

The Creation of Heterodoxy: “Pseudo” Mystics’ Visualizations of Catholic Doctrine in Colonial Mexico

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I saw Our Lord Jesus Christ crucified and suspended in the air very high and very distant from Mexico... I could not distinguish what material the cross was made of, nor if the Lord was alive or dead. But I did see that a great flow of water that trickled in many drops was coming from the wound of his right side and falling on a great multitude of men and women who were on the ground under the cross with their mouths open. and who received in them these drops of water.¹

So began a vision that Getrudis Rosa Ortiz, a poor *mes-tiza* lay woman, described to the judges of the Mexican Inquisition near the outset of her 1723 trial for “false” mysticism. Apparitions constituted the most significant feature of Ortiz’s religious expressions, as was the case for many people whom the

Holy Office in New Spain investigated for being *ilusos* or *alumbrados*, people deluded by the devil or falsely ‘enlightened’ into believing they were true mystics.² Her trial is replete with intricate visual descriptions of the sacred scenes with which God filled her imagination. Her visions, like those of many others investigated, detailed a wide variety of subjects, portraying such momentous occasions as the most significant Christian Mysteries as well as more localized revelations about the intimate lives of people in her Mexico City parish.

In this article, I discuss a number of the visions that Getrudis Rosa Ortiz and several other Mexican “pseudo” mystics experienced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, examining both orthodox and heterodox influences upon their conception. Ortiz, like many other *ilusos* and *alumbrados*, drew heavily from the religious imagery of colonial Mexican art in the formulation of her visions. She wove orthodox iconography, styles, and scenes from this work into her visions. Yet she also incorporated ideas, episodes, and attitudes absent from the corpus of colonial artwork into her revelations. Visionaries strayed from the path of orthodox mysticism when they presumed to wed their own daily experiences – for instance of social interactions, motherhood, and sexuality – into their formulations of Catholic doctrine. From the court’s perspective, the most controversial aspect of these mystics’ marriage of their own *quotidienne* experiences to the Christian miracles they depicted in their visions was their failure to perceive the subversiveness of their actions.

Religious Art and the Formulation of Mystical Visions

Religious art played a vital role in the proselytizing efforts of the Counter-Reformation Catholic church. Visual representations served as some of the most important sources from which the illiterate – in Mexico and elsewhere – learned about religious

concepts and biblical personages. The fundamental contribution of sacred art to the religious culture of orthodox Christianity in New Spain is no better illustrated than in the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her most important miracle authenticating her appearance to Juan Diego in 1531 on the hill of Tepeyac that would later house her basilica was, after all, the creation of a miraculous painting.³

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Council of Trent endorsed the use of sacred art to indoctrinate the populace, move the emotions of the devout, or inspire cults of devotion.⁴ The colonial Mexican church embraced this initiative, viewing art as means of facilitating viewers' reception of religious ideas and providing them with a tangible means of imagining such abstract and incredible concepts as the Christian miracles and mysteries of the Trinity, Transubstantiation, and the Incarnation. These miraculous episodes were frequently represented in the paintings of the most celebrated Mexican artists of the Viceroyal era: Cristóbal de Villalpando (ca. 1649-1714), Juan Correa (1646-1716), Miguel Cabrera (1695-1768), and Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1675-1728).

The church was also wary, however, of the possible idolatry, superstition, or irreverence sacred art might provoke if carelessly regulated.⁵ Trent mandated that the ecclesiastical hierarchy should retain strict control over the production of religious images, and the Mexican Provincial Councils, cautious of the sacrilege indigenous artists might introduce into such work, issued repeated directives endorsing this position.⁶ The colonial church could control artistic production because it was one of the few institutions with access to financial resources sufficient to sponsor its generation. Before granting commissions to execute sacred images, the church required sculptors and painters in New Spain to undergo rigorous theological examinations to ensure the production of orthodox representations.⁷

Artistic renderings of these and other painters' representations of Christian doctrine shaped the visual imaginations of Mexican mystics.⁸ *Ilusos* and *alumbrados* often provided the court with minutely detailed descriptions of the clothing, facial, and corporal features of the apparitions they saw, as well as of the settings in which they appeared. María Manuela Picazo, an early-eighteenth-century *beata*, graphically narrated the stylistic elements of her visions and even referred to the influences particular paintings had exerted on them. On November 8, 1712, she testified that she had once seen a vision of the Virgin Mary whose face was slightly pink, wearing a cloak of light blue, and a dress of pale rose, as Picazo observed "in the style worn by Our Lady of Guadalupe."⁹ Picazo's description is consistent with Mexican artists' common depictions of Mary wearing sumptuous brocades and other rich textiles, along with extravagant jewelry.¹⁰ In another vision, Jesus Christ appeared to Picazo. She observed that he was a man, "of good stature and thin with a cape of blue, with a dark and very generous skirt, and his interior clothing was red and the style in which he wore his cape was somewhat similar to the way in which he appears when in the [Church of the] Carmen he is shown with a ring."¹¹

The stylistic elements of Mexican mystics' visions drew heavily from stylistic elements of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painting in New Spain: the use of bold colors, sensual and natural tones, and abundant representation of Christian iconography.¹² Moreover, their visions, as with colonial artwork, most frequently depicted encounters with saints as well as the principle Mysteries and miracles associated with Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Although orthodox influences affected their perception of these religious subjects, Mexican mystics' visions also contained elements that diverged significantly from convention. Many of the unconventional elements contained in their

visions originated in mystics' incorporation of their own experiences into biblical and theological scenes.

Visions of Race

As was true for many mystics in the Counter-Reformation period, the early eighteenth-century mestiza *ilusa* Getrudis Rosa Ortiz began seeing representations of the Savior in her childhood. The image of Christ suspended on the cross above Mexico City appeared to her repeatedly during her adolescence. During the last period in which she witnessed the Crucifixion vision described above, Ortiz perceived that

the drops of water that fell out of the side of the Lord were converted into fat pearls, and in this form those below received them in their mouths, like they had done with the water, and then I could better distinguish than before the people who received this gift, and I knew that there were men and women, and white faces and black ones among them.¹³

For a period of ten or twelve years after witnessing this scene, Ortiz remained ignorant of its significance. Then one day, God spoke to her while she prayed and told her that the vision she had seen of the water and the pearls signified the "conversion of these infidels."¹⁴

Later in her trial, Ortiz described a similar vision to the court in which she perceived that her soul traveled in spirit to distant lands to accompany "Padre Marxil" on his missionary enterprises. She had assisted Marxil, she stated, in preaching, "to many people, without knowing more than that they were many men and women, all mixed together, not knowing if they were blacks or whites."¹⁵ Another witness confirmed that Ortiz referred, in her vision, to Antonio Margil de Jesús, a Franciscan missionary who journeyed to Guatemala, Zacatecas and Texas,

in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹⁶ The seventeenth-century Spanish nun, Sor María Agreda de Jesús, had set an orthodox precedent of the possibility of undertaking a spiritual journey to proselytize indigenous people who lived in these remote territories. Sor María Agreda's writings that detailed her visions of traveling in the spirit to the North-western territories of New Spain circulated widely amongst religious women in Spain and Spanish America.¹⁷ And several of the women tried for "false" mysticism in New Spain owned, or acknowledged their familiarity with Agreda's *La Mistica Ciudad de Dios*, a biography the Virgin Mary had dictated to her while she underwent ecstatic raptures.¹⁸

Ortiz began her education in religious imagery early. She testified that one of her brothers-in-law with whom she had lived as a child worked "adorning and setting up churches."¹⁹ She also claimed that since the age of four, she had spent many hours each week meditating, confessing, and taking communion in a number of Mexico City's churches, including the Cathedral, the parish church of Veracruz, and those of Santa Catharina and the Misericordia.²⁰ Her religious imagination was steeped in the imagery of the religious paintings that covered the walls of these buildings. She would likely have contemplated these forms as she prayed, and they clearly influenced the ways in which she saw her religious visions. She testified that she had seen figures in one apparition of the Trinity "dressed in their costumes, as they are normally painted."²¹ It is no surprise, then, that many of the iconographic elements that featured in Ortiz's vision of Christ are consistent with those contained in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Mexican paintings of the crucifixion.

In her vision, Ortiz specifically situated the cross over Mexico City, a common motif in the viceroyalty's sacred art that sought to demonstrate the Christian sanctity of New World locales.²² In Cristóbal de Villalpando's *La Mistica Ciudad de*

Dios, for example, the figure of Mary associated with her Immaculate Conception floats above a walled city, denoted as the “*Mística Ciudad de Dios*,” the same title as Sor María Agreda’s celebrated biography of the Virgin Mary.²³ Villalpando uses imagery to suggest in this piece that Spain’s New World colonies were destined heirs of the Christian missionary enterprise. The “Mystical City” depicted in this work, rather than Jerusalem, is a city in Spain’s overseas empire. Its architectural style is reminiscent of the Spanish Baroque, and the archangel Michael, symbolizing Christianity’s triumph over the forces of diabolic paganism in New Spain, heralds Mary’s Immaculate Conception over it.

Ortiz’s fusing of two separate Christian sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist—in her vision also echoes contemporary artistic tableaux. One anonymous seventeenth-century work, “*Bautizando los cuatro señores de Tlaxcala*,” depicts Hernán Cortés assisting in the baptism of four Tlaxcalan *caciques* (hereditary Indian chieftans) instrumental in the conquest of Mexico. An image of Christ, suspended on the crucifix, hovers above.²⁴

The sacred art of colonial Mexico seems to have partially fulfilled its creators’ intent, then, of instructing viewers like Ortiz on the orthodox visualization of significant elements of Christian dogma. However, several features of Ortiz’s vision also indicate that despite her immersion in instructional sacred art, she frequently diverted from convention in her own visualizations of religious episodes. In contemporary representations of the sacrament of baptism, including Villalpando’s “*Bautizando los cuatro señores de Tlaxcala*” and his “*Bautizo de la Virgen*,” now hanging in Mexico City’s Basilica of Guadalupe, the sacred baptismal water is always contained within a holy vessel held by a representative of the church. Ortiz’s depiction of the baptismal/Eucharist substance flowing directly from Christ’s side wound into the mouths of the “infidel” bypassed Tridentine or-

thodoxy's requirement of clerical mediation between human and divine contact. Her visualization parallels her own claim to having directly received God's spiritual teachings through her visions, and thus suggests one reason for the image's disfavor among its clerical evaluators.

The second notable diversion from orthodoxy in Ortiz's Crucifixion apparition concerns the composition of the population she described awaiting conversion. Ortiz stated that the vision represented the conversion of "the infidel." Rather than linking this label to the indigenous population, its largest and most likely recipient in New Spain, however, Ortiz carefully specifies that in her vision both women and men, "white faces and black ones" (*caras blancas y prietas*) gathered below the cross to await baptism from the substances flowing from Christ's blessed wounds. Ortiz's observation that women as well as men formed the crowd that gathered below Christ is consistent with many contemporary paintings that dealt with this theme, including Miguel Cabrera's *Alegoría de la Preciosa Sangre*, (Museo del Virreinato, Tepozótlan, México), but her pointed inclusion of blacks in this group was unusual.

The religious art of colonial Mexico almost entirely omitted blacks from representation. Occasionally, African figures appeared in illustrations of the adoration of the magi. More often, they were shown as secondary figures whose iconographic attributes suggest they were slaves.²⁵ Blacks were commonly represented in secular eighteenth century *casta* paintings where they were associated with degeneration, poverty, and violence.²⁶ Most often, sacred visual or textual sources in New Spain associated blacks and blackness with satanic forces.²⁷ Mexican visionaries sometimes absorbed these tropes into their visions, describing in them how "black" devils appeared to them, tempting them to sin.

Ortiz's uncommon inclusion of blacks in a different manner in her Eucharist vision may indicate her belief that blacks as well as whites required, and were worthy of, conversion from heterodoxy. Ortiz could not base such an assertion on models derived from the imagery of sacred art. Instead, her personal and social experiences must have influenced her formulation of this idea. Getrudis Rosa Ortiz was a poor woman who had survived on charity for much of her life. Like most of the non-elite population of urban Mexico, she lived, worked, and socialized with people from many different ethnic backgrounds – Indians, *mestizos*, *mulatos*, and Spaniards – who populated the viceroyalty's cities.

In the spring of 1723, Ortiz, who was herself illiterate, had begun dictating to her brother the messages God sent her. The two of them, assisted by a Spanish woman called Isabel Eusebia Mercado, then posted copies of these notices around several Mexico City churches and convents, including those of San Gerónimo, la Encarnación, and San José de Gracia. A cleric, alerted to the notices' publication, sent several copies to the Inquisition.²⁸ The documentation from the opening stages of Ortiz's trial, when her Inquisitors were attempting to confirm her status and whereabouts, reveals the kinds of intimate relationships Ortiz had established in both her secular and sacred life with people of various ethnicities.

One of the witnesses interrogated at this stage of the trial, for example, was a *mulato* water porter, Domingo Antonio de Ribera. Ribera, who lived in Ortiz's neighborhood, knew Isabel Eusebia Mercado. It is likely that he also knew, or knew of Ortiz as well, since they were neighbors. Yet when the court questioned him as to whether he had any knowledge of letters containing "threats and prophecies," that had been posted around the city, Ribera claimed total ignorance.²⁹ He may have been telling the truth. However, given the public notoriety of

Ortiz's visions, it is more likely that Ribera, perhaps on friendly commercial or personal terms with Ortiz and Mercado, denied knowledge of the letters in order to protect one or both women from the Inquisition's inquiries.

In contravention of conventional orthodoxy, Ortiz's crucifixion vision, as well as others she experienced, expressed her faith that people of a variety of racial and social positions within the colony could, legitimately, rise to positions of great power within God's sacred sphere. Perhaps it was because of interactions and relationships established with such figures as Isabel Eusebia Mercado and Domingo Antonio de Ribera this Ortiz managed to formulate alternative visions of blacks from the models she was exposed to in the sacred art she observed.

There are some indications that Ortiz might herself have had African origins. She identified herself to the court as a *mestiza*, but other witnesses suggested she was a *mulata*. Isabel Eusebia Mercado described Ortiz as "a single woman, somewhat black," and one of Ortiz's former confessors classified her as "*mestiza* or *mulata*."³⁰ She revealed the possibility of her own awareness of her own African identity in another set of visions she experienced involving the perception of blackness. She explained to the court at one point in her trial that for a period of several years, she had been unable to eat any food because of a series of visions she had seen. Just at the moment of consumption, Ortiz suddenly perceived that whatever food was on her plate was transformed into clusters of wriggling ants, worms, and other insects. Needless to say, she then lost all desire to eat.

The inability to consume food, described in Ortiz's trial as a type of a divinely induced fast, was not an unusual means for mystical women to demonstrate their sanctity and express their love of God.³¹ The unusual aspect of Ortiz's experience, however, lay in the alterations that her own body underwent simultaneous to the changes that occurred to her food. For while

the food on her plate turned into clumps of unappetizing bugs, Ortiz herself was also transformed into a black woman. Ortiz stated that while she sat at table, she watched the skin on her hands turn black, and although she could not see her face in a mirror, when she touched her hair, she felt that it had become curly "just like black woman's."³²

Ortiz informed her confessor about this set of visions, and he told her that she was not black, and "that it appeared to him that what she had experienced was the temptation of the devil."³³ A short while later, however, God sent a message to Ortiz explaining the experiences to her. God had told her, "my daughter, during all this time that you suffered in not eating because of those little bugs and became a black woman, I permitted it, that the devil should visit these harms upon you, for my greater honor and for the betterment of your soul."³⁴ With the help of divine – and demonic – intervention, Ortiz was transformed into a black woman. Her transformation was associated with physical suffering because she was unable to consume food while she was black, but her status as a black person was ultimately redemptive. God revealed that he had allowed her to become black for his own glory, and in order to assist her on her journey to religious purification.

Ortiz's vision may have served as a vehicle that allowed her to criticize the status of blacks in her historical context. In her vision, blackness carried with it the negative connotations of suffering and punishment, but the meaning of these attributes is complicated. In *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Caroline Walker Bynum astutely challenges previous interpretations of medieval religious women's engagement in extreme penitence as evidence of their assumption of a misogynist and dualist perception of female carnality.³⁵ Bynum argues that their asceticism and practice of *Imitatio Christi* illustrate the positive understanding women could have of their own bodies and the powers associated with them.

Such women, she demonstrates, did not understand their bodies only as the sin-filled components of their lower natures, but as the means through which they could follow Christ's divine example. Getrudis Rosa Ortiz similarly implies in her vision that her transformation into a black woman was a necessary step in the eventual salvation of her soul.

Ortiz experienced a number of other visions in which she expressed criticisms of colonial Mexico's racial hierarchy or suggested alternative perceptions of blackness. Several days into her trial's proceedings, Ortiz testified that on one occasion, when journeying to the church of Santa Catalina to pray, she had seen an apparition of,

a dead horse. which many dogs were ripping at with great rage, and having arrived at the church the vision continued while she was in prayer, and when she went to take communion, the Lord said to her in the accustomed way already referred to that the dead horse was the soul of a *mulata* slave owned by doña Mariana Terán, a widow, now dead, in whose house she had entered with familiarity, and that doña Mariana had already punished the said *mulata* and had sent her to a workshop with prisoners, to punish her more, and that the slave was saying many oaths, but had not yet reneged on God although she was very close to doing so, and to becoming desperate, and hanging herself, and that if she died, the devils would take her away and treat her like the dogs treated the horse.³⁶

The vision so horrified Ortiz that she attempted to convince Terán to release her slave. She refused, and Ortiz continued to experience the vision. Ortiz's confessor eventually advised her to tell another priest, don Hipólito de Acosta, about the vision. Ortiz traveled to Acosta's church of La Misericordia and described the apparition to him while in confession. Acosta,

accepting the veracity of Ortiz's vision, instructed Terán to release the *mulata*, which she reluctantly did.

In her religious experiences, Ortiz pictured blacks as potential Christians, virtuous redeemers, and people mistreated by other members of colonial society. Contemporary sacred sources did not assign them any of these roles. Ortiz drew from the knowledge she had acquired in her daily interactions with blacks and people of other ethnicities in order to modify their virtual exclusion from institutionally generated representations of Christian virtue. In at least one instance, she was also able to use the mystical legitimacy many powerful members of colonial society accorded her to address the abusive treatment to which blacks in colonial Mexican society were often subject.

Marian Visions

Christ frequently featured in the visions of Getrudis Rosa Ortiz and those of other Mexican *alumbrados* and *ilusos*. However, the most prominent figure who appeared to them was the Virgin Mary.³⁷ Mexican mystics' perceptions of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth reflected many elements of conventional artistic representations, but also diverged from these depictions in significant ways. They often incorporated their own experiences of sexuality, motherhood and child-bearing into their Marian visions and thus produced a variety of alternative representations of the Mother of Christ.

Getrudis Rosa Ortiz's visions of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth contained many such divergences. In her appearance to the Inquisition on April 28, 1723, Ortiz described one of her ecstatic fits during which she saw the Virgin Mary holding a child to her breast. Later, God relayed the vision's significance to Ortiz, telling her,

that it was the Virgin Mary in the vision, and that she was her [Ortiz's] true Mother, who had looked after her ever since she was born, and that it had cost her a lot of work, and that her true father was her holy Son, who she was holding in her arms, and that she had been predestined to be a saint, and that for this reason, she would be loved and served for her entire life.³⁸

Ortiz informed her inquisitors that the physical difficulties her natural mother had undergone in giving birth to her substantiated the revelation's declaration that the Virgin's participation in her birth had "cost her a lot of work." When Ortiz first emerged from her mother's uterus, those assisting in the birth believed her dead, but miraculously they succeeded in reviving her shortly thereafter. Ortiz's graphic description of the labor pains and difficulties of birth that her own mother endured (and symbolically the Virgin as well) was a subject studiously ignored in conventional depictions of the nativity.

Ortiz's vision contains several other adjustments to orthodox representations of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth. First, the Virgin Mary revealed in this vision that Ortiz was her daughter. In Ortiz's vision, the child of Mary, savior to the world, was a female *mestiza* born in Mexico. Second, Mary informed Ortiz of her celestial lineage while holding the infant Christ in her arms. This suggests that rather than replacing Christ, Ortiz saw herself destined to be his holy sibling. A Mary who mothered multiple children signifies more humanity and worldliness than does the conventional figure of Mary, virginal mother to Christ alone.

Other *ilusas* saw similar apparitions of Mary. María Cayetana Loria, a late eighteenth-century *mulata*, told the court, for example, about a series of visions she had seen of an exquisitely attired woman, whom two or three beautiful young girls

attended. In one vision, when Cayetana saw the woman holding a baby boy, she asked her: "Is this child your son?" And she responded, 'Yes my daughter, he is mine. He is the younger brother of the Priest [a figure representing Jesus Christ whom Cayetana repeatedly saw.]"³⁹ Cayetana's inquisitors classified as heretical her notion that the Virgin Mary could have borne more than one child. In their long list of accusations against her, they condemned the many errors her visions contained. At the forefront of these was Cayetana's challenge to the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity contained in her assertion that "after Jesus Christ, she had had other children."⁴⁰

Besides implying that Mary had mothered more than one child, Getrudis Rosa Ortiz's vision of the Incarnation and Virgin Birth articulated other theologically controversial ideas. Ortiz learned from her apparition not only that Mary was Ortiz's true mother, but also that the infant Jesus Christ whom she held in her arms was Ortiz's father. Neither the awkward temporal logistics such a mating presented nor its incestuous element seem to have troubled Ortiz when she formulated her divine parentage in Christ and Mary.⁴¹ Another remarkable element of Ortiz's vision concerns her reformulation of Mary's role in her miraculous conception. In Ortiz's vision, Mary, rather than the Holy Spirit, was the active agent of conception. In her vision, Christ conferred paternity to Ortiz, but Christ was only a passive child to whom Mary had already given birth.

A number of other Mexican mystics had similarly heterodox visions of the Incarnation. Agustina Rangel, a late seventeenth-century *mestiza ilusa* saw a series of such unconventional apparitions. Juana de Abalos, Rangel's *mulata* sister-in-law, provided one description of Rangel's unusual vision of this miracle to the court. She testified that Rangel had once told her about a vision she had seen after experiencing acute pains in her stomach. Rangel's sister, a *curandera*, (healer) had cured her

with the assistance of an herb she referred to as "*la Rosa de Santa Rosa*" (but which the court identified as *peyote*, a substance the Inquisition had banned.) While she was healing, Rangel had witnessed an apparition in which

the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared to her and pressed on her with her hands and opened up her chest and saw everything in her belly from the inside out and saw that she was pregnant with a girl ... and said that they would have to give her the name Rosa, and said that she would have to die...in a very few days, and that having taken the *rosa*, Our Lady appeared for more than an hour on top of the said Agustina sweating, and that the Virgin said to her that she had to cure all the sick people and that her Majesty would tell her how.⁴²

Another witness, Petrona Castra Valla, a Spanish woman whose brother Rangel had also nursed, provided a similar account of this vision. She testified that Rangel had once told her that, "judging herself to be pregnant with the baby of another man, not her husband, she had taken a drink so as to abort herself."⁴³ After attempting abortion, Santa Rosa had appeared to Rangel, and addressed her in great anger, asking her why she suspected that, "it was of another and not of your husband which you have in your belly." Saint Rose (presumably the recently canonized Rose of Lima) then told her, "to look inside her own body and then Agustina could see everything inside herself and she saw that inside her own stomach that the girl she had was of her husband, and then Saint Rose said you see how she is of your husband? She is also mine, and she must be called Rosa, and she will be born soon, but will live only for a short time because she is mine and I have only lent her to you."⁴⁴

Rangel's vision deviated alarmingly from orthodoxy. In both testimonies, witnesses suggested that Rangel had been

pregnant at the time she had seen the apparition. They described her anxiety over the child's paternity and told of her wish to abort the baby. In the midst of such speculation, either the Virgin Mary or Saint Rose appeared to Rangel and announced that her child was a prodigious girl who would only live a short time before ascending to heaven. The first version of the episode linked Rangel's conception and loss of the child to Mary's endorsement of her work as a *curandera*.

As in Ortiz's vision of the Incarnation, in Rangel's apparition, the supernatural child about to be born was female, and the active agent in her conception – the force responsible for conferring miraculous qualities upon her – was the child's mother. In Rangel's vision, Saint Rose's revelation that the child was the product of her union with Rangel's husband both dispelled Rangel's anxiety over the child's paternity and effectively relieved Rangel of maternal responsibilities for the child.

A great many other *ilusas* also experienced alternative visions of miracles surrounding miraculous conceptions and births. The late eighteenth-century Clarisa nun, Sor Ana María La Cal, for example, saw visions in which the Virgin Mary helped her procure an abortion. In the fall of 1788, when fray Joseph Castro appeared before the Inquisition to denounce Sor Ana María, he recalled how she had sometimes "executed lewd acts in front of others, speaking with the devil, as if she was sinning with him."⁴⁵ The convent's Mother Abbess swore that Sor Ana María had told another nun that she was pregnant and that the child inside her stomach would be called Juan, and that "he was destined to be another Baptist and another Messiah that would save the whole world."⁴⁶ Despite her impregnation with this miraculous progeny, however, Sor Ana María, like Agustina Rangel, desired to abort her child. Fray Castro told the court that he had heard Sor Ana María claim in public that "although I have been left pregnant, Holy Mary will save me,"⁴⁷ implying

that the Virgin Mary would assist her in dealing with the problematic progeny from which this coupling had resulted. He also declared that it was known throughout the convent that Sor Ana María had procured an abortion. Several other witnesses confirmed his testimony.

The Sacred and the Secular

Why and how did women like Getrudis Rosa Ortiz, Agustina Rangel, Sor Ana María La Cal, and many others, construct such alterations in their visions of the central mysteries of the Catholic faith, scenes that they repeatedly saw depicted in sacred art everywhere around them?⁴⁸ One quality that many of the women whom the court prosecuted for false mysticism shared was an uncommonly strong faith in the righteousness and validity of their own lives and experiences of the world. Sacred sources attempted to indoctrinate women with the idea that their worth could be measured by their ability to imitate the example of the Virgin Mary: they were to reproduce offspring while virtuously preserving their chastity, if not their virginity. Spanish Christian society taught disdain for women, particularly those of Spanish descent, who thwarted one or both of these prerequisites for female virtue.

In Latin America, the stigma of illegitimacy dated back to the establishment of the colonies when Spaniards refused to recognize the inheritance rights of their offspring who often the product of extra-marital unions with indigenous women. In its earliest usage in colonial Spanish America, the term *mestizo* actually connoted "bastard."⁴⁹ As the colonies matured and as *mestizaje* increased, Spanish women in particular experienced the pressure of maintaining sexual virtue and diminishing the phenomena of inter-racial mixing.

The documentation generated at the occasion of the late-eighteenth-century foundation of the clinic for *Partos Reser-*

vados (Confidential Births), one branch of the Mexico City Poor House, illustrates contemporary attitudes toward women who had failed to maintain their virtue.⁵⁰ This institution, as its founders perceived, would address, “the fear, shame, and desperation that seizes the hearts of fragile, fickle women after having blemished their own reputations and the honor of their marriages and families with their sexual excesses.”⁵¹ The proposed establishment would provide these women with a safe and discreet location in which to give birth to their unwanted children. Only Spanish women, whose family’s honor most imperatively required preservation, could access its services.

Colonial society may have proclaimed the worthlessness, fragility, and fickleness of women who had tainted their sexual virtue, yet Mexican visionaries constantly absorbed contradictory information about real women’s practices of virtue. Likely, they would have observed widespread engagement in adultery and been aware of the high rates of illegitimacy that characterized all levels of this devoutly Catholic colonial society.⁵² No doubt, they would have exchanged news with their peers and family members about upper class women – their employers, patrons, and patients – who managed to preserve their reputations for chastity even while engaging in unsanctioned sexual activities. Many of them would have known of women who, for a variety of reasons, avoided becoming mothers through abortion.

The secrecy enshrouding abortion makes it difficult to trace the procedure’s frequency in the colonial period with accuracy. However, women throughout the Catholic world practiced abortion frequently enough to elicit a papal prohibition, reproduced in Mexico in 1684, against the procedure. Moreover, supporters backed the establishment of the “Partos Reservados” clinic in Mexico because they claimed Spanish women commonly procured abortions or practiced infanticide in order to

avoid public disclosure of their unwanted children.⁵³ *Ilusos* and *alumbrados* also discussed abortions in their Inquisition trials. The parents of María Marta de la Encarnación, an early eighteenth-century *beata ilusa* whose sexual virtue the court suspected, apparently assisted their daughter in aborting a child. When he appeared before the court, Marta's father, Simón Avila, testified that on one occasion, several years earlier, he had noticed that his daughter's menstrual cycle had stopped. His wife confirmed the observation and added that she had noticed that their daughter's belly had started to rise.⁵⁴ Avila mentioned the matter to his mother-in-law who apparently took the appropriate measures, for one week later, his wife informed him (either employing a euphemism or describing a most indirect method indeed) that "in only bleeding her ankle they had gotten rid of Marta's belly."⁵⁵ One of Marta's acquaintances, Bartholomé Luis, also informed the court that the *beata* had admitted to him that she had had an abortion, perhaps referring to a separate instance from the episode her father had described. Luis testified that María had told him that a *mulato*, the son of a biscuit maker, had violated her virginity. Once realizing she was pregnant, and "when God was not watching, she took something to abort the child."⁵⁶

Sometimes Mexican visionaries' religious activities were directly linked to abortions that they had received or performed. Juana de Abalos, one of the witnesses in Agustina Rangel's trial, testified that she had watched this *curandera ilusa* perform cures on various women. Rangel had once even attempted to cure the witness herself. Rangel began by administering some of the "Rosa de Santa Rosa" to her in powdered form.⁵⁷ She then had begun revolving around Abalos, gesturing vigorously with her arms, but the cure did not appear to be taking effect, so Rangel approached her, shouting loudly, "while throwing herself against the ground with powerful and repeated blows, as one would use

to kill a chicken. It shocked the declarant to see Agustina beating herself all over the room in this way with these great blows since she was pregnant at the time."⁵⁸

Rangel then began to butt Abalos in the chest with her head until she fell down backward, at which point, Rangel "grabbing her tightly by the clothes and with great violence started hitting her belly (since that was what had been hurting her) with a closed fist." Although the first blows had hurt her a great deal, Abalos said she had not felt the subsequent ones at all.⁵⁹ The *curandera* continued pressing Abalos' stomach with her head and made many gestures over her body, from the bottom to the top. On another occasion, de Abalos testified that Rangel had given a similar cure to Ynes de Bustos, a Spanish woman, first giving her the Rosa de Santa Rosa and then punching her repeatedly in the stomach.⁶⁰

It would have been difficult for women who wished to emulate the examples of revered Christian mystics to avoid imbibing the Church's position on female sexual virtue, its prohibitions against both abortion and illegitimate births, and its reverence for the figure of a Virgin Mother, conceived Immaculately. The personal experiences of Mexican visionaries, many of whom considered themselves legitimate candidates for the receipt of God's mystical gifts, however, belied the possibility of embodying the Church's standard for female sexual virtue. Perhaps just as Getrudis Rosa Ortiz had used her experienced knowledge to transform her understanding of the qualities associated with blacks and blackness, these visionaries rendered the significance of the Virgin Mary more compatible to the knowledge they possessed of women's lives. Perhaps because they refused to discount the validity of their own experiences, they felt justified in modifying the impossible example the Virgin Mary had created for them, rendering her story more consistent with their own. Their experiences of sexuality, birth, and motherhood forced

them to reshape conventional formulations of dogma. This allowed them, in the face of contradictory evidence, to maintain their own embodiment of Christian virtue, either in their own eyes, or in those of their supporters.

Conclusion

The visions of Getrudis Rosa Ortiz and those of many of other Mexican *ilusos* and *alumbrados* transcended conventional mystical experiences. Many of the accused believed themselves to be bona fide mystics and all of them wished their communities and the clerical authorities they encountered to see them as proponents of spiritual orthodoxy. Perhaps for these reasons, their visions did conform, in some respects, to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century artistic representations of the miracles of the Eucharist, Incarnation, and Virgin Birth with which they were intimately familiar. Their visions, however, also contained many elements that deviated widely from orthodox norms.

Getrudis Rosa Ortiz transformed the connotations of blackness in several of other visions. She and several other Mexican visionaries drew on their experiences of family life, motherhood, and sexuality to modify institutional representations of the Virgin Mary. They incorporated their own experiences into these canonical stories and refashioned both elements of orthodox doctrine and attributes associated with the central figures of the Catholic faith.

Mexican visionaries were people who claimed to have experienced the highest levels of God's divine affections, but there were also people who lived within the corporality of colonial Mexican cities. Many of them were poor women who daily observed concrete expressions of New Spain's racial, economic, and gendered social hierarchies. They were also women who worked, sustained friendships, and (sometimes outside the

sanctity of marriage) had sexual relations, and gave birth to children. The "deviant" elements contained in their visions reflected such experiences, all of which conventional representations of important religious events and figures omitted. In their visions, *ilusos* and *alumbrados* reconciled the inconsistencies they perceived between the canonical norms they had learned and the divergent social, economic and political experiences they had endured in their own lives. From the point of view of the Holy Office, the most damning aspect of these visionaries' mystical expressions was their presumptuous lack of perception that such inclusions were heretical. In performing such fusions, *ilusos* like Getrudis Rosa Ortiz claimed that, "God gave her to understand *that which she knew of on her own*."⁶¹ They attributed themselves with the powers of regulating spiritual orthodoxy which the court dismissed as nothing more than their "own discourse...conjectures and imagination."⁶²

Notes

1. Mexico City, Archivo General de la Nación, (Hereafter AGN) Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, f. 31.

2. For further discussions of the prosecution of false mystics in colonial Mexico, see Jean Franco, "The Power of the Spider Woman: The Deluded Woman and the Inquisition," in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-22; Jacqueline Holler, "'More Sins than the Queen of England': Marina de San Miguel before the Mexican Inquisition," in ed. Mary E. Giles, *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 209-228; Solange Alberro, "La licencia vestida de santidad: Teresa de Jesús, falsa beata del siglo XVII," in ed. Sergio Ortega, *De*

la santidad a la perversión, o de porqué no se cumplía la ley de Dios en la sociedad novohispana (México: Grialbo, 1985), 219-237; and Nora E. Jaffary, "Virtue and Transgression: The Certification of Authentic Mysticism in the Mexican Inquisition," *Catholic Southwest: A Journal of History and Culture* 10 (1999): 9-28 ; and *Deviant Orthodoxy: A History of 'False' Mysticism in Colonial Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Forthcoming.) For a transcription of one set of the visions of a mid-seventeenth-century *beata*, see Antonio Rubial García, "Josefa de San Luis Beltrán, la cordera de Dios: Escritura, oralidad y gestualidad de una visionaria del siglo XVII Novohispano (1654)," in eds. Asunción Lavrin and Rosalva Loreto L., *Monjas y beatas: La escritura femenina en la espiritualidad barroca novohispana siglos xvii y xviii* (México: Universidad de las Américas, Archivo General de la Nación, 2002), 161-204.

3. In our own times, it has become tantamount to blasphemy to refer to the Guadalupe image as a "painting," but in this is what it was called in the colonial period when artist Miguel Cabrera and subsequent appraisers verified that the piece had not been formed by human hands. Huntington Library, San Marino. Collection Mexico (Viceroyalty) 1739 52497 3 Vols. Ser. 2. Vol. 1. "Oración á Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Compuesta por el Illmo Señor d. Francisco Antonio de Lorenzana." For recent discussions of the Guadalupe cult, see Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe 1531-1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995) and D.A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe. Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

4. Alfonso Rodríguez G. de Ceballos, "Uso y funciones de la imagen religiosa en los virreinos americanos," in eds. Joaquín Bérchez and Luis Elena Alcalá, *Los Siglos de Oro en los Virreinos de América 1550-1700*, (Madrid: Sociedad Para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000) 89.

5. *Ibid.*, 90. For a discussion of the role of religious art in the spiritual ideology of elite lay people, see Rosalva Loreto López, "Familial

Religiosity and Images in the Home: Eighteenth-Century Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico," *Journal of Family History* 22:1 (January 1997): 26-49 and "The Devil, Women, and the Body in Seventeenth-Century Puebla Convents," *The Americas* 59:2 (2002), 181-199.

6. Gilles Chazal, "Arte y Mística del Barroco," in Colegio de San Ildefonso, *Arte y mística del barroco* (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 23-24; Rodríguez G. de Ceballos, "Uso y funciones," 103; *Concilios Provinciales Primero y Segundo*, (México, 1769) Capitulo XXXIV, p. 91.

7. *Concilios Provinciales Primero y Segundo*, Capitulo XXXIV, p. 91.

8. For discussions of baroque painting's influences on mysticism, see Colegio de San Ildefonso, *Arte y mística del barroco*.

9. AGN, Inq., t. 748. exp., 1, f. 89v. Mary is often pictured in these colors in colonial art. See figure 2.

10. Elisa Vargaslugo, "La mística en la vida de María," in *Arte y mística del barroco*, 84.

11. AGN, Inq., t. 748, exp., 1, f. 89v. Other explicit references to visual representations' influences on *alumbrado* visions are documented in the trials of Getrudis Rosa Ortiz, AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, fs. 45v, 79, 95v and Salvador de Victoria, AGN, Inq., t. 445, exp. 1, fs. 172-3.

12. For general treatments of colonial Mexican art, see Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, *México Barroco* (México: SAHOP, 1981); Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en México* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990); Elizabeth Wilder Weisman, *Art and Times in Colonial Mexico: From the Conquest to the Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); and Francisco de la Maza, *Los retablos dorados de Nueva España* (México: Ediciones Mexicanas, 1950).

13. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, f. 31v-32.

14. *Ibid.*, f. 32.

15. *Ibid.*, f. 69.

16. *Ibid.*, f. 12v.

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17. Regarding their circulation, see Josefa Muriel, *Las Mujeres de Hispanoamérica - Epoca Colonial* (Madrid: Editorial Mapfre, 1992), 315. For an analysis of Maria Agreda's texts, see Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor Maria de Agreda: Writing, Knowledge and Power* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1994).
18. Eighteenth-century *ilusas* Maria Rita Vargas and Josefa Palacios both declared they had read Agreda's writings, and they were likely not the only mystics tried familiar with it. Edelmira Ramirez Leyva, *Maria Rita Vargas, Maria Lucia Celis: Beatas embaucadoras de la colonia* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), 108; AGN, Inq., t. 1291, exp. 1 f. 43.
19. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, f. 20v.
20. *Ibid.*, fs. 22-25.
21. *Ibid.*, f. 79.
22. See William Taylor, "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain," and Luisa Elena Alcalá, "Imagen e historia. La representación del milagro en la pintura colonial," in *Los Siglos de Oro en los Virreinos de América 1550-1700*, 108.
23. See Figure 1.
24. The painting now hangs in the Catedral de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Tlaxcala, Mexico. For a reproduction, see *Los Siglos de Oro en los Virreinos de América 1550-1700*, 185.
25. Juan Rodríguez Juárez's (1675-1728) *San Francisco Javier Bendiciendo Nativos*. (Franz Meyer Museum, Mexico City) represents a black man in this way.
26. For an excellent treatment of the development of *casta* paintings in colonial Latin America, see Ilona Katzew, *New World Orders -- Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America*, (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery 1996).
27. See Lopez, "The Devil, Women, and the Body," 188. An example of an "orthodox" mystical vision (experienced by Sebastiana Josefa de la Santisima Trinidad) which associated demonic forces with darkness is reproduced in Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela, *Colonial Angels*:

Narratives of Gender and Spirituality in Mexico, 1580-1750 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 111.

28. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, f. 3.

29. *Ibid.*, f. 10v.

30. *Ibid.*, fs. 12, 225v.

31. See Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1982), and Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

32. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1 f. 34.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, fs. 34-34v.

35. Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, 218, 257.

36. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1 fs. 41v-42. Black slaves often threatened to renege on God, as Joan Bristol argues, in order to bring the abusive behavior of their masters to the attention of the Inquisition. Joan Cameron Bristol, "Negotiating Authority in New Spain: Blacks, Mulattos, and Religious Practice in the Seventeenth Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001). See also Javier Villa-Flores, "'To Lose One's Soul': Blasphemy and Slavery in New Spain, 1596-1669," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82:3 (2002), 435-468.

37. This is hardly surprising given the importance of miraculous Marian images in Mexico's religious history. See discussions of her role in William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 277-300.

38. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, fs. 48v-49.

39. AGN, Inq., t. 1173, exp. 1, f. 28.

40. AGN, Inq., t. 1258, exp. 19, f. 214v.

41. The suggestion of a coupling between Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary does belong to a tradition within ecclesiastically endorsed iconography. See Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 121-133.

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42. AGN, Inq., t. 522, exp. 2, f. 112.
43. Ibid., f. 104.
44. Ibid.
45. AGN, Inq., t. 1246, exp. 5, f. 124.
46. Ibid., f. 155v.
47. Ibid., f. 130.
48. Unorthodox discussions of the Virgin Birth are also found in the trials of Barbara de Echagaray, AGN, Inq., t. 1251, exp. 1, f. 5; Mariana de San Miguel, AGN, Inq., t. 210, exp. 3, f. 310; Ana de Aramburu, Bravo, *Ana Rodríguez de Castro y Aramburu, ilusa, afectadora de santos, falsos milagros, y revelaciones divinas. Proceso inquisitoria en la Nueva España (Siglos XVIII y XIX)* (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1984), 94; and María Manuela Picazo, AGN, Inq., t. 748, exp. 1, f. 276.
49. Kathryn Burns, *Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 21.
50. The *Partos Reservados* component of the Poor House, originally founded in 1763, was created in 1774. See Samuel Karchmer Krivitsky, "La ginecología y la obstetrica," in eds. Hugo Aréchiga and Juan Somolinos Palencia *Contribuciones Mexicanas al Conocimiento Médico* (México: Secretaria de Salud, 1993), 282.
51. AGN, Bandos, t. 24, exp. 55, f. 143.
52. On the practice of illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America, see Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Asunción Lavrin, "Sexuality in Colonial Mexico: A Church Dilemma," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 47-92.
53. Proposition thirty-four of sixty-five statements that Pope Innocent XI prohibited was, "that it was licit to procure an abortion of the animation of the fetus." *Explicación de las sesenta y cinco proposiciones...por la Santidad de N.M.S.P. Inocencio XI...* (Puebla, 1684), 37; AGN, Bandos t. 24, exp. 55, f. 143.
54. AGN, Inq., t. 788, exp. 24, f. 405v.

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55. Ibid., f. 406.
56. Ibid., f. 503v.
57. AGN, Inq., t. 522, exp. 2, f. 114v.
58. Ibid., f. 114v.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., f. 116v.
61. AGN, Inq., t. 805, exp. 1, f. 17.
62. Ibid.