changes in the confessional and penitential rituals of the Church in the fifteenth century demonstrate a new discourse for the soul’s salvation in the Arte de bien morir. In the thirteenth century a shift occurred from public confessions and Canonical Penance in which the whole community participated, to a once-a-year process founded on Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council. The fifteenth century saw another change to a more private and personal process
of confession and penance with the emergence of Jean de Gerson’s “De Scientia Mortis” and the anonymous *Ars moriendi* manuals. The urgency of yearly confessions was no longer emphasized as they had been once, owing to such unforeseen events as the Black Death, war and famines. Even though these menaces to the established order created some instability, the Church remained constant in its ability to comfort and help a person die a good death. Although the *Ars moriendi* were considered to be passports to Heaven, sixteenth-century clerics such as Erasmus of Rotterdam considered the text to reflect the abuses of the Church with respect to salvation, indulgences, and the role of the priest reading the text in order for it to be applied effectively on *moriens’* behalf. Erasmus argues that it is impossible for someone who had lived a good life to die a bad death. He believed that the Church had put too much stress on the reading of the *Ars moriendi* in the process of salvation of the Christian than in making certain that they lived according to Christ’s teaching. As we will see in the next chapter, in addition to controlling the process of salvation and administering the last sacraments, the Church also had the monopoly on everything that involved death: the burial site; the preparation of the corpse; the mourning period; the indulgences, bulls, and number of masses required for saving the deceased’s soul from Purgatory. Although there were changes to the hierarchal pyramids in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Church still held a strong hold on its parishes by controlling the business of death and salvation.
Chapter III
Counseling the Dying in the Sixteenth Century: the New *Ars moriendi* Manuals

The Council of Trent (1545-1547, 1551-1552, and 1562-1563) was instrumental in outlining the criteria which would officially set the beliefs and rites of the Catholic Church. The reforms and decrees defined at this council shaped the actual state of the articles of faith and the roles of the clerical hierarchy in the Church’s structure. The conclusions reached at Trent promised to strengthen the faith of all Catholics as the separation of the Church between Protestants and Catholics took place. The rise in popularity of Protestantism forced the Church to re-evaluate its doctrinal positions as well as its administration which had generated much criticism among Protestant theologians and even some mendicant orders in the latter years of the Middle Ages. As a result of the reforms made at this council, certain doctrinal texts gained more importance because they were believed, by those attending the council, to be instrumental in reinforcing the Catholic faith. Charles Borromeo, who attended the Council of Trent, played an important role in the preservation of vital doctrinal texts, especially catechisms. This man, who later was made a saint, wrote many texts, among which we find confessionals, catechisms and an *Ars moriendi*. What had once been a simple guide during the late Middle Ages to counsel an individual during the process of death would continue to be valued in the sixteenth century for its practicality and its preservation of the Catholic doctrine regarding funerary rites.\(^{35}\) As the new sixteenth-century *Ars moriendi* texts show, professing confidence in the Catholic Church during the reading of this manual as one of the requirements for the soul’s salvation, demonstrates the newly cemented

\(^{35}\) La Iglesia quiso luchar con las armas espirituales para contener el desorden moral, y hubo de aplicarse también a su reforma interior: muchos hombres de la Iglesia de estos tiempos fueron gente *nueva*, procedente de una situación peculiar de España: los conversos (López Estrada 272).
discourse of the Council of Trent. As a result of the criticisms and tensions produced by the Protestant theologians and mendicant orders, the *Ars moriendi*’s title was changed. The sixteenth-century writers discontinued using the title *Ars* and opted for other terms, such as *Memoria*, *Preparación*, and *Aparejo*. In addition to this change, the medieval philosophy on dying well also changed. As we will see in this chapter, Erasmus of Rotterdam set the precedent for the new *Ars moriendi* by stating that a good death can only be achieved if the individual had lived a good life.

In the sixteenth century, penitential manuals, catechisms, and other religious books were being printed instead of being transcribed by hand. These religious texts became more accessible to other levels in European society, instead of their exclusive distribution in monasteries and in the private collections of wealthy individuals from the laity. Thomas Tentler notes in *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* that in the sixteenth century there were many printed texts based on the Sacrament of Penance (28). He also states that the texts which were published formed the opinions and influenced the practices of the people in the sixteenth century (29). As a result, it is crucial to see what religious texts were produced as well as their influence in other written expressions which were contemporary to these printed texts. Tentler also explains that even though there were innovative texts being produced based on the theological debates of earlier centuries we cannot assume that they were popular in sales (30-31). He states that for the most part, individuals purchased texts such as confessional, penitential manuals, and literary texts, from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; in other words, “the best books were the old books” (30). In the sixteenth century, the *Ars moriendi* continued to share the same success as it had in the fifteenth century and was printed in many vernacular languages.

The most important changes to occur in the *Ars moriendi* took place in its structure and in its discourses. The medieval texts show that the salvation of a Christian’s soul was impossible
without the reading of the *Ars moriendi* or the presence of a priest. As a result of the tensions between Protestants and Catholics, interesting changes took place in the sixteenth-century *Ars moriendi*. In this chapter, we will look at two texts which reflect the changes in the Church’s discourse: Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir,*\(^{36}\) and Alejo Venegas’ *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte.* Both of these texts were printed in the sixteenth century, and even though they include the base argument of salvation found in the *De Scientia Mortis* and the *Arte de bien morir,* the new discourse of “a good life for a good death” emerges. In addition, we will consider the sixteenth-century Spanish funerary rituals and the writing of testaments as complementary sources for understanding Erasmus’ and Venegas’ texts. We will also look into some forms of popular Catholicism since this will play a key role in later understanding the religious syncretism that occurred in New Spain after the Conquest.

**Wills and Testaments in Sixteenth Century Spain**

As seen, the Church emphasized the writing of a testament as a component for *Moriens* to die well. This is reflected in the medieval *Ars moriendi,* to a degree in the *De Scientia Mortis,* and in the sixteenth-century manuals for counseling the dying. Carlos Eire notes in *From Madrid to Purgatory* that he has examined the testaments from Madrid’s sixteenth-century nobility and from members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He states that everyone, whether rich or poor, was encouraged to leave a testament behind as an affirmation of their faith. For this important reason all individuals who died without a testament or *ab intestate* were treated in the same manner as those who had died excommunicated from the Church (heretics, or criminals) (21). Consequently those who had not written a testament were refused the right of a Christian burial. The *Arte de*

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\(^{36}\) This Spanish version of the *Praeparatio ad mortem* was translated by Maestro Bernardo Pérez and printed in Antwerp in 1555. As I am studying the Spanish *Ars moriendi* tradition, I will be including quotations from this Spanish version of Erasmus’ text.
*bien morir* and other manuals which treated the steps required to die well emphasized the need of writing a testament when the individual was still of sound mind. This precaution prevented the sin of dying without a will and forced the individual to ponder on their mortality and sins before the moment of death arrived. Of course some individuals procrastinated in their Christian duty to write a testament therefore, the priest that arrived to read the *Ars moriendi* manual and counsel them through the process of death, made it up at their bedside. If the priest attending the individuals was not skilled in legal matters, he asked for another that could write the testament or, as it happened in the latter part of the sixteenth century, a notary was summoned.

The testament was not an original work, since there were patterns used that date to Classical Antiquity (20). Eire states that these patterns were continuously recycled in the sixteenth century, but they were adapted to include important information that was required by the Church. The testament, therefore, was not only a written reflection of an individual’s faith, it was also a piece of the passport that could guarantee a Christian a good death. Although the medieval *Ars moriendi* did not stress the importance of deeds as much as the ones written in the sixteenth century, the requirement of the testament qualified as a document that organized, in writing, the individual’s charity toward others, the professing of their faith and reflection on the state of their soul. Therefore, the testament was considered by the Church as an honorary component to the sacrament of penance. Since the Church was reforming and restructuring its doctrine and its mendicant orders in the sixteenth century, the testament and the *Arte de bien morir* became important documents in helping it to maintain control over the salvation of souls and the business of dying. Historians such as Eire (1995), Gerbet (2001) and Miccoli (1990) have argued that the Church had suffered some setbacks in the late medieval period owing to the closures of monasteries and the Black Death. These events caused it to experience a dramatic fall in its
income from offerings and a loss of political power owing to shifts within medieval society. Protestants criticized the Church for its explanation and exploitation of Purgatory, the “purchasing” of indulgences and bulls that would contribute funds to its coffers, while at the same time taking advantage of Christians by holding their salvation hostage. The purchasing of indulgences, bulls, and paying alms for yearly masses on the anniversary of an individual’s death provided, in theory, the soul of the deceased with a shorter time in Purgatory. Since salvation was not something to be considered lightly, the Church’s hold on how a Christian should die and what steps should be followed to assure the salvation of the soul rested entirely within its jurisdiction.

The testament was divided into two distinct parts, as Eire points out: the first component, as we have seen, is the affirmation of moriens’ faith on paper; the second component is the enumeration of moriens’ assets and how they were to be divided. The process of writing the will was a kind of penance for the individual, as this would force them to focus on the transition of the soul and how this step separated them from all material things. Eire states that the Church encouraged the testator to choose two to three executors who were neither rich nor poor; this would guarantee that the testator’s wishes were carried out exactly as he intended (39). The testator had to indicate clearly how the money was to be divided, especially since this division would play an important part in how long the soul would be tormented in Purgatory. As a result, surviving family members were to pray for the soul of their deceased relative often and were responsible for making sure that the alms and masses listed in the testament were offered up appropriately. The Church advised all testators to revise their testaments after their yearly confession, since this was the moment when the soul was at its purest state. Reviewing the testament at this time would remind testators of their death and the joys of eternity in Heaven. Even though the Church required everyone to compose a testament, Eire shows that not everyone was able to do so. People who
were poor were not expected to write a testament, as they were unable to read or write and had few or no assets to divide. If they died ab intestate, the surviving family members had to promise their parish church a portion of the deceased’s money so that the priest could celebrate mass for them and thus lessen their soul’s time in Purgatory.37

The Positioning of the Body in Death and Burial

As Ariès explains in Western Attitudes toward Death, Guillaume Durand, the bishop of Mende (1285-96), outlines the importance of positioning an individual during the process of death. It was vital for the dying to await death lying on their back facing up “so that his face is always turned toward heaven” (Ariès 8-9). The body should also point eastward since it would be in the direction of Jerusalem. According to Ariès, this positioning can be seen in the arrangement of the sarcophagi of nobles and important ecclesiastical members in the many medieval churches of Europe. He also states that references made to the positioning of the body can be found in the romances of court literature. Ariès notes that it was common for the hero(ine) of these texts who felt the nearing of their death to position themselves in these specifications only in the final moments of their life. In the story of La saga de Tristan et Yseut, Iseult, once seeing Tristan’s dead body, feels her own death approaching and she turns toward the East and confesses her sins before dying (Lacroix 625-26). Lancelot in the Quête du Gral, feels his death approaching when he senses the loss of strength in his body, and like Iseult, prepares for his death and positions his head to face toward the wall.

37 Laura Vivanco notes in Death in Fifteenth Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites that there were also oral testaments in the late-medieval period (39). As a result there is little information about the contents of these testaments. The same case occurs with sixteenth-century Spanish testaments, as the ones to which Eire refers in From Madrid to Purgatory are also from the nobility or the clerical hierarchy.
Contrary to Ariès’ observation, Michel Vovelle believes that there is a problem in the historicity of death and especially with the “natural” acceptance of death as stated by Ariès in what he calls “la mort de soi”. Ariès draws a parallel between the importance of the positioning of the body in medieval literature (facing toward Heaven and Jerusalem) and the positioning of moriens in Tolstoy’s novels. He states that in the Judaic funerary tradition, as seen in the Old Testament, moriens was positioned to face the wall before their death. Vovelle disagrees with Ariès’ generalization and states that the death of Tristan, facing a wall, cannot have the same meaning culturally and historically as the death of the Tolstoy’s Russian peasant in Ivan Illitch in the nineteenth century. He labels this comparison as the a-chronic death, “La mort qui échappe au temps” (1983: 5). Vovelle believes that the roles of good-death/bad-death in each of these given cultural-historical times cannot share the same meaning: Tristan’s death, facing a wall, is unlike Iseult’s death since she faces upward and eastward toward Heaven and Jerusalem. Iseult is given an opportunity to confess her sins before her death, whereas Tristan dies in despair after hearing that her ships’ sail was black. Since he died in despair, without confession and facing a wall, Tristan died a bad death according to the medieval cultural belief. In the nineteenth century, death became more taboo, as people died in a hospital, separated from family and friends. In the case of Tolstoy’s peasant, he dies a good/proper death as he faces away from any possible spectator in order to protect what his society believed was a taboo.

We have seen in the late Middle Ages that most people were buried outside their parish church in a cemetery, with the exception of nobles and important clerics who could afford a luxurious burial within the church or at two separate places. To avoid the overcrowding of cadavers in the cemeteries, bones were excavated and placed in charnel houses. Eire studies the burial of cadavers in sixteenth-century Madrid and we see a remarkable change take place. Instead
of consecrating more land to build cemeteries, burials in Madrid returned to burying the dead within church walls. The Spanish Church encouraged the Christian to follow this tradition, since burial in a cemetery could be viewed as a remnant of the funerary traditions of the Muslim and the Jewish faith (92). The Spanish Church also stressed that the corpse should never be washed before burial, and this was strictly enforced by the Inquisition since corpse washing was an important element of the Jewish funerary ritual (86). Eire states that 435 testators out of his corpus of 436 requested to be buried within a church or monastery (91). Madrid’s citizens were buried in one of the following locations: 12 churches, 8 monasteries, 4 convents, 1 hospital, and 1 Jesuit School.\[38\]

The testaments were important documents in the sixteenth century because testators specified the location where they wished to be buried. In addition to choosing the church (monastery, etc.) Eire notes that the testator also requested a specific place within the church where they were to be buried (98). This request generated some economic problems as a consequence since a price had to be paid to the church for a specific place of burial. Eire states that many wills requested that the testator’s family “paguen lo que se acostumbra” (98) to the church, and since they paid for the privilege of burial at a given location, they believed themselves to be the proprietors of this spot. Eire gives an example of this idea of ownership in the case of Pedro de Raballos, a priest, who

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\[38\] The twelve churches are: San Ginés, San Miguel, Santa Cruz, San Justo, San Pedro, S. María Almudena, San Andrés, Santiago, San Nicolás, San Juan, San Sebastián, San Salvador. Of all these churches, Eire records that the most popular for burial during the years of 1520-1599 was San Ginés (95). In the 1520’s 58% of Madrid’s deceased chose to be buried at a church (San Ginés received 30% of the dead). The decade with the highest numbers for burial at a church is 1570, with 66% (San Ginés’s percentage dropped in this decade to 20% since more citizens were being buried at the other eleven churches listed above).

The eight monasteries are: San Francisco, N.S. de Atocha, San Felipe, San Geronimo, Victoria, N.S. de la Merced, San Martín, Sta. Trinidad. From 1520-1599 the monastery of San Francisco was the most popular place for burial in a monastery (95). The decade of 1540 was its highest percentage for burials (14%).

The four convents are: Sta. Catalina, Sta. Clara, Santo Domingo and El Carmen. Burials at these convents were not as popular as those done at churches or even at monasteries and they did not gain this popularity until the last decade of the century. Even if burials at convents started to take place in the 1590’s, only 11% of Madrid’s citizens chose this option (95).

Finally in the decade of 1590, burials were being done at the Italian Hospital (2% of Madrid’s deceased were buried there) and the Jesuit School (also 2% of Madrid’s deceased were buried there) (Eire 95).
requested that his executors buy his burial place for 3,000 maravedis. In addition to purchasing his place of burial, his executors were instructed to prevent the gravesite to be sold again (99). The purchasing of gravesites in a church also began to resemble the case of church burials in the medieval period when the proximity to a saint’s relics assured the deceased their intervention.

Because the burial places within the church were cramped, the competition became keen for favorable grave sites such as that just mentioned, especially after 1561, when church building could not keep pace with the growth of the city. Although the graves within the church partook the same sacredness, it is evident that they did not share in this equally and that the testators accepted a certain hierarchy of space within the church building. The closer one could be to the Eucharist, the better. (99)

The reasoning for this place of choice was its proximity to the altar since masses were celebrated there regularly and therefore the deceased’s soul would receive those blessings and prayers. The place of burial as we see was important in assuring the soul a quick stay in Purgatory and the proper intervention.

The burial of corpses under the floor-boards of Madrid’s churches and the positioning of the bodies in proximity to the altar brings a new assurance that the deceased would have a “good death”. In addition, the burial and exhumation of bodies from these gravesites forced the parishioner who sat in a pew over a grave to ponder on their own mortality. The immediate realization that someone was buried under their feet was a great reminder of the temporality of physical life and placed their focus on the immortality of the soul as well as a good second death.

Burial clothing also played an important role in the funerary rites of Spanish Christians. Eire states that in the sixteenth century, all lay people had to choose one of three burial cloths: a shroud, a habit from a religious order or the habit of a confraternity. Most people in sixteenth-century Madrid chose to wear the Franciscan habit. Eire notes that in the 1540s, 59% of Madrid’s testators requested the Franciscan habit as their burial clothes (105). Although it would seem
strange to dress a lay person in the habit of a religious order, the answer to this perplexing tradition can be traced to the veneration of saints in the early Middle Ages. As seen in Chapter 1, it was believed that a relic embodied the whole identity of the saint and that even though the saint was physically dead, they could communicate with the realms of earth and Heaven. If a relic can embody the whole presence of a saint, why can’t their clothes? Even though the habit of the order of St. Francis was not worn by the saint himself, it still embodied his presence; therefore, the habit could still function as a reminder to the saint of the deceased’s loyalty to his cult. As Eire states, Inés de Arroyo wrote in her testament that she was to be buried in the habit of the order of St. Francis so that “St. Francis may serve as my advocate before the son of God” (107). He also notes that some testators do not refer to the burial habit as “el ábito de la orden de San Francisco” rather as “el ábito del Señor San Francisco” or “el ábito del Seráfico Señor San Francisco” (107). This change in wording proves that the people believed that the habit could embody the presence of the saint and thus guarantee them mediation in the Judgment. Another interesting note about the burial of people in the habits of religious orders comes from an exemplum story. Eire writes that a monk died without his habit and when his soul was taken to be judged, the patron saint of his order did not recognize him; as a result, he did not intercede on his behalf (109). This error of not wearing his habit and consequently not receiving the saint’s mediation may seem a bit exaggerated nowadays, however, in the sixteenth century this fear was very real, as the faithful wanted to make certain that all steps were covered to avoid a bad spiritual death, even if this meant dressing in the habit of a religious order.

39 All the quotations taken from the testaments in Carlos Eire’s book From Madrid to Purgatory have been translated by the author. On some occasions he gives the original quotation in Spanish in the footnotes section; however, in the case of Inés de Arroyo, he does not provide the original version in Spanish. He does make a note that Inés de Arroyo uses the word “abogado” (advocate) when she states that St. Francis will be her lawyer before Christ. The choice of “abogado” is a familiar term when referring to the mediator’s role before the Last Judgment; Gonzalo de Berceo uses it often in the Milagros de Nuestra Señora when he refers to the Virgin Mary’s role as mediator on behalf of her faithful (milagro XXV, for example).
The Funeral Cortege

Burials were carried out quickly, and therefore an individual who had died in the morning was usually buried by the afternoon. If a person died in the afternoon, their burial depended on the time of their death. As a result, they could be buried the same day as their death or the following morning. As Alejo Venegas states in the *Agonía del tránsito de la Muerte*, as soon as an individual died, the soul was removed from the flesh’s prison and was transported to one of four places: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory or Limbo.

As we have noted in Chapter 1, most people did not qualify as saints, or were exceedingly evil, therefore their souls would have to spend some time in Purgatory to purge for their lives. Limbo was reserved for children who were not baptized, as well as god-fearing men and women from the Old Testament. Because the soul did not remain frozen in time until all the funerary preparations had been completed, it was extremely urgent to organize everything that would be needed to save the soul from any additional time in Purgatory. The testaments from Eire’s corpus request that funerary corteges be organized by summoning townspeople (121). Eire states that initially the funeral cortege was composed of priests and family members, but soon began to include monks from the deceased’s chosen religious order, men from a confraternity, the poor and orphans. In the deceased’s testament, arrangements were made to provide these members of the cortege with alms if they promised to take part in the procession and to pray for their soul and for the funeral meals (148). Initially men and women chose priests to walk in the cortege because they could pray directly to God so that He could grant mercy to the deceased’s soul. Later, monks became
important in the cortege because of their religious vows of poverty, chastity and humility. These vows made them ideal representatives for their prayers to God since in theory they were the only humans who lived closest to the example of Christ. Religious confraternities were formed and were skilled in the funerary rituals. These men participated in the cortege, but also took vows to pray fervently for their deceased members. Eire notes that some individuals who were not members of a confraternity had requested the prayers and the participation of these organizations, but were denied their services because they were not members (134-41). This was not always the case, since there are accounts of the participation of the confraternities in the cortege of a non-member; however these services were compensated monetarily. Finally, the poor and orphans became desirable participants in the cortege because Christ had promised them the Kingdom of God and therefore their prayers were readily heard (141). Eire states that the participants of this demographic were usually men and they were chosen by the priests directing the cortege. The orphaned children came from schools and their school was compensated for their participation. In some cases as Eire points out, the children were sometimes promised shoes as payment for their services (141). The cortege is therefore the last opportunity for the deceased to make an appeal to God for the eternal resting place of their soul.

The cortege was a serious element in the death of an individual. As is generally the case, the wealthier people in society were able to purchase more people's prayers and participation than the poor. Even though the cortege presents itself as a highly serious and somber affair, Eire gives two examples of mock-corteges which were tried by the Inquisition and found to be guilty of heresy. The first case of a mock funeral took place in 1538 in Guadalajara and was organized by a group of youths (159). They knocked on the doors of their friends' houses with the roadside cross. At one of the houses they all had a round of drinks and one of them pretended to die. The
remaining friends wrapped him in a sheet and paraded the "corpse" around the streets. They used a cooking pot and a broom as a sprinkler of Holy Water and pretended to weep as one of them banged on a cowbell. The citizens of the town who had seen this procession brought it to the attention of a priest who reported them to the Inquisition for profaning the sacred nature of the funeral and the Church's role in it.

The second case occurred in the village of Hita during a public joust. Eire explains that the men participating in the contest were to dress in costume to perform their joust (161). Antonio de Sandoval, dressed as a corpse (wrapped in a linen shroud), rode down to his place in the line and was followed by two men dressed in black each on horseback and carrying candles. These men were followed by the rest of the "cortege": a horseman in black carrying a cross, another man carrying a bell and wrapped in a chain, two other men dressed as friars and followed by three men dressed as women crying out "Woe is me!... he has left me all alone with four children!" (161). After the cortege circled the area several times, the men dressed as friars and priests turned their clothes inside out to show bones: "And they revealed painted skulls and bones of the dead, and said they were the horsemen of death" (161). Because of this grotesque representation of a funeral cortege, the tribunal found all the participants guilty of sacrilege. They were condemned for the profanation of Church rites in the assisting of the dead and for showing contempt for the Holy Mother Church (161).

As we see, there are similar elements present in the second mock-funeral that could be compared to Alvar García de Santa María's account of the coronation of Fernando de Antequera in Chapter 1. In this case, there was a celebration which included jousting and by the request for costumes, it seems to have a link with Carnival, since according to Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* this was the only time of year when this kind of subversion could take place. The
laughing at death and creating a parody of a sacred religious act is a direct connection with the culture of laughter that existed prior to the creation and enforcement of the institutions by the Church and the State. Although death was no laughing matter because of the seriousness associated with the Last Judgment, these men chose to laugh at death and thus break the tension and seriousness that was cultivated by the Church (Bakhtin: 1984, 94).

It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed medieval man. It was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by the forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden ("mana" and "taboo"). It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than the earth itself. Through this victory laughter clarified man's consciousness and gave him a new outlook on life. (90-91)

Mocking death and the subversion of the feudal and ecclesiastical hierarchies during carnival festivities, according to Bakhtin, also went hand-in-hand with the banquet. He notes that the medieval banquet was also a celebration that allowed for the people to forget about their troubles and connect with the ancient laughter and with the process of regeneration (282). Banquet images connected life and death, "The victorious body receives the defeated world and is renewed" (283). Banquets celebrate life, but as Carlos Eire demonstrates in From Madrid to Purgatory, they could also celebrate the second life (148-51). The banquets that followed the funeral service could be lavish and raucous and were not limited to this event, as they were also held on the anniversaries of the dead and on All Souls' Day (148). He states that in some cases the banquets were so excessive that the deceased’s estate was completely spent on the funeral meal. As a result, the Spanish Church criticized this kind of "misuse" of the inheritance as well as the banquets that were held in the church itself.

Antonio de Guevara, Bishop of Mondoñedo, proclaimed in 1541 that churches in his diocese could no longer be used for funeral banquets. He knew what he was banning, for he had seen it up close: "They eat and drink, and put up tables within the churches; and,
even worse, set plates and pitchers on the altars, turning them into sideboards.” That such feasting could take place in a sacred space in the company of the dead indicates how difficult it could be to separate the mundane from the transcendent in Spain and how familiar the living had become with the dead. (149)

Ofrendas, offerings of food, were also brought to the funeral or the anniversary mass and placed on the altar by relatives and friends of the deceased, as indulgences for their soul. Testaments specified the kinds of ofrendas that were to be brought. In most cases these were comprised of grain, bread and candles. As we saw in Chapter 1, Aron Gurevich states in Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception, that elements of pagan culture and worship were still practised by the townspeople despite the presence of the Church. Some Christian cults of the Middle Ages can be deconstructed to find pagan roots that have survived in Catholic rituals. As we see in the example of bringing offerings to the altar as indulgences for the soul of the deceased, this practice was not condemned by the clergy and is an example of the syncretism that occurred in Europe and which is preserved in a purely Catholic ritual. The official Catholicism that was practiced in Spain would later play an important role in evangelizing the Nahuas in Nueva España. However, popular Catholicism was also brought to New Spain and would greatly influence in the religious syncretism that took place there. The example of bringing offerings to the church on behalf of the deceased’s soul has strong ties with the offerings of Días de Muertos as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4.

Even though the above examples show a different perspective on death and the burial customs of the sixteenth century in the area around Madrid, we must note that death was still an obsession for most people. Pondering on one’s mortality and the death of the soul were serious and important components in everyday life. In spite of the evidence that Eire has uncovered in From Madrid to Purgatory the preparations that were needed for an individual to die well, the idea of a good death still played an important role in the decisions that were taken. Tentler’s statement
that an old book is a good book proves that a text from the *Ars moriendi* genre still had an important role in sixteenth-century Spanish society, since it led to the printing and translation of Erasmus’ *Preparación y aparejo de bien morir* and the composition of the *Agonía del tránsito de la Muerte*.

**Discourses in the Arte de bien morir**

The *Arte de bien morir* focuses on God’s mercy and forgiveness rather than on openly terrifying its reader with the dark and hopeless side of spiritual death. Unlike the *Danza general de la Muerte* which focused on the fear of bodily corruption and of the second death, the *Arte de bien morir* was more positive in tenor, although still employing imagery of the spiritual battle between Satan and Heaven and the discourse that the Christian can only obtain salvation with the reading of the text and the presence of a priest. Because the priest was the only person authorized to administer the last sacraments, he exercised the power of the Church while emphasizing its discourse on salvation, confession and penance. The gravity of the sin, according to the medieval versions, is not an impediment for the Christian’s salvation because God’s power and compassion are infinite and He can forgive the most horrible of sins. The *Arte* was structured after Gerson’s four points from the “De Scientia Mortis”, and if followed properly, *moriens* could be led to a good death, thus making them dependent on a priest. Unlike Gerson’s text, which was in Latin, therefore limiting its readership, the *Arte de bien morir* is in Castilian and had woodcuts showing the devil’s five temptations and the angels’ inspirations. It is structured in a similar manner as the forensic debates, by comparing Satan’s justification for his interpretations of the Scripture to the angel’s reassuring quotations from the New Testament and the Fathers of the Catholic Church. The *Arte de bien morir* recommends familiarity with its content before going through the process of death. Moreover, it states that not being acquainted with its content, could lead to eternal perdition.
Although a sense of hope could be argued for the discourse found in the medieval *Arte de bien morir*, the death of the soul and the horrors of Hell are still present in the text in order to create moriens’ dependency on the Church and its clergy, who knew and kept the secrets of salvation.

**The New *Ars Moriendi* Manuals of the Sixteenth Century**

The Protestant Reformation gave the Catholic Church the opportunity to establish some major reforms within its hierarchy, as well as to strengthen the beliefs of the faithful in specific areas of their faith with doctrinal texts: for example, salvation, free will, indulgences and Purgatory. These elements of Catholic doctrine were challenged by Martin Luther (1483-1546), and his theories began to gain popularity, causing conflicts and diverse opinions within the Church. In the midst of all the confusion surrounding the reforms of the Church in the sixteenth century, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536), from the New Learning of the Renaissance, composed the *De preparatione ad mortem* in 1534. This text, according to Marcel Bataillon in *Erasmo y España*, was commissioned by Thomas Boleyn, the Count of Rochford (558). This new version of the *Ars moriendi* was translated from Latin into Spanish in 1535 because of its popularity. The first translation, which, according to Bataillon, is not faithful to its Latin version, was made anonymously in Burgos and given the title *Libro del aparejo que se deue hazer para bien morir*. Bataillon believes that its translator was probably the chaplain or protégé of Don Juan de Zúñiga y Avellanada, since the text is dedicated to Don Juan and his wife, Doña Estefanía de Requeséns (563). The problem of fidelity in translation has been debated by critics such as Douglas Kelly (1997) as they reflect on the question as to whether the translator a traitor to his source text. Bataillon states that the *Libro del aparejo que se deue hazer para bien morir* was greatly edited.

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40 Luther attacked Johan Tetzel’s sermons on the need for acquiring (purchasing) indulgences to save a Christian’s soul. He also challenged the pope’s authority, resulting in his excommunication.

41 Don Juan de Zúñiga y Avellanada was the Knight Commander of Castile, Governor of the crown prince, and the steward of the prince’s household (Bataillon 563).
during its translation, and that the translator made modifications and additions that he felt were necessary to the original.

Lo tradujo con cierta libertad, haciendo ligeras ampliaciones en los lugares en que el texto le parecía poco explícito. Pero no retrocedió ante ningún pensamiento del autor; su prefacio demuestra, inclusive, que no experimentaba el menor empacho en reaccionar contra las supersticiones con que se traficaba la cabecera de los moribundos. Por otra parte, leyó a Erasmo con ojos muy ortodoxos, y de su lectura sacó en limpio “el principal aparejo para bien morir es limpiar la conciencia muchas veces con sacramento de confesión.” En consecuencia, le pareció oportuno completar la *Praeparatio* con un manualito de confesión, más manejable que los tratados existentes, y que se reduce a decir verdad, a un formulario sin complicaciones inútiles, para uso de los penitentes. (563-64)

As some specialists in translation studies claim, the so-called fidelity of the translator to his source text can turn out to be a betrayal of what was originally written. Because the source text has been altered to a significant degree, according to Bataillon, and a confessional manual was added because the translator felt that his source text was lacking this element, this translator could be considered a traitor to his source. However, he could also be considered the creator of an original discourse which dialogues with his source text, as well as with other existing confessional manuals. The solutions to these problems are not easy to solve, since the writers of the period understood that “creative” licence was part of the process of text production, and even in sixteenth-century ecclesiastical texts these attitudes were still common. As Tentler shows, “new” analyses and explanations were given to texts of the earlier centuries, and even though other points of view were present, the original “Work” still lived on (31).

The second Spanish version of Erasmus’ *De praeparatio ad mortem* was printed in 1555 and is the text most commonly studied, owing to the fidelity of its translation. The *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir* was translated by Maestro Bernardo Pérez and printed in Antwerp by Martín Nucio. This version was dedicated to Doña Francisca de Castro, Duchess of Gandía. In its dedication, Pérez includes a message of hope to reinforce her faith and understanding of the three
lives and deaths. Marcel Bataillon notes that the first edition of this version originally appeared in Valencia in 1535, according to some written references by Gallardo, but that edition has never been found (564). Consequently, the version printed in Antwerp (1555) is the only one that can be studied. Unlike the Arte de bien morir, which was meant to counsel the dying, this version begins with Maestro Bernardo Pérez’s clear explanation of the life-cycle of the soul. The soul’s existence is divided into three lives and three deaths. He states that once individuals are born from their mother’s womb, they are born into nature’s womb. Humans grow and age in nature’s womb until they die; this is nature’s birth process.

In other words, there is no death for the human, just a displacement to another realm where there is life. Upon the individual’s physical birth, they are separated from the placenta. The second life begins with one’s physical death. The soul sheds the prison of the body and is therefore free to enter the third birth (life), the eternal life. Pérez notes that there are no immediate dangers in the second life; however, its outcome will directly affect the third life. What each individual does in the first life will affect where the soul will live out its eternity. Pérez recommends that individuals surround themselves with people who will contribute positively to a good delivery in the first life, since bad choices will lead to negative outcomes.

Pues en verdad no menores peligros ay en la segunda preñez, porque si el tiempo que en naturaleza viuimos no viuimos bien, en lugar de parir muere, y en lugar de nacer morimos, quando el anima no passa en el vientre de la divinidad, sino en el vientre del infierno, y assi como por falta de buenos padrinos, en el articulo de lo que llaman muerte (y yo aqui llamo nacimiento) muchos se pierden. Donde si para el primer parto se buscan las mas diestras parteras, para el segundo que es la muerte se deuen buscar buenos compadres, que ayuden a nuestra anima, a nacer desta vida para la otra, porque si este parto se yerra, ninguna emienda ay. (2r-3f)
In addition to choosing the right people to have as loyal friends who will offer suffrages on their behalf to prevent bad second and third lives, Pérez recommends taking part in good deeds (which he refers to as diapers and blankets, since they contribute to keeping the newborn safe). He expands on the metaphor and states that a child should be properly cared for in the first life. It must be guided and instructed by its mother (the Church), in its doctrine and in the Aparejo. It is imperative for the child to be prepared for the second birth, since nothing can be done to save them in the second life and in the third.

Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir*

The manual composed by Erasmus of Rotterdam to help and counsel someone through the process of death is not artistic in any form. This manual, like the medieval *Ars moriendi*, was intended to instruct the Christian on the steps that had to be followed for a good death. Mikhail Bakhtin states in “Discourse in the Novel” that a “prose discourse is denied any artistic value at all; it is the same as practical speech for everyday life, or speech for scientific purposes, an artistically neutral means of communication” (260). This statement can be applied to Erasmus’ text since there are no popular references integrated within his text, and there are no poetic devices employed to facilitate an easy transmission of its didactic content. Erasmus is seeking to save as many Christians as he can, while at the same time debating some doctrinal truths of the Church.

Erasmus’ text begins with a strong statement that is sure to capture the attention of his reader: “De todas las cosas espantosas la mas espantosa es la muerte” (5r). Although this statement is frightening because it conjures images of the Judgment and the decomposing corpse, Erasmus elaborates this point to show that there is hope after death and that it should not be feared. He states that even though the body may die, every human being’s soul is immortal. The soul has
been imprisoned in the body and it can only be freed from its host with their death. The body must disintegrate but it does not completely disappear, since it will be summoned on the Day of Judgment to be reunited with the soul. As Genesis 2:7 states, God breathed the soul into Adam’s nostrils to animate and give life to the body. When an individual dies, their soul is returned to God. God has temporarily lent the soul to the body while it lives, and as Isabela Díaz says, “There is no moment that matters as much as the hour of our death, because if it is a good one, it will serve as a door through which we can come to enjoy the eternal glory for which we have been created” (76). Like Isabela Díaz, Erasmus reminds the Christian that they must not fear death because it is the moment when they complete their duty in returning their soul to God. In addition, Erasmus states that a Christian who fears death does not fully trust in Christ’s promises.

As Erasmus paraphrases David in Psalm 23, he emphasizes that believers need not fear anything, provided they live well. As in the “De Scientia Mortis” and the *Ars moriendi*, Erasmus notes that the Christian must not lose their faith during trials and afflictions because God’s greatness and His abilities can make the impossible possible. By trusting in God, individuals can be assured that God will not forget them and He will reward them with eternal life as Christ promised in the Gospels.

The next point that Erasmus writes about is the familiar *topos* of human existence as a pilgrimage to a shrine. Like many writers before him, Erasmus reminds his readers that they are only pilgrims in this life for a very brief time and that they must journey through difficult territory

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42 This quotation is from Carlos Eire’s *From Madrid to Purgatory*. Isabela Díaz was a member of Philip II’s court and she became a Franciscan nun in 1584. Eire’s book deals with the wills and testaments which were produced in Madrid in the sixteenth century.
until they reach their final destination. The journey of life leads the pilgrim to a physical death that should not be feared because it is the gateway to everlasting life (5r). The Gospels and the Epistles stress that there will be no warning when death comes to claim an individual’s life, therefore one must be prepared for death’s arrival and God’s calling back of the soul. Like the *Ars moriendi* and the “De Scientia mortis”, Erasmus encourages his readers to accept their death as part of God’s Will, as a result, they should be willing to return their souls to God.

Los que corren en la carrera piensan lo que dexan atras, y quanto les queda hasta el cabo. Los que esperauan antiguamente el año de Jubileo, ya sabian quanto tiempo podrian gozar de la cosa que mercauan. Pero de los mortales ninguno tiene certidumbre que llegara a mañana. Corremos y llevamos la muerte rebuelta entre los pies, y aun en todo el cuerpo. Dio nos el señor la vida devalde, pero con tal condicion, que se la boluamos cada y quando nos la demandare. (5r)

In keeping with the mendicant orders’ criticism of material gain, Erasmus notes that wealth is temporal and visible but that the treasures accumulated by the Christian because of their faith will remain invisible until the Day of Judgment. Erasmus states that it is natural for human beings to fear death, since Christ was also afraid. Although Christ knew that his death would be violent (Matthew 26: 39, 42, 44; Mark 14: 35-36, 39, Luke 41-44), he prayed for strength and that God’s Will would be done. As a result, all Christians should follow in Christ’s example if they want their soul to be saved and praise its creator, “Este es el fin para que fue hecho el hombre” (6v).

Because Christ conquered death and sin with his resurrection, Christians should never have to despair during the process of death, since they are assured eternal life in Heaven. Erasmus reminds his readers that God is not deaf to those who call out to Him when they are going through trials (10r). Although Christians are assured God’s favour, Erasmus reminds them that all individuals are born into sin and they are made aware of their sinfulness by means of their baptism. Falling into sin knowingly is the real challenge for the believer since it can cause the soul to go to
Hell. Therefore, sins of this nature must be especially avoided (10r). Erasmus asks, if Christ came to earth to defeat sin, why then do all individuals still live under its hold? He notes that all human beings are born with a predisposition to sin, but Christ was able to destroy the hold sin has over them. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, Christians are no longer slaves to sin and are able to be forgiven. In the New Testament, Christians are provided with the tools required to fight the devil’s temptations. In the same manner as the *Ars moriendi*, Erasmus outlines Satan’s final temptations: lack of faith, despair, impatience, vainglory and avarice. These can be avoided, if, at any moment during the process of death, *moriens* utters “Vade retro Sathanas” (11r). He suggests that pride, arrogance, confidence in themselves and in their own merits, be avoided at all cost as this will weaken the soul enough to become Satan’s prey. Focusing on their material gains and on the fear of death, are also ways for the devil to trap the Christian. As a result, Christians must weigh their lives often and realize that youth and wealth are temporary. Instead, they should be prepared for their death and reflect on the horrors of Hell (11r-12r). Erasmus encourages his readers by reminding them that no matter how difficult a trial, they must have hope and trust in God to guide them. If they give into despair, they will surely suffer eternal condemnation and their souls will be severed from God forever.

Nosotros mereciamos el infierno y siendo inocente teme por nosotros, para que si semejante perturbacion naciere en nuestro animo, o por recelo de nuestros pecados, o por Nuestra fragilidad no desconfiemos luego, antes alçando los ojos a Iesu Christo, saquemos como dizen fuerças de flaqueza, y convirtamos nuestra desesperacion en esperanza. (15r)

In order to prevent them from spending eternity in Hell, Erasmus describes for his readers the four types of death and what their consequences can be: 1) the natural death, 2) the spiritual death, 3) the transformative death, and 4) the eternal death. As seen earlier, the translator of Erasmus’ text, Maestro Bernardo Pérez, also touches on this subject in the prologue. In the natural death the soul is separated from the body and must be suffered by all individuals as a consequence
to Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. The soul which God breathed into the body is returned to its Creator to be judged for the time in which it lived, while the body returns to the earth from which it came. The second type of death, the spiritual death, takes place when the soul is separated from God forever. The soul can only remain living if it is in harmony with its Creator. God gave all humans a soul and it is what animates the body. If the soul is separated from God, it experiences the spiritual death because it cannot be reunited with its creator.

Weighing of one's soul in life and doing penance for one's sins will allow the individual to reconcile with God and prevent its death (17r). The third death or the transformative death is the transformation from the old Adam into the new Adam (Christ); the death or divorce between reason and the flesh. This battle is very difficult to win since all humans are prone to sin; nevertheless, because of Christ's triumph over death and sin, all those who follow him will no longer be guided by the flesh but by the spirit of God. The death of the old self gives spiritual life much in the same way as the death of sin gives life to the spirit of God.

The final death is eternal death. Erasmus states that humans fear the first death because they associate it with the corpse. Even though this is a frightening sight, he states that all those who go to a funeral should take that opportunity to reflect on their own life. They should view themselves in the place of the deceased and not follow the poor example of others who take this opportunity to get drunk and to fall into other sins of the flesh (18r). The second death is definitive and there is no returning from it. The individual should take advantage of the little time they have on earth to make amends with God and to make sure that all their penance has been completed in order to assure a safe and favorable outcome after Judgment. Those who choose not to follow in these
steps will be judged negatively, and consequently will have to be tormented in Hell forever (18r).

Erasmus reminds his reader that no one knows the moment of their death and that the youth are guilty of assuming that they will live forever.

Erasmus later states that if individuals were to ponder the gravity of the horrors that can occur in the spiritual death, they would no longer fear the physical death (18r).

Erasmus notes that salvation cannot be based solely on the reading of the *Ars moriendi* or on its rapid-style confession. He insists that a person must live a good life to be assured a good death: “No puede ser mala Muerte aunque mas subita sea, si la vida precedente fue buena” (20r).

There is no guarantee of salvation for persons who have lived a terrible life and then confess their sins in their final moments. Since all humans know that the final outcome of life is death, Erasmus stresses the importance of acknowledging one’s frailty and to be prepared for the inevitable (21r). He states that even if individuals have faith in their salvation, it may not be guaranteed. The only person who will decide if a soul will be saved is Christ, as he will weigh it for its deeds and its faith. The soul will be judged twice on separate occasions: one shortly after death (which will determine the soul’s temporary home: Hell, Purgatory or Heaven), and another in the Last Judgment (this will decide the final resting place of the soul: the Heavenly Jerusalem or the eternal lake of fire, as seen in the Book of Revelation).
Todos aquellos avisos del Señor nos avisan del día del juicio, pero poca diferencia ay, pues a cada uno su postrero día es como último día del mundo. En el fin del mundo será público el juicio vniuersal, pero entretanto cada anima luego que dexa el cuerpo, passa por su juicio, aunque a nosotros es oculto. Quiso el Señor que assi el un día como el otro nos fuese secreto, mostrando tambien en esto el grande amor que nos tiene, porque aun siendo assi, como vemos que los poderosos y malos son intolerables, que arian si supiesen que auia de viuir mucho tiempo. (21v-22r)

The Church therefore cannot judge the soul of one of its flock since the only individual authorized to judge all humans is Christ. Other individuals should also avoid judging Moriens’ soul since it is not their responsibility. Even if an individual seems pious, others in their society cannot have access to their soul’s state and therefore should not judge them as being safe from God’s wrath. A person who can be judged as guilty by their society may be innocent (22v-23r). Erasmus states that all Christians should habitually reflect on the state of their soul, and if there is a sin which is staining it, they should confess it. He suggests that this process only lasts fifteen minutes and that if this self-analysis if done contritely it will guarantee God’s immediate forgiveness (23r). Erasmus’ comments here are unusual, since the confession of one’s sins was still done through a priest who was authorized in this process so that he could assign proper penances and absolve the individual’s sin. Self-reflection was encouraged by the Church, since this would prompt the faithful to confess their sins in an orderly fashion. Nevertheless, the confession of one’s sins without going through the intermediary of a priest falls under the beliefs of the Protestant faith.

Erasmus adds a controversial point that conflicts with the requirement that a priest must assist moriens to assure a good death. He states clearly that having a priest present for the final sacraments are a comfort for moriens, but that having him present is not completely necessary. He

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43 The Preparación y aparejo para bien morir states that,

Pero como quiera que sea la Muerte, no por eso deuemos juzgar a ninguno. Aun de los que mueren justificados por algunos excessos, dado caso que mueran con infamia, no por esso diremos que van condenados. Porque puede ser que el que por reboluedor y alborotador de pueblos muere hecho quatroquartos, buele derecho al cielo, a la compañia de los angeles, y que otro que muere en su cama con el habito de santo Domingo y confessado, decienda derecho al infierno. Solo el Señor es quien puede juzgar desto.
believes that it is done for superstitious reasons (30f). If a priest is not available to attend moriens and offer the final sacraments, Erasmus suggests that they should confess all their sins to God and to plead with Him for the lack of the sacraments. He states that since God is able to do all things, He is able to administer the sacraments spiritually to moriens if a priest cannot be found.

Erasmus proceeds to criticize the Church for its lack of compassion in cases when priests did not go to counsel moriens through the process of death because of their negligence or because they were not paid on time (30v). He states that Christians who died without the administering of the final sacraments are still likely to go to Heaven because of their deeds in life and not because of the manner in which they died (30v). In addition, he states that some Christians who received the final sacraments and are buried inside a church could be in Hell. The only ones who know the truth are the souls of the deceased and the Holy Trinity. He encourages his reader by adding the following:

Erasmus supplements his messages of preparedness for one’s death by stressing the importance of fulfilling certain earthly responsibilities. Like the Ars moriendi manuals, Erasmus suggests that moriens should prepare a testament while they are still in good health to avoid rushing through its writing during the process of death. According to him, it is vital to make a testament for several reasons: instructing the executors on offerings that should be made, the numbers of masses
commissioned for the deceased, the funeral preparations and burial, but most importantly because it gives the testator the opportunity to reflect on the deceased’s life and death. Rushing through these things in the final moments of an individual’s life would not guarantee their soul’s proper preparation for death. Some individuals would delay the writing of their testament until the moment when they were suffering death. The writing of a testament at the deathbed of an individual was accepted as long as moriens was still of sound mind. If they were delirious, the testament could not be drawn up and therefore these individuals died ab intestate, without a will.

According to Erasmus, certain provisions had to be met if individuals were to dictate their testaments to a priest or notary. The obvious provision was to clearly outline their wealth and how they wished for it to be distributed among their survivors. He notes that the individual’s community was responsible for praying for their soul (23v). He gives the example of the body of Christ from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, that all members of the Christian faith make up the body and that Christ is at the head. The body cannot function without the help of the many parts which make it up. By giving alms to those who were poor or orphans in their community, the testator was guaranteed extra prayers and would also receive positive recognition for this charitable work in the Judgment. For even though their body was dead and could no longer perform good deeds, provision for these unfortunate people mirrored Christ’s charity to others. The three important components of salvation as stated by Erasmus are like the three nails that were put into Christ’s hands and feet: faith, hope and charity. If moriens was to die well, they would have to live well and not stray from their faith and their hope. Charity was to be accomplished in life by showing Christ-like compassion toward others, though it could also be done post-mortem by provisions outlined in their testaments. Erasmus warns the executor of the testament that God will punish all those who do not carry out the specific requests of the testators. Therefore, to avoid confusion and
greed, testators had to specify the amounts of money that would be designated for their family, for offerings to those less fortunate, the parish church, monasteries, and masses which were to be celebrated on their behalf.

**Alejo Venegas’ *the Agonía del tránsito de la muerte***

Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir* was a popular text in Spain because it followed in the tradition of the *Arte de bien morir*, although it also provided a more extensive outline on how to prepare for one’s death. As we have seen, Erasmus made several controversial statements with regards to the participation of the clergy in the process of death, as well as abuses of the Church in the “purchasing” of salvation with indulgences. The core message of the *Ars moriendi* was still preserved in the sixteenth-century Church’s discourse, since it continued to counsel the dying and give individuals hope in their faith, salvation, and especially in the Catholic doctrine. Shortly after Erasmus’ death, Alejo Venegas’ *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte* was published and was received with great enthusiasm in Spain. Even though he was not a member of the clergy, Venegas was a very well-educated man who had studied at the *Estudio* in Toledo and became one of the first censors of the sixteenth century. Venegas read numerous books in his career as a censor, but also before being appointed to that position. According to Bataillon, Venegas was mesmerized by Erasmus’ *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir* (565). Daniel Eisenberg remarks in “An Early Censor: Alejo Venegas” that Venegas was very dedicated to his Catholic faith and that he was “in constant and close contact with the ecclesiastical authorities of this religious center [Toledo]” (5). Venegas gained a great reputation as an important scholar in Toledo, although as Eisenberg states, Toledo’s importance as an intellectual center was no longer as great in as it had been in the medieval period (6). As a result of this decline, Venegas moved to Madrid in 1544 and continued working as a censor.
Bataillon notes that Venegas had many humanist friends and that he was even called to testify at the trial of Beteta in 1558 (565). Beteta stayed at Venegas’ house during his trial, and although Venegas had connections with people who were being investigated by the Inquisition, Venegas remained untouched. To critics such as Bataillon and Eisenberg it remains obvious that Venegas read and referred to Erasmus’ *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir* in writing the *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte*. Bataillon states that Venegas remarks that he got the idea for his text on June 1, 1536 after the death of his friend Don Diego de Mendoza, Count of Mélito (565). Because Venegas was a deeply religious man, he included lengthy explanations of the process of death and he criticized individuals who refused to follow the teachings of the Holy Catholic Church. The *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte* refers specifically to the spiritual battle that takes place as the soul leaves the body and important definitions are given of the soul and its immortality. The text, like others in the *Ars moriendi* tradition, describes the devil’s temptations, while it emphasizes the sixteenth-century Catholic Church’s discourse of remaining true to its doctrines and its hierarchy. The *Agonía* criticizes all individuals who have strayed to “false teachings” and who will consequently suffer greatly in the afterlife and Final Judgment for their erring.

Like all the *Ars moriendi* manuals, Venegas’ text reveals in a quotation from 1 Thessalonians 1: 4 that Christians should not be caught by surprise by their death, and imparts the hope that someday all those who have died before them will arise from their graves: “No queremos, hermanos, que tengais ignorancia de los que duermen, porque no os entristezcais como los otros que no tienen esperanza de resurrección” (9). The text’s message is meant to inspire Christians by reminding them that their soul’s life is immortal and as a result, every effort must be made to keep it free from the stain of sin. Venegas divides his argument into six parts that he
believes are essential in preparing his readers for a complete understanding of death and the immortal nature of the soul: 1) accepting God’s Will; 2) being aware of one’s mortality; 3) Satan’s temptations and how to pass them; 4) the nature of the soul and its many states (the division of the soul from the body); 5) a list of indulgences that will help liberate the soul from Purgatory; 6) observations on how to counsel and encourage moriens’ survivors.

As in the texts that we have already seen in chapters 1 and 2, the Agonía del tránsito de la muerte encourages moriens to accept their death as penalty for Original Sin and that God’s Will for their death should be accepted happily. To understand their mortality Venegas gives definitions of the different types of life and death, like Erasmus and Maestro Bernardo Pérez, in order to prevent the most horrifying of deaths, eternal death. The devil’s temptations are also included to remind moriens of how Satan will try to deceive them. In addition to fighting these temptations, by professing faith in Christ and his promises, Venegas suggests that remaining faithful to the Catholic Church will also save the true Christian’s soul and assure the intervention of the saints and other members of the celestial court on their behalf. An interesting addition to the Agonía del tránsito de la muerte is found in the fifth section when Venegas includes a list of all the indulgences that each Christian should possess before and following their death. It also explains how their survivors can apply the indulgences to the deceased’s time in Purgatory to shorten their stay there. This point will be elaborated upon shortly.

Accepting Death and God’s Will

Like other texts that counsel the dying in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Agonía requests that the Christian rely on Christ as he has promised that He can lighten any load (Matthew 11:28-30). Christians are assured that the compensation for all of life’s trials, following in Christ’s
example, will result in their eventual entry into Heaven. Because Heaven has been promised to the faithful, moriens must accept Purgatory as part of God’s plan in preparing the soul for Paradise. Venegas argues that Heaven is perfect and therefore no imperfection can be allowed to enter this place. As a result, the soul must be purged of all impurities. Venegas quotes 1 Corinthians 12:6 to encourage and remind his reader that all things are possible if they seek God’s help. Those who attempt to solve their problems on their own, or who try to endure a trial on their own, will fail miserably unless they make the effort to call out to God.⁴⁴

Christians cannot be saved by faith alone; they must perform good deeds since this is part of God’s commandment to love one’s neighbor. Even though Christ was living on earth and was holy, he was not exempt from performing good works, as the Scriptures chronicle many of his miracles. Since Christ helped those around him, even those whom he did not know, it is vital for all Christians to follow in his footsteps. Therefore Christians must attempt to have their actions mirror their Savior’s: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me” (John 16:24). Venegas remarks that Christ does not force everyone to follow his example, as he states “if any man will come after me” and not “everyone will come after me”. This is a clear example that proves that God gave all humans a free will to make their decisions. Obviously, if Christians wish to mirror Christ’s life, they must be more impressed to make the correct and moral choice. Venegas adds that in John 16:24, Christ invites all people, even people from different cultures and faiths, to follow him, and that he does not judge them: “mas amorosamente les persuade el camino de la verdad” (14). It is therefore important for Christians to not be full of pride in assuming that they will be admitted into Heaven over someone who converted to Christianity and who had a different religious and cultural

⁴⁴ Venegas includes a quotation from Luke 17:10 to elaborate his point.
background. Only those who have faith in Christ’s power of salvation combined with good works, will be allowed into Paradise. Venegas states that Christians who take part in any teaching that is contrary to Catholicism, they will never be admitted into Heaven (14). Those who follow the right path, the one laid out by the Catholic Church as the rightful representative of Peter’s ministry, will be saved, since all others are mistaken in their journey.

Todos estos emboscados, por ignorancia o por presunción pierden el camino de Dios, porque no se contentan de seguir pisadas de su Maestro como los otros; mas porque se tengan en cuenta y estima presumen ir adelante como nuevos descubridores de nuevo camino, por donde piensan llevar a todos los amadores de novedad. (14)

The correct path for the journey to Heaven is the one outlined by Christ’s life on earth, therefore all individuals who want to enter Heaven’s gates will have to follow his advice and “deny themselves”. The journey of following in the steps of Christ and being true to their faith will help these individuals through all trials no matter how painful or difficult the situation (15). Venegas states that if Christians are not able to resist the whole trial on their own, they can rely on God’s help since He will provide the remainder. Here we must keep in mind one of Venegas’ earlier warnings which is that anyone who does not seek out God’s help in a trial, will fail. If Christians have sought out God’s help and remained faithful until their death, they can be assured that Paradise will be their journey’s final destination.

Like the “De Scientia Mortis” and the Arte de bien morir, which state that death comes to all living beings, Venegas makes the same affirmation and then defines death. Death, according to him, is the separation of the soul from the body (25). He elaborates on his brief definition by explaining that it is:

una privación con que se acaba la vida mortal; cómo el que quitase la lumbre que alcanza las tinieblas, en sólo quitar la candela sin poner algo de nuevo, queda la obscuridad, y así
This image reminds the reader that Adam’s body gained life and a soul by God breathing it into his nostrils. On an interesting note, although the figure of Death in medieval texts, such as the *Danza general de la Muerte* and Alvar García de Santa María’s account of the coronation of Fernando de Antequera, is “animated” though in an advanced stage of decomposition, it is still animated by its soul as it is immortal. In most of the literature that we have seen, the writers note that the soul must be separated from the body in death and Venegas is no exception. He states that the body will be unrecognizable because of its decomposed state (dust), however it will return to its living form and be reunited with the soul once again on the Day of Judgment (26). Death is not to be seen as a horrible or frightening event, since it brings the promise of a better life and an end to one’s pilgrimage in a strange land.

Concluyamos, pues, que la muerte no se debe poner entre los males, porque la muerte de los que mueren en gracia no es otra cosa sino la salida de cárcel, un fin del destierro, un remate de los trabajos del cuerpo, un puerto de tempestades, un término del viaje, un dejo de la carga pesada, una salida del caedizo edificio, una evasión de peligros, una exclusión de todos los males, una paga de la deuda que a naturaleza se debe, un caminar a la patria, y finalmente, un recibimiento y entrada en la gloria. (27)

One cannot define death without referring to life. To understand this statement, Venegas gives three explanations, similar to the ones found in Bernardo Pérez’s translation of Erasmus’ text. He states that there are three lives and three deaths: 1) the natural life vs. the death of the body; 2) the life of grace vs. the spiritual death; 3) the life of glory vs. the eternal death. Pérez made references to the processes of life and death as “births” since the individual’s soul never dies but passes through different birthing processes before entering eternal life. Venegas uses the same metaphor, though he does not describe the births and maturing processes in the same manner. The “natural life” is the life that we are living and will end with the death of the body. The second life
(and death) is divided into two sections: life of grace and the spiritual death. At this stage, the soul separates from the body and is weighed to determine if it will take part in the life of grace or in the spiritual death. If the soul of the individual has lived under God's grace in the first life and it has made itself agreeable to Him then it will be admitted into Heaven after the Judgment. Until that day when the body is resurrected, the soul will spend a time in Purgatory purging itself until it is clean. If the soul has not lived under God's grace in the first life, then consequently it will have to suffer a terrible fate before and after the Judgment.

The second life and the third life are interconnected, as are the second and third deaths. All those who have lived under God's grace will be purged of impurities in Purgatory and enter the eternal life of glory after the Judgment. All those who did not live under God's grace will suffer the spiritual death which will not allow them to be admitted to Heaven. Consequently, this individual will have to suffer the most terrifying death, which is to be tormented forever in the gehenna, the eternal lake of fire that is described in the book of Revelation. Venegas reminds his reader with a quotation from the Book of Revelation 14:13, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.” Death can come at any age and the youth should not delay in confessing their sins and doing penance for them until they are old, as death can surprise them before they are able to reform their lives. The intent to confess and do penance must be carried out as soon as an individual's soul is convicted, because if they procrastinate their confession, the intent alone will not be sufficient to save the soul in the Final Judgment.

De aquí se arguye el yerro de aquellos que en la juventud proponen de hacer penitencia en la vejez, cómo sea verdad que o lo dejan por pereza [...] De esta misma manera los buenos propósitos dilatados, como la dilación sea causa de peoridad, abortan las ánimas al infierno, el cual está lleno de hombres que tuvieron buenos propósitos y con la dilación ordinaria nunca los sacaron a la luz. (30)
Procrastination is attributed to sloth. Venegas states that even though this terrible sin is not as grave as pride, it can still be the cause the condemnation of many Christians as it targets all people and all ages because it begins gradually. The process of sloth steadily advances until the soul has to make compromises that can affect their mortality. It will stall the individuals’ life-purpose and their completion of good deeds; it can lead Christians away from the right path and from following in Christ’s footsteps, and thus force them into a terrifying afterlife.

According to Venegas, it is important that all individuals whom the deceased loved do not come into contact with them anymore, as they can lead moriens into sin (46). The priest assisting moriens with the preparation of their soul for death will be responsible for choosing who will look after them in the final moments of life. They must be charitable and remind the dying of the devil’s temptations and how they can be avoided with the three virtues: faith, hope and charity. They should encourage moriens to trust in God and to have a strong faith in Christ. The dying have to believe that they have been forgiven from their sins and that they will go to Heaven. However, in order to enforce their belief in this promise, Venegas states that if two or more priests pray for moriens’ soul before the latter lose their five senses, they will double the amounts of charity shown to them and they will profit doubly in the afterlife (49).

In addition to these prayers, moriens is to be as patient as possible during the process of death to avoid falling into the devil’s temptation. In order to be successful during the temptation of impatience, moriens must focus on the Passion of Christ and how he also patiently waited for his death. To resist the devil’s temptation, moriens can whisper the names of Jesus or of the Virgin Mary, which according to Venegas, will automatically scare away the devil “cómo se esparce el humo al viento” (51).
The disappearance of the devil at the name of Jesus or of the Virgin Mary is not a new theme. This action takes place in several medieval texts, such as Gonzalo de Berceo’s *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, when the character who is being besieged by the devil calls out the name of the Virgin. When she appears, the demons flee her presence (*milagro* XX, “El monje embriagado”). As Jacques Le Goff remarks in *En busca de la Edad Media*, demons could be depicted in several forms in medieval literature and art. Le Goff makes it very clear that Satan cannot be placed on the same level as God, since he was a creation and not the Creator. As a result of this definition, he rejects the notions of dualism and Manichaeism when making comparisons between these figures. Le Goff argues that in the early Middle Ages theologians preferred referring to Satan as Lucifer to make the distinction clear between creation and Creator (139). The creatures who served under Satan, demons, were of different sizes and did not always play the same role as their leader. The demons can be represented as troublemakers, jokers, and in some cases, as in Berceo’s *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, occasionally offered a comic relief when a tense situation appeared, for example they play kick-ball with the soul of a character (*milagro* II, “El sacristán fornicario”). Demons are contrasted to the wise powers of good, such as the angels, saints or the Virgin Mary, since their stupidity is clearly and immediately revealed when members of the celestial court appear. As a result of the fear of being face to face with goodness, their prey (the soul) is automatically released. Because Venegas’ text and the *Ars moriendi* texts expose the deceiving devices used by the devil in moriens’ final moments of life, it is therefore vital for them to be prepared to fight him by learning the effectiveness of the name of Christ and of the Virgin, since their whole presence is evoked in the utterance of the name.

Y, sobre todo, cuanto más se consigue expulsar a Satán y sus servidores, más crece el número y la fuerza de los adversarios de Satán: los ángeles, los santos, la Virgen, Jesucristo, pero también la Iglesia y todos los sacramentos. (Le Goff 139)
Carlos Eire further completes Le Goff’s argument about the presence of demons at moriens’ bedside. He states that the dying could see the spiritual battle which was taking place over their soul as the dying would be in a special state once they lost the five senses.

Popular and official belief in the presence of demons at the deathbed was apparently quite strong, and helped shape much of the death ritual. As the body of the moriens deteriorated and its five senses began to fail, it was believed, the soul could now catch glimpses of the spirit world. Because the soul was now nearly out of the body, literally at the door of the hereafter, but the moriens’ reason remained unimpaired, the devil would make one final terrifying assault and turn the final hours of life into a pitched battle (32).

For this reason, Venegas emphasizes the need of having several good Catholics praying for moriens in the room and as many priests as possible to pray for their soul as it struggled to fight the Enemy’s temptations. The soul must be strong in its faith in order for it to resist Satan’s temptations in this final period since he will attack the soul frequently and in different ways. Since he can only have access to an individual’s soul during its lifetime, it is his priority to steal the soul before it becomes strengthened by the counseling of priests and the reading of manuals such as the Arte de bien morir. Venegas states that the devil is not completely certain that he has a hold of an individual’s soul, therefore he must make every possible attempt to secure a soul’s perdition (55).

Compared to the Arte de bien morir and even to Erasmus’ Preparación y aparejo de bien morir, which do not explain the responsibility of the soul as the five senses leave the individual, Venegas emphasizes that the soul will not be excused from Judgment if it is weakened by the devil’s temptations. For this reason, it is vital to have people present in the room with the dying who can reassure them and counsel them through the many deceptions that the devil has in store.

Venegas’ text differs from the other three Ars moriendi texts that we have examined in a section in which he outlines four of Spain’s vices. He states that the Spaniards are as guilty of the five temptations of the devil as their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe. He criticizes them
especially, however, for the excessive decoration of their clothing instead of focusing on the state of their souls (92); the condemnation of the “oficio mecánico” which leads to sloth and other vices (93); the obsession with one’s lineage that leads people to abuse others (93); and the refusal of the Spaniard to become more knowledgeable (93). The first sin, the excessive decoration and investment in an individual’s clothing is criticized because people were exceeding their spending on their clothing over their rent or their housekeeping. Individuals were starving their families in order to be well-dressed in life and at their burials (94). This vice causes people to fall prey to vainglory as well as a lack of charity toward their neighbors. The second vice is the condemnation of the “oficio mecánico”. According to Venegas, instead of making progress and contributions to their society, these men were falling into other vices such as burglary, womanizing, and sloth. The third vice, the problem of lineages, was causing disunity of the body of Christ (95) and therefore made others feel more superior to the rest. The fourth vice is the refusal of the Spaniard to apply the advice given in church sermons to their lives. He states that this vice is rooted in pride, and is one of the ways that the devil can take hold of an individual.

Venegas’ criticism of his society in this section shows a clear and critical discourse that can dialogue with the other texts in an original manner since the other texts do not make this specific criticism. Venegas’ text is unique in its criticism which does not appear in Maestro Bernardo Pérez’s translation of the Preparación y aparejo or in the medieval Spanish version of the Arte de bien morir. As we will see in the next few chapters, even in the versions written in Nueva España, some did not openly criticize the problems of their societies. The only texts that make a specific criticism to the issues addressed by Venegas will be the seventeenth-century Aparejo para bien morir by the Dominican friar Martín de León and the Reglas y obligaciones para para una buena

Venegas writes that “... por cuya causa hay abundancia de holgazanas y malas mujeres, demás de los vicios que a la ociosidad acompañan, con toda cofradía del número.” (92-93)
muerte by the eighteenth-century Congregación de la buena muerte. In these texts, the issues of sloth and ostentatious clothing will be addressed and critiqued.

**Can the Soul Communicate with the Living?**

Venegas states that the soul is aware of what is happening in the world since it senses the indulgences offered up on its behalf, provided that they are offered in charity. The soul still retains its free will once it has separated from the body, but it now relies on what God wants for it. It is therefore not impossible for the soul to be visible to its survivors, although this can only be achieved if God allows it. Venegas warns that most apparitions of departed souls are angels or demons and therefore it is important to analyze what they are saying to the living. If the living trust all the spirits that visit them, they could be deceived by a demon and fall into occult practices (114). Angels and saints are the only ones permitted to contact the living, thus accounting for the sightings of the Virgin Mary or the saints. Since demons and evil souls are condemned to Hell they cannot leave this realm (as proven by the story of Lazarus and the rich man) to contact the living. Venegas states that the living should be wary of people who claim to have seen a soul, since this is one of Satan’s deceptions. He can represent these souls to cast doubt on the living, as he did in Berceo’s milagro VIII “El romero engañado por el enemigo malo”, when he took the shape of St. James and convinced a pilgrim to commit suicide. Souls that are in Heaven cannot know what people on earth are thinking or feeling, though this can happen if God allows it. Angels and saints are the only ones who are permitted to see into a human’s heart, as this will allow them to recognize the individuals they have to defend on the Day of Judgment (119-120).

The subject of indulgences was one of the major points of controversy in the sixteenth century among the Protestant theologians and the Catholic Church. The Protestants criticized the
Church for stressing the role of indulgences in the salvation of the soul and the abuses of power resulting from their “sale”.\(^{46}\) Alejo Venegas supports the Church’s doctrine regarding indulgences, as he states in the *Agonía del tránsito de la Muerte* that payment is required to free the deceased’s soul from Purgatory.

Dícese en caridad, porque la caridad es la forma de las virtudes sin la cual ninguna obra es meritoria de Gloria. Dícese para paga o parte de paga de la deuda, porque el que no debe, no tiene necesidad de sufragios. Dícese lo último del prójimo porque la obra caritativa, que cada uno hace por sí, no se dirá sufragio, sino paga propia de la deuda que por sus propios pecados es obligado a pagar. (125)

The indulgences obtained after their death, and offered by family and friends, were beneficial to all parties involved. The soul would receive a blessing, and those who had obtained the indulgence also, since it was done in the spirit of charity and met with the requirements outlined by Christ in the seven acts of mercy. According to St. Gregory, there are four types of indulgences: 1) the Eucharist, 2) prayers to the saints, 3) offerings on behalf of the deceased’s soul, 4) fasting. Of all these indulgences, the most important and effective is the Eucharist as it is a reminder of Christ’s Passion and his grace. Since it was often celebrated during private mass for priests, in front of the congregation and under the commission of relatives and friends of the deceased, it was the most common of the four. As in all indulgences that were offered in the spirit of charity, the Eucharist also had to be celebrated with this attitude. If a priest offered it up in vain, the indulgence would not be applied to the souls and could even condemn the celebrant. Venegas also states that the Eucharist should not be celebrated by individuals who are trying to break the unity of the Church, as there will be no advantage for their soul or for the deceased’s.

\(^{46}\) Thomas James Dandelet notes in *Spanish Rome, 1500-1700* that in some testaments of Spaniards living in Rome in the sixteenth century, they requested that their entire properties be given to the Church for the exchange of their prayers and masses. In some cases, testators made their souls their only heir and consequently all their wealth and property went to the churches who agreed to say masses on their behalf (162).
Por lo cual la Iglesia prohíbe a los malos ministros de la administración de los sacramentos, y en especial del santísimo sacramento de la Eucaristía, al cual derechamente repugna la malicia del mal sacerdote. Por lo cual, porque este santísimo sacramento es sacramento de fe, la Iglesia prohíbe y suspende los heréticos de la celebración de él; y porque es vínculo de caridad, por eso suspende a los cismáticos, que quieren romper la unidad de la Iglesia.

(129)

As we see, there is a strong condemnation for the priests who had opposed the Catholic Church and turned to Protestantism. In Venegas’ view, these individuals who had been excommunicated from the Church would not be able to guarantee the deceased’s soul a place in Paradise as a result of their own offense.

The sixteenth-century texts that we have studied in this chapter elaborated on the main structure and content of the *Arte de bien morir* by adding some new discourses. If we break down the main elements in both the *Agonía del tránsito de la Muerte* and in the *Preparación y aparejo para bien morir*, we still discover Gerson’s four founding points as well as the devil’s five temptations from the *Arte de bien morir*. We can tell that Venegas has read Erasmus’ *Preparación*, as he makes indirect references to it, though he deviates from it on several points. Venegas’ text enforces Catholic doctrine, especially the need for indulgences and the presence of a priest at *moriens’* bedside, while Erasmus criticizes the abuses of the Church. Venegas also adds his own social criticism of sixteenth-century Spanish society by enumerating its vices. The discourse of the Church in the salvation of the soul is supported by three virtues, faith, hope and charity, which are cultivated in all four texts. Nevertheless, there are new discourses present in the sixteenth-century texts studied here. Erasmus questions the role of the Church in the process of death since he believes that it controls and judges who can be admitted into Heaven by frightening its faithful into believing that only the Church can save their souls through the secret bond between priests and Christ. He states that those who have lived a good life should not be frightened by dying alone and without the council of a priest since good deeds will contribute to their salvation.
Venegas, on the other hand, supports the Church's role in the salvation of the soul even if it takes place in the last moments of an individual's life. He believes that the role of the priest attending the dying is indispensable in assuring them that they will enter Heaven's gates. He also places a great deal of importance on other elements which will contribute to their good death, such as the location of burial, the funeral cortege, and a well-crafted testament. As we have seen, the good death in the late Middle Ages consists of the contrite confession of one's sins on the deathbed, but the perspective shifts in the sixteenth-century. What is considered a good death varies and takes on new meanings depending on a specific time and space. For Spain's sixteenth-century, a good death was achieved by the manner in which individuals lived their lives; by the means of how they cultivated the three virtues of faith, hope and charity.
Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the
name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have
commanded you: and lo I am with you always, even unto the
end of the world. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

The Spaniards arrived in Anáhuac (Nueva España) on Maundy Thursday 1519 under the
command of Hernán Cortés. As he and his men descended from the ship, Fray Bartolomé Olmedo,
a Franciscan, officiated mass on the beach as the Nahuas watched in amazement at Cortés
kneeling before a wooden cross (Ricard 78). From that moment, it would take five years to
conquer Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec Empire, destroy the Templo Mayor and build in its
place the first Christian church in Mexico (now known as the Catedral Metropolitana). Another
building of equal symbolic importance was the Convento Grande de San Francisco, the first
monastery to be established in Nueva España. It was constructed in 1524 and would be recognized
by scholars as an important centre for its linguistic and anthropological contributions on the Nahua
languages and its cultures, as well as for its evangelistic projects. The Franciscan friars, and later
the Dominicans, learned the difficult languages of Nueva España’s inhabitants, their history and
their traditions, in order to have a complete understanding of how the Aztec Empire functioned.

47 Edmundo O’Gorman notes in his edition of Fray Toribio Motolinía’s Historia de los indios de la Nueva España that
one of the men who took part in Juan de Grijalva’s expedition in 1511 first used the term Nueva España when referring
to Anáhuac (Mexico). Cortés adopted the term Nueva España in 1519 and since then, Nueva España became the
official name of this land (2).

48 I will be using the term Nahuas to refer to the native inhabitants of Anáhuac. Because the Aztec Empire was made
up by many distinct cultures and Náhuatl was spoken by most groups, I will refer to the people by the land’s lingua franca.

49 These two mendicant orders were the first to arrive in Nueva España, followed shortly by the Augustinians in 1533.
The Jesuits arrived in 1572. The Franciscans and Dominicans were the orders most interested in adopting a humanistic
approach to evangelize the Nahua. They insisted on learning their customs and languages in order to better communicate Christianity to the people.
As there were no exact equivalents in the languages of the natives for such Christian terms as the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, Purgatory, sin and salvation, the friars made some substitutions that would later be questioned by future members of their orders.

The mendicant orders that arrived in *Nueva España* believed that the spiritual conversion of the Nahuas would not meet with any resistance. They assumed that the people would reject their deities in favor of the Christian God. Although in theory their conversion techniques seemed ideal, as Tzvetan Todorov demonstrates in *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, the Nahuas and the Spaniards had different views on religion and its function within society (83). Todorov notes that the Nahuas were a highly ritualized people and relied on the traditions of their ancestors to organize their society; whereas, the Spaniards relied on improvisation and were better at rationalizing their faith and its rituals (83). As a result of the approach taken by the Franciscans in the conversion of the Nahuas, the Christian faith eventually began to spread and there were thousands of conversions to Christianity, as seen in Mendieta’s *Historia eclesiástica Indiana* and in Motolinía’s *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*. The conversion of the natives occurred quickly and was supervised by the Inquisition; however, as we will see in the remainder of this dissertation, some elements of the pre-Hispanic religion survived the process of Christianization. As William Rowe and Vivian Schelling state in *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, the syncretism that occurred in *Nueva España* can be linked to three distinct elements: official Catholicism, the indigenous religion, and sixteenth-century Spanish popular Catholicism.

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50 The number of Nahuas that were baptized in the early years after the Conquest of Mexico varies depending on each account. Motolinía writes that on one occasion over three hundred thousand individuals were baptized in an afternoon (*Tratado* 2, chapter 3), while Mendieta states that the “Twelve” (Franciscan friars), baptized over six million Nahuas (Book III, chapter 39).

51 Richard E. Greenleaf writes in *Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543* that there are no inquisitorial documents for the Americas before 1519 and that there was no organized Inquisition in Mexico in the early years after the Conquest (8). The first trial to be documented in *Nueva España* dates from 1522 and accuses a Nahuá, Marcos de Acolhuacán for the crime of concubinage (8). Martín de Valencia, one of the “Twelve” was the first friar in *Nueva España* to have inquisitorial powers.
As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, medieval and sixteenth-century popular Catholicism in Spain, and in Europe, permitted the survival of ancient forms of worship in Catholic rituals, for example: the cults of the saints, of the Virgin Mary, and remedies and superstitions. The early Church in Europe had attempted to erase the syncretism that occurred by substituting pagan deities with Christian equivalents; however, as seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the Church was unable to complete this task. Popular Catholicism arrived in Nueva España with the conquistadors and would continue to evolve as it permitted the survival of certain elements of the Nahua religion in Catholic iconographies and rituals. In this chapter, we will examine some elements of the indigenous religion as well as the Church’s initial acceptance of the religious syncretism that occurred in New Spain. We will also look at the Church’s opposition to the phenomenon once Christianity had officially been firmly established in the land.

**Joachim of Flora and the Franciscan Order’s Millenarian Views for Nueva España: Converting the Nahua**

In the Book of Revelation 20:4-6 the Apostle John describes Christ’s millenarian reign. All individuals who had remained faithful to Christ would arise from their graves and be rewarded for their loyalty by living and reigning with him for a thousand years. Joachim of Flora (Fiore) (1130-1202), a Cistercian abbot from Calabria and founder of the abbey of Saint John of the Flower, was part of the monastic trend of living by the virtue of poverty. He interpreted the Bible following traditional exegesis but also a numerical exegesis that resulted in several eschatological works that were popular among the mendicant orders (Baudot 1995: 76). Georges Baudot states in *Utopia and History in Mexico* that St. Francis of Assisi was greatly inspired by Flora’s writings and analyses of dreams (1995: 76). Like Flora, who had chosen to live in poverty, St. Francis and his twelve disciples also lived in the same state in order to receive the reward of reigning with Christ
for a thousand years. In the sixteenth century, the Franciscans who arrived in New Spain were also greatly influenced by these two medieval men. The "Twelve" Franciscans, who were arguably the most famous clerics to evangelize in Mexico, were led by Fray Martín de Valencia who followed Joachim of Flora’s theories of millenarianism and had adopted a humanist approach (based on Erasmus of Rotterdam’s theories) to their evangelistic mission in New Spain (Ricard 26). Joachim of Flora had written that mass conversions to Christianity would hasten Christ’s second coming. To complete Flora’s millenarian prophesy (Baudot 1995: 78), which required that the gentiles and the lost tribe of Israel convert to Christianity, the Franciscans and the Dominicans focused all their efforts on converting and baptizing the Nahuas, who they believed were the lost tribe. This evangelistic opportunity, following the recent spiritual re-Conquest of


54 The Nahuas were supposedly the lost tribe of Israel, the one that had been separated from the rest under the rule of the Assyrian Emperor Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17: 7-23, 34-41). Fray Diego Durán’s writes about this suspicion in the first chapter of the Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la tierra firme.

Quanto a lo primero, tendremos por principal fundamento el ser esta nacion y gente indiana advenediza, de extrañas y remotas regiones, y que en su venida a poseer esta tierra, hizo un largo y prolijo camino, en el cual gastó muchos años y meses para llegar a ella, como de su relacion y pinturas se colige, y como de algunos viejos ancianos de muchos días, he procurado saber para sacar esta opinion en limpio: y dado el caso que algunos cuenten algunas falsas fabulas, conviene a saber: que nacieron de unas cuevas; otros que su generation es de los dioses, etc.; lo cual clara y abiertamente se vee ser fabula y que ellos mismos ignoran su origen y principio, dado caso que siempre confiesen aver venido de tierras extrañas, y así lo he hallado pintado en sus antiguas pinturas, donde señalan grandes trabajos de hambre, sed, y desnudez, con otras innumerables afligiciones que en él pasaron, hasta llegar a esta tierra y poblalla, con lo cual confirmo mi opinion y sospecha de que estos naturales sean de aquellas diez tribus de Israel, que Salmanasar, Rey de los Asirios, cautivó y trasmigró de Asiria en tiempo de Oseas, Rey de Israel, y en tiempo de Exequias, Rey de Jerusalem, como se podrá ver en el cuarto Libro de los Reyes, cap. 17, donde dize que fue trasladado Israel de su tierra a los Asirios, hasta el día de hoy etc., de los quales dize es tierra remota y apartada que nunca había sido auitada. (Vol.1, chapter 1:2)
Spain for Catholicism, led the friars to re-examine Flora’s predictions of the millenarian rule. Consequently, the “Twelve” were confident that converting the Nahuas to Christianity would usher in Christ’s millenarian rule as predicted by Flora.

Flora’s theory on the end of the natural world was based on numerological evidence that he found in the Scriptures. He also saw in the seals of the Apocalypse the destruction of the temporal Church and the nearing of the End-times. Though he believed that he was living in the age before the millennium, because of the corruption in the Church, Flora died before he could see his dream realized. The destruction of the Church by events in human history were re-analyzed in the sixteenth century by the Franciscans who believed that the threat of Protestantism, the “discovery” of the Americas, and the corruption in the Church would finally usher in Christ’s second coming and the Judgment. Flora had supported his argument for the millenarian rule by doing a “historic” reading of the Apocalypse based on the Old Testament and the predictions of Christ in the New Testament. He believed that there were three distinct stages, each of which corresponded to a person of the Holy Trinity. The first stage was the age of God the Father and corresponded linearly to the time represented in the Old Testament. The second stage was the age of the Son and was characterized by Christ revealing the true meaning of the Old Testament’s prophesies. These revelations, which were passed on to Peter (the founder of the Church), prepared his believers for the third stage. As a result, the Church believed itself to be solely responsible for correctly interpreting Christ’s words to the faithful. Flora predicted that the second stage, the rule of the temporal Church, would come to an end with a great cataclysm that would bring about the age of the Holy Spirit. Under the Holy Spirit’s rule, Christ’s prophesies would finally be revealed to all living creatures and there would no longer be any need for the disciplinary institutions founded in
the first and second stages. As Baudot states, the Franciscans believed that the third stage would be ushered in by their Order.

This third age would be inaugurated by a new Christ, the founder of a new monastic order, whom Joachim identified as Saint Benedict. This point is important because, later on, Saint Francis of Assisi would be identified by some of his followers as the new Messiah, as the second Christ, the bearer of the new age. (1995: 77)

This did not necessarily mean that St. Francis would re-appear and bring in the third age. As seen in Chapter 2, the testaments of certain individuals reveal a popular belief that the habit of the Franciscans represented the actual presence of the Saint. This justification could also be used to explain why the Franciscans that arrived in New Spain were certain that they would be responsible for converting the Nahuas and in turn hasten Christ’s return to Earth and his millenarian rule.

Mickey Abel-Turby notes in “New World Augustinians and Franciscans” that the Franciscans justified the use of force in the spiritual conquest of the Nahuas because of their millenarian interpretations of the biblical passage of Luke 14:12-14. In this passage of Scripture, Christ speaks about the need to love one’s neighbour, especially those who are in need and not only individuals who are already in one’s acquaintance. The Franciscans interpreted the poor, maimed and lame in the passage to be the Nahuas.

The Franciscans’ “apocalyptic” reading of the Luke parable justified their own coercive actions, but it also corresponded perfectly, if not conveniently, with the Spanish military’s program under Cortés. It was an ideological compatibility that allowed the religious order to support Cortés and the conquest openly. In the end, the military’s violent conquest was deemed a necessary prerequisite to the friars’ religious instruction. (11)


56 Then said him that bade him, when thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensated at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:12-14)
Since the Franciscans were convinced that the Nahuas were the lost tribe of Israel, their conversion to Christianity would be the final component required for the new age. Supporting the military and Cortés’ vision for another Catholic colony would be justifiable in order for Flora’s prophesy to become a reality. As the New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia states, “After this Latins and Greeks would be united in the new spiritual kingdom, freed alike from the fetters of the letter; the Jews would be converted, and the ‘Eternal Gospel’ abide until the end of the world.”

Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta (c. 1524-c.1614) also employed a millenarian discourse in the composition of his text, though he was not one of the original “Twelve” Franciscans. He notes that the Catholic Church needed a savior. The solution to this problem, according to Mendieta, was the “discovery” of the Americas and the birth of Hernán Cortés. Using the technique of comparison that was applied in the forensic debates of the Middle Ages, Mendieta contrasts Cortés (the defender of Catholicism and the saviour of the Nahuas’ souls) to Martin Luther (the destroyer of Catholicism in Europe and chief “heretic”). He compares their dates of birth and other important dates in their lives in order prove that Cortés is God’s chosen servant for expanding Catholicism in the New World and creating an opportunity for the friars to convert the Nahuas to Catholicism. Luther, on the other hand, is Satan’s helper and is seeking to confuse European Catholics and lead them away from the “true” faith.

Débese aquí mucho poderar, cómo sin alguna dubda eligió Dios señaladamente y tomó por instrumento á este valeroso capitán D. Fernando Cortés, para por medio suyo abrir la puerta y hacer camino á los predicadores de su Evangelio en este nuevo mundo, donde se restaurase y se recompensase la Iglesia católica con conversión de muchas ánimas, la


58 Mendieta’s exact date of birth or the date of his death are not known. His relative, Father Domayquia, states that he “murió viejísimo, muy cerca de los noventa años de edad, y sesenta de morador de las Indias” (Mendieta, XVII). Joaquin Garcia Icazbalceta, the first publisher of Mendieta’s text (1870), notes that he, himself, made the calculations for Mendieta’s date of birth and death according to the information that he gathered from letters and other written documents.
pérvida y daño grande que el maldito Lutero había de causar en la misma sazon y tiempo en la antigua cristianidad. De suerte que lo que por una parte se perdía, se cobrase por otra. Y así, no carece de ministerio que el mismo año que Lutero nació en Islebio, villa de Sajonia, nació Hernando Cortés en Medellín, villa de España; aquel para turbar el mundo y meter debajo de la bandera del demonio á muchos de los fieles que de padres y abuelos y muchos tiempos atrás eran católicos, y este para traer al gremio de la Iglesia infinita multitud de gentes que por años sin cuento habían estado debajo del poder de Satanás envueltos en vicios y ciegos con la idolatría. (Mendieta, Book 3, chapter 1: 174-75)

In his view, Cortés was the chosen man to preserve the strength of Catholicism in the New World and lead the Nahuas away from idol worship.

Mendieta also refers to Cortés as the new Moses who would lead the Nahuas away from the domination of the pharaoh (Satan), thus justifying the Conquest and the forced spiritual conversion of the people. According to him, God heard the cry of the Nahuas and sent them a saviour who would free them from their bondage to the gods. Although there are Messianic overtones in the text, we cannot say that Mendieta believed Cortés to be the New World’s Messiah.

En confirmación de esto se halla por la cuenta de las antiguallas de los indios, que el año en que Cortés nació, que fue el de mil y cuatrocientos y ochenta y cinco, se hizo en la ciudad de México una solemnísima fiesta de dedicación del templo mayor de los ídolos (que á la sazon se habia acabado), en la cual fiesta (que a la razon tendría largos octavarios) se sacrificaron ochenta mil y cuatrocientas personas. Mirad si el clamor de tantas almas y sangre humana derramada en injuria de su Criador sería bastante para que Dios dijese: Vi la aflicción de este miserable pueblo; y también para enviar en si nombre quien tanto malo remedias, como á otro Moisén á Egipto. Y que Cortés naciese en aquel mismo año, y por ventura el dia principal de tan gran carnicería, señal particular y evidencia de su singular eleccion. (Book 3, chapter 1: 175)

As Mendieta has stated, God chose the date of the dedication of Templo Mayor to be the same for Cortés’ birth. Because Cortés allows for the preservation of Catholicism and its expansion to Nueva España, he is recognized as a key player in the evangelization of the Nahuas, thus allowing for the precipitation of Christ’s return. Todorov writes that historical chronology of the Church is also used to justify the spiritual conquest of the natives (147). He notes that God oversees everything; therefore, it was in His Will for Christ to transmit his power to Peter, who established
the Church. The Church is overseen by the pope and the members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, who in turn supported the Spanish Crown’s plans to expand Catholicism in the Americas. As a result, the Crown chooses Hernán Cortés as its representative and who is consequently the defender and establisher of the Catholic faith in *Nueva España*. Hernán Cortés becomes the God-chosen hero of Catholicism according to the chronological relationships listed above. Therefore it is possible for Mendieta to see Cortés as the solution to the spiritual conversion of the Nahuas and the ushering in of the third age.

**Evangelism in New Spain: the Exclusive Control of the Mendicant Orders**

During the process of converting the Nahuas to Christianity, the Franciscan Order brought with it numerous doctrinal texts that would strengthen its own faith while benefiting the newly-converted natives. These texts would later be translated into the Nahuas’ different languages by the friars. The printing press was brought to Mexico in 1539 by its first bishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Although he has been accused of destroying important Nahua texts, he played an important role in selecting the texts of doctrinal importance that would be printed at Juan Pablos’ press in Mexico.

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59 We must note that Zumárraga’s press was established in Mexico City and was the Mexican branch of Juan Cromberger’s press. According to Román Zulaica Gárate in *Los franciscanos y la imprenta en México en el siglo XVI*, Cromberger’s worked in participation with Juan Pablos, who, was sent to Mexico City in 1539 to set up the press. Zulaica Gárate states that the contract between Cromberger and the Bishop of Mexico (Juan de Zumárraga) appears in *Documentos para la historia de la tipografía Americana* and outlines Juan Pablos’ role in the establishment of the press (Zulaica Gárate 18).

60 Although Fray Diego Durán does not name Zumárraga directly in his *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de la tierra firme* as the individual who requisitioned the burning of important historical manuscripts, future generations of scholars will not be able to study the unaltered discourses of the Nahuas.
City. Most texts were printed in Castilian although numerous texts were also printed in Náhuatl and in other important indigenous languages. Among the doctrinal texts that were printed in Mexico are catechisms and several versions of the *Arte de bien morir*. These texts will be looked at in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Hernán Cortés believed that the tasks of evangelizing and converting the Nahuas to Christianity would be more successful if a simpler system was adopted. As a result, he wrote to the king in one of his *cartas de relación* dated October 15, 1524, asking that the mendicant friars be in charge of establishing the Church in *Nueva España* (Greenleaf 8). The Spanish Crown accepted Cortés’ request, since there was a shortage of members from the secular clergy in Spain and numerous willing candidates from the mendicant orders who were eager to contribute to the missionary plans of the Crown. The Franciscan Order appealed to Pope Leo X (1475-1521) requesting that they be permitted to act as secular clerics and therefore be allowed to administer sacraments. The bull was granted on April 10, 152161 and extended by Pope Leo X’s successor Adrian VI (1459-1523) in another bull “Exponi nobis”, allowing all mendicant orders the same privilege where there was no resident bishop or when he was at two days’ distance. Mendieta writes in *Historica eclesiástica Indiana* that the secular clergy was not permitted to make the initial voyage to New Spain because the mendicants feared that their corruption would be a poor example for the Nahuas and could prevent them from freely accepting the Christian faith.

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61 The complete bull, as it appears in Mendieta’s text, is included in the Appendix section of this dissertation, page 224.
Although the mendicants were supposed to have complete control over the project of evangelizing the Nahuas, Mendieta notes that some members of the secular clergy, who were unhappy with the decision, clandestinely entered the colony.

In addition to granting their complete control over the conversion of the Nahuas, the mendicants were able to convince Cortés to petition the Spanish Crown and the Holy See to avoid sending representatives of the secular clergy to Nueva España to collect tithes from the natives until Christianity had been completely established in the land. They feared that if the Nahuas linked the tithes with the Church’s ostentatious ceremonies, the process of conversion would suffer greater resistance.

Once these problems were resolved, Cortés’ plan for converting the Nahuas was realized with the arrival of the “Twelve” Franciscans in 1524 under Fray Martín de Valencia and later with the “Twelve” Dominicans in 1526. Even though other mendicant orders (the Augustinians and Jesuits) arrived in subsequent years, the Franciscans and Dominicans were the first to undertake the project of evangelization in Nueva España. Their most difficult challenge was to present the

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62 According to Ricard the Dominicans arrived in July 1526 but did not set up a monastery until 1529. Before the establishment of their monastery, the Dominicans ran three indigenous parishes: in Oaxtepec (Morelos), in the towns of Chimalhuacán and Chalco (Valley of Mexico) and in Coyoacán (close to Mexico City) (147).
Gospel to individuals who had never been exposed to it and who had previously relied on the wisdom and traditions of their ancestors for every aspect of their lives.

Before the arrival of the “Twelve” 1524, three Flemish Franciscans made the first attempts to evangelize the Nahuas (1523). Johann den Auwera (Juan de Aora), Johann Dekkers (Juan de Tecto) and Pierre de Gand (Pedro de Gante) encountered no organized plan on how the spiritual conversion of the natives would take place. As a result, Pedro de Gante, who is notable for translating a version of the *Doctrina cristiana* into Náhuatl (printed in 1553) and for organizing a school for children of important members of the Nahua social hierarchy, made the first advances in explaining Catholic doctrine to the natives. His text, *Doctrina cristiana en lengua mexiana*, a catechism manual, outlines, in Náhuatl, the important elements in the Catholic faith and instructs the natives in the doctrine and the articles of faith. According to Ernesto de la Torre Villar, the editor of Fray Pedro de Gante’s text, in 1981, the friars were intrigued by certain elements in the Nahua culture, therefore they had to find a unique approach to explain Christianity. The friars determined that the people of *Nueva España* possessed reason, free will, and a soul; however, because their religion relied on ancient traditions, it would be difficult to convince them to adopt a new faith that was based on a set of traditions that were foreign to them. Since the Nahuas had not been exposed to the corrupt world, they would have to be gently guided away from their “pagan” faith in a secure location away from distractions and evil. As Ricard notes, the Franciscans believed that the Nahuas were innocent; they were like Adam before the fall. Although they had no concept of the severity of sin, the natives were not free from the consequences of Original Sin. Therefore, the friars felt responsible to guide them to an understanding of these Christian beliefs.

Con una postura no muy lejana de la de Las Casas, Mendieta seguía convencido de que los indios representaban la inocencia de Adán antes de la Caída. Opina que son incapaaces de pecar y que por este motivo había que imponerles una segregación absoluta, no para proteger a los demás, sino para protegerlos de los demás, del contacto peligroso de los
españoles. Por consiguiente, era necesario reunirlos en una vasta comunidad autónoma, que sería comparable a una inmensa escuela o a un inmenso convento. (Ricard 29)

To prevent the Nahuas from falling further into error, the friars instructed their children in the Christian faith, so that they could teach it to their families and their communities (Gante 18). The children were also taught the basics of western culture beginning with the alphabet, and later learned Castilian, Latin, and their own language in Roman script (19). As Serge Gruzinski states in *The Mestizo Mind*, the Nahuas became so skilled in Latin that the friars eventually became suspicious of their abilities.

By 1540s, the teaching of Latin was so successful that some Spaniards became alarmed, convinced that “reading and writing are as harmful as the devil.” It was reported that “every day there are more Indians who speak a Latin as elegant as Cicero’s . . . it is admirable to see what letters and colloquies they write in Latin and what they say [in that language].” 64 (94)

Although the friars were wary of the skills of their pupils, they still continued to educate them in the Catholic doctrine. These individuals, the *indios cantores*, as we will see later, will take an active role in their communities when the Church’s representative was unable to assist the town’s citizens.

**The Nahua Cosmology and Religion**

For the Nahuas, the rite of human sacrifice was enacted to honor their gods and was considered a privilege for the participants. The Nahua gods, especially Huitzilopochtli the god of war and of the sun, required blood offerings in order to keep the sun on its rightful course. As the Aztec Empire mostly relied on an agricultural economy, it was dependent on sun and rain to keep the cycles of

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63 Ricard also notes that the Franciscans came to this conclusion by not basing the situation on theology like the Dominicans, rather by basing it on their exposure to the people and by their spirit of charity (29).

64 Gruzinski notes that the segments in quotations were taken from Jerónimo López’s letter to the emperor, which was written in Mexico City on October 20, 1541. This letter can be found in Joaquín Icazbalceta’s *Colección de documentos para la historia de México*, Volume II, (Mexico City: Porrua, 1971) 149-150.
life fertile. Consequently, it was crucial not to offend Huitzilopochtli and happily repay his
faithfulness with thousands of human sacrifices. Jacques Soustelle notes in *La vida cotidiana de
los aztecas en visperas de la Conquista*, “el sacrificio humano es una transmutación por la cual de
la muerte sale la vida. Y los dioses han dado el ejemplo de ello en el primer día de la creación”
(1984: 102). According to the Nahua myth of the creation of humanity, the gods had unselfishly
sacrificed their lives; therefore, it was each human being’s duty to repay this gesture with blood.
Soustelle notes that individuals chosen as sacrificial candidates were either prisoners of war (from
the *guerras floridas*) or slaves purchased for this specific purpose (1984: 58). For the Nahuas, a
good death was achieved through human sacrifice, death in battle or in childbirth. As a result, the
individual’s soul would be rewarded with the highest honor, a direct journey to the Paradise of the
Sun (Omeyocan). In the Nahuas’ religion, good deeds and bad deeds did not play a crucial role
in determining the soul’s final resting place, as compared to Christianity. Only the manner in
which an individual died had a bearing on the ultimate outcome of the soul’s final resting place.

Human sacrifices were not only reserved for Huitzilopochtli; the Nahuas also sacrificed
men and women at the top of the Huixachtécatl Mountain for the New Fire celebration which took
place every fifty two years. The people believed that this ceremony had to be performed to
determine if the end of the world would occur. The New Fire celebration required that all the fires
in the Empire be extinguished, thus leaving the world in total darkness and at the mercy of the gods
and the *tzizimime,* monsters that would come with the end of the world. The priests would
carefully survey the constellation of the Pleiades from the top of the Huixachtécatl and once it
approached its zenith, the chief priest waited for a signal that would indicate when they should

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65 In the Nahua cosmology there were thirteen levels of heaven, with Omeyocan being the thirteenth and consequently
the most prestigious.

66 In *El universo de los aztecas*, Jacques Soustelle defines the *tzizimime* to be “monstrous que habitaban en el Occidente
y que aguardan el fin de nuestro mundo para devorar a las criaturas” (1996: 179).
proceed with the lighting of the new fire. If the sun did not rise, this would indicate that the world would end at the hands of the *tzizimíme*. Once the priests determined that the total destruction of the world would not occur, the chief priest ordered that a victim be offered as a human sacrifice. Unlike the other ceremonies that required the swift removal of the heart from the body and its dedication to the gods, the New Fire ceremony consisted of lighting the fire inside the victim’s chest. As the fire burned, messengers from different parts of the Empire lit their torches and took them to their communities. This event promised a new cycle of light and life which would last another fifty two years. The last New Fire ceremony to be celebrated by the Nahuas occurred in 1507 (Soustelle 1996: 59).

Another “good” death could be earned when it resulted from water (by drowning, dropsy, in a storm such as a hurricane, or hit by a thunderbolt). In Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), the pyramid of the *Templo Mayor* had two altars on its summit: one dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and another to Tláloc, god of water and winds (Illustration 3.1). Tláloc was the patron god of farmers while Huitzilopochtli was venerated by warriors. Although Huitzilopochtli required endless amounts of blood from his sacrificial victims, Tláloc received offerings of snakes, birds, plants and flowers. While Tláloc’s offerings were mostly derived from nature, he also occasionally received human sacrifices. Women and children were chosen and drowned to honor this god with their deaths (Soustelle 1984: 103, Matos Moctezuma 12). To us it seems unthinkable and cruel that children should be sacrificed to Tláloc; however, the Nahuas believed that it was part of their duty to die for their gods, and therefore brought up their children in this custom (Sahagún, Book 6, chapter XXXI). Like the victims sacrificed to Huitzilopochtli, who were guaranteed an afterlife in Omeyocan, those who died for Tláloc journeyed to his paradise, Tlálocan, a place with abundant vegetation, birds and rivers.
El Tlalocan - imagen idealizada de las tierras tropicales de oriente, país de ver dor y de las flores acariciadas por la lluvia tibia - jardín de abundancia y de descanso donde los favorecidos disfrutaban de una alegría tranquila e interminable. (Sou stelle 1984: 114)

Giving a Christian equivalent to a concept that is not from the same derivation is an interesting problem in the New World. Since Tlalocan is similar in description to the Garden of Eden, the friars used this parallel; however, in the Nahua cosmology, Tlalocan is one of the thirteen levels of the Aztec Empire’s heavenly realms. To reach this place, an individual must die.

In the case of the Garden of Eden, it is the location where God created Adam and Eve and where they lived until they sinned and were expelled. Todorov mentions an interesting phenomenon that occurred when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Azores. He notes that Columbus linked the knowledge he acquired in the “Old World” to explain similarities that he found in the New World.

Columbus’ belief, that he would encounter similar elements in the Azores to those in Europe was so strong that it was inevitable for him to find a link.

There is nothing of the modern empiricist about Columbus: the decisive argument is an argument of authority, not of experience. He knows in advance what he will find; the concrete experience is there to illustrate the truth already possessed, not to be interrogated according to pre-established rules in order to seek the truth. (17)

The same case occurs when the Franciscan monks encounter the concept of Tlalocan. The friars, like Columbus, are familiar with Christian concepts because their religious background provides them with knowledge of the “truth”. Therefore, the concept of Tlalocan can be “found” in New Spain because of the friars’ previous understanding of the Garden of Eden. Believing firmly that there will be similarities between the Old World and the New World is the force that can connect Tlalocan to the Garden of Eden. Other examples of this phenomenon will be seen later in this chapter.
A “Bad” Death According to the Nahuas

For the Nahuas, individuals who died of natural causes had not served their true purpose in life (which was to return their blood to the gods), and therefore died badly. Their souls were expected to make a difficult journey to Mictlán, the ninth level of the underworld. Mictlán was not a beautiful place. It was engulfed in darkness, was cold, and had spiders and meowing cats (Soustelle 1984: 114). This level of the underworld was the farthest away from the centre of the earth (Mendieta, Book II, Chapter XL), and was ruled by the god Mictlantecuhtli whose face was a skull. Because Mictlán was a dark and lonely place, Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta likened it to the Christian Hell, and its ruler, Mictlantecuhtli, was the “capitán del infierno” (Book II, Chapter I). Again, as in the case of the Garden of Eden, the Franciscan friar associates Mictlán with Hell because he uses a referent from his previous knowledge and applies it to the new concept of Mictlán.

No sabían a qué parte era el infierno, mas de que habían de penar para siempre. Verdad es que según el vocablo que en su lengua usan los mexicanos para lo que nosotros llamamos infierno, que es lugar de los dañados, y ellos dicen Mictlán, bien podemos inferir que a la parte del norte (por ser lugar umbroso y oscuro que no lo baña el sol como al oriente y poniente al mediodía) ponían ellos el infierno, porque Mictlán propiamente quiere decir “lugar de muertos,” y es (como se ha dicho) lo que nosotros llamamos infierno, que es el lugar de los que para siempre mueren; y a la región o a la parte norte que llaman los indios Mictlampa, que quiere decir “hacia la banda o parte de los muertos;” de donde bien se infiere que hacia aquella parte ponían ellos el infierno. (Mendieta, Book 2, chapter 11: 94)

Although, it would seem logical for Mendieta to make this assumption, Mictlán is more like Sheol from the Old Testament. The late-medieval and sixteenth-century concept of Hell (and eternal Hell) is characterized by fire and torment and therefore not a proper equivalent to Mictlán. Moreover there was no suffering in Mictlán, other than complete alienation from the living. Sheol was also dark, cold, lonely, and completely isolated from God and from others. Unlike Sheol, souls that went to Mictlán had to journey for four years before they had to be forgotten by the living. During the soul’s journey to Mictlán, it would have to pass through difficult terrain and
fierce winds, but once a year, could return to its home on earth to receive its relatives' offerings. The families of the deceased would prepare and offer them food, clothes, sandals and other items that would be useful for the upcoming year's journey. These offerings would take place on the many religious festivals for the dead and on the anniversary of the deceased's death. Once the four-year trek to Mictlan had been completed, the soul would permanently be separated from the living and would no longer be able to return to the natural world.

Funerals in the Aztec Empire

As is the case of the poor in medieval and in sixteenth-century Europe, there is little information regarding the funerary traditions of the poor in the Aztec Empire. The information that has survived is limited to the ceremonies performed for the nobility or priests. Although Mendieta describes, in intricate detail, the funeral of a nobleman from the Valley of Mexico, he does provide some information on funerals for individuals of lesser social rank. He states that all were buried in a similar manner; however, the rituals were not as elaborate.

Esta que se ha dicho era la costumbre de enterrar á los grandes señores, y con los demas principales se hacian menos ceremonias, con cada uno conforme á su calidad y estado, y con la gente comun mucho menos. (Book 2, chapter 40: 164)

María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Álvarez has studied the funeral rituals from pre-Hispanic to colonial Mexico, and states that there are few surviving descriptions of the funeral traditions of the lower classes in the Aztec Empire; most of the records that have survived belong to the elite (27).

In the case of the burial of a nobleman, described by Mendieta, other nobles from the surrounding towns paid homage to him by arriving four days before the burial so that they could comfort the family. As the mourners arrived, the corpse was offered gifts: feathers, woven blankets, bracelets, flags and slaves. An emerald was placed inside the corpse's mouth, as it symbolized the heart (life), and then the body was wrapped in fifteen to twenty blankets. The
deceased’s hair was cut from the crown of the head and placed in a decorated box that contained hair that had been cut at the nobleman’s birth. Afterward, a mask was placed over the face of the deceased while he was decorated with other artifacts that prominently displayed the patron gods. Once the body had been prepared in this fashion, the first of several human sacrifices took place. The victim of this important sacrifice was the slave who had lit the lamps and torches in the nobleman’s house. This sacrifice was symbolic since the slave would provide light for the nobleman in the underworld as he journeyed to Mictlán.

The corpse was then carried to the temple followed by a cortege of nobles, family members and friends. The survivors had to show their grief by crying loudly and singing sad songs without any musical accompaniment (Book 2, chapter 40). Once arriving at the temple, they would be met by the chief priest and his assistants who would build a fire for the incineration of the body. Copal, incense produced from a tree, was burned during the ceremony, and a dog was sacrificed to guide the soul of its master through the nine levels of the underworld. As the body was incinerated, one hundred to two hundred men and women were sacrificed and burned for the gods. These victims were part of the offerings brought by the funeral guests and would act as the nobleman’s servants while he journeyed to Mictlán. In addition to these burnt offerings, more sacrifices would be offered by family members as “indulgences” on behalf of the deceased’s soul on the anniversary of the nobleman’s death and the celebrations dedicated to the dead: Quechollí, Toxcatl,

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67 Quechollí was a ten day celebration honoring the god Mixcóatl (cloud snake). It took place between Oct. 24th and Nov. 20th and offerings consisting of food, clothes and jewelry were made to Mixcóatl and to the dead (Sahagún, Book II, chapter 14).

68 Toxcatl was another celebration that honored the dead and which included food offerings. It was held from April 23 to May 12 (Garcigodoy 112).
Ilf Miccailhuitontli, Miccaihuitl, Tepeilhuitl. The day after the funeral, the family returned to the temple to collect the nobleman’s ashes. Small bones that had not been consumed by the flames, the ashes, and the emerald, were placed in the box containing the two hair samples. For the next four days, offerings were brought to the box and to the temple and on the fourth day, another ten to fifteen slaves were sacrificed to help the soul through its journey.

As seen, the Nahuas made offerings to their deceased on specific dates. These offerings would strengthen the soul as it traveled through the nine levels of the underworld before reaching Mictlán. The offerings that Mendieta recorded begin twenty days after the funeral with four to five human sacrifices. Two more slaves are sacrificed on the forty-day anniversary, and eighty days after the funeral, ten slaves are sacrificed. After this last series of human sacrifices, no more lives were required. On the first anniversary of the funeral, quails, rabbits, birds and butterflies were sacrificed for the deceased by family members. In addition, offerings of copal, cocoa, food, pulque, flowers and perfume were brought to the soul. For the next three years, these same items were offered to the soul on the funeral’s anniversary. Once the journey to Mictlán had been completed, no more offerings were required and it was time to forget the deceased (Book 2, chapter 40).

The Cantares Mexicanos – The Songs of the Nahuas

Death, according to the Nahua belief, was not the end of the life-cycle. Even after death, the soul

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69 Miccailhuitontli was celebrated in the ninth month, Tlaxcochimaco (approximately on August 5 of the Gregorian calendar) and honored all of the children who had died. These souls were mourned for twenty days, and their souls were offered vegetables and fruits (García Gómez 112).

70 Miccaihuitl took place in the tenth month, Xocohuetzi (August 25 to September 14). This celebration honored the souls of the adults in the communities. Food offerings were made to them including bread baked from amaranth seeds (García Gómez 112).

71 Tepeilhuitl celebrated the dead on the thirteenth month (October). During that month Tláloc was venerated and those who had died by lightning or by drowning were remembered (Sahagún, Book II, chapter 13).
was able to commune with the living for four years by means of yearly visits to its relatives in order to receive their offerings. The surviving members of the deceased’s family grieved their loss, but they also celebrated with dancing and drinking, “Los vivos, en la memoria de los defunctos, bailaban y se embeodaban, y lloraban acordándose de aquel muerto y de los otros sus defunctos” (Mendieta, Book 2, chapter 40: 163). The Cantares mexicanos are ninety-one songs, taken from the oral tradition, and were written in Roman script in the sixteenth century in Náhuatl. The Nahuas recorded their texts by two different methods, orally and picto-ideographically. Walter Mignolo notes in The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization that most of the texts that were produced before the arrival of the Spaniards in Nueva España relied mostly on oral transmission. The picto-ideographic texts found in the Nahua codices were “read” exclusively by the tlamatini (sages); however, the reading does not follow the linear model used by Europeans. The Nahuas “read” by looking at the picture and then interpreting the story.

This method of “reading” (an inexact science) was incomprehensible for the Spaniards because it allowed for slightly different interpretations each time that it was read. This method led friars such as Juan de Torquemada, to assume that the Nahuas lacked a history and culture because of their lack of letters (Mignolo 133). The Cantares mexicanos and the Huehehuehtlahtolli (the words of the ancients) were recorded, by the sixteenth-century friars in Roman script from oral texts (and possibly picto-ideographic texts). As Bierhorst remarks, the Cantares that have survived are mostly from the Valley of Mexico, and most comment on the Conquest and its aftermath (4). He suspects that some songs in his collection date earlier; however, he notes that it

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72 Since Zumárraga ordered the burning of Nahua manuscripts, it is not known if there were written forms of the pre-Hispanic Cantares mexicanos.
is difficult to determine the exact date of composition since many of these songs were passed down in an oral tradition.

This collection of songs includes three that are dedicated to grieving the dead. The most interesting song is number eighteen, the “Bereavement song” (Folios 12v-15r). This text tells of the intense grieving for a loved one and how once the soul reaches Mictlan, its memory will be destroyed (Fol. 13r: stanza 6). The lament is addressed to the pre-Hispanic god, the creator of life (Quetzalcoātl), though Huitzilopochtli could also be the god since there are references to the battles for his glory on the campos floridos. The song exposes several key themes for human existence and mortality: the dream-like characteristics of life, the brevity of life, the uselessness of living, and the wilting golden flowers (marigolds or cempoaxōchitl). According to Juanita García-Godoy in *Digging the Days of the Dead*, these golden flowers represent the sun as it rises and sets; “a metaphor for being born and dying” (134). The golden flowers that are described in the song were traditionally brought as offerings to the dead in pre-Hispanic Mexico and continue to be used today at the Day of the Dead celebrations in early November.

We’re briefly in that good place. Enjoy! We’re with companions just a moment. And that glory is for but a while. Ah, no one really is your friend! But briefly are Your good flowers, those golden flowers, borrowed.

All the nobles, lords and rulers, are blossoming upon Your mat and throne, upon that field. Now Your war flowers, those golden flowers, are spinning. Nothing we say here is real, O Life Giver. What we say on earth is only a dream, as if we stood sleeping. We really utter it to no one.  

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73 The sixteenth century version in Nahuatl appears as follows in Bierhorst’s book.

Achin ocan ye cac ni xonahauia y can cuel a chic cohuatihu in can ixquich cahuitl ommahuixtihihu ym tlaca ayac Nelly mocniuh in can cuel a chic onnetlanahuilo y iectli moxochihu cacahuic xochitl.

Yxquich in cueponi mopetlapan moqpal ypan in tecpillot tlahuatl ytec in teucuyotl ye ic malintiac in moyoxochihu cacahuic xochitl.

Ye antle nel o tic ytohuac ycan yalnemohuac ycan iuhi teqictli can toncohitehihu in tiquittoa tlpc. Ayac nellin tiquilhuilua ycan. (Fol. 12v-13r: 170)
The dream-like characteristics of life are also reflected in the poems that were written by individuals gifted in the *palabra florida*. These poems do not communicate anxiety or the fear of death. Tochihuitzin Coyolchiuhqui, a poet from the last half of the fourteenth century until the mid-fifteenth century, uses the metaphors of the dream and flowers to show life’s brevity and the ephemeral quality of life.

Así lo dejó dicho Tochihuitzin,
Así lo dejó dicho Coyolchiuhqui:
De pronto salimos del sueño,
sólo vinimos a soñar,
no es cierto, no es cierto,
que vinimos a vivir sobre la tierra.
Como yerba en primavera
es nuestro ser.
Nuestro corazón hace nacer, germinan
flores de nuestra carne.
Algunas abren sus corolas,
luego se secan.
Así lo dejó dicho Tochihuitzin.74

As seen, the approach of death is not terrifying but a natural process in the cycle of life. The connection of the human with the cycles of vegetation is a natural one, according to Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Rabelais and His World*, he states that death must occur for life to continue (50). The body will decompose and fertilize the earth; this process will consequently create new life. Such is

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74 This poem is taken from León-Portilla’s *Quince poetas del mundo Náhuatl* (170-71). He has also included the version in Náhuatl of this poem titled “Vivimos a soñar”. All of the poems included in his book are in Spanish and in Náhuatl. The poem in Náhuatl is as follows and is titled “Zan tontemiquico”.

In ic conitotechuac in Tochihuitzin;
In ic conitotechuac in Coyolchiuhqui:
Zan tocochitlehuaco,
Zan tontemiquico,
Ah nelli, ah nelli
Tinemico in tlalticpac,
Xoxopan xihuitl ipan
Tochihuaca.
Hual cecelia, hual itzimolini in toyollo
Xochitl in tonacayo.
Cequi cueponi,
On cuetlahuia.
In conitotechuac in Tochihuitzin.
the case with the flowers in the poem and in the *cantar*. The symbol of the heart in Coyolchiuhqui’s poem, which will break down to give life to the flower, shows the cycle of life as described in Bakhtin’s text. The flower’s life is brief, like the humans’ and must also wither and die. The verses of this poem show that death comes to everyone. Even the gods died to bring continuity to the human existence when they sacrificed themselves for the preservation of the sun.

**How the Franciscans Convinced the Nahuas to Accept Christianity**

Tzvetan Todorov argues that “Religion, whatever its content, is certainly a discourse transmitted by tradition and important as a guarantee of cultural identity” (83). He states that the Nahua priests did not question the traditions of their ancestors and therefore weakened their religion’s survival when encountered with the well-developed arguments of the friars in favour of Christianity (83). Although it is true that the Nahuas’ religion was ritualistic and defined them as a people, the same can be said of the Spaniards with Catholicism. At the time of the conquest of *Nueva España*, the Spaniards were now living in a country that was newly-united by religion. The unification of Spain in 1492 under the Catholic Monarchs was achieved under the ideal that faith and language would create a national identity for its inhabitants. To achieve this goal, individuals from other faiths were forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled from the Peninsula. Though the priests could deconstruct Christianity, according to Todorov, they also followed a ritualized tradition that was enforced by the Holy See and supervised by the Inquisition. Spanish society was more-or-less ruled by the foundations of Christianity and the rituals of the Catholic Church. Catholicism was what separated the Spaniard from the “infidel” during the re-Conquest of Spain and also in the Conquest and colonization of New Spain. If we recall Mendieta’s statement about Cortés (Spanish and Catholic) being the saviour of Catholicism and its defender in the New World (Book 3, chapter
we also see that religion gave the Spaniards a cultural identity. Greenleaf shows in Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543 that the Inquisition looked for "old Christians" to populate New Spain and thoroughly investigated each individual’s religious background in order for Catholicism to survive in the colony (5). This identification of religion with cultural identity remains strong in sixteenth-century Mexico, as most printed catechism manuals were written for the Spaniards and printed in Spanish. The cultural identification of the Spaniard with Catholicism would begin to weaken in the seventeenth century, as we will see in Chapter 5, when catechisms are written in bilingual editions and dedicated to both Spaniards and Natives.

The task set before the Franciscans was to convince the Nahuas that they were following a weak religion, based on rituals that lacked credibility. This argument implied that the Nahuas’ ancestors, the founders of their faith and traditions, had mistakenly chosen the incorrect religion. The Franciscans’ plan was to create enough doubt regarding the Nahuas’ faith that they would be easily convinced to accept Christianity. One of the methods that the “Friars Minor” chose was to compare the power of the Nahua deities to that of the Christian beatific figures. Santiago (St. James), according to several accounts, had fought on the side of the Christians in the battles for the Conquest of New Spain. He appeared with his white horse, as in the medieval accounts of the Battle of Clavijo, and fought on the side of the Christians against the "infidel". In the medieval story, Santiago crushed Muslims under the hoofs of his horse and was consequently referred to as "Santiago Matamoros" (Castro 264-65). In the case of New Spain, Santiago and his horse participated in battles on the side of the Spaniards and killed thousands of Nahuas, therefore his name changed from “Santiago Matamoros” to “Santiago Matatindios” (Weckmann 166-67). In another account, Luis Weckmann notes in La herencia medieval de México that the Virgin Mary appears at the Templo Mayor and defends the Spaniards from the natives by blowing dirt in the “infidels’” eyes.
Vázquez de Tapia confirma que la Virgen, descrita por los capitanes indios como “una mujer de Castilla, muy linda y que resplandecía como el sol”, intervino en la batalla (como siempre echando puñados de tierra en los ojos) contra los próceres aztecas que vanamente intentaron defenderse en la matanza del Templo Mayor ordenada por Alvarado. (169)

In addition, Christian Duverger gives several examples of the Christian God’s superiority over the Nahua deities in *La conversión de los indios de Nueva España*. He shows that the Franciscans contrasted the double dimension of Christ’s divinity (it is spiritual and temporal) to the single dimension of the Nahua gods (98). As a result of this argument, Christ is both man and God, and consequently has power over everything. This argument could not be used in favour of the Nahua gods since they did not have power, only functions. Tláloc did not have power over rain and wind; he was the god of rains and winds. The Christian God had authority, was identified by His power over everything in the universe, whereas, the Nahua gods had to be identified by their submission to different natural phenomena. In Nahua society, the highest-ranking political ruler was called the *tlatoani* (“el que habla” or “el que tiene la palabra”) and his rule was sovereign. The Franciscans gave God the title *tlatoani*; however, they elaborated it further by adding *in teotl* in (god). Once combined, the title for the Christian God became *in teotl in tlatoani* (Sovereign God). Sahagún lists the different titles for the Nahua gods: *totecu* (our lord), *tlacatl* (man), *tlazopilli* (precious lord), *totla* (our father), *tona* (our mother), but there are no supreme titles and none of them are comparable to the coined-title of the Christian God (Sahagún Book 6, Duverger 100).

The Franciscans argued that the rulers in Nahua society were not gods and, therefore, they were able to create enough doubt to persuade the natives to convert to Christianity. As the Franciscans presented all of their arguments, the people were amazed to hear about the Christian God who was divine and sovereign.

Los franciscanos traducen la expresión “convertirse” como *teotia tlatoatia*, literalmente: “reconocer como dios y como soberano”. Hasta entonces los aztecas habían conocido dioses que no eran soberanos o soberanos que no eran dioses. Admitir que un dios pueda ser soberano resulta efectivamente para ellos en abrazar la nueva religión. (Duverger 101)
The points listed above and the participation of Santiago and the Virgin in the battles against the natives, were enough to prove to the Nahuas that their gods were “inferior” in comparison to the power of the “sovereign God”. As a result, “los caciques se pusieron furiosos contra sus sacerdotes, y los sacerdotes furiosos contra sus dioses” (Duverger 101).

**Replacing the Nahua Religious Traditions with Christian Traditions**

The Franciscans and other missionaries that arrived in *Nueva España* preached the Gospel to the natives in the same manner as they had in Europe. Since speech was an integral component in their philosophy of communicating the Church’s doctrine, they required a profound understanding of the Nahuas’ languages even to communicate the most basic approach to Christianity. The friars had to fully understand the natives’ languages, society and their daily activities in order to successfully communicate their faith. Soon they discovered that there were some similar elements present in the Nahuas’ religious ceremonies with Catholic rituals. Two of the most interesting similarities are infant baptism and the celebration of “communion”, which will be examined later in this chapter. As we will also see, there were some characteristics of the Nahuas’ gods that were similar to the Christian saints, the Virgin Mary and the Trinity.

Once the Franciscans had managed to convince most of the Nahuas to trust in the Christian God, they began in earnest the process of indoctrinating and baptising them. In addition to spiritually replacing the pre-Columbian faith with the Conqueror’s faith, the Spaniards replaced the Nahuas’ sacred structures with Christian ones. Weckmann states that the process of evangelization in *Nueva España* was accomplished by levelling the Nahuas’ religious structures, and replacing
their celebrations and deities with churches, Christian saints, the Virgin and Christ, much in the same way as the Church had substituted festivities and deities after the fall of the Roman Empire.

De acuerdo con el proceso general de la historia, para evangelizar a los naturales los frailes combinaron algunos principios y propósitos cristianos con ritos y ceremonias paganas en un sincretismo religioso que fue expresión del genio de la Iglesia desde su triunfo en el Imperio Romano y, nuevamente, a raíz de las invasiones y conversión de germanos y celtas. (190-91)

The substitution of the Other’s cultural and religious symbols with Christian ones was a common practice for the Spaniards, according to Weckmann. As we saw in Todorov’s explanation of Columbus “discovering” common similarities between the Old World and the New, the Spaniards also “discovered” similarities between the Muslim culture and structures in Spain and those of Nueva España. For example, the Spaniards referred to the Nahuas’ temples as mezquitas (mosques), their priests as alfaqües (teachers of the Koran), and the natives themselves as the pueblo morisco, árabes or estos moros (Weckmann 187-88). As seen earlier with the example of Santiago fighting on behalf of the Christians against the “infidel”, this legend in New Spain continued to vilify the Nahuas’ cultures and religion.

To show Christianity’s superiority in comparison to the Nahuas’ religion, the Templo Mayor was levelled and replaced with the Catedral Metropolitana, which was built with the Templo’s stones. For the Nahuas, the Templo Mayor was the most sacred structure as they believed it to be the marker for the center of the universe. It divided the thirteen levels of the heavens from the nine levels of the underworld at the base of the pyramid. The base of the temple pointed to the four cardinal points of the universe (East, South, West and North). Only four sacred colours were used to paint the structures of the Templo Mayor and these symbolized each cardinal point: red symbolized the rising sun, blue symbolized water, white represented the heavens or

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75 According to Soustelle, red is the colour of the rising sun and would be the colour for the East. It symbolizes rebirth, the youth of humans and vegetation, pleasure, song, love, games and witty youthful gods such as Centéotl.
the Milky Way, and black represented night. Each direction and colour was accompanied by a symbol: cane, rabbit, home, and knife. In addition to its importance as the gateway between the heavens and the underworld, the Templo Mayor’s summit was reserved for human sacrifices, which were offered to Huitzilopochtli, and where offerings were brought to Tláloc.

As Eduardo Matos Moctezuma states in Vida y muerte en el Templo Mayor, the Templo was built three times (26-30), each one on the site of its predecessor. The reconstructions resulted from severe flooding from Lake Texcoco. As an active archaeological site, discoveries are still being made at the Templo Mayor by anthropologists of the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia). In April 2005, excavations were underway to prove what scholars have suspected, that there was a fourth pyramid beneath the three discovered phases. The excavated areas of the three known phases of the Templo Mayor (Illustration 3.2) have revealed important information regarding the Nahua’s religion and their funerary traditions.

Mircea Eliade notes in Tratado de historia de las religiones that religious structures are constructed in order to symbolically represent the universe. We saw that Templo Mayor was believed to be the sacred structure that divided the heavens from the underworld; however, according to Eliade there are even more symbolic elements in its structuring. The thirteen levels

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76 Soustelle explains that blue and green had the same word in Náhuatl and in the other languages of the Empire. Blue/green is the colour of water and of the Chalchihuitl, the most precious stone for the Mexicas. It is the colour of Tláloc and his companion Matlalcueye, who wore blue/green stones on her skirt (160).

77 White is the colour of the West and of the ancient earth goddesses, especially of the goddess Iztacmixcóatl, the white serpent of the clouds. It is also the colour of the first lights of the day, before the sunrise (161-162).

78 Black, according to Soustelle, is the colour of the night gods, like Tezcatlipoca, the sorcerers and sorcerer-gods like Tláloc, whose body was always painted black. He remarks that Tláloc’s body could be painted black because of the colour of the storm clouds (159).

79 East, which was Tezcatlipoca, red and cane; South, which was Tezcatlipoca, blue, rabbit; West, which was Quetzalcóatl, white, home; and North, which was Tezcatlipoca, black, knife (Matos Moctezuma 51).
leading up to the summit of the Templo Mayor’s pyramid, also represent the thirteen levels of the heavens.

Todas estas construcciones sagradas representan simbólicamente el universo entero: los pisos o las terrazas son identificadas con los “cielos” o los niveles cósmicos. En cierto sentido, cada uno de ellos reproduce el monte cósmico, es decir que se le considera como construido en el “centro del mundo.” (334)

The altars at the Templo’s summit, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and Tláloc, also have a symbolic meaning. The altar represents the convergence of supernatural time and space with the times and spaces in the natural world.

As Eliade shows, the altar also symbolizes the creation of the universe, of life. At the altars of the Templo Mayor, the sacrifices offered to Tláloc and Huitzilopochtli linked the natural world with the supernatural world in order that life may continue in the natural realm. The Templo Mayor was the most important structure that displayed symbolically every element of the Nahua cosmology. Because of its importance in the Nahuas’ religion and in the structuring of the pre-Columbian society, the Templo Mayor would have to be destroyed if Catholicism was going to reign in Nueva España. The Catedral Metropolitana, the physical representation of the Spaniards’ religion and cultural identity, was built on the ruins of the Templo Mayor in 1527 (Illustrations 3.3 and 3.4). In the state of Puebla there is further evidence that the Templo Mayor was not the only pyramid to be destroyed and be replaced by a church. The pyramids in Cholula were also levelled and churches were built on their summits; for example, the Tepanapa Pyramid was replaced by the Santuario de
Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (Illustrations 3.5 and 3.6), and the Templo de San Gabriel (constructed in 1530) was built on the site of another pyramid.

The Franciscan friars considered the Nahua gods and their rituals as demonic. The Devil and his demons were ugly creatures because they reflected the ugliness of sin and their fall from God’s grace. As Gruzinski states in La colonización de lo imaginario, the friars were shocked to see the stone representations of the Nahuas’ gods (189). These statues depicted gods which were half-human and half-animal and reminded them of the European representations of the devil and his demons.

Para los evangelizadores, la reducción de los cultos indígenas a lo demoniaco implicaba al mismo tiempo una condena moral y un repudio estético. Los dioses locales no podían sino ser feos. El ícono indígena de modo infalible era rebajado a la categoría de ídolo proscrito y repulsivo. (189)

Since they had created a parallel between the Nahuas’ gods and their priests (the sacerdotes del Diablo), the Franciscans were wary of the ceremonial rituals of the natives and their beliefs. This is evident in their writings, as they call the natives’ deities demonios and their worship as idolatria. Weckmann notes that for “good” to exist, there must be “evil”. As a result, it was the duty of the Christians (the good) to define the “evil” elements in the Nahuas’ religion and convert the people to follow the “good” (173). Therefore, the only qualification for “evil” was the refusal to give into “good”.

Entre los principios hay una relación casi maniquea: el Demonio, encarnación del mal, fue en la Nueva España (y en cierta medida lo sigue siendo) o sólo un ente tangible sino claramente corpóreo. Fue, en una palabra, el Diablo medieval transportado a América como parte de la estructura intelectual y emocional de conquistador y especialmente del fraile. Pronto se identifica al Diablo en forma sistemática con los dioses que mueren, los cuales tenían para los mendicantes una existencia real y diabólica. Como en el Medievo europeo, el diablo novohispanico echa mano de múltiples recursos y se las ingenia con variadísimas estratagemas, pero toda su lucha es vana. Era un eterno perdedor, no porque en su conducta hubiera realmente mucha maldad, sino sencillamente porque su derrota y humillación significaban el triunfo del Evangelio. (173)
To control the Nahuas' "pagan" worship, the friars ordered the burning of written texts and the stone representations of the gods, and leveled their temples. Although the friars made every effort to remove the pre-Columbian religion, certain elements managed to survive in Christian rituals.

As seen, the Franciscans and the Dominicans required the complete understanding of the different languages of New Spain in order to carry out their evangelistic goals. Their linguistic advances and ethnographic studies contributed greatly to future anthropological studies of the Aztec Empire and its peoples. Spanish was not initially imposed on the natives, although friars such as Pedro de Gante believed that the people were open to being changed to the European culture (Gante 16). Duverger notes that the Franciscans felt that the Christian faith would be rejected by the Nahuas if a link was not established between the two religions (21). As a result, the Franciscans attempted to convert the people to Christianity by linking and replacing elements of the Nahuas' religion with their own.

Although there were some similarities between the two religions, difficulties arose in communicating the doctrine with precision. The friars were adamant that the Nahuas should not confuse Christian elements with pre-Hispanic referents. As there were no exact translations for certain concepts in the Christian doctrine, the friars used two different approaches: firstly, Spanish terms were directly transferred to the indigenous languages; and secondly, an indigenous term that was loosely related to the Spanish term would be used. In each of these cases, the friars had to explain the complete Christian concept to the Nahuas by carefully selecting words that would not suggest other connotations or create false links that would suggest equality between the two signs. The first method is not very problematic, in theory, since the word in Spanish was transferred directly to the indigenous language and reflected its same content. However, the second method was more risky, according to Ricard, since it could reflect more than one connotation and therefore not clearly represent the Spanish concept.
“Es preciso que nuestras ideas tomen un giro indígena: de no ser así, quedarán solo en la superficie: no tendremos sino una civilización de ‘sobrepuestos’.” Y no solamente quedarán las nociones cristianas mal asimiladas, o quizá totalmente extrañas, sino que toda la obra de cristianización tomará la apariencia de religión de extranjeros y la Iglesia universal en su institución parecerá de carácter particular, propia de una raza y un pueblo. (131)

The problem of communicating similar concepts in both religions, while trying to create a difference between the “good” and the “bad” led to some confusion. As seen earlier, by the syncretism that resulted from the intermingling of official Catholicism, sixteenth-century popular Catholicism, and the Nahua religion, some elements of the pre-Columbian faith managed to survive in Catholic rituals of a popular nature.

As known, the most notable syncretism is the worship of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, a sixteenth-century Franciscan friar, wrote in *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* that the Nahuas mixed the referent of the goddess *Tonantzin* ("our mother" in Náhuatl) with Our Lady of Guadalupe (Book 11, Appendix, Clause 7).80 At the time when Fray Bernardino de Sahagún wrote his text, the early years of evangelization had already passed. Although he acknowledges that the site of veneration for the goddess *Tonantzin*, the Tepeyac Mountain, was important to the pre-Hispanic religion, he notes that the Spaniards, who venerate the Virgin Mary there, had re-named the site *Tepeaquilla* (Book 11, Appendix, clause 7). In keeping with this tone of frustration, that reflects intolerance for the religious syncretism that had occurred, Sahagún condemns the mixing of referents once again in his text.

80 *Tonantzin*, the earth and mother goddess in Nahua mythology was a similar equivalent to the Virgin Mary, the mother-figure for all Catholics. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Tepeyac Mountain had been the shrine for hundreds of Nahua pilgrims who visited *Tonantzin*’s temple. They brought offerings and sacrifices to the goddess, who would bring fertility to the land. In that same location, during the bishopric of Juan de Zumárraga, an indigenous man, Juan Diego, received three visions of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Virgin requested to Juan Diego that he should go and tell the bishop that he had seen her. Since Diego had no proof of his encounter with the Virgin Mary, the bishop did not believe him. During the third vision, the Virgin asked Juan Diego to cut some roses from the Tepeyac and gather them in his tunic. She then asked him to take the roses to the bishop as proof of her vision. When Juan Diego released the flowers, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was printed on his tunic. Since that moment, the Tepeyac became the official site, and shrine, for individuals who venerate Our Lady of Guadalupe. Since the Nahuas’ mother goddess was also a virgin like the Virgin Mary, it would seem logical for them call her, *Tonantzin*. 
De donde haya nacido esta fundación de esta Tonantzin no se sabe de cierto, pero esto sabemos de cierto que el vocablo significa de su primera imposición a aquella Tonantzin antigua, y es cosa que se debería remediar porque el propio nombre de la Madre de Dios Señora Nuestra no es Tonantzin, sino Dios y Nantzin; parece esta invención satánica, para paliar la idolatria debajo la equivocación de este nombre Tonantzin, y vienen ahora a visitar a esta Tonantzin de muy lejos, tan lejos como de antes, la cual devoción también es sospechosa, porque en todas partes hay muchas iglesias de Nuestra Señora, y no van a ellas, y vienen de tierras lejas a esta Tonantzin, como antiguamente. (Sahagún, Book 11, Appendix, Clause 7. Emphasis added)

The friars who wrote in the seventeenth century in Nueva España usually addressed “idolatry” in their texts as one of the leading problems that the Mexican Church faced. Although Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) is not a writer from the seventeenth century, he is concerned about the natives’ substitution of the term Tonantzin for the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the quotation taken from Book 11, we see that he criticizes the syncretism (the survival of indigenous beliefs in Catholic iconography) and states that it is an “involución satánica”. The natives’ insistence on using the pre-Columbian goddess’ name, Tonantzin, for the Virgin Mary instead of the literal translation, Dios y nantzin, in Sahagún’s belief, permits the preservation of the goddess’ memory in the form of the Virgin of Guadalupe. As Rowe and Schelling note in commenting the cult of Guadalupe, religious syncretism became a widespread concern for the Catholic clergy in Mexico in the seventeenth century. In their belief Christianity had already been accepted, therefore there was no longer a need to maintain a link with the Nahuas’ religion. Rowe and Schelling show, as do other scholars, that Christianity was not always easily accepted and had to be imposed by the Church and was sanctioned through interrogation.

The complete suppression of native religions became a particular concern of the Church in the seventeenth century, when ‘extirpators of idolatry’ were appointed to interrogate native populations: idolaters were now seen not so much as pagans in the simple sense but as perverse, intelligent people, able hypocritically to mix two religions. (69)

The confusion over the term in Náhuatl for the Virgin of Guadalupe created, in the point of view of the clergy, a major problem in establishing an exact and clear separation between the “good”
religion and the “bad” religion. In addition, Sahagún notes that the reason for the widespread problem of idolatry in New Spain rests in the devil’s refusal to allow the Nahuas to make a complete conversion to Christianity. In the prologue of his third book “Del principio que tuvieron los Dioses”, Sahagún relies on Augustine’s *City of God* to establish a parallel between the European “pagan” faiths and the Nahuas’ faith.

Porque cómo él dice [Augustine], conocidas las fábulas y ficciones vanas que los gentiles tenían acerca de sus dioses fingidos, pudiesen fácilmente darles a entender que aquellos no eran dioses, ni podían dar cosa ninguna que fuese provechosa a la criatura racional. A este propósito en este Tercer Libro se ponen las fábulas y ficciones que estos naturales tenían cerca de sus dioses, porque entendidas las vanidades que ellos tenían por fe cerca de sus mentirosos dioses, vengan más fácilmente por la doctrina evangélica a conocer el verdadero dios; y que aquellos que ellos tenían por dioses, no eran dioses, sino diablos mentirosos y engañadores; y si alguno piensa que estas cosas están tan olvidadas y perdidas, y la fe de un dios tan plantada y arraigada entre estos naturales que no habrá necesidad en ningún tiempo de hablar de estas cosas, al tal yo lo creo piadosamente, pero sé de cierto que el diablo ni duerme ni está olvidado de la honra que le hacían estos naturales, y que está esperando coyuntura para si pudiese volver al señorío que ha tenido; y fácil cosa le será para entonces despertar todas las cosas que se dice estar olvidados cerca de la idolatría, y para entonces bien es que tengamos armas guardadas para salirle al encuentro. (269)

Because the devil is eager to convince the Nahuas to return to worshipping their pre-Columbian gods, measures would have to be taken to prevent this from occurring.

**Quetzalcóatl and the Holy Trinity**

Although the example of Tonantzin/ Guadalupe is the most studied case of the syncretism that occurred in *Nueva España*, there are numerous other examples. An interesting case is the creator of human beings, Quetzalcóatl. The myth of Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent, justifies and

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81 The name *Quetzalcóatl* is derived from two words in Náhuatl: *quetzalli*, the bright green feathers of the quetzal bird, and *coatl*, serpent. According to Baudot, the word *coatl* is especially important because the serpent connotes water, rain, vegetation and the fertility of the land (20).

82 Quetzalcóatl’s role in the creation of humanity begins when he descended to the underworld and sprinkled his own blood over the bones of a man and woman from the previous existence. Before the creation of the first humans of this existence, the Nahua gods had created and destroyed humans on four other occasions. Since Quetzalcóatl had given life to these bones with his blood, it created a sacred bond between humans and the gods. In addition to creating this era of humanity, Quetzalcóatl had sacrificed his life by jumping into a fire, with the other gods, in order to keep the sun
codifies all religious beliefs and practices that structured Mesoamerican society (Baudot 2004: 18). In *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, John Leddy Phelan notes that the Franciscans that came to New Spain, and chiefly Mendieta, believed that the myth of Quetzalcóatl and the universal deluge were based loosely on the belief that the Nahuas’ ancestors were Jewish (25). According to Phelan, Mendieta had formulated this association by reading José de Acosta’s (1540-1600) writings about the apocalypse and the third age of the Holy Spirit. Acosta was a Jesuit missionary and scholar, who wrote in the *Historia moral y natural de las Indias* that the ancestors of the inhabitants of the New World were the lost tribe of Israel that had been exiled by the Assyrians. This conclusion was not unique, as there were many other mendicant theologians who believed the same theory. Acosta believed that the natives had given up their religious customs and faith (Judaism) and had allowed them to evolve into the pre-Hispanic religion of the Aztec Empire (25). Mendieta was unable to refute Acosta’s arguments; however, Mendieta’s conclusions are slightly different. Quetzalcóatl, the Nahuas’ “promised savior” (25), was supposedly the Messiah that the Jews had been expecting when they revolted against the Roman Empire in 66-70 A.D. Consequently, the Nahuas’ ancestors were individuals who had escaped from the revolt after the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian (26).

Quetzalcóatl was worshipped as the supreme dual god in the classical period of pre-Columbian Mexico, at Teotihuacán, where his temple still stands today (Illustration 3.7). Although the Nahuas believed in one supreme god, Ometecutli (or Omeyotl), Quetzalcóatl is arguably the most important god in their pantheon. Temples dedicated to the Feathered Serpent can be found on its course. Quetzalcóatl is associated with many elements of life but mostly with religion, art, writing, and the great civilization of Teotihuacán. Quetzalcóatl was also known for reincarnating himself in human form, and, as Baudot notes, certain leaders called themselves Quetzalcóatl because they believed themselves to be the god’s reincarnation (20).
throughout Mesoamerica, from Teotihuacan to Chichén Itzá. Because Quetzalcoatl had been resurrected from death and could reincarnate himself as a man, it was not difficult for the Nahuas to mistake Cortés as the reincarnation of their beloved deity. It was also easier for friars, such as Mendieta, to establish a connection between Quetzalcoatl and Christ. As a result, they concluded that explaining Christ’s crucifixion, death and resurrection, to the Nahuas, would be clearly understood since Quetzalcoatl had also had a similar fate in Nahua mythology.

According to Soustelle in *La vida cotidiana de los aztecas en visperas de la conquista*, Quetzalcoatl was also permanently fixed (or resurrected) in the heavens as Venus, the morning star, because he sacrificed his life so that human beings could survive in this last era (1986: 112).

Weckmann states that the common link between Quetzalcoatl and the Holy Trinity is not limited to the elements of creation and sacrifice; Quetzalcoatl was also represented artistically with perforated crosses (197). Baudot quotes a passage from Pedro Martir de Angleria’s text in which the Spaniards encounter crosses in New Spain.

Vieron que [los indios] tenían cruces, y al preguntarles por su origen mediante las lenguas, contestaron algunos que al pasar por aquellos parajes un cierto varón, hermosísimo, les había dejado dicha reliquia como recuerdo. Otros dijeron que en ella había muerto un hombre más resplandeciente que el sol. (2004: 15)

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83 Jacques Soustelle remarks in *El universo de los Aztecas* that there are artefacts representing Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, in the indigenous art of North and Central America. He states that they range in location from the mounds of the Ohio Valley and the Mississippi Valley to Nicaragua (178).

84 Fray Bernardino de Sahagún describes in *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* how Moctezuma confused Cortés for Quetzalcoatl because the Nahuas were expecting the god’s return.

Estos se fueron a ver qué cosa era aquélla, y llevaban algunas cosas para venderlas, so color de ver qué cosa era aquélla: llevaronlos algunas mantas ricas que sólo Mocthecuizoma y ninguno otro las usaba, ni tenía licencia para usarlas: entraron en unas canoas y fueron a los navíos, dijeron entre sí, estamos aquí en guarda de esta costa, conviene que sepamos de cierto qué es esto, para que llevemos la nueva cierta a Mocthecuizoma: entraron luego en las canoas y comenzaron a remar hacia los navíos, como llegaron junto a los navíos, y vieron los españoles, besaron todos las proas de las naos en señal de adoración, pensaron que era el dios Quetzalcoatl que volvía, al cual estaban ya esperando según parece en la Historia de este dios. (Book 12, chapter 2: 25)

85 Baudot only provides the quotation and its author’s name; however, he fails to give the exact reference for his source.
The symbol of the cross was also known in the areas of Yucatán and Campeche as the Mayas also worshipped Quetzalcóatl. The second person of Quetzalcóatl’s trinity was Bacab who, like Christ, had also been crucified (Weckmann 198). This god was the son of Icona or Yzona, who had created the universe and everything in it. Bacab was born to a virgin, Chiribirías and according to Weckmann, was crowned with a crown of thorns before being crucified. Like Christ, Bacab resurrected three days after his violent death and he ascended to the heavens to be reunited with his father and his mother (198). In the heavens, he was met by the third person of his trinity, a spirit named Euchannach or Estruac Icona, who descended to the earth to satiate its needs (198). The Mesoamerican cross and the gods that it represented were so similar to the Christian Trinity that the Spaniards suspected that there had already been a pre-Columbian Christianity in New Spain (Weckmann 198).

**Baptism and the Eucharist: Similarities and Differences between Christianity and the Pre-Columbian Religion**

The syncretism between Quetzalcóatl and the Holy Trinity, and the goddess Tonantzin and the Virgin Mary, is present because of a previous understanding that the Spaniards had already brought with them. As stated by Todorov, the Spaniards who arrived in New Spain made links between elements of the Christian faith and certain elements of the Nahuas’ religious beliefs and their deities because they understood them in terms of their previous knowledge, faith and beliefs. However, the same can be said about the Nahuas, who also had a previous understanding that led them to reconvert what they understood and saw in Christianity, in terms of their own background. As the Franciscans and Dominicans attempted to describe Christianity to the natives, they cultivated the reverse operation of establishing links between the “Other’s” religion and their own. The Christians and the Nahuas both performed the same comparative analytical operation, the difference being what they were comparing in terms of their own understanding.
The sacrament of baptism in Christian belief seals Christ’s promise that an individual receive eternal life by entering the Kingdom of God in the afterlife. For the Christian, baptism symbolizes the Christian’s death of their old self and rebirth as a new creation.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:3-11)

The Nahuas also immersed their children in water in dedication to their gods and although it resembles the Christian baptism, they are not equivalent. Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) described the baptism of children during the pre-Columbian years in *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*. Like the infants born to Christian parents who were baptized shortly after their birth, Motolinía states that the Nahuas’ infants were baptized eight to ten days after their birth in order to protect them from their enemies. However, he also notes that there is a difference inherent between the Christian and Nahua rituals. In terms of his understanding, which is based on the official discourse of the Church, he shows that though there are similarities in bathing the child, the Nahuas’ ritual cannot approximate the same symbolic meaning as the Christian sacrament. Motolinía’s statement demonstrates in a clear manner how the language he used can already carry its own prejudice.

En muchas partes de esta tierra bañaban a los niños recién nacidos a los ocho o diez días, y en bañando al niño poníanle una rodela pequeña en la mano izquierda, y una saeta en la mano derecha; y a las niñas daban una escoba pequeña. Esta ceremonia parecía ser figura del bautismo, que los bautizados habían de pelear con los enemigos del ánima, y habían de barrer y a limpiar sus conciencias y ánimas para en que viniese Cristo a entrar por el bautismo. (Motolinía 118. Emphasis added.)
In another account by Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta in the *Historia eclesiástica Indiana*, the infant was not immersed in water, but could be washed with water or pulque in order to be cleansed from all impurity.

Like his fellow Franciscans, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún also writes about this ritual and states that the midwife was responsible for baptizing the infants after their births and for burying their umbilical cord in the earth. These two rituals were required to dedicate the child to the gods and to the earth. They symbolically show the connection between the natural and the supernatural worlds and the cycles of life and death. While the midwife prepared the water or pulque for the ritual, she recited a blessing. In this case, the midwife assumed a role that in Christian ritual would be performed by a priest. Unlike the Christian baptism, that shows Christ as the source for cleansing the sinner’s soul, the Nahua ritual asks the water goddess Chalchuihtlicue to cleanse the child’s heart and from its parents’ filth.

_Hijo mio, llega a vuestra madre la diosa del agua llamada Chalchuihtlicue o Chalchiuhtlatónac; tenga ella por bien de te recibir, y de lavarte; tenga ella por bien de apartar de ti la suciedad, que tomaste de tu padre y madre, tenga por bien de limpiar tu corazón, y de hacerle bueno y limpio; tenga por bien de te dar buen costumbres_ (Sahagún, Book VI, Chapter XXXII).  

The Nahuas’ baptism protected the child from its enemies, while cleansing it from a stain inherited by its parents. Sahagún makes an analogy between the stain or “filthiness” of the natives and the Original Sin, inherited by human beings according to Judeo-Christian belief. Although the friars believed that the Nahuas had a similar concept for “sin”, there was one main distinction: for the

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86 Pulque is a thick and white fermented beverage (6% alcohol) made from the *maguey* plant (an agave). It was used in offerings to the gods but was also the beverage drunk by the Nahuas. Pulque contains many vitamins and anti-oxidants and is still consumed in many parts of Mexico. Mendieta does not use the term “pulque” in his text; however, he refers to this alcoholic beverage as the “vino de lo que usaban y usan en esta tierra” (Book 2, Chapter XIX).

87 If the subject of this ritual was a girl, Sahagún notes that the midwife had a different dedication.

_Y luego metía en el agua a la criatura y decía: “Entra hijo mio – o hija mía-, en el agua, que se llama metlaloc y tuxpalac; laveos en ellas, limpios él que está en todo lugar, y tenga por bien de apartar de vos todo el mal que traéis con vos desde antes del principio del mundo. Vayase fuera, apártase de vos lo malo que os ha pegado vuestra madre y vuestro padre_ (Sahagún, Book VI, Chapter XXXII).
Nahuas, death was not the consequence of sin, it was simply part of the cycle of life; whereas for Christians, the sacrament of baptism repaired the separation between the Christian and Christ, as the believer was redeemed from the penalty of Original Sin. Baptism is the first sacrament for every Christian and it prepares the soul so that it can receive the others (confession, penance, communion, extreme unction, marriage and ordination). It is therefore a requirement for all Christians, if they wish to live a good life and then die well. Although there are similarities between the Christian baptism and the Mesoamerican pre-Columbian ritual, they cannot be considered homologous.

Sabine MacCormack notes in “Atahualpa and the Book” that poor explanations of Christian elements were the result of a lack of referents in the pre-Columbian languages, and ignorance on behalf of the Spaniards. They were in fact responsible for the Nahuas not fully grasping the complete meaning of the sacrament of baptism (144-45). As with other rituals, baptism was also executed with force when opposition was present; such is the case of Cuauhtémoc who refused baptism and then relented when his life was threatened (Weckmann 200). Abel-Turby states in “New World Augustinians and Franciscans” that Catholic doctrine was cemented in New Spain and in other parts of the Americas by an alliance between the mendicant orders and the conquistadors (11). We saw that Mendieta fully supported Cortés’ efforts in order to save the Nahuas from the devil’s deceptions and considered him to be the defender of Catholicism in the New World. Though Mendieta and Motolinía wrote that the Nahuas had embraced the Christian sacrament of baptism with a complete understanding of its symbolism and with eager attitudes (Mendieta, Book 3, chapter 39: 275-78, Motolinía 31, 117-19), the texts by MacCormack and Abel-Turby, and even Mendieta’s support for Cortés (as the defender of Catholicism), show that Christianity had also been imposed by force and had been heavily
sanctioned by interrogation. It had not been accepted as widely and as enthusiastically as the friars had hoped.

As seen, the Nahuas had a different concept of death and dying compared to the Christian. Sin did not impede the Nahuas’ soul from entering the highest level of the heavens, Omeyocan, or any of its other twelve levels. For the Spaniards, a contrite confession was vital in order to save the soul. In the case of the natives of New Spain, confessing their faults was also a requirement in their religious rituals and was enforced by their priests (tlapouhqui). Unlike Christianity, that stressed the wrath of God in the afterlife if the faithful did not confess their sins, the Nahuas believed that the wrath of their gods would befall them in this world if they did not confess twice a year (Mendieta, Book 3, chapter 41). The tlapouhqui who monitored the process of confession were the intercessors between man and the gods; however, during the actual ceremony, they became the gods themselves. In the Nahuas’ cosmology, there were two gods who could cleanse the faults away from the soul: Tlazolteotl and Tezcatlipoca. Tezcatlipoca, like the Judeo-Christian God, was omnipotent and invisible, and Tlazolteotl was the goddess of lusts and illicit love and devoured all impurities: “Y asimismo, era ella quien perdonaba. Ella quitaba la mancha, ella limpiaba, ella lavaba. . . y también ella perdonaba” (Soustelle 1984: 198). The tlapouhqui was an expert in reading and interpretation of the sacred texts and would consult them in order to assign an individual a specific date for their confession (Soustelle 1984: 199). Confessions could either take place at the individual’s house or at the priest’s house. This event began with the confessor sitting by a large bonfire while the tlapouhqui added copal to its flames in order to invoke the presence of the gods Tlazolteotl and Tezcatlipoca.

Madre de los dioses, padre de los dioses, oh tú, dios viejo (el fuego), he aquí que ha venido un pobre hombre. Viene llorando, triste, angustiado. Puede ser que haya cometido faltas. Puede ser que esté engañando, que haya vivido en la impureza. Tiene el corazón pesado, lleno de pena. Señor, nuestro dueño, tú que estás cerca y lejos, haz que cese su pena, pacifica su corazón. (Soustelle 1984: 199)
Once concluded, the priest requested that the repentants tell him all of their faults and to touch the ground, the solemn vow to the earth indicating their sincerity. As the individual made this vow, they became fully accountable to the gods and to the sacred elements of earth and fire. If they did not disclose all of their faults to the priest, the gods could send punishment on the individual for their dishonesty. After the priest had heard the confession, he assigned a penance. The nature of this penance depended entirely on the severity of the faults and could include: fasting, piercing their tongues with a sharp tool and then threading the wound with “hasta por ochocientas espinas o brinazas de paja” (Soustelle 1984: 199), or giving offerings to Tlazoltéotl. As soon as the penance was completed, the individual was absolved of their faults and could expect to live in harmony with the gods once again. Because the *tlapouhqui* became the gods during the ceremony, they were unable to repeat the contents of the confession to anyone else.

These two rituals of the Nahuas’ religion “coincide” with the first two sacraments of Catholicism; however, they are not the only similarities found between these two faiths. Christianity’s most important sacrament is the celebration of the Eucharist. Holy Communion symbolizes the forgiveness of sins as they are cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 John 1: 7-9). The reenactment of Christ’s Last Supper and the presence of his body and his blood in the emblems of the host and the cup, remind the recipient of Christ’s death and resurrection. They bring the Christian the assurance that all those who remain firm in the faith will also be raised from the dead and rule with Christ for a thousand years. The Nahuas had several similar ceremonies to the celebration of the Eucharist. In one, the priest sacrificed a victim to the gods and then the whole gathered community ate its flesh and drank its blood. The individuals selected for these ceremonies were usually prisoners of war or slaves because, as Carlos Lomnitz notes in *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, sacrificing a member of the reigning community could create chaos in the
universe and prevent the smooth flow of the cycles of fertility (166). The first man to be sacrificed was sponsored by an important member of the community (his “father”), and it was this man’s responsibility to ensure that the soon-to-be “victim” was treated to great luxury before he became the sacrifice. Weckmann notes that the individual who was sacrificed, reenacted the god’s original sacrifice and that in that sacred moment, he became the god himself.

The individual who died at the altar did not consider himself to be a “victim”, rather a favored participant. As seen earlier, those chosen for the sacrifice viewed their imminent death as part of their destiny (Lomnitz 166). The “father” led his “son” to the altar and introduced him to the priest who would perform the sacrifice by saying, “He aquí a mi hijo bien amado” (Soustelle 1984: 105). To show that he was in agreement with the ceremony, the “son” addressed the priest by acknowledging his submission to his “father” by saying, “He aquí a mi padre venerado” (1984: 105). The words uttered by the man presenting his sacrifice for the gods and the appeasement of their wrath, are similar to those that appear in the Gospels after Christ’s baptism: “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).88 After the “victim” had been sacrificed and the heart dedicated to the gods, all individuals attending the ritual were invited to drink the blood and eat its flesh. This “communion” promised life to the households of each individual who had taken part in this ritual. As in the case of the Nahua, Abraham also presented his son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22) and God presented Christ as the

88 This statement is also found in Mark 1:11: “And then came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. In Luke 3:22, “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son: in thee I am well pleased.”
sacrifice for humanity’s sins. As a result of the submission of the sons, life was able to be generated in each case. In the first case, the Nahuas’ sacrifice promised the continued fertility of the earth and its inhabitants. In the second case, Abraham’s son, Isaac, would be the father of Jacob, who in turn, was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the third case, Christ was sacrificed in order to permanently remove humanity’s bondage to sin and consequently bring forth eternal life in Heaven.

Ricard writes that the Nahuas also ate bread molded in the form of the god Huitzilopochtli (Ricard 98). Fray Bernardino de Sahagún describes this feast and the bread in Historia de las cosas de Nueva España.

Luego deshacían y desbarataban el cuerpo de Huitzilopochtli, que era de una masa hecha de semilla de bledos, y el corazón de Huitzilopochtli, tomaban para el señor o rey, y todo el cuerpo y pedazos que eran como huesos del dicho Huitzilopochtli lo repartían en dos partes, entre los naturales de México y Tlatilulco. Los de México, que eran ministros del dicho Huitzilopochtli, que llamaban calpules, tomaban cuatro pedazos del cuerpo de dicho Huitzilopochtli; y otro tanto tomaban los de Tlatilulco, los cuales se llamaban calpules, y así de esta manera repartían entre ellos los cuatro pedazos del cuerpo de Huitzilopochtli, a los indios de los barrios y a los ministros de los ídolos que se llamaban calpules, los cuales comían el cuerpo de Huitzilopochtli cada año, según su orden y costumbre que ellos habían tenido. Cada uno comía un pedacito del cuerpo de Huitzilopochtli, y los que comían eran mancebos, y decían que era cuerpo de dios que se llamaba Teoqualo; y los que recibían y comían el cuerpo de Huitzilopochtli se llamaban ministros de dios. (Sahagún, Book 3, Chapter 1, Point 2)\(^89\)

The bread that represents Huitzilopochtli was eaten with a similar reverence as the host in the Christian celebration of the Eucharist. In order for the Nahuas to receive a piece of the bread that symbolically represented Huitzilopochtli, they had to promise to the gods that they would do penance afterward. The penance was a year in duration and required that an enormous bonfire be lit for him each night until the term was over. Sahagún notes that the expense for such a privilege

\(^{89}\) Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta also describes the Nahua communion in Historia eclesiástica Indiana. However, it is much shorter than the one described by Sahagún. He also indicates that the Totonacs offered human sacrifices to their gods every three years before a confession was recited to the gods on behalf of the whole community (Book 2, Chapter XIX).
was very high: the first cost of the penance was two thousand logs and torches, costing each participant ten large blankets (*quachtli*) (Book 3, chapter 1, section 2). In addition each penitent had to offer to Huitzilopochtli another large blanket and five small ones (*tequachtli*), a basket of corn and one hundred ears of corn. Because not all individuals could afford to pay these tributes, some of the penitents left in order to fight in the *guerras floridas* so that they could pay the remainder of the penance with their lives. The final tribute of six blankets was collected from all the penitents before the final lighting of the bonfire.

When that final night arrived, a procession was led through the streets at midnight. One of the penitents dressed in the likeness of Huitzilopochtli (*Yiopoch*) danced behind a candle-lit cortege of men to the place where the statue of Huitzilopochtli would be cleaned with water. Flautists played while a priest of Huitzilopochtli (*Teohua*) poured water over the statue of the god in order to “bathe” it. The ceremony concluded when the *Yiopoch* took the statue to its place of honor (Book 3, chapter 1, section 3). This penance was not physically trying, as it could be after the Nahuas' confession; however, it was difficult economically as not many penitents were able to pay the tributes that were required to light nightly fires to the god.

**The Indios Cantores: Who Were They? What Was Their Function?**

The spiritual conquest of the natives made great progress as a result of the efforts of the Nahua children educated at the Franciscan monasteries. After learning Catholic doctrine and living in a monastic setting until the Franciscans considered them to be ready for communicating the Christian message to their communities, these children, and in some cases adults, were sometimes the only “representatives” of the Church in the isolated communities of New Spain. The Franciscans in New Spain greatly relied on their former pupils (the *indios cantores*) to carry out their missionary goals to the more remote regions where monasteries had not yet been established.
Porque como de todos los pueblos principales, aunque estuviesen algo lejos, hacían traer los hijos de los señores y mandones a las escuelas, después de bien doctrinados aquellos, enviabanlos a sus tierras, para que allá diesen noticia de lo que había aprendido de la ley de Dios, y lo enseñasen a sus padres, juntasen ciertos días para ser enseñados, como se hacía en los pueblos donde había monasterios (Mendieta, book 3, chapter 32: 258).

Although the Franciscans had established themselves in different parts of New Spain, their main efforts remained concentrated in the Valley of Mexico and as a result they were better able to control what was occurring in the Valley’s parishes. In the more isolated areas of New Spain, the friars had entrusted the indios cantores to continue their projects of evangelism. As Mendieta notes in Historia eclesiástica indiana, the Nahuas were unable to “mandar y regir, sino para ser mandados y regidos” (Book 4, chapter 23: 448). As a result of this attitude and the papal bulls that did not allow the friars to ordain priests in New Spain, there was no indigenous-run church; all of its “official” representatives came from Europe.

Desde luego tales ideas no podían triunfar, debido a su misma índole utópica. En este campo nos encontramos con el problema del clero indígena, pues la Iglesia indígena no podía perdurar sin un clero indígena completo, es decir, sin obispos, puesto que sin este clero completo no era posible perpetuarse y corría el riesgo de seguir siendo sólo lo que se llama una cristiandad. Pero, ¿era factible construir dos Iglesias yuxtapuestas, la indígena y la hispana? Las circunstancias y la misma situación no lo permitieron. De hecho, no surgió la Iglesia indígena porque los franciscanos no lograron crear un clero indígena. (Ricard 30)

Even though the indios cantores were not officially recognized as friars of the Order of St. Francis, Mendieta states that there were many worthy indigenous candidates who chose to remain at the monastery after their schooling. He notes that they would have served faithfully as Franciscans, had they been given an opportunity (Book 4, chapter 22: 444). Mendieta later criticizes the Church for not allowing these men to take up the cloak of St. Francis simply because they were not of European descent and suggests that the natives should be treated fairly and as equals. In addition to these points, Mendieta writes that the children educated at the Order’s school in Tlatelolco were deeply devoted to the Franciscan Order and to their patron saint. These individuals lived in the convent with the friars until they were old enough to return to their communities where they
continued to serve the Church faithfully and defended Catholicism from the remnants of idolatry. In a passage from his text, Mendieta tells of an episode when the children confronted a medicine-man from their community and killed him in the name of Christianity because he had been "possessed" by a demon (pre-Columbian god). The children were praised by the Church officials because they had protected their community from the devil's evil plan for a return to the pre-Columbian "idolatrous" religion (Book 3, chapter 24).

The syncretism that occurred as a result of the intermingling of sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism, the Church's official Catholicism, and the Nahuas' pre-Columbian religion, deeply troubled the friars. As Lugo Olin notes in *Una literatura para salvar el alma*, the purpose of the friars in New Spain was to firmly establish the presence of the Church in New Spain in order to prevent all forms of heresy by instructing the new converts in the doctrine of the Church (38). As Claudio Lomnitz writes in *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, the friars were particularly concerned about the burial practices of the Nahuas. As we have seen, in the Valley of Mexico, the people incinerated the corpse and then kept the deceased's ashes in their homes. In addition to the Nahuas' burial practices, the friars were concerned by the "extreme" grieving that occurred during the funeral, which led to drinking and dancing (Lomnitz 170-72). According to Lomnitz, Motolinía and the other "Twelve" were under the impression that at their arrival, the Nahuas had completely given up their traditions and no longer celebrated their feasts and ceremonies (168). On the surface, Motolinia was correct; however, the Sinaloans continued to cremate their dead and to bury them in the caves of their ancestors (Lomnitz 172-76). The Valley of Mexico was well

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90 Lomnitz describes that in other parts of Anahuac, the people buried their dead in caves located far away from the settlement in order to avoid their unwanted visits (168). These practices shocked the clergy when they discovered that they had not yet been eliminated. Lomnitz notes that the account by the Dominican friar Benito Fernández, shows the shock and rage of a clergyman when he was led to a burial cave in Sinaloa.

And when he came up closer, he recognized the bodies of the *caciques* who had died but recently... and who he thought had been good Christians, and burning with zeal and divine honor, he lunged at the bodies, threw them to the ground, and stomped and dragged them like belongings to Satan. (176)
monitored by the Franciscans, Dominicans, and other Orders; however, in the smaller towns of the vast territory of New Spain, the traditions of the ancestors were still being practiced after the Conquest.

In the AGN (Archivo General de la Nación) in Mexico City, there are accounts of the roles that the *indios cantores* played in the burials of the natives in their communities. Because a Franciscan monastery was at least two days away from the small towns in their area, the *indios cantores* were responsible for overseeing the needs of their communities until the arrival of the friar(s), and to take on his role if he was unable to arrive on time. Their tasks also included singing mass on Sundays and at other ceremonies. Mendieta notes that the devotion of the Nahuas toward the Franciscans was so incredible that they requested, when it was not possible to have a friar present to preach the Gospel on Sundays or religious days, to put the habit of the Order on a pole, as they believed that the robe had mysterious power and would preach to them (Book 3, chapter 56: 331). Rodríguez Álvarez notes in *Usos y costumbres funerarias en la Nueva España* that the *indios cantores* in some cases carried out the administration of the sacraments and that they served their community by preaching the doctrine, burying the dead and helping others to die well (54). The Nahuas chose to bury their dead with the help of the *indios cantores* because they did not want to pay, or could not pay, the three Peso fee imposed by the clergy (54). The *indios cantores*’ role in the expansion of the Church’s authority in New Spain was so crucial that an accusation against a priest was brought forward by the people of Mexicalcingo. The document, now housed at the AGN, shows how two native men were beaten by a priest because they had not sought the help of the *indios cantores* to bury a man (AGN, Clero Regular y Secular, Vol. 186, exp.1, fol. 3v-6v).

Although the Church of *Nueva España* could not oversee every part of the colony, the *indios cantores* were given considerable authority in their communities in order to preserve Christianity.

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91 Rodríguez’s source is taken from the AGN’s document (AGN, Derechos Parroquiales, Vol.1, exp.1 [1671]).
in the land. As Mendieta notes, these men were the “discípulos de lo religiosos” (Book 3, chapter 32: 258).

Dying Well in Nueva España: Death, Burial and Indulgences

In the Historia eclesiástica Indiana Mendieta notes that the Nahuas’ pre-Columbian concept of death prepared them to accept death better than the Christian Spaniards. He notes that the reason for their acceptance stems from their detachment to the things of this earth and their acceptance of the brevity of life.

Basta decir que ninguno de ellos muere con la inquietud y pesadumbre que muchos de los nuestros, mostrando alguna impaciencia ó que le pesa de morir, sino con muestras de contento de que se cumpla en ellos la voluntad de Dios. (Book 4, chapter 21: 442)

Although it was difficult for the clergy to erase most of the pre-Columbian traditions associated with death, many were still preserved under Christian rule. In keeping with the Church’s command to bury the dead, the friars brought with them the tradition of indulgences, Christian burial, and the manuals of the Arte de bien morir. In the archives of the Biblioteca Nacional and at the library of the Museo de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, there are many documents chronicling the funerary traditions of Nueva España as well as several printed catechism manuals that include the Arte de bien morir in Spanish and in Latin.92 In the sixteenth century, the catechisms and the Arte de bien morir that were written in Spanish were most likely read and used by the Spaniards living in New Spain. Although, there were also some bilingual versions and versions in “lengua mexicana” of the Doctrina cristiana produced in the sixteenth century (Gante 62). As the Nahuas converted to Christianity and were baptized, they had the right to obtain a Christian burial and the counsel of a priest before their death, like any Spaniard. Not every town

92 These Mexican versions of the Arte de bien morir will be studied in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.
had access to a priest and therefore the citizens relied on the help of the indios cantores, who assisted other members of their community to die well and carried out their burials.

As the friars and the Spanish soldiers set up their cities, permanent visual elements of Christianity had to be established. The first Franciscan church, as Rodríguez Álvarez, states was the church of San Francisco el “Viejo”, though the location of its actual site has been greatly debated. It is believed to have been constructed on the ruins of the Templo Mayor in Mexico City’s Zócalo area, but the confusion arises because two solares were issued for the construction of the church and monastery. The first one, as Rodríguez Álvarez shows, was probably not used whereas, the second one allowed for the construction of the current Catedral Metropolitana of Mexico City. With the construction of the first church, land was also consecrated for the burial of its parishioners. Rodríguez Álvarez states that 2000 people were buried on this church’s grounds and inside the church itself (178). We must keep in mind that not everyone was granted the privilege of being buried in this church. As Rodríguez Álvarez notes, the cemeteries showed the segregation between social classes and races that took place within Nueva España’s society. Shortly after its construction, all Spaniards were buried at San Francisco el “Viejo”; however, as the city grew, only important Spaniards were buried there. All Spaniards who were not part of the governing elite were buried in smaller churches or at their cemeteries, and at city cemeteries.

The natives were never buried at San Francisco el “Viejo” or at the smaller churches; they were buried in specially designated cemeteries for the naturales; the Camposanto of San Lázaro, for example (Rodríguez Álvarez 177). As the documents at the AGN demonstrate, some abuses were committed against the Nahuas regarding funeral costs or assistance by the clergy. The natives were often denied Christian burial until they paid their funerary fees to their parish priest. In some cases, the priests refused to leave their monastery late in the evening because they feared the dangers of the road; therefore, they arrived too late to guide the dying person through the
process of death.\textsuperscript{93} As seen, the Church condemned all pagan burials (in caves, fields, in the homes of the survivors, and by incineration) and in some cases, people were jailed for not seeking Church assistance in burying their relatives. Christian burial on church grounds was crucial to the salvation of the soul in Spain, as we saw in Carlos Eire’s text and the same applies in sixteenth-century Nueva España. The Franciscans banned all pre-colonial burials that were done by incineration since this was not permitted in the Catholic Church because, like the dismemberment of corpses for burial in the late-Middle Ages, it destroyed the body that had been created in the image of God. For the Nahuas, forbidding their ancient burial rites was the most difficult expectation to accept (Rodríguez Álvarez 51). The Franciscans emphasized that all Christians had to be buried in church cemeteries in order to benefit from the many prayers which were continuously offered up during the day. These prayers and burial in the cloak of a Franciscan was still believed to bring the Saint’s intercession in the Judgment and could even perform miracles (Mendieta, book 3, chapter 56: 331). As Mendieta relates, the loyalty of the Nahuas toward Saint Francis was so strong that on one occasion, a child that had died and whose body had already been prepared for burial, was resurrected because of the intense faith of his parents (Book 3, chapter 56: 333).

The subject of indulgences was controversial in the sixteenth century because of the criticism it had received in Europe by the Protestants. As seen in chapter 2, the Protestants had accused the Church of increasing their coffers by selling indulgences and salvation to the faithful. In New Spain one of the most important documents that a Christian could obtain to lessen the time of penance in Purgatory was the Bull of the Crusades. This bull was first issued by Pope Urban II (1042-99) in 1096 during the first Crusade. The purpose of purchasing this document was to

\textsuperscript{93} There are numerous cases that can be found at the AGN with regards to the negligence of the clergy assisting the dying. One such case appears in the branch of Clero Regular y Secular, Vol. 152, exp.4.
collect funds that would help Christians to re-conquer Jerusalem. This bull was sold in Spain during the XIIth and XIIIth centuries (Weckmann 309) and in the XVth century financed the battles against Muslims in Spain and other “infidels” in the Americas. As Weckmann states, this battle against the “infidel” permitted the selling of the Bull of the Crusades in Nueva España and in Spain. Even though the Bull of the Crusades was not officially renewed by Pope Gregory XIII (1502-85) until 1573 to extend it to the Americas, there is evidence that it was brought to Nueva España in 1519. This indulgence was important for the Spaniards, but also for the natives as they were unable to confess their sins regularly because of a lack of priests in rural areas, and thus obtain their indulgences. In 1542 Pope Paul III (1468-1549) requested that all indigenous people should give up meat, eggs and dairy produce for thirty years during Lent and other days prohibited by the Church (Rodriguez Álvarez 104) in order to obtain the Bull of the Crusades. The following year, Charles V (1500-58) writes in a letter dated May 1st that the bull should not be preached to the indigenous people until they have a full understanding of the Christian faith. In the case of Christian towns, the bull had to be preached in Spanish; however, all natives living in those towns could not receive the Bull of the Crusades if they had not officially accepted Christianity (Rodríguez Álvarez 104).

Before the printing press had been established by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, the Bull of the Crusades was printed in Spain and taken to Nueva España. This bull would be conceded to the

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94 Weckmann states that the first written proof of this document in Nueva España is from 1519 when Cortés prepared himself to travel from Cuba to Nueva España. In addition, he states that during the see of Tenochtitlan, Cortés received a visit from Fray Pedro Melgarejo de Urrea, commissioner of the Crusade, who later returned to Spain with treasures for Charles V paid with the tithes gathered for the purchase of the Bull (309-310). Weckmann also remarks that the Tribunal of the Holy Crusade was set up in 1537 and collected tributes for the continued battles against the Mexicas.

95 The AGN has an Inquisition trial document charging Juan Sanchez Almasa for using profanity, and not devoutly following the Church’s orders for seeking out the Bull of the Crusades, and for eating chicken meat during the forbidden days (Inquisición, v. 360, exp. 109, f. 307-396).

96 In 1562 Pope Pius IV decrees that the all Christians give up these foods for thirty years during the Lenten period in order to obtain indulgences. The only individuals who were exempt from the decree were the regular and secular clerics (Rodríguez Álvarez 104).
deceased as part of the indulgences offered up by their survivors and included three bulls within it: that of the Crusades, of the dead, and "composición". Rodríguez Álvarez notes that this Bull could only to be purchased once a year in the major cities and then it had to be renewed in order for it to be effective in the moment of a person's death (104). In the case of rural Nueva España, since the territory was so large and some areas did not have easy access to a priest, the only opportunity to obtain this bull came once every two years when a priest from the Tribunal of the Crusades returned to the town (104). The publication of the bull in Nueva España was done on Maundy Thursday and could be acquired any time during the year; however, most people renewed or received it on Easter Sunday when they had completed their penance. The bull could only be applied to Christians in their final moments of life when the doctor summoned a priest for the reading of the Arte de bien morir. It is significant to note that the Bull of the Crusades was an important component in the burials of Nueva España, as it was found in the coffins of the nuns of San Jerónimo (Rodríguez Álvarez 106).

As we have seen, the Nahuas had several feasts dedicated to the dead. The Franciscans banned all of the Nahuas' celebrations; however, since in Europe the dead were remembered on All Souls' Day and offerings were brought to the Churches for their souls in Purgatory, they allowed the natives to observe this yearly celebration. During this day, offerings were brought to the churches on behalf of the deceased's soul and were brought to the altar where they were received by the priests. Mendieta states that in the early years after the Conquest, the Spaniards were faithful with their offerings for the dead which included bread, wine, fish, meat and other items, but that as time progressed, their offerings began to decline (Book 4, chapter 17: 423); whereas, the Nahuas continued to provide offerings steadily for their dead. Mendieta states that the Spaniards did not provide enough offerings for the survival of the convent, while those made
by the natives at the Convento Grande de San Francisco (San José de los Naturales) in Mexico City sustained the convent. He notes that in 1572 on All Souls’ Day, the official date when the Nahuas were able to remember their dead, the chapel collected more than five thousand loaves of bread, three to four thousand white candles, twenty-five “arobas” of wine, chickens, eggs, fruit and soil (Book 4, chapter 17: 423). It was traditional for the Nahuas in the pre-Columbian religion to bring offerings to the spirits of their dead relatives who were journeying to Mictlan. It was also traditional in sixteenth-century popular Catholicism to bring food offerings to the churches in order to gain indulgences for relatives in Purgatory. Rodríguez Álvarez notes that offerings of wheat, bread and wine, were typical in the Basque region of Spain and that they were taken to churches to gain indulgences for the dead at funeral masses, or they were taken to the gravesite (127). These two traditions of bringing food and candles to an altar where they could be applied to the souls of the dead intermingled with the official discourse of Catholicism regarding indulgences and created a new phenomenon: the ofrendas of Días de Muertos (Fiesta de fieles difuntos). This celebration, another example of religious syncretism in Mexico, began its evolution in the sixteenth century with the offerings made on All Souls’ Day and with visits to the cemetery. At the graves, the surviving family members would not grieve for their dead but drink to excess, as had been the pre-Hispanic custom (127). Rodríguez Álvarez notes that the celebrations for Fiestas de fieles difuntos on November 2 varied in grandeur depending on the region. In smaller, more rural towns with a large indigenous population, the celebrations were generally livelier, with music and excessive drinking (129-30). Processions were organized after mass on November 2 from the church to the cemetery. When the procession arrived at the cemetery, the priest made the sign of the Cross over each grave before they returned to the church. The townspeople paid the Church for this service

97 One “aroba” is equal to 11.52 Kg in weight. Although, according to the Diccionario de la lengua española from the Real Academia Española, the weight of liquids varied according to province (199-200).
and a vigil following the visit to the cemetery (130). All food offerings were received on behalf of the dead and indulgences were applied toward their souls.

The Open-Air Chapels of Huejotzingo and San Andrés de Calpan

The message of the Last Judgment was taught along with Church doctrine and was also a contributor to instilling the fear of death to the Nahuas. The concept of the Last Judgment was difficult for them to understand, since their pre-Columbian afterlife did not depend on deeds or faith in a savior. The Nahuas were not like the European Christians who, during the medieval period and in the sixteenth century, feared their physical deaths because of the impending Judgment of their soul. How could the friars communicate the Judgment to the Nahuas and give them permanent reminders of this event? The friars chose to include visual representations of this event in the Christian faith in the open-air chapels of the atrium of the Franciscan convents in Huejotzingo and San Andrés de Calpan. Weckmann states that these chapels were similar in construction to medieval churches since they possessed a domed roof typical of Gothic architecture in Europe. Even though they are similar in construction, they are completely a Nueva España phenomenon since they were only constructed in Mesoamerica. These chapels combine European, Muslim and indigenous influences. The Franciscans had these chapels constructed in order to attract the natives, as in the past all their religious ceremonies and rituals had taken place outdoors (Weckmann 571). These chapels were convenient because they allowed the friars to celebrate mass in front of thousands of people at one time.98 Weckmann states that open-air chapels were also present in Europe during the Roman Empire and were later used by the early Christians to preach the Gospel. He states that the open-air chapels in Nueva España are influenced by mudéjar

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98 Weckmann notes in footnote 22, page 571 that Fray Pedro de Gante celebrated mass in front of 50,000 people in an open-air chapel in the atrium of San José de los Naturales.
architecture (573) and this is seen in the first open-air chapel to be constructed in Nueva España, in San José de los Naturales in Mexico City. This particular chapel, where Gante preached, is constructed in a manner similar to the mosques in Spain (573).

The Church emphasized the importance of being prepared for one’s death in its sermons, in the Arte de bien morir manuals and also in the visual representation of the Last Judgment. The fresco representations of the Last Judgment in the churches around Europe were useful in visually reminding all individuals, literate and illiterate, of the horrors that could befall them if they did not die well. These artistic representations of the Judgment, the fires of Purgatory and Hell, in the frescoes, stained glass, altarpieces, and sculptures were also taken to Nueva España to communicate the certainty of these events in the Christian life to the Nahuas who were not familiar with these concepts. The most interesting display of the Last Judgment in Nueva España appears in the open-air chapel of San Andrés de Calpan. The Franciscan monastery was constructed in 1548 and is twenty six kilometers from Puebla de los Ángeles. This once vibrant community is now part of a very rural area that is almost completely deserted. The atrium of this monastery acted as a meeting place, as a place where cultural exchanges were made between the Nahuas and the friars, a place through which processions passed, where mass was celebrated and where people were buried. In this sense, the atrium of these convents acted much in the same manner as the Cemetery of the Innocents in Paris as described by Johann Huizinga. The four outdoor chapels were located on each corner of the atrium and each one has a small altar within to celebrate mass. The atrium functioned as a gateway from the town square to the monastery since its gates opened toward the square (Ricard 268). The chapels of the monasteries of Calpan and Huejotzingo are

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99 Mendíeta refers to this chapel in his Historia eclesiástica indiana, Book IV, Chapter XX, p. 434. This chapel was on the grounds of the convent of San Francisco de México and was located in the northern part. It was used for the most part to attend the Mexicas and as a result they brought offerings of food (corn, fruit, bread) to this chapel as well as coco beans, which was their currency before the Conquest.
capillas posas because each one of them was a stop in the town processions. The chapels of Calpan and Huejotzingo are particularly beautiful as they were constructed with stones and their exterior walls were intricately carved with scenes from Christian doctrine. Inside, these chapels were decorated with stucco which unfortunately has not survived well over the years, especially after the earthquake of 1989 (Illustration 3.8). Each one of these chapels is dedicated to one of the four archangels, who appear on one of the exterior side walls. In Calpan the most interesting chapel is the one on the North-western corner of the atrium (closest to the gate). This chapel displays on the eastern wall the representation of the Archangel Michael with the devil at his feet. The archangel is flanked by the Archangels Gabriel and Rafael on the eastern wall. On the southern wall, we can see the Last Judgment according to the book of Revelation. Christ appears in the center as Judge while the Virgin kneels on his right side and John the Baptist on his left. Immediately on either side of Christ are two of the angels of the apocalypse, while underneath we can see six open tombs with the dead rising to be judged (Illustrations 3.9 and 3.10). The stone representation of the Judgment, the sermons, and later the reading of the Arte de bien morir, show the gradual gain of emotional and spiritual control that the clergy of Nueva España were seeking and which they would eventually achieve.

The late Middle Ages and to a certain degree the sixteenth century in Spain promoted an obsession and paranoia with death. The only way to avoid the death of the soul was to live a good life and to be led to a good death by a capable priest who would make certain that all the individual’s sins were confessed and that their affairs were in order. The Nahuas believed that death was not to be feared since it was simply a continuation of life in another place. The friars who came to Nueva España were surprised to see the many differences and similarities that existed between the Nahuas’ religious rites and beliefs and their own. Even though the first Franciscans to
settle in *Nueva España* wanted to evangelize the people in order to speed Christ’s return, eventually they wanted to cement the Catholic Church’s presence to prevent idolatry and the spread of Protestantism to *Nueva España*. In order to do this, a differentiation had to be made between the “good” religion and the “bad” religion. The demonizing of the Nahuas’ faith and their gods by creating a Manichaeian distinction demonstrated to the people the weakness of their gods, as they had been defeated in the battles fought against the Christians who had been supported by strong beatific figures (St. James, and the Virgin), thus defending the “true” faith. This explanation contributed greatly to the mass baptisms and conversions (Duverger 101) recorded in Mendieta and Motolinía’s histories of *Nueva España*. These records obviously do not completely represent the reasons for which the people converted. The spiritual conquest of *Nueva España* did not occur overnight, and as a result a curious syncretism took place in the rites and beliefs of the Church. The funerary traditions of the colonized *Nueva España* were similar in nature to those found in Spain, since the *Arte de bien morir* was read to the dying and the deceased had to prepare their affairs for their good death. As the colony became more established and the rule of the Church was more prominent, the *Arte de bien morir* would play a crucial role in *Nueva España*’s funerary tradition.
Chapter V
Two Mexican Versions of the *Arte de bien morir*: Fray Juan de Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte” and Fray Martín de León’s “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”

In New Spain the *Arte de bien morir* continued to play a fundamental role in counseling the ill and dying from the sixteenth century until the eighteenth century. The versions of this text that were brought to Mexico in catechism manuals were written by European authors such as Charles Borromeo, Roberto Belarmino, Ignacio de la Erbada, Alonso de Vascones, João de Santo Tomaz, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, and Fray Martín de León, and printed either in Spain or in Mexico City. As the *Arte de bien morir* was a component in the Catholic funerary ritual in the sixteenth century, the Franciscan and Dominican friars used them in order to help establish the requirements for dying well in New Spain. The Mexican versions of the *Arte de bien morir* follow the same structure as the medieval texts, which were modeled after Jean de Gerson’s *De Scientia Mortis*, but they also demonstrate the sixteenth-century Church’s official discourses on salvation, penance and dying. Although the *Artes de bien morir* from New Spain share similarities with contemporary European texts such as Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Preparación y aparejo de la buena muerte* and Alejo Venegas’ *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte*, their focus reflects the specific challenges that the Mexican Church faced. As we will see in this chapter, the main differences found in the Mexican *Artes de bien morir* address the Church’s concerns on religious syncretism and “idolatry”.

Fray Juan de Zumárraga (1468-1548), a Franciscan and Mexico’s first bishop, archbishop and Inquisitor, wrote many catechisms during his bishopric and was a prolific editor of important doctrinal texts. As seen in Chapter 3, the Franciscans brought with them texts that they felt were important for their own spiritual growth, but also texts that would solidify the faith of the newly

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100 Most sixteenth century catechisms and religious texts were printed in Mexico City by Juan Cromberger’s or Juan Pablos’ press.
converted Christian Nahua. The relationship of the mendicants with theological texts that were brought from Europe or printed in New Spain, relied on a comparable connection to the one that existed between the Nahuas and the "wisdom of the ancients". As seen in Chapter 3, the Nahuas depended on the traditions and words of their ancestors in order to function within society. In a similar manner, the Franciscans and lay-Spaniards of New Spain relied on the "wisdom" of the Church and the writings of medieval theologians, who interpreted the Scriptures and nourished the Church's official discourse. This discourse directly and indirectly dictated how Spain and New Spain's Christian society would function. As a result, locating a printed version in Latin of Jean de Gerson's *Opusculum Tripartitum* among the holdings of the Convento Grande de San Francisco in Mexico City is no accident (Illustration 4.1).

Tentler notes that in the sixteenth century theological texts from the late-medieval period were still being printed and had a wide readership (30). Fray Juan de Zumárraga and the Franciscans of his generation were influenced by the intellectual movement of "Modern Devotion" and were consequently familiar with the writings of theological scholars such as Jean de Gerson, John of Ruysbroek, Gerard of Groote, Thomas of Kempis, Adrian of Utrech and Erasmus of Rotterdam (Weckmann 211). Mickey Abel-Turby states that the "Twelve" Franciscans were chosen for their Erasmist beliefs. In the early years of post-Conquest New Spain, Fray Juan de Zumárraga was in charge of overseeing the "Twelve" as well as interpreting several of Erasmus' texts. The "Twelve" and Zumárraga, as noted by Abel-Turby, "denounced scholasticism, supported an unlimited diffusion of scripture, and believed in the doctrine of interior Christianity" (16). The ideals of this line of philosophy did not last long in New Spain (16) as their utopian

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101 This version was printed in Zaragoza by Jorge Coco Leutórico in 1514 and titled *De preceptis decalogi, de confessione et arte bene moriendi*. It was bound together with Nicolas de Ploue's *Tractatus sacerdotalis* and Juan de Lapide's *Resolutiorum dubiorum circa celebrationem missarum*, and is housed at the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropologia e Historia.
beliefs gave way to other pressing issues of the Church: time, money and stopping “idolatry”. Even though Erasmus’ texts and philosophies were no longer prevalent in New Spain after 1544, remnants of textual influences can be found in Zumárraga’s writings.

Critics such as José Almoina, the editor of Zumárraga’s *Doctrina cristiana breve*, have noted that Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte”, is heavily influenced by the “Modern Devotion” movement, namely, the writings of Jean de Gerson and Erasmus of Rotterdam (XXV, XXXVII-L). In addition to textual references in his writings that suggest a “Modern Devotion” influence, Zumárraga edited a Spanish translation of Gerson’s *Opusculum Tripartitum* that was published in Mexico City in 1544 by Juan Cromberger’s press. This text, the *Tripartito del christianissimo y consolatorio Dr. Juan de Gerson de doctrina cristiana a cualquier cosa muy provechosa*, is housed at the Biblioteca Nacional de México in Mexico City. Since there are no specific references in these texts to “idolatry” or religious syncretism in New Spain, there is no need to analyze them here. Our only interest in these texts is to show that Zumárraga and other “Mexican” writers, such as Martín de León, relied on the “wisdom” found in the printed works of medieval writers and in the interpretations of the sixteenth-century theologians, in the composition of their own *Artes de bien morir*.

**Zumárraga Commissions the Translation of the *Doctrina Cristiana***

Fray Juan de Zumárraga was unable to speak, read, or write in any of the indigenous languages of New Spain. His role in the First *Audiencia* in Mexico-Tenochtitlán was to represent the Nahuas’

102 The *Tripartito del christianissimo y consolatorio Dr. Juan de Gerson de doctrina cristiana a cualquier cosa muy provechosa* at the Biblioteca Nacional de México in Mexico City appears in facsimile form in an edited version by Alberto María Carreño and printed in 1949. The text has the same structure as the Latin copy of the *Opusculum Tripartitum* at the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, also in Mexico City, as it contains sections on the Catholic doctrine, the Ten Commandments, Confession and the “De Scientia Mortis”.

103 Although these two men were originally from Spain, their written contributions to the Mexican tradition of the *Arte de bien morir* in New Spain, distinguish them from their contemporary writers in the Iberian Peninsula.
complaints to the commission and to protect them from any abuse that had been committed against them by a Spaniard. In addition, his responsibility as bishop was to oversee the conversion process of the people and to prevent them from turning away from Catholicism. Zumárraga’s conflicts with the first Audiencia have been well documented by Joaquín García Icazbalceta in Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Primer Obispo y arzobispo de México. The problems that arose in these conflict-filled years stem from the fact that Zumárraga arrived in New Spain without having been consecrated bishop (51). Since he only had the title of “bishop-elect” and Protector of the Indians, his authority was challenged by other members of the Audiencia, namely Nuño de Guzmán and two other auditors (oidores) Matienzo and Delgadillo. As García Icazbalceta notes, Zumárraga arrived without having a clear definition of his role in New Spain or of his jurisdiction. As a result, problems immediately surfaced after his arrival as members of the Audiencia refused to acknowledge his authority.

La Corte misma no acertaba a definir la jurisdicción y facultades de los protectores; quejábanse éstos, y con razón, de que no sabían a punto fijo cuál era su carácter, ni lo que debían hacer, de donde se originaban frecuentes disputas con las autoridades. (51)

The members of the Audiencia and their sympathizers prevented Zumárraga from exercising his authority in New Spain by creating a web of censorship that targeted his personal letters to the Spanish crown.

Román Zulaica Gárate states that Zumárraga wanted to make the doctrine available to all inhabitants of New Spain, despite his not knowing the languages of the land (26).

Ya que con la palabra de la predicación no puedo aprovechar a quien principalmente soy enviado, por no conocer su lenguaje, y por su mayor necesidad soy más obligado, y como en esta congregación de los señores obispos fue acordado que fueran ordenadas dos doctrinas para los indios incipientes y proficientes.104 (Zulaica Gárate 26)

104 This quotation is taken from the prologue of Zumárraga’s undated Doctrina cristiana. Although Zulaica Gárate notes that this version of the Doctrina cristiana is one of the most important texts in Zumárraga’s repertoire, he fails to mention the exact page reference for his source.
Although he did commission different translations of the *Doctrina cristiana*, Zumárraga also wrote a catechism in Spanish specifically for individuals who required a simpler form of this complex text. The *Doctrina breve muy provechosa de las cosas que pertenecen a la fe catholica y a Nuestra criстиandad en estilo llano para con e sin inteligencia* was printed in 1544 and is housed at the Biblioteca Nacional de México.\(^{105}\) This text, although much more condensed than the other versions written by Zumárraga, is not likely to have been read by the Nahuas. The only possible native readers for this text would have been the *indios cantores* since they learned Spanish at the schools established by the Franciscans. As seen in Chapter 3, Spanish was not imposed on the natives because the Franciscans had insisted on a more humanist approach in their conversion projects; therefore, this version was most likely read by the Spaniards and the friars. However, it could have also been translated and preached to the natives in their own languages.

Robert Ricard writes that catechisms in Nueva España were generally preached as part of the ritual of Mass in the cemeteries of churches or in the atriums of monasteries every Sunday and holiday (181). It was irresponsible for priests to abandon the newly baptized people without giving them proper instruction in the important matters related to their faith. Ricard states that at these ceremonies men and women were divided into separate sections and after the doctrine’s reading, the people were required to repeat it aloud two or three times in order to commit it to memory (182). The Franciscans chose the *indios cantores* to baptize, help the ill to die well, organize funerals and to make sure that holy days were kept (183). These men, who had learned to read and write with the pedagogic instruction of the friars, had access to the bilingual texts and unilingual texts in the different indigenous languages. Since they were the representatives of the Church in remote villages, they acted as priests unofficially before the mendicants transferred power to the

\(^{105}\) Zumárraga wrote and printed this catechism with his own money. This catechism, like the others that were mentioned earlier explains the Catholic doctrine, the importance of the sacraments and the articles of faith in a brief format. There is no *Arte de bien morir* in this catechism.
secular clergy in 1574. Ricard notes that unlike European manuals that dealt with the threat of Protestantism, the Mexican manuals tackled “idolatry”, which referred to paganism, sorcery, and Lutheranism.

Así, por temor a que la idolatría sustituyera a otra, los franciscanos insistieron muchísimo en que el culto dirigido a las imágenes no iba dirigido al objeto material, sino a lo que representaban. Por ejemplo, fray Matutino Gilberto en su catecismo tarasco se expresaba, de acuerdo con la traducción que él mismo dio: “no se adora ninguna imagen aunque sea el crucifixo o Santa María, pero solamente por esto se figura el crucifixo o Santa María o los santos, porque solamente se traiga a la memoria la gran misericordia de Dios … y aunque delante del Crucifixo, de rodillas se adora, no empero se adora el Crucifixo porque solamente es hecho de palo, pero a Dios mismo nuestro Señor que está en el cielo.”

Zumárraga’s project of translating the *Doctrina cristiana* into the Nahuas’ languages was accepted by the Dominicans and some Franciscans; however, surprisingly the Franciscans did not produce nearly as many catechisms as the Dominicans because they were more focused on their schools and plans to expand Catholicism elsewhere in Mesoamerica. The best-known translation of the *Doctrina cristiana* by a Franciscan is the *Doctrina cristiana en lengua mexicana* by Pedro de Gante which was printed in 1553 by Juan Pablos’ press in Mexico City. It contains the acts of faith, an explanation of the sacraments, and prayers, but there is no *Arte de bien morir*. The Dominicans’ versions contain the affirmations of faith, an explanation of the sacraments, like the Franciscan versions, and like the Franciscans’ texts, not all contain the *Arte de bien morir*. The 1611 catechism *Camino del cielo*, written by Fray Martín de León, contains a version of the *Arte de bien morir*: “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”. This text, as we will see later in the chapter, is interesting because it includes specific references to New Spain, and reveals the official discourse of the Mexican Church in the early seventeenth century.

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106 Ricard notes that this quotation was taken from Fr. Matutino Gilberti’s *Libros y Libreros* on page 11.
Rivalries between the Mendicant Orders in New Spain

The years surrounding Zumárraga’s bishopric were a step between the two important periods of religious authority in New Spain’s history. His rule divides the height of the mendicant order’s control over all aspects of Catholicism and the establishment of the secular clergy’s hierarchy. Under Zumárraga, the mendicant orders had already founded numerous monasteries and the flood of conversions had begun to abate. A rivalry between all mendicant orders in New Spain gradually became more visible in the mid-sixteenth century, thus resulting in tension and violence. The two Mexican versions of the *Arte de bien morir* (Fray Juan de Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte”, and Fray Martín de León’s “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”) present the official discourse of the Catholic Church with respect to salvation, penance, death, and its “rejection” of all forms of “idolatry”; however, they also include some major differences with respect to religious syncretism and the tension between these two orders as we will see later in this chapter.

The two main monastic orders that arrived in New Spain were the Franciscans and the Dominicans but they were shortly followed by the Augustinians, the secular clergy\(^\text{107}\) and the Jesuits. Before the control of the Mexican Church was transferred completely to the secular clergy in 1574,\(^\text{108}\) there were some major power struggles for spiritual authority in *Nueva España*. Jurisdiction became a major point of controversy among the mendicant orders, which feuded over land and the rights to oversee the Nahuas living in a given area. Ricard notes that in 1536 the

\(^{107}\) The secular clergy refers to all members of the Church who were priests in Europe and who had the authority to administer the sacraments and ordain priests. In 1574 the secular clergy finally oversaw the Church of New Spain and enforced tithing and other elements that were part of the European churches.

\(^{108}\) The arrival of the Jesuits in Nueva España took place 1572. Their arrival marks the ending of monastic influence and rule in New Spain as two years later the complete secularization of the Church occurred. The secular clergy resumed its power over the Mexican Church’s hierarchy, administered the sacraments and oversaw all aspects of Catholic faith. The mendicant orders no longer maintained their power in New Spain and had to obey the European-established Church hierarchy.
Queen of Spain instructed Viceroy Mendoza of New Spain to find a solution to the feuding among
the monastic orders (362). The main players in these feuds over jurisdiction were the Franciscans
and the Dominicans, who had begun to experience tensions in 1526 (362). The tensions between
these two orders continued during and after the initial conflicts between Nuño de Guzmán and Fray
Juan de Zumárraga in the first Audiencia, as the Dominicans had openly supported Nuño de
Guzmán over their mendicant “brothers”. Although their abbot, Fray Domingo de Betanzos had
been friends of Zumárraga, their alliance did not yield any benefits for the Dominican Order in
New Spain. Ricard states that as a result of continuing hostilities and suspicions, Betanzos was
forced to leave New Spain for Guatemala (363-64).

The tensions between the Dominicans and the Franciscans continued to escalate with the
Dominicans accusing the Franciscans of conditioning the natives to reject them when their order
was ceded former Franciscan convents (363). In addition to these feuds, the Dominican friar
Andrés de Moguer wrote a letter to the Council of the Indies accusing the Franciscans of
controlling three quarters of New Spain’s land. His main accusation was that the Franciscans
would not allow the Dominicans or the Augustinians to expand and settle in areas of the colony
that were in need of priests (363). These arguments continued to escalate with threats of violence
and resistance against Zumárraga and the Franciscans until 1556 when the Spanish Crown forced
Viceroy Luis de Velasco to put an end to the feuding. Instead of imposing a settlement between
the mendicant orders, he authorized them to find a solution to their own problems. As a result, the
mendicant orders reached an agreement on August 1, 1558 to not set foot or get involved in areas
that were not under their jurisdiction (363-64). This solution seemed to please everyone
momentarily; however, it was short-lived.

Since the mendicant orders had been given exclusive control of New Spain’s Church in
Adrian VI’s bull, the friars did not want to yield their authority to anyone. Although the secular
Church would gradually resume its place in New Spain and remove the mendicants’ exclusive power and force them to submit to Rome, the mendicant orders in New Spain often lived by their own rules. During Zumárraga’s bishopric and his feuds with the Audiencia, the Augustinians of Ocuituco were building a monastery and were more focused on completing the monastery than the church (Ricard 372-73). Since the church was more important than the monastery in Zumárraga’s opinion, he commanded that the construction of the monastery cease until the church had been built. The Augustinians refused to listen and therefore Zumárraga commanded a secular cleric to be put in charge of the convent, to oversee the construction, and to meet the spiritual needs of Ocuituco’s inhabitants. The Augustinians, who refused to yield authority to the secular cleric, left Ocuituco and sacked their own church before taking refuge in a nearby Augustinian convent.

Entonces los agustinos resolvieron dejar el pueblo, pero llenos de furia desmantelaron la iglesia y se llevaron todo a su convento de Totolapan, aun la campana, los ornamentos, los cerrojos y llegaron incluso a arrancar los naranjos y demás árboles frutales que en la huerta habían plantado. (372)

When the monastery and church had been repaired and completed, the Augustinians returned to tell the secular priest in charge that they were the rightful “owners” of the church and monastery. If the secular cleric did not yield the land and buildings to them, they threatened to inflict violence on him and any Franciscan that set foot on their “property” (372). In other cases involving physical violence that are documented by Ricard, friars set fire to rival monasteries, beat each other and members of their congregations, sacked churches and in one case, broke Prior Andrés de Moguer’s teeth (373).

As seen in Chapter 3, tithing was a major concern for the early Mexican Church. The Franciscans had petitioned the Crown and the Holy See to prevent the collection of tithes from the Nahuas until Catholicism had been established in the land. The tithe was not collected during Zumárraga’s bishopric, though to increase the Church’s coffers, he emphasized the “purchase” of
indulgences with offerings of food to the Church. When Zumárraga was replaced by the Dominican, Bishop Montúfar (1489-1572), Montúfar advocated the need for tithes in order to expand Catholicism throughout Mesoamerica. This infuriated the Franciscans since Montúfar suggested that they should give up their monasteries and continue their evangelistic projects elsewhere (Ricard 375). As a result, the rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans continued well into the late sixteenth-century.

**Idolatry in New Spain**

According to Rowe and Schelling, “idolatry” became an obsession of the Church in New Spain in the sixteenth century. Ricard notes that in 1537 Zumárraga complains that the Spaniards themselves were responsible for tolerating the natives’ practice of idolatry and for allowing them to “entregarse a ritos del paganismo” (377). Zumárraga accuses the Spaniards of undoing all the friars’ efforts with their questionable conduct, thus preventing the natives’ complete conversion to Christianity. Rowe and Schelling state that for the Spaniards, “idolatry” was another synonym for “paganism” and consequently the Church’s official discourse required its elimination immediately (68). According to them, the Spaniards believed that the “effective” presence of the sacred was found in objects, for example, in the stone representation of the Nahuas’ gods. However, the same statement can be made when considering the “effective” presence of the saints in their wooden icons or in relics. Saints were the “special dead” and had a dual existence in heaven and on earth. These individuals were fully “alive” in an icon or in a relic and could mediate on behalf of the living. Their clothes, habits, also evoked their presence and could work miracles or save a Christian’s soul in the Last Judgment. It is curious that Zumárraga acknowledged the role of the lay-Spaniard in the increasing problem of “idolatry”, although he could not specifically isolate the factors that played a role in New Spain’s religious syncretism. Zumárraga believes that the
Spaniards were a poor example for the Nahuas. Ricard states that the Spaniards ignored the friars’ advice or penitential exercises and instead complained to the first Audiencia, who then ruled against Zumárraga (377). The frustration that Zumárraga expresses and is chronicled in Ricard’s book is not without foundation since Zumárraga was challenged daily by the members of the first Audiencia who refused to recognize him as a true bishop (378-84).

The problem of “idolatry” threatened the faith of the old and new Catholics and had to be monitored by a higher court, the Santo Oficio de la Inquisición. The Inquisition in New Spain, which was installed under Zumárraga’s archbishopric, was overseen by him from 1536 until 1543 and brought forth many trials against individuals (Spaniards, natives and mestizos) regarding “suspicious” circumstances involving “idolatry”. As seen in Rowe and Schelling, any act of worship that involved an “effective” presence (other than the ones promoted by the Church) had to be dealt with in a severe and immediate manner. In the collection of inquisitorial documents at the AGN in Mexico City, there are transcripts of many trials that accuse individuals of “idolatry”. Most of these cases involve men or women from a native or racially mixed background and rarely involve Spaniards or Criollos, although, as Greenleaf notes, Spaniards were also found guilty of sorcery, superstition and heresy during Zumárraga’s role as Inquisitor (112). Because the friars feared the “effective” presence of the Nahuas’ deities, Zumárraga sentenced the culprits severely. Greenleaf summarizes several accounts of natives who had been found guilty of hiding statues of the pre-Hispanic gods (Huitzilopochtli, Tlaloc and Tezcatlipoca) in caves and burying them on their properties. Sacrifices and other rituals celebrated to these statues were performed by Nahua men and women who had been baptized in the Christian tradition but refused to give up their ancient beliefs. These individuals were denounced to the Inquisition by other members of their community and in more severe cases, were sent to be judged by Zumárraga himself in Mexico City. At their trials, the men, and occasionally women, were questioned about their offences and
their knowledge of the Catholic doctrine. They were also questioned regarding other community members and their suspected ties with “idolatry”. In most of the examples listed in Greenleaf’s book, which are taken from the actual trial documents housed at the AGN in Mexico City, the individuals were punished physically, economically and emotionally. Zumárraga ruled in each case that the culprits be led through the streets of Mexico City by the town-crier, who proclaimed aloud their charges while they were dragged by a donkey to the town square. Once there, they received one hundred lashes and their hair was shorn. The remainder of the punishment depended on the severity of their crime. In most cases, the accused were sent to prison, had their property confiscated, and then sent to a monastery to be indoctrinated (42-75). According to Greenleaf, torture was rarely used to extract information under Zumárraga’s rule as Inquisitor (112).

The trials against “idolatry” were common from the sixteenth century until the eighteenth century. There are three accusations from the eighteenth century that are housed at the AGN which were filed against women who were under suspicion of performing “dark arts” with a skull. The skull was an important symbol in the Nahuas’ religion that signified death but could also mean life, as it reminded the living of the cyclical nature of human and agricultural life. For the Europeans, the skull or the skeleton, are not positive symbols as they connote death and remind individuals of the corruption of the body and the inevitability of the Last Judgment. In the trial against María de Bonilla, the accused was charged with grinding a skull into fine powder and pouring it into her husband’s wine in order to cure him of a dependency on alcohol (AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 438, fols. 410-19). In another case, Doña Jerónima Tenorio was also charged with grinding a skull into fine powder which she and others believed could cure illnesses (AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 1051, fols. 56-57). Her accuser, Doña Josefa Zapata states that Tenorio learned to make the powder from the devil himself and that she mixed the pre-Hispanic rituals with Catholic indulgences for maximum effect. Tenorio administered the powder to the person who
was ill and then commissioned mass for their soul (fol. 56). The third and last case of idolatry that involved the symbol of the skull was against María Theresa Curiel. She was charged with exhuming a skull from the cemetery and then promising the natives at the Hospital de los Indios that if she prayed to the skull on their behalf, they would be healed from their illnesses. To complete the ritual, Curiel reportedly re-buried the skull in a well on her property where she lit candles and celebrated mass for its soul (AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 1175, fols. 149-69). The indirect worship or the invocation of a pre-Hispanic tradition that involved a skull in these three examples was sufficient proof to convict these three women of “idolatry”.

\textbf{Fray Juan de Zumárraga, the \textit{Doctrina cristiana breve} (1547), and the “De la memoria y aparejo para bien morir”}

As the first bishop of Mexico, Zumárraga was faced with many political and spiritual challenges. Like his fellow Franciscans, Zumárraga’s first priority was to indoctrinate the newly-converted people of \textit{Nueva España}. In the opening lines of the \textit{Doctrina cristiana breve}, Zumárraga states that his text is composed with the spirit of charity and structured into seven parts that will contribute to the spiritual edification of his reader.

\begin{quote}
Constreñido pues de la caridad, hermanos míos y confiado del favor diuíno por su suma bondad os dare aquí siete documentos y avisos, en los quales ejercitadas vuestras animas, podais cada día mas suavemente ordenar vuestra vida (5).
\end{quote}

In addition, he reiterates that the \textit{Doctrina cristiana breve}, if followed exactly as written, will contribute meaningfully to the salvation of any Christian’s soul. He notes that the text can be read by all individuals and consequently can be applied to every human being’s specific circumstances, no matter what their occupation should be. The soul’s salvation is only guaranteed to Christians who remain faithful to the Catholic Church and to its doctrine.
Porque cada vno segun su estado ha de mirar que saque vitilla enlo que lee. Quando la leccion habla con el religioso passe adelante el casado; y quando enseña al eclesiástico, no se detenga el mercader en aquel passo. Aquí hallareys doctrina para todos, pues el título con todos habla; y es regla de la vida xpiana. Y si los documentos vuiertes cumplido con el favor de dios, passa al exercitatorio espiritual y hallara vuestro espiritu campo bien grande, donde se pueda estender y bolar bien alto. No tengo mas que dezir prudente lector sino que siguiendo vos esta regla, sera muy cierta la bendicion que dio sant Pablo alos de Galacia, todos los que se siguieren esta regla alcancen paz y misericordia de dios. Bendicion doblada nos de el señor según aqui dixo el apostol concedieron a vuestra alma misericordia enesta vida y paz de quietud y descanso de gloria enla otra. Amen. (18-19)

In this excerpt taken from the prologue of the Regla cristiana breve, Zumárraga specifically addresses four groups representative of New Spain’s Spanish society: the religioso, the casado, the eclesiástico, and the mercader. Because the text is written in Spanish and the groups that he mentions are limited to Spaniards and Europeans, it is very unlikely that the text’s readers were natives. As Lugo Olín states in Una literatura para salvar el alma, the written versions of the Arte de bien morir in New Spain were not meant for all social groups and ethnicities since the purchasers of catechism manuals and religious books usually belonged to privileged groups within society (140). She notes that these books and manuals were housed in private libraries and collections where only select individuals could have access to them (140), thus accounting for the different versions that were housed in the libraries of the Franciscan convents in New Spain.

Like the medieval Ars moriendi texts, Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena Muerte” in the Doctrina cristiana breve is divided into four parts: exhortations, interrogation, prayers, and some final observations. The devil’s final temptations are included but not in the same manner as in the medieval versions. The Arte de bien morir manual that we saw in Chapter 1 includes eleven chapters dedicated to the devil’s temptations, the angels’ council and the death of moriens; however, in Zumárraga’s text, the temptations appear as examples in the theological arguments made in the exhortation, interrogation and observation sections of the text. Zumárraga’s text also shares some common points with the sixteenth-century Arte de bien morir by Erasmus
and Venegas that expound new interpretations of the nature of the soul and the human beings’ many births and deaths. Zumárraga encourages moriens to accept death as part of God’s Will and as a natural event in every human being’s life, therefore they should be prepared for death. He also notes that idolatry and other vices should be rejected in favor of a good life.

Todo fiel xpiano deue con grandissima diligencia estar continuamente aparejado para quando la muerte viniera no le halle desapercibido. Y este aparejo ha de ser según el apostol a Tito. Negando la idolatria y desseos del siglo; biuiendo templada, justa e religiosamente. Porque biuir de esta manera es el verdadero bien morir; y dela buena vida pende la verdadera esperança de la salvacion. (451)

The statement “a good life for a good death” is emphasized throughout Zumárraga’s text. He argues that having faithfully received the five sacraments of baptism, confession, penance, communion, and extreme unction in the Christians’ lifetime will guarantee their salvation: “E cierto es que la verdadera buena muerte es la buena vida passada, y el arte de bien morir es el arte de bien biuir” (421).

In addition to these arguments, Zumárraga encourages the priest or friar assisting moriens during their process of death to enquire whether they have written a testament. The writing of a testament became a crucial element to the process of death in the sixteenth century, and showed the Christian’s preparation for death and acceptance of their own mortality. In addition, writing a testament acted as penance and could obtain an indulgence since it was usually accompanied by the Bull of the Crusades. In comparison to the medieval versions that required the presence of a priest to administer the sacraments, in New Spain there were very few secular priests in the first half of the sixteenth century. Although friars had been given the authority to act as priests by the bull of Adrian VI, they were not always available to counsel the dying. The argument presented in Erasmus’ Preparación y aparejo para bien morir, that superstitions are generated by the requirement of having a priest present at moriens’ bedside to guarantee their good death, is also
recognized by Zumárraga in the “De memoria y aparejo para bien morir”. Placing their trust in the teachings of the Catholic Church and remaining loyal to it would guarantee their salvation and help them recognize the devil’s deceptions. In order to receive this protection against Satan’s temptations, Zumárraga’s readers are asked to clearly state audibly their loyalty to the Church.

Reprobays y apartays de vos fielmente todo aquello que reprueua y aparta de si la sancta iglesia romana? [. . .] Pues renunciays de agora para siempre a Satanás y a todas sus obras, amonestaciones y enganos, y days os todo en anima y cuerpo a nuestro señor Jesú xpo dios y hombre verdadero (455).

The core message of the “De memória y aparejo de la buena muerte” is not different from the medieval versions since the text’s primary objective is to prepare moriens for death. However, there are some differences in Zumárraga’s text that show a change in the Church’s discourse with respect to the loyalty of its flock. Since this text was not primarily destined for the natives, there are few direct references to the problem of “idolatry”. The “idolatry” to which Zumárraga refers is the rejection of the Catholic Church’s teachings and adoption of sorcery, magic and Protestantism (Lutheranism) (Greenleaf 112).

In the opening lines of the “De la memoria y aparejo para bien morir”, Zumárraga remarks on the overwhelming number of people who tend to neglect the process of confession until they are passing through the agony of death. This negligence worries him and prompts a warning of the horrors of hell. Zumárraga’s concern is not unique and follows a borrowed topos that can be traced to the Middle Ages. This warning is found in Berceo, Gerson, the Danza general de la Muerte, and the Arte de bien morir, as well as in the sixteenth-century texts by Erasmus and Venegas. The brevity of life and the reality of the Last Judgment continued to be important in the official discourse of the Mexican Church.

Marauillado estoy mucho y espantado dela comun ceguedad que todos por la mayor parte tenemos; de estar tan descuydados dela muerte; y delo poco que nos aparejamos para ella; viendo quitados cada dia tantos delante de nuestros ojos; vnos niños, otros mancebos, otros
viejos; otros sanctos, otros malos. Unos muertos de enfermedades breues; otros de largas; otros supitamente; otros por casos desastrados; que cierto ay razon para se admirar y espantar quien quiera; maxime como en todo el sacro evangelio no se reze cosa tantas vezes repetida por la boca sagrada del hijo de Dios nuestro maestro y redemptor, ni dicha debaxo de tantas y tan diversas parabolas como esta, para despertarnos y auisarnos como aquel que dessea nuestra salvacion y le costamos tan caro, porque estemos aparejados para la muerte y no nos descuydemos, como parece por sant Matheo. Capitulo xxiiiij. (Zumárraga 407)

In addition to the unexpected timing of death, Zumárraga reminds his reader that the manner of death and its location are also unknown. His note regarding deaths resulting from illness or “casos desastrosos” may refer to the plagues that occurred in the sixteenth century in New Spain. Rodríguez Álvarez states that the longest period between two epidemics lasted only seventeen years (between 1546 and 1563) (174). The epidemics that caused the most mortality were in 1519-1520 (smallpox), in 1531 (measles), in 1545 and in 1576 (plague). In the last two cases of plague, Rodríguez Álvarez notes that at their height one hundred people died daily (174). The practice of flagellation in order to do penance for the sins of the people, which appeared in Europe during the Black Death, came to Nueva España (Kubler 50-57). These terrible events brought with them reminders of the signs of the apocalypse which promises plagues unleashed by seven angels (Revelation 15:1). Fr. Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) and Fr. Gerónimo de Mendieta wrote about the plagues that devastated Nueva España.

Hirió Dios y castigó esta tierra, y a los que en ella se hallaron, así naturales como extranjeros con diez plagas trabajosas. La primera fue de viruelas, y comenzó de esta manera: siendo capitán y gobernador Hernando Cortés, al tiempo que el capitán Pánfilo de Naváez desembarcó en esta tierra, en uno de sus navíos vino un negro herido de viruelas, la cual enfermedad nunca en esta tierra se había visto, y a esta sazon estaba esta Nueva España en extremo muy llena de gente; y como las viruelas se comenzasen a pegar a los indios, fue entre ellos tan grande enfermedad y pestilencia en toda la tierra, que en las más provincias murió más de la mitad de la gente y en otras menos; porque como los indios no sabían el remedio para las viruelas antes, como tienen muy de costumbre, sanos y enfermos, el bañarse a menudo, y como no lo dejasen de hacer morían como chinches a montones. (Motolinía16)
Y hartos fueron los que murieron de hambre, porque como todos caían de golpe, no podían curar unos de otros, ni menos había quien les hiciese pan. Y como en muchas partes morían todos los de una casa, y no podían enterrar á tantos, echaban las casas encima de los muertos, dándoselas por sepultura. A esta enfermedad llamaron los que quedaron vivos, *huey zahuatl*, que quiere decir la gran lepra, porque desde los pies a cabeza se henchían las viruelas. La segunda pestilencia les vino también de nuevo por parte de los españoles, once años después de las viruelas, y esta fue sarampión, que trajo un español, y de él saltó en los indios, de que murieron muchos, aunque no tantos como de las viruelas, porque escarmentados del tiempo que las hubo, se puso mucha diligencia y se tuvo aviso de que no entrasen a los baños, y se dieron otros remedios que les fueron de provecho. (Mendieta Book IV, Chapter 36, 514)

These two accounts of the plagues that devastated *Nueva España*’s population shortly after the Conquest foster the need for manuals such as the *Arte de bien morir* because its content could prepare any individual quickly, and without the requirement of a secular priest, for a good death.

**How Funerals Should Be Conducted According to Zumárraga**

Zumárraga’s text includes some information of how he believed that funerals and burials should be conducted in New Spain. Venegas promoted the celebration of elaborate funeral masses and showy corteges as part of the indulgences required to lessen a soul’s time in Purgatory. In *Nueva España*, there were also elaborate funerals that displayed a comparable grandeur to those noted in Eire’s accounts of Madrid’s nobility. In the early years after the Conquest of New Spain, funerary rituals were not very elaborate; however, during the bishopric of Zumárraga and later under his archbishopric, they began to resemble those in the Old World. Zumárraga notes that the most important component in the final moments of human life was to pray the *Pater Noster* three times as this would effectively guide the soul out of the body and direct it toward God (467). In addition, Zumárraga clearly outlines the requirements of a proper Christian burial. He states that all individuals should be buried in a humble manner under the earth of the Church, where the soul will receive the favor of the church’s patron saints. If the soul of an individual was not considered to be
free from sin, the corpse could not receive a Christian burial (466). He notes that *moriens* should be dressed in any one of the mendicant orders’ habits, as this would permit the orders’ patron saint to intercede on their behalf in the Judgment.

Tome el enfermo para morir habito de alguna religion para provocar al patriarca y santos Della que sean sus abogados; y aun porque las religiones de sancto Domingo, y sant Francisco, y san Augustin tienen para esto muchas gracias y perdones concedidas por los santos padres. (465)

Zumárraga criticizes the churches that allowed wealthy individuals to be buried in elaborately carved sarcophagi as they were mere humans and did not deserve these luxuries. He notes burials of this nature should not exist as they profaned God’s temple (466).

Bien es sepultarse en las iglesias por prouocar el fauor delos sanctos patrones de ellas; mas esto sea con mucha humildad, quanto al lugar y quanto a la manera. Si el anima se tiene por pecadora, porque ha de ser sepultado el cuerpo como si fuesse sancto? O prophana cosa embaraçar los templos de dios con sepulturas leuantadas. Assi como no empecio ala gloria de los sanctos martyres quemados hechos poluos; que sus plomos se echasen en el rio Rodano; como dize san Augustin, assi no aprovecha antes empece aos pecadores la pomposa sepultura. Pues luego conforem ala humildad y contricion que cada vno ha de tener enla muerte, deue disponer de la sepultura y del luto, y reparta se alos pobres lo que se auia de gastar locamente en hachas y vanidades. (466)

He advises the reader of his *Regla cristiana breve* that they should concentrate on distributing their wealth in a measured manner and that they should give most of their wealth to the poor. According to Almoyna, Zumárraga may have been influenced in this excerpt by some similar comments made in Erasmus’ *Coloquios* where Erasmus criticizes the ostentatious burials of Europe (466).

Although Zumárraga’s text was written for the literate Spanish members of his society, there is no direct social criticism other than his comments on idolatry and the ostentatious burial practices of New Spain’s high society. Idolatry is generally associated with the natives because pre-Hispanic elements of their religion survived in Catholic rites and iconographies. As seen in Rowe and Schelling, these elements were permitted to survive in New Spain’s Catholicism
because of the Spaniards’ sixteenth-century popular Catholicism. Though the Inquisition was thorough in investigating all individuals who settled in the Americas, Spaniards were also found guilty by the Inquisition of sorcery and superstition. The trials of the Inquisition on the topics of sorcery, superstition and idolatry were divided into two different manners.

Native superstition and wizadry had a different purpose, namely the pacification of the gods and the direction of the forces of nature for man’s benefit. The Spanish sorcerer or magician was essentially a nefarious person who capitalized on the ignorance or credulousness of his subjects, and his actions were surreptitious. (Rowe and Schelling 112)

The Franciscans had initially accepted religious syncretism in the sixteenth century as a means to communicate some difficult concepts of Catholicism; however, during Zumárraga’s bishopric and archbishopric a rejection of this phenomenon occurred. The continued practice of this form of “idolatry” over “pure” Catholicism was troubling to the friars and even though numerous trials were overseen by the Santo Oficio de la Inquisición, “suspicious” activities continued well into the eighteenth century. The soul’s salvation depended entirely on the teachings of the Catholic Church and the information that was included in the catechisms produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These texts, like their European contemporaries and the medieval versions, were guides on how to save a human soul from the fires of hell and continued to be used until the mid-eighteenth century.

Fray Martín de León’s “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”

The first twelve Dominican friars arrived in Nueva España in 1526, two years after the “Twelve” Franciscans. These twelve Dominicans were also eager to convert the Nahuas to Christianity by learning the different languages of New Spain; however, they were never able to achieve the same
linguistic breadth as the Franciscans (Ricard 119-120). Compared to the Franciscans, who were more numerous and had established their monasteries in different regions of Nueva España, the Dominicans did not have the same advantages in resources and land. They considered the process of evangelization a priority, especially in the early years after their arrival. They did not find the need to impose Spanish on the indigenous people and therefore insisted on learning and preaching to them in their own languages. The Nahuas’ acquisition of Spanish came later when schools were established by the Franciscans and Dominicans to learn the doctrine.

Dado que no había la intención de hispanizar a los indios, y que el trabajo de evangelización tenía que hacerse completa y exclusivamente en lenguas indígenas, había necesidad de libros que poner en las manos de los religiosos, sea para que estudiaran los rudimentos, sea para que se perfeccionaran en las lenguas de sus fieles, tanto como para ayudarles en la predicación de la doctrina cristiana, en la divulgación de los libros santos y en la administración de los sacramentos, principalmente el de la penitencia. (Ricard 121)

The Camino del cielo, a catechism that was written by Fray Martín de León and published by Diego López Dávalos in 1611, includes an Arte de bien morir: “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” (Illustration 4.2). Unlike Zumárraga’s text that was meant for the literate Spaniard, Fray de León’s text is specifically addressed to both Indians and Spaniards, “para qualquier fiel Christiano, que en este punto se hallare, y por ser lo tanto, y poder aprovechar, à Indios y à Españoles, lo pongo en ambas lenguas” (141r). The text was written in bilingual form with the doctrine expressed in Nahuatl on the left side of the book and with the Spanish version on its right. The text promotes equality among these two peoples since both of these groups would equally benefit from its message and therefore their souls would be saved. Like the medieval texts such as the Danza general de la Muerte that preached equality in death, the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” also reminds its reader that men, women, kings, emperors and popes will also suffer.

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109 The Dominicans mostly used Náhuatl, Mixtec and Zapotec in their evangelistic projects because the majority of the inhabitants of their areas of jurisdiction spoke these languages (119).
through death (142v-43r). Like the other sixteenth century texts that we have seen, Fray de León’s demonstrates a rejection of the medieval concept of salvation that could be achieved with the reading of the text. Fray de León consequently also rejects a rapid-style salvation for the soul and promotes the discourse of a “good life for a good death”. This text possesses a similar structure to Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo para bien morir” since it includes exhortations, interrogations, prayers and observations. The official discourse of the church regarding frequent confessions and penances are reiterated in Fray de León’s text. He states that the Christian has to obey the Church’s teachings and laws in order to live well and consequently die well. He notes that those individuals who choose to stray from the Catholic faith will not be saved (144v).

Hermano mio, (ó hermana mia) quieres morir y vivir en la firmeza, de la Santa fe católica en respeto de Christo nuestro Señor, como fiel y católico Christiano? y hijo verdadero de la Santa Madre Iglesia Romana? y protestas de estarle sujeto y obediente a sus mandamientos? (146r)

Although this text is from the early seventeenth century, there are some key differences compared to Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte”. The Franciscans had initially accepted religious syncretism, even employing it themselves, in order to communicate certain concepts of the Catholic faith. By the late sixteenth century, Sahagún began to show some resistance to the phenomenon of Tonantzin/ Guadalupe in his writings and during Zumárraga’s time as Inquisitor General of the Santo Oficio; he also expresses frustration with the survival of indigenous rites and beliefs (Greenleaf 42-75). As Rowe and Schelling note, the height of the Mexican Church’s obsession with “idolatry” and “superstitions” was in the seventeenth century but as documents at the AGN show, trials involving these two terms continued well into the eighteenth.

The Franciscans were the most preoccupied with the survival of pre-Hispanic indigenous rituals and Zumárraga made every effort to halt their existence by publicly punishing individuals
who had been found guilty of “idolatry”;\textsuperscript{110} the contrary can be said about Fray Martín de León’s attitude toward religious syncretism. In the section of observations, at the end of the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”, a description is provided of how the process of death should be divided. León notes that when it becomes obvious to all those at moriens’ deathbed that death is near, they should begin to recite the Credo in their own language so that moriens will be able to understand the words and not have to undergo the added pressure of understanding a foreign language. If moriens was too weak to repeat the words of the Credo, Fray de León suggests that they should repeat Christ’s name. If they are too weak to speak, León indicates that their soul should speak Christ’s name. It is during this moment of agony that the Bull of the Crusades should be applied in order for the indulgence to be validated at their death. When the priest or friar has made the sign of the Cross over moriens’ eyes, ears, nose, mouth and heart, the devil will no longer be able to deceive them.

If moriens is still conscious after all these steps, Fray de León notes that food and drink should be offered to them. This offering will permit the body to regain some strength in order to be physically, mentally and spiritually ready for death. The food and drink that Fray de León recommends are pre-Hispanic dishes made with corn.

Y si boluier e ensi denle alguna cosa que coma vn poco de atole\textsuperscript{111} o pisto de carne molida y maiz hecho atolle, para que no desmaye y le de alguna fuerca o vnos huebos frezcos

\textsuperscript{110} In Greenleaf’s book Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition 1536-1543, the author summarizes several accounts of natives who had been found guilty of hiding statues of the pre-Hispanic gods and offering sacrifices to them or of performing rituals to the gods. Since these individuals had been baptized and in theory were familiar with the Christian doctrine, Zumárraga ruled that they be led through the streets of Mexico City by the town-crier, who told of their crimes, while they were dragged by a donkey to the town square. Once there, they received one hundred lashes and their hair was shorn. The remainder of the punishment depended on the severity of their crime. In some cases, the accused were sent to prison or could be sent to a monastery to be indoctrinated (42-75).

\textsuperscript{111} Atole is a beverage made of corn meal and it is of thick consistency. Sahagún indicates how the Nahua prepared and ate this meal.

El que vende atolli, que es mazamorra, védelo caliente o frío. El caliente se hace de masa de maíz molido, o tostado, o de las tortillas molidas, o de los escobajos de mazorcas quemadas y molidas, mezclándose con frijoles, con agua de maíz aceda o con aji, o con agua de cal, o con miel. El que es frío hácese de ciertas semillas que parecen linaza, y con semilla de cenizos y de otras de otro género, las cuales se muelen muy bien primero, y así el atolli hecho de estas semillas, parece ser cernido; y cuando no están bien molidas hacen un
calientes, blandos que los beua, y no se exasperen si enfaden los que estan con el enfermos en que diga que no quiera comer por que es muy ordinario en todas las enfermedades qitar la gana de comer al enfermo [. . .] (153r)

Maize (centli) was and still is a staple in the Mesoamerican diet and was often offered up to the gods in order to revive the earth and all life forms. It played a crucial role in the offerings that were buried with the dead and which were offered to the souls of the deceased as they journeyed to Mictlan. Maize was generally offered to the gods associated with agriculture (Tlaloc and Chicomecóatl),¹¹² and at special ceremonies performed during the life-cycle of this grain. Jacques Soustelle states that before the maize seeds were sown, a ceremony took place in which the earth was prepared by “sweeping” it with a broom made of leaves. The sweeping readied the soil for the planting of the grains (1996: 124) and offerings were made to Tlálloc in order for the crops to receive the required water for the plants to grow. Soustelle remarks that in the rural areas of Mexico, the tradition of sweeping the soil is still practiced (1996: 124). The goddess Chicomecóatl was also believed to give life to the people as she was the creator of maize and other staples in the Nahuas’ diet.

Esta fiesta hacían a honra de la diosa llamada Chicomecóatl, la cual imaginaban como mujer y decían que ella era la que daba los mantenimientos del cuerpo, para conservar la vida humana, porque cualquiera que le faltaran los mandamientos se desmaya y muere. (Sahagún, Book 6, chapter XXIII: 152)

Motolinía also mentions atole in his description of the Uey-Tozozthi, the first day of the corn harvest.

Entonces cada uno cogía de sus maizales algunas cañas, y envueltas en mantas, delante de aquellas cañas, ofrecían comida y atuli; que es un brebaje que hacen de la masa del maíz, y es espesa y también ofrecían copalli, que es un género de incienso que corre de un árbol (48).

¹¹² The goddess Chicomecóatl was believed to be the creator of corn, legumes, and all vegetables. Sahagún describes the celebrations that took place during the fourth month (uey tooztli) of the Nahua calendar in Book 6, chapter XXIII. Here he tells of how young girls took ears of corn which were destined for seed to be blessed at the “cu de Chicomecóatl y de Cintéotl” (151). They were accompanied to the site by other members of their communities and once the corn had been blessed, it was taken back to their homes where it would be stored until it was time to sow.
It is interesting that Fray de León would suggest feeding *moriens atole* and other meals prepared with corn during their illness and agony since it had some strong ties with the pre-Hispanic religion and especially since the rejection of religious syncretism was supposedly strong in New Spain during the seventeenth century. Although León was a Dominican friar like Fray Diego Durán, his position on religious syncretism is not as severe in the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” as compared to Durán’s in *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España y las islas de tierra firme*. These men, like the Franciscans, did not officially accept the religious traditions of the Nahuas since they were “idolatrous”; however, they did have a complete understanding of their language, and historical and religious traditions. By integrating *atole*, a beverage made with the grain of life (a symbol from the pre-Hispanic cultures of Mesoamerica), into an official catechism, a tolerance of religious syncretism is seen despite its official rejection. Aaron Gurevich makes an interesting statement regarding popular cultural beliefs in the Middle Ages that could also be applied to this situation in the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”.

Catholicism included also a powerful layer of behaviour patterns, views of the world and ways of thought that had little in common with the tenets taught by priests. The clergy does not seem to have been able successfully to counter this complex of superstitions and practices, as witnessed by the repetition of the questions and prohibitions about ‘pagan’ customs over series of centuries. It was possible to destroy or discredit the old gods, but not to eliminate traditional habits of thinking, embedded as they were in the eternally repetitive cycle of agrarian life and linked with the many techniques of ‘managing’ the matters of the world by way of magic. This type of consciousness remained more or less unchanged over a very long historical period, reproducing again and again primordial mental structures. (90-91)

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Nahuas had been an agrarian economy and the natives continued in this tradition under Spanish rule after the Conquest. In the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”, the addition of corn-based meals and beverages, shows that the survival of pre-Hispanic beliefs combined with Catholic ritual provide an element of magic and mystery; much in the same way that is seen in the trial against Doña Jerónima Tenorio who ground a skull in order to bring
healing to the ill and dying. Doña Curiel combined the pre-Hispanic cure with her own celebration of Catholic mass. These combinations of two different religious rituals connote mystery and magic, in the same manner suggested by Gurevich and which is also present in Fray Martín de León’s “remedy” for the weakened soul.

María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Álvarez states that corn was frequently used as payment to cover funeral and burial expenses. She notes that the Convent of St. Paul and St. Peter in Calimaya collected tributes twice a year, in May and November in 1721 from its parishioners for that very purpose. The account of this tribute, called “maíz de difuntos” was collected by the convent and can be found in the Fondo Franciscano at the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City. The text gives an exact account of how the maize was divided.

Dicho maíz no lo dan cómo limosna, sino de obligación, lo primero: en satisfacción de la misa y responsos que les canta; lo segundo: en recompensa de todos los entierros que se les hacen en el discurso de todo el año, que los pagan; tercero: por modo de ofrenda y sufragio por los difuntos; lo cuarto: por las primicias de el maíz que cogen en su cosecha a que están obligados por precepto de la iglesia y finalmente por pacto y costumbre anticuada; por todas estas razones, dan en toda esta jurisdicción el maíz que llaman de difuntos. (FR-B-INAH, Fondo Franciscano, v. 48, fs. 29v-31)

As seen, the tribute of corn was still given in the eighteenth century to those in power, much in the same manner as it had been offered to the gods in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. Maize was used to pay for the masses and funerals of community members which would act as indulgences on behalf of the souls of the deceased. It is interesting to note that the writer of this account mentions that this is an ancient tradition (costumbre anticuada) thus acknowledging its pre-Hispanic origin. Although the tradition of bringing agricultural goods to the altars of the gods in pre-Colonial New Spain and also during Colonial times can be seen as an indigenous tradition, let us not forget that in sixteenth-century Spain, food offerings were also taken to churches in Madrid on behalf of the
deceased. These offerings were also viewed as payment for indulgences and promised to relieve the suffering of souls in Purgatory.

**Life, Death and Renewal According to Mikhail Bakhtin**

The Nahua belief that the cycles of agricultural and human life were not disconnected from one another and Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument in *Rabelais and His World* also shows this relationship. Bakhtin notes that blood must be spilled in order for the land to continue its cycle of fertilization. He considers the lower-body stratum (conception, birth and defecation) to be vital in the continuation of life, since through it, life is created and brought forth to the world (409). The head (reason), upper-body stratum, has been conditioned by the institutions ruling society and disconnects the body from the earth. Human reason (upper-body stratum) is focused on heaven, while the lower-body stratum is associated with laughter and diversion. As a result of these complex relationships, the by-products of the lower-body stratum (dung and cadavers) can fertilize the earth and render it productive. Bakhtin notes that conception, birth and defecation all take part in the banquet during carnival festivities and therefore glorify the lower-body stratum by creating a link between popular culture and laughter. Death and life are not disconnected either since the cycles of human life and agriculture mutually depend on decomposing matter (the corpse and dung, which Bakhtin considers to be the “gay matter” of life).

In the Nahua cosmology, the human sacrifices were also seen as important elements in the process of bringing fertility to the earth. As Soustelle notes, there were many gods and goddesses associated with fertilizing the land as well as the fertility cycles of women: Teteoinan (the mother of the gods), Coatlicue (Huitzilopochtli’s mother, who is characterized for her skirt made of serpents adorned by human skulls, and her necklace made with human hands and hearts), Cihuacoatl (the serpent woman), and Itzpapalotl (the obsidian butterfly). These goddesses were
mothers of important deities that were associated with the land, war, and other symbols of the earth, since they devoured corpses and drank the blood of fallen warriors (1996: 54). In the New Testament, the Christian receives eternal life with Christ’s death which was accomplished by his shedding of blood on the Cross. Bakhtin gives an example of the use of blood to fertilize the earth, found in Genesis 4, when Cain murders Abel.

The first death (according to the Bible, Abel was the first man to die) renewed the earth’s fertility. Here we have the combination of killing and birth with which we are familiar. Death, the dead body, blood as the seed buried in the earth, rising for another life—this is one of the oldest and most widespread themes. A variant is death inseminating mother earth and making her bear fruit once more. (327)

As the sixteenth and seventeenth century European and Mexican Artes de bien morir show, the physical death promises renewal and re-birth for the soul. In Erasmus and Venegas we see that the death of the physical body is explained as a birth (a re-generation) which takes place when the soul leaves its physical “prison”.

En el primer parto se desnuda el hombre de aquella tela en que nace embuelto: en el segundo se despoja del cuerpo para que salga el anima de prision. De manera que los que llamamos muerte, es parto para la vida, y lo que llamamos morir, es nacer, y ya mejorando siempre la cosa. (Erasmus 2r)

As a result of this phenomenon, the second birth brings forth life for the soul and the promise of an eternal life in Heaven, provided that a good death is obtained.

How the Secularization of the Church Affected Funerary Rituals in New Spain

The transfer of power from the mendicant orders to the secular clergy occurred in 1574. The Camino del cielo shows some changes in the role of the mendicant orders, which now had to obey the secular hierarchy and were no longer able to make any administrative decisions. Before 1574 the mendicants had controlled all aspects related to the evangelization of the Nahuas (preaching of
the catechism, the administration of the sacraments, and the manner in which a person died). Although the mendicant orders had accused the secular clergy of corruption and negligence in administering the sacraments to all individuals who could not afford to pay the funeral and burial costs (AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Leg. 210, Exp. 14), the mendicants also followed the same example on occasion (AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Leg. 150, Exp. 14). Because the royal decree of 1574 forced the mendicant orders to obey the authority of the secular clergy, the funerals and burials in New Spain changed. The mendicant orders could no longer accompany their deceased congregants to their church in a cortege led by the parishes’ cross, and mass had to be celebrated by an authorized priest. Fr. Martín de León’s text shows a certain resistance to the control of the secular clergy and includes in his “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” certain indulgences that could be “purchased” and blessed by the Dominicans.

Y quando se viere con las agonías de la muerte se estira, y quiere espirar ponganle con tiempo la vela encendida de buen morir sellada con el sello de Nuestra Señora, y bendita por los prelados de la orden de nuestro Padre Santo Domingo, Piores, o Vicarios, que son los que tienen el priuilegio para bendecillas, para que consigan la indulgencia plenaria y remision de todo sus pecados, a culpa y a pena, con que se vayan derechos al Cielo. (153v-154r)

In addition, he recommends that the burial clothes of mortient be a simple tunic wrapped with a cord and that a small cross and candle be placed in their hands (154r). Rodríguez Álvarez states that this was typical of the Dominican funerary tradition (121). She writes that Pius V gave the Dominican order permission on August 22, 1567 to bless these candles in the name of the Virgin Mary. At the time of an individual’s death, if they softly uttered the Virgin’s name, they would receive another plenary indulgence (121). Once dead, mortient had to be buried within twenty-four hours. The corpse would no longer be accompanied to the Church by a funeral cortege; however, cantors could be sent to the deceased’s house in order to have mass there and afterward the body would be taken for burial to the cemetery. In cases when mortient died late in the day, there would
be a vigil at their house and the following morning the corpse would be buried. After the burial, mass would be celebrated at the church, a reading of the testament and the distribution of assets concluded the process of death and burial.

In the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” we note an increased role of doctors and hospitals in the process of death. For Philippe Ariès, the hospital is a major component in the defamiliarization of the human with death. He states that this place, which was once a place to shelter the poor and where pilgrims sought refuge, later became the symbol of the secularization of death.

Death in the hospital is no longer the occasion of a ritual ceremony, over which the dying person presides amidst his assembled relatives and friends. Death is a technical phenomenon obtained by a cessation of care, a cessation determined in a more or less avowed way by a decision of the doctor and the hospital team. Indeed, in the majority of cases the dying person has already lost consciousness. Death has been dissected, cut into bits by a series of little steps, which finally makes it impossible to know which step was the real death, the one in which consciousness was lost, or the one in which breathing stopped. All these little silent deaths have replaced and erased the great dramatic act of death, and no one any longer has the strength or patience to wait over a period of weeks for a moment which has lost a part of its meaning. (88-89)

Fr. Martín de León includes an argument that appears in Zumárraga's and Venegas' text; that physical illness is the result of a spiritual illness. His conclusion assumes that individuals who are physically ill can only recover from it by confessing all of their sins. Only with a contrite confession can the soul begin to heal. Hope of recovering physically should not be encouraged since no one can know the Will of God (152r). Although he shows favor toward this argument, he also states that moriens should not be given any false hope that they will recover from their illness (151v), which is contradictory to his advice of strengthening moriens with atole. If the doctor assisting moriens can determine that their illness is caused by a spiritual problem, he must immediately summon a priest, who is trained in curing illnesses of this nature (152r). Once the priest arrives and hears moriens' confession, he must inquire if a testament has been prepared in
order for their good death. As soon as they have been treated from their spiritual illness and the
viaticum has been administered, the individual who is dying can be taken to a hospital for
treatment. Written proof of the priest’s assistance is required before admitting any individual to a
hospital; therefore, if moriens refused to participate in the spiritual curing of their soul, they were
not allowed to stay at a hospital. Fr. de León states that the hospital is a place where the poor in
Christ must go to be healed.

Y en esto se jacta de ver lo que conuiene en todas partes poner vn mandato, y hordenacion
en cada Hospital o casa donde los pobres de Iesu Christo son acogidos, y curados, y en
ellas son faborecidos que no fuese receuido ningun pobre, ni enfermo, si luego no se
confesare, o vuiere confesado antes de entrar o truxere cedula de como se confeso para
venir al Hospital. (152r)

He mentions later in the text that this requirement was not only valid in New Spain but also in
Spain (152r-153f). Summoning a doctor before a priest shows a major change in the role of the
clergy in the Christian’s process of death.

As we have seen, the Mexican versions of the Arte de bien morir show different discourses
and reflect the “wisdom” of their theological ancestors’ interpretations, while presenting the
specific challenges of New Spain. Although Fray Juan de Zumárraga’s Regla cristiana breve and
Fray Martín de León’s Camino del cielo are official catechisms of the Catholic Church and have
helped individuals to die well, they do not completely maintain the Catholic Church’s “pure”
oficial discourse regarding penance, confession, and a good death. The differing discourses in
each of these Mexican texts regarding religious syncretism and “idolatry” demonstrate that the
condemnation of these phenomena was not as clear-cut as some critics have suggested. Changes in
the burial and funeral traditions of New Spain show the gradual process of secularizing the clergy
that will eventually lead to the establishment of confraternities in the eighteenth century. The
Congregación de la Buena Muerte at the church of La Profesa in Mexico City, and many others
like it throughout New Spain, will restructure the manner in which a good death could be obtained by publishing their own requirements in manuals that they sold and endorsed. The written tradition of the *Arte de bien morir* that was preserved by the mendicant friars began to gradually fade out in the eighteenth century and would be replaced by the confraternities’ manuals. In Chapter 5, we will look closely at the 1743 manual of *La Profesa’s Congregación de la Buena Muerte*: the *Reglas y obligaciones para bien morir*. 
Chapter VI  
Religious Syncretism, Confraternities and the Colonial Macabre

Quién pudiera detener el veloz curso del tiempo para impedir este día de mañana, que será el día de mis angustias y tribulaciones: mañana forzosamente se me han de acabar todos mis gustos y me ha de privar la Muerte de todo lo que más estimo y aprecio; mañana se vestirá mi casa de tristes lutos, todo será llanto y tristeza, y yo seré arrojado de este mundo a los horrores de un sepulcro. (Bolaños 179-80)

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the height of catechism production in New Spain as they were useful in establishing Catholicism in the Colony. Although officially the Nahuas had been converted to Christianity, there was still resistance on their part to completely turn away from their ancient traditions and the knowledge of the ancients. Idolatry and religious syncretism were some major challenges for the Mexican Church as a result of the natives’ resistance to Catholicism; however, religious syncretism was also used by the Church to communicate the official discourses of salvation, penance, death, and other doctrinal subjects, such as the devotion to the Virgín Mary. As the eighteenth century neared, the role of the mendicant orders in the funerary traditions of New Spain diminished. In Fray Martín de León’s text we note a resistance to yielding complete control to the secular clergy when he endorses simple funerals and indulgences that could be obtained directly by “purchasing” candles from the Dominicans. A curious phenomenon occurs in the early eighteenth century when the Arte de bien morir evolves once again. Isolating moriens from friends and relatives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the increasing role of doctors and hospitals began to create the taboo of exposing others to the natural process of death. Confraternities were organized in Mexico with the purpose of helping their members prepare for death and assist each other during this trying process. The “return” of a community that would observe its members and make sure that they followed the requirements for a good death, replaced
the need for the *Arte de bien morir* manuals. In this chapter, we will look at two texts that show the gradual transition of the mendicant orders’ loss of power over the funerary tradition in New Spain: the *Huehuehtlahtolli*, a sixteenth-century text, written by Franciscans, that followed the structure of the pre-Hispanic exhortations based on the wisdom of the ancients; and the *Reglas y obligaciones del Congregante de la buena muerte* (1743), a guide that was issued by the *Congregación de la buena muerte* in Mexico City. In addition, we will also look briefly at the representations of Death in the 1713 Choral Manuscript from the *Biblioteca Nacional de México*. This text shows the religious syncretism that occurred in the colonial iconography of Death as well as the return of the *macabre* in the eighteenth century. These texts though different in genres will show that the secularization of the clergy in *Nueva España* profoundly affected how death would be represented and viewed.

**The *Huehuehtlahtolli*: Syncretism in the Word of the Ancients**

Fray Juan de Zumárraga’s “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte” was written for a specific group within *Nueva España*’s society: literate Spaniards. As Román Zulaica Gárate states, any version of the *Doctrina cristiana* that contained Jean de Gerson’s *Tripartitum* was meant for individuals who were familiar with this text; in other words, “más adelantados, esto es, los españoles” (28). Ricard noted that catechisms were preached to the natives in oral form and that the individuals attending mass memorized the text. The pre-Colonial Nahuas also relied on spontaneous interpretations of pictographs to communicate their stories. This culture relied on texts that would be transmitted orally. In the sixteenth century the friars used the Nahua structure and rhetorical devices found in the *huehuehtlahtolli* (the word of the ancients) to communicate their doctrine in a simple and brief manner. This highly specialized genre in Nahua literature had been cultivated by a small elite group of individuals during the Aztec Empire. These sages,
tlamatini, were educated in a special school (calmecac) and were mentored in the art of transmitting the palabra florida and in composing poetry. In addition to learning these difficult and precise techniques, they learned the skills for divination; they calculated important dates on the calendar; foretold the destinies of members of their society; and they were the keepers of the codices (León-Portilla 10). The tlamatini were educated in a similar manner as the monks in the medieval period, who were also a small and privileged group in their society. The medieval monks were taught the traditions of classical Antiquity, how to read and write, as well as how to interpret Scripture and other important theological texts. In other words, they were the European society’s sages.

When the friars arrived in Nueva España, they encountered many difficulties in transmitting their knowledge to the Nahuas. The confusion that arose in communicating important elements of Christian theology led to a syncretism that can be found in specific Catholic rituals and iconographies of New Spain and modern-day Mexico (Tonantzin/Guadalupe, the Day of the Dead, for example). Critics such as Todorov, Rowe and Schelling, Gruzinski, Ricard and Weckmann have addressed this point by citing cultural phenomena and accounts written by sixteenth-century friars such as Sahagún, Las Casas, Durán, Mendieta and Motolinia. However, little has been said regarding the syncretism manifested in official writings of the Mexican Church, for example, in its catechisms and in the huehuehtlahtolli. The huehuehtlahtolli has yet to be well researched and is an interesting source that shows how Christian doctrine was applied to a pre-Columbian structure. Bernardino de Sahagún and Andrés de Olmos transcribed texts from the huehuehtlahtolli tradition in their major works and have remarked on these texts’ complexities. The process of colonization and Christianizing Nueva España caused the destruction of many of the Nahuas’ codices as well as the banning of oral texts. The friars feared that elements of the Nahuas’ religion could seep into Catholic rites or that the natives would continue to worship their pre-Hispanic gods in secret. Even
though the friars were morally opposed to the existence of religious syncretism, they could not ignore its presence.

The *huehuehtlahtolli*, or word of the ancients, was cultivated by the sages in an oral tradition for many generations. These texts told the basic truths of the Nahua religion, its moral values, and how its society should be run. The friars greatly admired these texts as they identified moral issues and elements that were compatible with Christian doctrine. Although Sahagún’s concern for the rise of religious syncretism is evident in the *Historia de las cosas de Nueva España*, he records excerpts of the *huehuehtlahtolli* in Book 6 “De la retórica y filosofía moral y teología de la gente mexicana, donde hay cosas muy curiosas tocantes a los primores de su lengua, y cosas muy delicadas tocante a las virtudes morales”. Before he writes the *huehuehtlahtolli*, he comments on the *tlamatini*’s skilled use of language and their delicate metaphors. The moral texts in the *huehuehtlahtolli* are elegant exhortations exchanged between parents and their children in order to prepare them for important moments in their lives; for example, birth, marriage, war, and death.

Apart from the Spanish transcriptions that appear in Sahagún and Olmos’ texts, two complete codices survive in Náhuatl and were transcribed in the Roman alphabet. Miguel León-Portilla, an important scholar in pre-Hispanic Mexican literature and history, dedicates special attention to these surviving codices and has compiled them in an edition by the Fondo de Cultura Económica entitled: *Huehuehtlahtolli: Testimonios de la antigua palabra*. He notes that the clergy found the moral issues in the pre-Hispanic texts to be very useful for their evangelistic projects. They were adapted in their sermons as they were ideal texts for their brevity and compatible

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113 An example of Sahagún’s admiration for the rhetorical techniques found in the *huehuehtlahtolli* appears in his title for chapter XIII of Book 6.

De los afectos y lenguaje que usa el que responde por el señor a los oradores cuando el señor no se halla para responder; es oración de algún principal, o amigo o pariente del señor, bien hablado y bien entendido; usa en ella de muchos colores retóricos (102).
morality. In addition to using the huehuehtlahtolli, the friars composed several of their own in the sixteenth century. They used some key themes from the Doctrina cristiana and set them in Spanish to the poetic structure found in the pre-Hispanic texts. The huehuehtlahtolli’s original purpose and structure were once an art that only the tlamatini could learn. They cultivated wisdom, in poetic structure and in oral form, wisdom to inspire their communities on the moral values of the Empire. In these Franciscan versions of the huehuehtlahtolli, the friars established themselves as the new sages of Nueva España’s society. They learned the pre-Hispanic structure and used it to communicate the doctrine of the Church. Although the books are written in Spanish, there are some words in Náhuatl that have been preserved in the text. These words occupied a strategic placement in the texts and could attract natives to its reading/recitation. Because the texts were in Spanish and were meant to be read to others, illiterate Spaniards could also benefit from the doctrine. It is possible that the indios cantores could have had access to these texts as they used familiar structures and could read and understand Spanish. As a result, these texts could serve as sermons in smaller communities when there were no official Church representatives.

León-Portilla includes some of the Franciscans’ huehuehtlahtolli in his edition that show the change in the Church’s discourse. The “He aquí lo que se hace la obligación del medico, del que cura a la gente, para que le hable y consuele al enfermo” shows the increasingly important role of the doctor at moriens’ bedside, and is a short and a simplified version of the Arte de bien morir. The decreased role of the clergy at moriens’ process of death suggests that the text dates from the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The date of this text’s composition is unknown. León-Portilla suspects it to be from the sixteenth century. Since Fr. Martin de León includes a similar comment about the role of the doctor in the “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo”, which was written in the early seventeenth-century (1611), it is probable that the huehuehtlahtolli was composed after the secularization of the Church in 1574.
Fray de León’s text, the hospital and the focus on the doctor’s diagnostic skills show the shift that was suggested by Ariès. The huehuehtlahtolli requests that the doctor diagnose the illness that is plaguing moriens so that he can determine if a priest should be summoned. Over time the role of the priest and of the indios cantores in New Spain became less important and the diagnosis of a doctor allowed for a more “economic” use of time. A priest no longer had to “waste” time traveling to moriens’ bedside if it was not necessary. Not all priests were keen on helping parishioners to die well and therefore also relied on doctors. This problem had occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but remained a strong concern in the eighteenth century. Documents in the AGN (Archivo General de la Nación) show that a priest from Tepetlastoc was called to the homes of several individuals who were dying yet he refused to leave his church. He was also criticized in the document for refusing to confess women who were pregnant and in danger of dying in childbirth (AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Leg. 150, Exp. 14). Although the secular clergy had resumed control of the Church in New Spain after 1574, there was still a shortage of priests and therefore the role of doctors could allow enough time for the priest or cleric to be called to moriens’ bedside.

Unlike the other versions of the Arte de bien morir, the “He aquí lo que se hace la obligación del médico, del que cura a la gente, para que le hable y consuele al enfermo” does not emphasize the necessity of moriens’ familiarity with its contents in order for a good death to occur. Once the doctor has determined the nature and source of the illness he can proceed to counsel moriens. His words in the huehuehtlahtolli are like those of a priest as he reveals that God has placed an illness on moriens who needs to be disciplined for their faults.

Hijo mío, mi apreciado, te ha tomado, te ha atrapado el Señor, el Dueño de la tierra, el Dueño del mundo, Aquél a quien nada iguala, Aquél con quien nadie habla; ha venido a atarte, te ha colocado en su casa de madera, en su rincón, en la oscuridad; [...] su alacrán, su ortiga las acerca a ti, las pone en ti, así te enfermas. (217)
If the doctor determines that the illness is of a spiritual nature and can only be cured with spiritual medicine, the doctor summons the priest, “su curador de gente del Señor Nuestro, Dios, al confessor” (218). The health of the soul is vital because it is the element that gives life to the physical body. The only way that a soul can be cured from its illness is for individuals to confess all of their sins in a contrite manner to a priest. This text suggests that once the soul has been healed there is a slight possibility that the body could return to its normal, healthy state. Although spiritual healing can occur, the illness plaguing the body could remain with moriens as punishment. Because God is disciplining moriens, they must remain focused on His mercy and meditate on their soul’s salvation. Even though this text does not include woodcuts of the battle between the demons and angels there is a brief description in the huehuehtlahtolli that is similar to the final scene in the medieval Arte de bien morir.

Lo tercero, con todo tu corazón oye, sabe que cuando nos enfermamos, muchos nos inclinamos a la muerte porque luego, junto a nosotros, vienen a espacarse los hombres tecolote; así se esparcen en espera de nuestra alma para llevarla a la región de los muertos. Por eso es muy necesario que con todo tu corazón te pongas de rodillas en tu intimidad, y juntas las manos con el nombre del Señor Nuestro, Jesucristo. Lo invocarás para que haga rescate de ti y envíe sus amados ángeles para que vengan a colocarse en espera de tu alma todo el tiempo que tarde en salir, para llevarla al cielo, a gozar al lado de Dios, nuestro padre. (219-220)

The narrator refers to Satan’s demons as hombres tecolote. The same term appears in other parts of the text when references are made to Satan (hombre tecolote). Tecolote in Náhuatl means owl and, as is well known, these birds are nocturnal and hunt at night. In the medieval collective memory, nighttime was the moment of the day when occult forces came out to attack innocent people on the road. In Berceo’s “De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el Diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo” the protagonist, Teófilo, leaves his monastery at night and is met by a sinister parade of demons, led by Satan, at a crossroads (Stanzas 778-86). Since this event occurred in darkness and at midnight, Teófilo instantly becomes Satan’s prey. In the same manner,
the huehuehtlahtolli warns moriens that they should prevent their soul from becoming the devil’s prey. The use of a word in Náhuatl in a text written in Spanish warns against “idolatry” as well as reminding the listeners that the Church considered all of the pre-Hispanic deities to be demons (demonios) and should be avoided in order for the soul to be free from illness.

The Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte

In 1743 a confraternity from the Jesuit church La Casa Profesa published the manual Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte in Mexico City (Illustration 5.1). The secularization of the clergy reformed the mendicant orders’ characteristic funerary practices. The secular clergy and the Jesuits sponsored the Congregación de la Buena Muerte which was supervised by clerics who read sermons based on the nature of the soul and the mortality of the flesh. The Congregación de la Buena Muerte met every Friday afternoon at three o’clock in front of their altar in the church of La Profesa. This confraternity’s goal was to publish a manual that would guide its members through the process of death and which would explain to its members what contributions could be made for indulgences. By the time that the Congregación de la Buena Muerte published its manual, it was enjoying a renewed role of importance. The confraternity had originally been established in 1659 when Pope Alexander VII issued them a bull to them that guaranteed its members indulgences at their deaths if they met every Friday as a congregation (Rodríguez Álvarez 111). Unfortunately, because of a lack of interest and money, the confraternity’s success was short-lived and it had to be dissolved. It was reinstated in 1710 with the vigorous support of the viceroy, the Duke of Linares, and Fathers Andrés de Luque and Félix de Espinosa. As Rodríguez Álvarez notes, since the viceroy was a founding member of this second confraternity, other members of Nueva España’s high society joined quickly (111). Pope
Benedict XIII reissued Alexander VII’s bull that promised indulgences to the members of the confraternity at their deaths.

The church of *La Profesa* was built in 1592 on the corner of the modern-day streets of Isabel la Católica and Francisco I. Madero in Mexico City’s historical centre. The location of the church with an adjoining monastery was the subject of a dispute among the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Augustinians, and the Jesuits, as all four orders claimed jurisdiction over the land. The three largest mendicant orders filed an official dispute for the land; however, the secular clergy and Mexico’s City Hall awarded it to the Jesuits. The Jesuits arrived in Nueva España in 1572 at the very moment when the mendicant orders were at the height of their disputes with the secular clergy. The time of their arrival marks the transition of reducing the roles of the mendicant orders in *Nueva España* and the gradual process of secularizing the church. By the time that the church of *La Profesa* was constructed in 1592, the secular clergy was in complete control and their decisions regarding jurisdiction, administration of the sacraments, and rituals of the Church, all rested in its hands. The *Reglas y obligaciones del Congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte* allowed the secular clergy to keep control over the members of the confraternity and for the participation of a few Jesuit friars who would be its representatives. The *Congregación* would be a collective support system for its members, do charitable deeds, endorse a good life for a good death, and confess their sins frequently.

*Servir a Nuestro Señor, exercitarse en obras de piedad Christiana, y obligar a su Majestad con una ajustada vida, a que a todos sus Fieles Congregantes (mediante los meritos de la Passion, y preciosa muerte de su Santíssimo Hijo, y su Dolorosa Madre Maria Señora) una feliz y dichosa muerte, el principal, y mas atento cuidado, del que en ella se recibiere, ha de ser la reforma de sus costumbres, pureza de conciencia, y ajuste de la vida: procurando hacer una buena, y sincera confession en su ingreso, y deseeando continuar en frecuencia de Sacramentos para tener limpia la alma, y estar dispuesto en todo tiempo, para quando llegare la hora, que precissamente ha de llegar, de que salga de aqueste mundo, y no aviendo instante seguro, procurará con estas diligencias, y del favor Divino, estar continuamente en gracia de Dios, para conseguir la eterna salud, que deseea en el momento terrible, de que depende la eternidad. (If)*
Although this text was written in the eighteenth century, there are some similarities with the community-focus found in the medieval Church. The *Congregación de la Buena Muerte* monitored its members to make sure that they lived good lives according to Christ’s example. In Chapter 1 we saw the role of the parish in the Middle Ages. The priest heard each person’s confession privately; however, it was the community’s responsibility to ensure that their penance was carried out properly (78-80). According to the rules found in the *Congregación de la Buena Muerte*’s manual, members were responsible to pray for the souls of all living members, as well as the ones that had already died. Praying for the souls of the dead in their community was a sure manner to obtain indulgences on their behalf as well as for themselves. In this community, death would no longer be an isolated occurrence as it had been in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but an event in which all members participated.

The manual outlines many other rules that the members of the congregation had to follow, especially on Fridays when they met. The *Arte de bien morir* reminds its reader or listener of their mortality and the *Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte* also emphasizes this point. It states that to be fully prepared for one’s death, each congregant must be made aware of their life’s fragile nature. Consequently, the members had to think about their death at all times of the day (2f-2r). This meditation throughout the week would ensure that each individual attended the Friday meetings with a contrite spirit ready for confession and communion. Like the *Artes de bien morir*, the *Reglas y obligaciones* notes that all members must write their testament, which will count as penance, and that they should meditate on the Passion of Christ and the sorrow of the Virgin. Although the *Arte de bien morir* is a practical guide for all Christians that clearly outlines the requirements for a good death, the *Reglas y obligaciones* gives more details as
to what each congregant should accomplish in their lives in order to receive as many indulgences as possible at their deaths.

Before each meeting on Friday afternoon, the congregants had to prepare their soul at home. At noon on that day, a candle was lit and remained in this state from noon until three o’clock. These three hours represented the agony of Christ on the Cross and the candle itself symbolized Christ as the Light of the World. Because Christ had died at three o’clock, the candle also had to be extinguished precisely at that time. The Congregación met at three inside the church of La Profesa where the ceremonies would begin. Individuals who wanted to prepare their souls for the meeting were allowed inside the church at two thirty in order for them to pray before the Eucharist.

En essa media hora se guardará silencio, y en ella podrá estenderse la devoción en pías consideraciones de los beneficios, que el Señor nos hizo en la Sagrada Eucaristía, ó de la Passion, y muerte de su Majestad, ó de los dolores de MARIA Santissima, pidiendo continuamente el salir en paz de esta vida; como quien tiene presente el último instante. (5r)

The members who had businesses were obliged to close them at three and then promptly leave for the Congregación’s meeting. La Profesa employed three priests to administer the sacraments and oversee the needs of the congregation. One preached the sermon, another administered the sacraments of confession and communion, and the last one would give the members a spiritual exercise for the day. This exercise had to be copied by each member in attendance in their notebook which would allow them to meditate on this point until the following meeting. Members who could not afford a notebook were encouraged to ponder carefully on the exercise during their meeting as this would permit them to commit it to memory. These members would also be expected to meditate on the exercise throughout the week. Prayers were also assigned to the members on Fridays, which they would have to pray with their families every day at three o’clock.
until the next week when they were assigned another one. During the sermons, all members were
required to reflect on their mortality and on Christ’s Passion.

The most important monthly meeting for the Congregación de la Buena Muerte took place
each third Friday of the month. At this meeting, which required all members to attend without
exception (unless they were ill or dying), the priest administered to them the “last” sacraments.
Before receiving the sacrament of communion, which was viewed as the viaticum, all members
had to confess their sins without omitting anything. Since the members had meditated on the status
of their soul, on the Passion of Christ and the Virgin’s sorrow for three weeks, this meeting was the
opportune moment to be served the viaticum. On these Fridays the members in attendance
received a special indulgence that could be applied at their death when it occurred. Confessions
were conducted and encouraged every week, but on this third Friday, they were even more
important as the number three symbolized the third hour of Christ’s agony and eventual death.

Y porque la mas provechosa, y grata memoria de la Passion, es el adorable Sacramento del
Altar, los devotos del Crucifixo, y que tienen á dicha el ser de su Congregacion,
procuraran, en quanto les fuere posible, comulgar, sino todos, algunos de los Viernes del
mes, y con mucha especialidad el tercero, que es la Comunion general. (5r)

Because the members were taking part in reenacting their deaths in a symbolic manner, the
Miserere was sung at the conclusion of their meeting.

There are also other days that were important for the Congregación; for example, the four
Fridays in Lent. At these meetings the sermon was followed by the Miserere and then the altar of
the Crucified Christ was decorated with flowers and candles (4v). During the Lenten period, all
members were required to pray to Christ at his altar, where they pleaded for his blessing of a good
death (4v). On Good Friday the confraternity walked in a procession led by the representation of
the Crucified Christ. Because this was a solemn occasion, the manual insists that the female
members should avoid wearing jewelry or anything else that would distract others from focusing on the icon.

Las señoritas, que son Congregantes, y que como tales son las primeras, que deben, como en todo, dar buen ejemplo; no usaran esse Sacrosanto día adorno ni compostura, para venir a acompañar a Christo clavado afrentosamente en un Leño, y a su Dolidá Madre llena de aflicción, y congoja a la Cruz. (5f)

Once the procession returned to the church of La Profesa, all members were required to give their condolences to the icon of the Virgin. The text cautions the female members of the Congregación that they should never give a person their condolences when they are wearing elaborate clothes or jewelry. Because the Virgin Mary wears a plain tunic, the women should follow her example and not be distracted by vanity.

The text also mentions other dates which should be recalled by all members of the confraternity. If the members visited the church of La Profesa on these important days, they were guaranteed to receive more indulgences. The Friday immediately following June 3rd, members paid homage to the founder of the second Congregacion de la Buena Muerte, the Viceroy, Duke of Linares. On this occasion, the Eucharist was put away and hidden from public viewing, and the confraternity sang the Responso at the Congregación’s altar. Another ceremony was held on September 15th. A mock funeral was organized in order to have the congregation reflect on its mortality. At this funeral service, a plain coffin would be placed in front of the altar and the people would take part in a vigil for all members who had died. These members included the Duke of Linares, any relatives, and their own souls. The coffin symbolized the death of each individual present.

Bueno sera el que los vivos asistan a este Sufragio, que se hace a sus Hermanos los muertos; para que quando aquellos estuvieren como estos en la otra vida, aya quien haga lo mismo por ellos. (6r)
Another interesting date was the first Friday after All Souls’ Day when the *Congregación de la buena muerte* held a special mass for the dead and for the relics at the church of *La Profesa*. At the meeting, the sermon was read and exercises were assigned. The souls of former members were remembered. They concluded the meeting by singing the *Responso* after the sermon. It should be noted that the Jesuits were the first order to bring relics to *Nueva España* and that since the church of *La Profesa* was under the responsibility of this order, there was a cult of relics there.

El viernes primero después de la Fiesta de todos Santos, y Celebración de los Fieles Difuntos se celebran en la Congregación los Santos, cuyas reliquias Sagradas se veneran en el Altar del Santo Cristo, y se hace un breve recuerdo de los Difuntos en la Platica, y ejercicio, aviando antes repartido las cédulas de los Santos, y Animas. Encerrado el Santísimo se canta Responso por todos los Difuntos de la misma Congregación. (6v)

The last few pages of the *Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte* are dedicated to the means by which a member could obtain as many indulgences as possible and to how the *Congregación* should respond to other members who are ill or dying.

Quando huviere algun Congregante enfermo, o moribundo, se abisara por los suyos, o por el que lo supiere, así para que se diga en el Pulpito, en orden a que lo encomienden a Nuestro Señor, como también para que lo visite el Visitador de enfermos, Asistente de moribundos, para su espiritual consuelo, y alivio. (7r)

Members of the confraternity received indulgences for praying for other members who were ill or dying. They also received indulgences for attending another member’s funeral (7r). Another indulgence could be obtained if, when they heard the bells of *La Profesa* toll, they prayed an “Our Father” and a “Hail Mary” on their knees. A small section is dedicated to the members of the confraternity who are absent from Mexico City and could not attend the Friday gatherings at *La Profesa*. The text notes that as long as the members seek to attend mass an indulgence will be granted to them. If they were in Rome, they were required to attend mass at the Jesuit’s church and pray the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary” seven times to obtain their indulgence (8f). If they prayed for members who were deceased, or received communion on Fridays or on the third Friday
of the month (día de la vida), they were guaranteed to receive even more indulgences. In addition, the Reglas y obligaciones states that the Bula de la Santa Cruzada is an important document that can accumulate further indulgences (9f). The manual also gives equivalents of time that will be subtracted from the soul’s stay in Purgatory for each indulgence gained: “A los que hicieron Oracion en esta Iglesia, se conceden en la Quaresma cada día quatro años, y doscientos, y cuarenta, y quatro días de Indulgencia” (10r).

The Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte is a fascinating document that simplified the process that each member of the confraternity should follow in order to assure them and others in their community of a good death. Unlike the Artes de bien morir that were more individualized and which relied on the counsel of a priest or doctor, here the whole congregation takes part in praying for each other’s soul, when they are living and when they are dead. There is a common interest in this community-based approach to the salvation of a soul since each person depends on the charity of another member. The soul’s salvation was guaranteed by their frequent confessions and communions. The sacrament of penance is always present because the congregation meditated daily on mortality. With each requirement that was completed, they obtained indulgences for themselves but also for the other members. Rodríguez Álvarez notes that when the prefect of this confraternity died, a túmulo was made for him that displayed forty candles and mass was held for his soul. The congregation had to attend his mass in full mourning attire (112). For further indulgences, members of the confraternity left in their testaments dowries for orphaned girls (113).

The most notable confraternity was the Congregación de la Buena Muerte, but there are others that have records listed at the AGN. In 1802 a document was written about the Congregación de Agonizantes. This confraternity was based in Mexico City and had been founded twelve years earlier. The goal of this congregation was to model itself after the one that already
existed in Madrid, the Congregación del Señor de la Agonía. The viceroy at that time, Don Pablo de Sotomayor, and one of its founding members in Mexico City, wanted this congregation to assist all individuals who were dying. This document presents some problems that worried the confraternity. The first was whether to allow young priests to assist young women at their deathbeds. There are other inconveniences listed as well, which, according to the prosecutor would have to be addressed.

De la suma prudencia y moderación que debe tener los que exortan a bien morir para no fastidiar a los enfermos, ni con un grito desatorcido, que puedan inquietarles, e inspirarles un sumo temor, ni con unas expresiones que puedan causarles languidez y desaliento. (AGN, Bienes Nacionales, Leg. 614, Exp. 42)

It is not known if this Congregación had its own manual for counseling the members of the confraternity through the process of death. But it is clear that the importance of confraternities in the funerary tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had gradually replaced the Arte de bien morir manuals in helping New Spain’s habitants to die well.

**Iconography of Death in the Aztec Empire and in Medieval Spain**

The iconographic representation of death during the Aztec Empire was limited to the skull. It was generally represented in stone carvings, such as at the base of the altar of Tzompantli (Illustration 5.2) at the Templo Mayor but could also appear in jewelry and painted on clay vessels. At the Museo del Templo Mayor there is a representation in clay of Mictlantecuhtli, the ruler of the Aztec underworld (Mictlan); his head is a skull and his ribcage is exposed (Illustration 5.3). Hanging loosely, like a pendulum, below the ribcage is the heart. This unusual representation of the god of the underworld is the closest example that the Nahuas had to a skeleton. Even the representations of the women who had died in childbirth have skulls for heads but do not show any other bones. Death was a normal step in life and was a common theme in the artifacts that were produced during the Aztec Empire, and in earlier cultures. Religion was the thread that linked all aspects of
the Nahuas' society. Death was an important element in the religious rites (human sacrifices, the guerras floridas, and the juego de pelota); as a result, it is not strange that the Nahuas have so many artifacts displaying the skull.

Death and the Judgment were important themes in the sermons and frescos of the medieval Church. Even though the Church often reminded the Christian of the horrors of Hell and the uncertainty of an afterlife in Heaven after the Judgment, the Black Death (1347) forced the medieval Christian to reflect on mortality and produce texts such as the Danse macabre, the Ars moriendi, and plastic representations of Death such as the skeleton holding a scythe. Even though Death did not appear in any plastic art forms in Spain as it had in France, Italy, Germany and Britain, it did make its appearance in literature (the Danza general de la Muerte) and in the entremeses at Fernando de Antequera’s coronation banquet. The spirit of the macabre was present in fifteenth-century Spain and although it was not represented in the same manner as in the rest of Europe, Death would make the trans-Atlantic voyage to Nueva España. The only complete skeleton from Mexico’s early colonial period is in a fresco from the sixteenth century at the cloister of the convent in Malinalco (State of Mexico). The skeleton was painted holding a scythe and facing a monk. Even though Weckmann affirms that the Danza general de la Muerte was brought to Nueva España, there is no documented proof of its existence. The fresco at Malinalco would be the only indication that the Danza general de la Muerte, or at least the danse macabre fresco tradition, arrived in New Spain. It is unlikely that the Nahuas were exposed to this fresco since it was inside the convent and not displayed in a courtyard.

As seen in earlier chapters, remnants of the Nahuas’ religion survived in some of the Mexican Church’s celebrations. The celebration with the most obvious examples of syncretism is Días de Muertos (Day of the Dead), which takes place on November 1st and 2nd. This event is celebrated throughout Mexico; however, those that best display the syncretism that occurred in
New Spain take place in rural areas with predominantly indigenous inhabitants. Even though the friars forbade the continuation of human sacrifices and banned many pre-Hispanic celebrations, there are countless documented examples that show their failure to erase the native religion. As a result, the friars could not force the people to forget their deceased relatives. The friars decided that the Nahuas could pray for the souls of the dead and remember their relatives on All Souls’ Day (November 2\textsuperscript{nd}) since offerings were permitted by the Church in order to obtain indulgences for the souls in Purgatory. On the eve of November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, the people brought food and flowers to the altar of the Church as payment for the indulgences. The contents of these offering depended entirely on the region to which the natives belonged. As seen in Chapter 4, the monastery in Calimaya accepted offerings of corn as payment for funerals and mass for the dead. Other churches accepted offerings of chilies, tomatoes, eggs, spices and chickens (AGN, Derechos Parroquiales, v.1, exp.a, f.4. 1721). In the Reglas y obligaciones del Congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte the members were required to decorate the altar of the Crucified Christ with flowers and candles. Candles were also offered to the churches in Madrid in order to obtain indulgences, according to Eire, on All Souls’ Day. Another offering that was taken to the altar is Pan de Muerto, bread baked in the shape of a person. This bread, which is a surviving custom from a Nahua ceremony, survived colonization and remains to this day an important element for the altar. Bread, during pre-Hispanic times, had been baked in the shape of Huitzilopochtli and was eaten in one of this god’s ceremonies.

The last item that appears on an altar during the feast of the Day of the Dead is a skull. The skull, as a symbol of death in the Aztec Empire, was feared by the clergy because they believed it to be associated with the dark arts. As seen in Chapter 4, María de Bonilla, Doña Jerónima Tenorio and María Theresa Curiel were accused to the Inquisition for their “occult” ceremonies that involved the combination of elements from the pre-Hispanic religion (skull) and some from
Catholicism. Even though the skull was the symbol of life and death for the natives, the clergy saw it as a reminder of the Nahua religion and all "idolatrous" practices. The Church reformed certain elements of the Nahua religion and gave them a different meaning in the Christian context. Death in Father Joaquín Bolaños' *La vida portentosa de la Muerte* is transformed from a feared character to a parodical and comical figure, while representations of Death in the Biblioteca Nacional's choral manuscript of 1713 portray skulls and skeletons that are terrifying yet comical. The eighteenth and nineteenth century Mexican skull and skeleton, no longer possess the same meaning as they did during the Aztec Empire or in medieval Spain. It has become a symbol of the syncretism that took place in Mexico between Christianity and the Nahua religion. The colonial skull will inspire late-nineteenth-century artists, such as José Guadalupe Posada, to create engravings such as the *Calaveras* that will come to symbolically define the Mexican national identity.

**Colonial Macabre Illuminations in the Biblioteca Nacional's Choral Manuscript**

(03 RMS782.3F IGL3)

The Choral Manuscript in the collection at the *Fondo Reservado* of the Biblioteca Nacional de México dates from 1713. It was illuminated by Miguel de Aguilar and commissioned by Fr. Antonio Gutierrez, as indicated in the colophon. According to Dr. Silvia Salgado at the Biblioteca Nacional de México's *Fondo Reservado*, the manuscript was hand-produced on parchment and contains beautifully intricate initial letters in the form of bones. Within each illuminated letter, complementing images depict symbols of time (hourglasses, sundials, clocks, candles, and mirrors), Death (skulls and skeletons), and of the clerical hierarchy (crowns, and other hats). Very little is known about the history of this manuscript and about the individuals who are named in the

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115 General information about the manuscript's history and format was obtained from a conversation that I had with Dr. Salgado on April 12, 2005 at the *Biblioteca Nacional de México*. The analysis of the manuscript in my dissertation regarding the medieval and pre-Hispanic iconographic influences found in the colonial *macabre* tradition is my own.
colophon. Dr. Silvia Salgado is the first scholar to study the collection of Choral Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Nacional for her doctoral dissertation\textsuperscript{116} and she was very generous in providing copies of her photographs for this study. As we will see, the manuscript suffered some water damage in recent years and as a result some of the illuminated pages have been spoiled. These pages have been repaired, but a full restoration is planned for the manuscript according to Mr. Liborio Villagómez, Director of the Department of the Fondo Reservado. Although some pages have lost their original beauty, the images of skulls and bones give us a glimpse into the Mexican colonial 	extit{macabre} tradition.

As we will see in the manuscript, the illuminations show similar scenes that can be found in the 	extit{Danza general de la Muerte} and in the 	extit{Danse macabre} traditions. There are symbols present in the initial letters and in the borders of certain pages that show the different classes found in Nueva España’s society. Even though there are representations from the secular hierarchy, most illuminated letters show symbols of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. There are no visible representations of the indigenous people; however, we cannot state that this is impossible since some of the illuminated letters have been destroyed by water. Two of the illuminated letters show the Judgment (Illustration 5.4), but the lower part of the letters, in which Purgatory would appear, have been badly damaged (Illustration 5.5). Fray Martín de León showed that all individuals were equal and would all have to die, and the illuminator of this manuscript presents the same argument. The 	extit{Danza} shows the different levels of the lay and the ecclesiastical hierarchies by alternating one from each hierarchy as Death leads them away in her dance. In this illuminated manuscript, there is no clear order between the representatives of each hierarchy in Nueva España and the only illuminated letters for a member of the lay hierarchy are for the king. In the elaborate border of the

\textsuperscript{116} Dr. Salgado’s dissertation is entitled 	extit{Libros de coro conservados en la Biblioteca Nacional de México: aportaciones a la iluminación de manuscritos novohispanos de los siglos XVII y XVIII}. It was not available for consultation at the Fondo Reservado of the Biblioteca Nacional de México in 2005, but has since been added to their collection.
first page, more symbols of the lay hierarchy appear: a suit of armor, a helmet, drums, and fashionable hats (Illustration 5.6).

There are isolated elements in the manuscript that point to a survival of Nahua artistic representations of death. In the elaborate border that we see in Illustration 5.5, there is a heart in the center of the top border (Illustration 5.7). The heart is a symbol of life and was an important element in the Nahua ceremonies of human sacrifice. When an individual was to be sacrificed, the priest cut into the victim's chest and removed the heart, which was then raised for all to see. Another reference to the Nahua practices appears in the illumination of the letter “R” on fol. 13v2 (Illustration 5.8). If we recall, the Nahuas and the cultures that existed before the Aztec Empire, often used the symbol of the divided face (life and death) to represent the brevity of life. This symbol appeared on their urns and masks. In this example, the monk’s face is also divided to show the duality of life. On the left side of his face, life is represented, while on the right side, death is shown as a skull.

There are some examples of the funeral tradition as seen in the descriptions of the colonial Artes de bien morir and in the Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte. The illuminations do not follow a chronological order, as in the rituals outlined in the Arte de bien morir and in the Reglas y obligaciones. The first illuminated letter is “D” (Illustration 5.9). Even though this page has been damaged by water, the letter still shows, with the help of some restoration, two Dominican monks burying a person dressed in the same black tunic that they are wearing. It remains unclear if the individual they are burying is from their order or if it is a parishioner dressed in their tunic to show their loyalty to Saint Dominic. The second illuminated letter is another “D” and shows two monks digging a grave (Illustration 5.10). It is possible that the friars are either digging the grave or that they are covering the grave of the corpse from the first illumination. The third illuminated letter is “O” and shows the coffin at its vigil
(Illustration 5.11). The coffin is black and has been raised on a platform. In front of the coffin is a crucifix and three candleholders are placed behind it. Candles and crucifixes were important elements in the *Artes de bien morir* and continued to play important roles in *Nueva España* to obtain indulgences for the deceased as seen in the *Congregación de la Buena Muerte*.

There are numerous examples of skulls and bones in the manuscript. In most cases the representation of death appears with a single skull (Illustration 5.12), but occasionally there will be crossed femurs underneath it (Illustration 5.13). Crossed femurs beneath a skull are commonly found in Nahua carvings and painted ceramic vessels. Though skeletons were not typical in *Nueva España* to represent Death, this Choral Manuscript has three skeletons. The first skeleton appears on fol. 83r and in the illuminated letter “h”. It is sitting and waiting patiently while holding a scythe (Illustration 5.14). The last two skeletons, or “angels of death”, are reclined on top of the colophon (Illustration 5.15). Even though the skeleton once symbolized fear and uncertainty, these skeletons do not appear to be in a hurry to claim victims as does *La Muerte* in the *Danza general*. The meaning behind these skeletons is not the same as it was in the Middle Ages. The colonial skeleton is still a reminder of death and of its eventual occurrence but there is no longer a terrifying element. Here we find that the medieval genre of macabre iconography has been reconstructed to give way to a Mexican colonial *macabre* iconography.

When the grotesque is used to illustrate an abstract idea, its nature is inevitably distorted. The essence of grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better. (Bakhtin 62)

The colonial skeleton and skull in iconographic form will take on a more parodied role later that century in Joaquín Bolaños’ novel *La vida portentosa de la Muerte*. This novel presents a biographical account of Death’s life. The novel explains Death’s birth in the Garden of Eden, her rule as Empress, and her court made up by the dead and Satan, and her eventual death with the
Judgment. The parody of Death found in this novel will later inspire artists such as Posada and writers such as Octavio Paz who defines the Mexican national identity by its ability to laugh at death. The Choral Manuscript and the colonial *macabre* deserve to be more fully analyzed in a separate project, which I intend to carry out in the future.
Chapter VII
Conclusion

I have attempted to show in this dissertation how the origins of the *Arte de bien morir* tradition in Mexico can be found in the discourses of the medieval and sixteenth-century Church regarding salvation, confession and penance. These *Ars moriendi* texts were practical solutions for preventing the eternal loss of a Christian’s soul; however, they also reveal information about the funerary practices of the Church, popular belief, and the Church’s official discourses and doctrine.

In the late-medieval period, the Church was struggling to maintain control over society because of tensions within its hierarchy and in the new rising social classes. The fear of death and of the Judgment was a discourse that the Church had used often throughout the medieval period; however, in the fifteenth century, a shift is noted from the overtly intimidating tactics to a more subdued message. The intimidation tactics that remind Christians of the Judgment and the corruption of the body are still found in fifteenth-century texts such as the *Danza general de la Muerte*; however, in the same century, the *Arte de bien morir* communicates a slightly different message. In the *Arte de bien morir*, the official discourse of the Church dialogues with the one from the *Danza general de la Muerte* and reveals that death should still be feared because of the impending Judgment, but that a contrite deathbed confession was enough to save the soul. This reveals the beginning of a new discourse on salvation (to live well is to die well) and the individualization of death (the individual judgment of each soul) that will be elaborated in the sixteenth century and preserved in subsequent centuries.

The literary treatment of the theme of salvation changed throughout the centuries. As the theology of salvation matured with the decrees of each council (especially the Council of Trent), so did each author’s interpretation of it. In sixteenth-century Spain, Erasmus of Rotterdam’s and Alejo Venegas’ texts establish a dialogue with the medieval versions of the *Ars moriendi* (the *Arte
De bien morir in Spain) that reveal a change in the Church’s official discourse on confession, penance and salvation. Erasmus and Venegas insist that faith and good works are equal partners in the quest for saving a Christian’s soul. They acknowledge that the fear of death (that implies the Judgement) is the most powerful sentiment that a human being can feel and therefore they provide helpful solutions to prepare Christians for death. The theological arguments that they present in their texts reflect the mendicant orders’ beliefs: that Christians (and especially members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy) should renounce all worldly values and focus on the eternal rewards of Heaven. Erasmus and Venegas criticize the rapid-style salvation of the medieval Arte de bien morir when they state that a good death can only be achieved by a good life. Although these two texts address important issues that were of concern to the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century, their primary objective is to reinforce the Christian’s loyalty to the Church and its teachings.

Fray Juan de Zumárraga’s version of the Arte de bien morir, the “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte” demonstrates the importance that was given to writers such as Erasmus, Venegas, Flora, and Gerson in New Spain during the initial decades of the process of colonization. Zumárraga’s text was destined for Spaniards, not natives. Therefore he reinforces his readers’ faith in the Church’s official discourse regarding confession, penance and salvation. The “De la memoria y aparejo de la buena muerte” is an official extension of Zumárraga’s position as an important member of the clerical hierarchy in New Spain; nevertheless, the text also dialogues subtly with popular Catholicism and the phenomena of religious syncretism and idolatry. In other words, Zumárraga’s text acknowledges a growing concern for these phenomena and condemns their practice. In keeping with the opinions of other writers of his century, such as Sahagún, Mendieta and Motolinía, he recognizes the problem and asks Christians to remain true to the Catholic Church. For the Spaniards, idolatry was the term that described the “effective” presence of the pre-Hispanic gods in Catholic iconographies and rituals (Rowe and Schelling 68-69);
however, it could also represent any pre-Hispanic icons of the gods and ceremonial practices that were observed in secret. Religious syncretism led to idolatry and deceived the Christian to take part in occult practices that would result in the soul’s eternal death. Zumárraga states that when Christians are not prepared and aware of death’s unexpected arrival, souls are lost.

As we have seen, catechisms and the *Arte de bien morir* were preached to the Spaniards by the friars and the *indios cantores* preached them to the natives. The *indios cantores* were crucial to the process of converting the Nahuas and were trained by the Franciscans to read and write Spanish and Latin (AGN, Indios, Vol. 33, Exp. 91, Foj. 54r-55r) and to oversee all spiritual matters of their communities when a priest was unable to be present (AGN, Indios, Vol.1, Exp. 167, Foj. 61 VTA). This contribution, as well as the explanations of Christianity given by the Franciscans to the Nahuas, was a contributing factor to the establishment of religious syncretism. Fray Diego Durán, a Dominican, also acknowledged and criticized religious syncretism; however, as Todorov notes, he also understood the need for religious syncretism in the communication of the Christian faith to the natives. In keeping with this understanding, the seventeenth-century “Arte de bien morir con el aparejo” by Fray Martín de León, demonstrates the official discourse of the Church regarding confession and salvation; however, there are some social criticisms that distinguish it from Zumárraga’s text. Fray de León acknowledges the increased role of the doctor in diagnosing spiritual illnesses that would require the intervention of a priest, therefore demonstrating the reduced role of the spiritual component in death. He also clearly outlines the requirements for admitting *moriens* to the hospital. Fray de León tolerates the religious syncretism that occurred in New Spain and refers to it in his text when he suggests that *moriens* be fed and made to drink foods made from corn. These foods, in the pre-Hispanic beliefs restored health to the ill, and officially gave them legitimacy. It is curious that Fray de León’s inclusion contradicted one of the main arguments of the *Arte de bien morir*, which clearly states that *moriens* should accept illness and
death as part of God’s Will and not expect to get well. Although Fray de León’s text reveals the transition of a religious-centered death to a more “secularized” version in the hospital, he also shows the gradual return of indulgences as part of the requirements needed to save the soul from Purgatory’s fires.

The eighteenth century presents the decline of the importance of the Arte de bien morir in New Spain and its replacement with confraternities, such as the Congregación de la Buena Muerte. The members of this confraternity were equally responsible in the salvation of its members’ souls. Indulgences were heavily emphasized in the Reglas y obligaciones del congregante de la Congregación de la Buena Muerte in comparison to the sixteenth-century versions of the Ars moriendi that required individuals to live well in order to save their souls. In addition to this change, the process of death in the eighteenth century allowed for the emergence of humor and parody in texts that dealt with this subject. María Agueda Méndez notes in “La muerte burlada en textos populares mexicanos (siglo XVIII)” that popular texts and songs were submitted to the Inquisition because of the grotesque manner in which the “serious” concept of death was being mocked in New Spain (12). The bitter and ironic smile that was projected in the verses of these texts can also be found in some that seemed religious, but mocked the terror that death connoted. As a result, they were banned by the Inquisition. Death in the eighteenth century was not always presented as sinister and frightening. Although the revival of the medieval macabre iconography is seen in the Choral Manuscript of 1713 conserved in the Fondo Reservado in the Biblioteca Nacional de México, it does not project the same fear or intimidation as its medieval source. The syncretism of the pre-Hispanic iconographies and views on death combined with the medieval macabre show some serious images in a more humorous light. The humor in the representation of Death can also be seen in the La vida portentosa de la Muerte, emperatriz de los sepulcros, vengadora de los agravios del altíssimo y muy Señora de la humana naturaleza by Joaquin
Bolaños. This novel was written and published in 1792 but did not receive wide attention because it was considered to be grotesque. As this text was written by a priest, it masqueraded as a “serious” novel; nevertheless, the representation of Death is parodic and comical. The underlying theme is the brevity of life and the urgency to repent of one’s sins; however, there is humor infused in most scenes in Death’s words, in her plans, her actions and in her reasoning. Because the treatment of Death changes so dramatically in the eighteenth century, and critics believe Bolaños’ parodic figure of Death to be the calavera’s predecessor, a future study will have to be conducted to determine if this is indeed an exact connection or an unfounded generalization.

This dissertation set out to identify the different discourses that are present in the Mexican versions of the Arte de bien morir by applying Tzvetan Todorov’s theory (that an original discourse must be able to dialogue freely with other discourses) to medieval and Mexican colonial texts. In order to accomplish this task and prove what other scholars had suspected, the author had to conduct a complete study into the medieval origins of the Arte de bien morir in order to establish links between the identified original discourses of differing periods. The results of this investigation confirm, through a varied corpus, that indeed the official discourse of the Church regarding confession, penance, salvation and death changed drastically over three centuries, and that socio-political and socio-historical events are major contributors to this evolution. Though the Mexican versions of the Arte de bien morir have received some scholarly exposure in recent years, they have been overshadowed by the study of other religious texts. The versions of the Arte de bien morir examined in this dissertation reveal important information regarding the funerary practices of New Spain and the challenges the Church was facing from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in Mexico. In addition, they establish trans-Atlantic dialogues with discourses from medieval Spain and sixteenth-century Spain that reveal the evolution in the Church’s dialectic on death and the afterlife. The Artes de bien morir produced in Nueva España are crucial
components in the canon of religious literature on death that shaped the Mexicans’ familiarity with
death. Because many more versions of the *Arte de bien morir* and other funerary texts composed
by the *Congregación de la Buena Muerte* remain unexamined, it will be necessary to explore them
in future studies.
Illustrations


Illustration 3.1 Ruins of the altars for Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc at the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 26 July, 2003.


Illustration 3.5 Base of the Tepanapa Pyramid, Cholula (Mexico). Personal photograph by author. April 14, 2005.

Illustration 3.6 The Santuario de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios on the summit of the Tepanapa Pyramid, Cholula (Mexico). Personal photograph by author. 14 Apr. 2005.


Illustration 4.2 Title page from Fray Martín de León, *Camino del cielo*. 1611.

Illustration 5.2. Skulls at the base of Tzompantli’s altar at the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 26 July, 2003.
Illustration 5.3 Statue of Mictlantecuhtli at the Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 27 July, 2003.

Illustration 5.4 The Last Judgment (Fol. 32r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.5 Purgatory (Fol. 57r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Illustration 5.6 Folios 2v and 3r, Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.7 Detail of a Heart, center upper border of Folio 3r, Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Illustration 5.8 Folio 13v 2, Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.9  Dominicans burying a corpse (Fol. 84r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Illustration 5.10  Dominicans digging a grave (Fol. 90v). Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.11  Vigil (Fol. 101v), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Illustration 5.12  Death (Fol. 29r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.13 Death (Fol 67r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Illustration 5.14 Death with scythe (Fol. 83r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Illustration 5.15  Colophon (Fol. 103r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
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Illustrations

Base of the Tepanapa Pyramid, Cholula (Mexico). Personal photograph by author. April 14, 2005.


Colophon (Fol. 103r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Death (Fol. 29r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Death (Fol 67r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Death with scythe (Fol. 83r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.


Detail of a heart, center upper border of Folio 3r, Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.


Dominicans burying a corpse (Fol. 84r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México, (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Dominicans digging a grave (Fol. 90v). Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Folios 2v and 3r, Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.
Folio 13v (2), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.


Grave and Fresco at the Old Cathedral, Salamanca (Spain). Personal photograph by author. 3 Aug. 2001.

The Last Judgment (Fol. 32r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

Phases one and two of the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 26 July, 2003.

Purgatory (Fol. 57r), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.


Ruins of the altars for Huitzilopochtli and Tláloc at the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 26 July, 2003.


Skulls at the base of Tzompantli’s altar at the Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 26 July, 2003.

Statue of Mictlantecuhtli at the Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Personal photograph by author. 27 July, 2003.


Title page from Fray Martín de León, *Camino del cielo*. 1611.


Vigil (Fol. 101v), Choral Manuscript from 1713 at the Fondo Reservado, Biblioteca Nacional de México (03.RMS782.3F IGL3), Mexico City. Photograph by Dr. Silvia Salgado, n.d.

**Secondary Sources**


Appendix

Mendieta includes Pope Leo X’s Bull, which is addressed to Fr. Juan Clapión and Fr. Francisco de los Angeles, in the *Historia eclesiástica Indiana*. Mendicant priests and monks were permitted to administer all sacraments with the exception of ordination.

Dilectis filiis Joanni Clapioni et Francisco de Angelis, ordinis Minorum de Observantia professo, et eorum cuilibet, Leo Papa Decimus. Dilecti filii, salutem et apostolicam benedictionem. Alias, felicis recordationis Nicolaus Quatrus, et Joannes Vigessimus secundus, et Urbanus Quintus, et Eugenius Quartus, et alii Romani Pontifices praedecessores nostri, debita meditacione considerantes quod vestry ordinis munda religio, a Christo Domino exemplis ac verbis apostolicis suis tradita, ac beato Francisco et eum sequentibus inspirata fuerit, ac quod nonnullos ejusdem ordinis professors pro fidei propagatione ad infidelium partes (cum jam Apostoli in orbe non existent) destinare opus esset (prout etiam ipse beatus Franciscus suo tempore actualiter fecit), ut in vinea Domini fructuosos palmites, producerent, nonnullis vestry ordinis tunc expressis fratibus, ut in terris infidelium tunc designatis existentibus, quod Dei Vebum proponere, et constitutos ibidem (si eorum aliqui excommunicationis censura ligati essent) absolvere, quoscumque ad unitatem christianae fidei converti cupientes recipere baptizare, et Ecclesiae filiis aggregare: et hi ex dictis fratibus qui in sacerdotio constituti essent, Poenitentiae, Eucharistiae et Extremae unctionis, aliaque ecclesiastica sacramenta personis praemissis ministrare et exercere, necnon in casu necessitates, Episcopis in Provincia non existentibus, Confirmationis sacramentum, et ordinationes usque ad minores Ordines fidelibus ministrare, capellas et altaria, necnon calices et paramenta ecclesiastica benedici, ac ecclesias reconciliandas, val coemeteria reconciliare, et eisdem de idoneis ministris providere, eisque indulgentias quas Episcopi in suis diocesibus concedere solent, impartiri, et alia quaecumque facere quae ad augmentum divini Nominis, ad conversionem ipsorum infidelium popularum, et amplificationem fidei Orthodoxae et reprobationem et irritationem illorum quae sacris traditionibus contradicunt (sicuti pro loco et tempore viderint expedire) valeant et possint. (Mendieta, Book 3, chapter 5: 188)