

2. From Women's Missions to Women's Convents 1528-1547

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Early in the seventeenth century, the Spanish nun Sor María de Ágreda reported a remarkable episode of bilocation. While ostensibly enclosed in her convent, Sor María had crossed the Atlantic, appearing to and converting large groups of indigenous people in New Mexico. ¹ Indeed, by 1600 divine intervention was virtually the only means by which women could participate in the official missionary effort. But only seventy years earlier, missionary women had been an integral part of the plan to Christianize the natives of New Spain. Such women participated in evangelization as teachers in *colegios de niñas indias*, residential institutions that attempted to replicate the structure and way of life of women's convents. In these institutions, indigenous girls were linked with Spanish women in a kind of apprenticeship in Christian womanhood. This experiment lasted only fifteen years, and the period of its full vigor can be reckoned as just one decade, from 1530 to 1540.

The women who brought Christian training to native girls were, strictly speaking, laywomen ² who participated in a missionary enterprise. Only one of these women apparently became a nun. ³ The uncloistered communities established by the beatas were not converted into regular convents, as commonly occurred in Europe. Because of this, their activities have come to be seen as separate from the subsequent development of convents for women. Their mission, by this reckoning, was a part of the evangelical effort, while the later foundation of convents was a flowering of already-established Christian religiosity. ⁴ Yet at the same time, the first convent in Mexico City (and in the New World) is presumed to have had its origins in the outcome of the beatas' missionary experiment. ⁵ Mexico's first bishop, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, is referred to as the founder of that convent, and sought its foundation as a means to improve the instruction of indigenous girls. Paradoxically, however, the cloister Zumárraga envisioned never achieved this objective. The reason for this paradox lies in the nature of colonial society.

This chapter argues that the missionary effort of semi-religious and lay women was problematic from its inception. First, the beatas, whose role it was to Christianize the indigenous girls of Mexico City, were inherently troublesome. By the late 1530s, they were viewed by the ecclesiastical establishment - and by Bishop Zumárraga in particular - with suspicion. As we shall see, he and New Spain's other bishops came to believe that true convents staffed by professed and enclosed nuns were the solution to the problem presented by the beatas.

Moreover, the project of educating native girls seems not to have attracted the full support of the local Spanish population. In the late 1530s, the urban

elite as represented by Mexico City's *cabildo* (city council) was concerned less about these girls than about its own daughters and the social and symbolic needs of the Hispanizing city. "Indians" were the object of fear rather than protective care. Settler aspirations would be fulfilled only by the establishment of a convent along peninsular lines: cloistered, elite, and contemplative. Thus both the secular elite and the episcopacy came to see the establishment of convents of cloistered, regular nuns as an appropriate goal, but each had a different idea of what such convents would mean. The establishment of La Concepción, so often imputed to Zumárraga, appears less as the fulfillment of his dreams than as the triumph of settler goals over those of the missionary effort.

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By 1545, native girls and women were to be "guided" not by the active teaching of Spanish semi-religious women but by the rarefied example of professed and cloistered nuns. In this sense, María de Ágreda's appearance can be read not only as a throwback to an earlier, more active phase of female evangelism, but also as an emblem of what was by her day the role of the religious woman: the cloistered but symbolically potent image of Marian purity and of Spain's "providential transatlantic mission."⁶ The establishment of the convent of La Concepción in 1541 represented not the extension of the missionary effort but a rapprochement with a city that sought nuns for its own ends.

Background to the Colegios de Niñas Indias

Indigenous girls became a target of evangelization as part of the continuing development of the missionary enterprise, whose first pedagogical successes came in the instruction of boys. Women missionaries thus came to New Spain to participate in a mission that had been defined well before their arrival. The conversion of children was already a hallmark of the mission to Indians long before the conquest of Mexico. The instructions given in 1503 to Nicolás de Ovando, first governor of the Indies, ordered that each town, beside its church, should erect a house in which friars could gather boys for daily training in literacy and doctrine.⁷ This command was reiterated in the Laws of Burgos (1512). While this project may not have come to full fruition, native boys did live as *internados* in the Caribbean convents of the evangelist friars.⁸ An emphasis upon the education of children was thus inherited from the missionary effort in the Antilles. Even before contact with the mainland of New Spain, the Spanish had established a mode of acculturation that emphasized education, particularly of children, under church auspices.⁹

As is well known, the missionary effort enjoyed its most dramatic successes and fullest development in New Spain. With the arrival of Fray Pedro de Gante and his two Flemish Franciscan companions in 1523, the evangelical project was transferred to the American mainland. Though the *flamenco* mission was individual rather than institutional, it emphasized the pattern already established in the Antilles. Gante and his companions settled in Texcoco, where they studied Nahuatl and taught the sons of nobles. Thus

was founded the colegio of Texcoco, which Gante directed for three and a half years. ¹⁰
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Mexico City became the focal point of Spanish American missionary activity as soon as the first official Franciscan mission - the famous *Doce* or Twelve - arrived there in 1524. Their arrival brought the number of Franciscans in New Spain to seventeen, and an intense conversion effort began. Again, schooling was emphasized. Hernán Cortés, in his Ordinances of 20 March 1524, ordered that sons of indigenous *principales* be turned over to the monasteries for teaching. ¹² Five friars, including Fray Martín de Valencia, the custodian, remained in Mexico City, while Texcoco, Tlaxcala, and Huejotzingo received four friars each. In each city, buildings were constructed in which boys could be gathered for education and residency. Between 600 and 1000 students were gathered in each school. ¹³ In 1526, Pedro de Gante moved to the capital and began to teach at San José de los Naturales, the school annexed to the newly built convent of San Francisco de México. ¹⁴

The Dominicans and Augustinians would also take to the project of education, particularly to primary and vocational training, respectively. The Franciscans, however, addressed themselves most comprehensively to the project, offering elementary instruction as well as opening the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, the well-known school of higher education for *naturales*. Schools thus became, and would remain, the Franciscans' primary mode of evangelization throughout the Indies. ¹⁵ The friars' principal effort was thus aimed at the conversion of young people who, when grown and married, would form the basis of a new Indian Catholicism. ¹⁶

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The effort began with the boys, who were divided into two groups according to the social status of their families. Lower-class boys were brought to the churches every day by old men who served as chaperones. There the boys learned the catechism. ¹⁷ Sons of the indigenous aristocracy boarded in the convents, and were taught the catechism, reading, writing, silent prayer, discipline, and music. They also assisted at Mass and, in general, lived a quasi-monastic life. ¹⁸ Students thus received training in both doctrine and *policía*, or general conduct.

Girls were targeted by the friars as well. Native women, of course, had the distinction - dubious or otherwise - of being the earliest converts to Christianity; the mistresses given to the Cortés expedition were baptized before their distribution to the conquerors. The first twenty-five people baptized by the Cortés expedition were women "converted" in this manner. ¹⁹ Similarly, the Franciscan mission would

attend to the *sexo débil*. There may have been friars who complained, as did Fray Francisco de Mayorga in 1533, that with native men working, only women and children remained to be converted. [20](#) But most friars knew that children were the most fertile medium for the germination of Christianity. And they knew as well, as Fray Jerónimo de Mendieta explained, that no conversion could be complete or perfect if it neglected the female half of the population. [21](#) Therefore, girls were assembled for instruction in the patios of the churches, where they were taught by friars, boy catechists, or even other more advanced girl pupils. [22](#) Pedro de Gante was again at the forefront of this effort, collecting some 700 girls for education as early as 1526. [23](#)

Not surprisingly, chastity was the overwhelming theme of the mission to Indian women and girls. If sexual modesty was the sine qua non of European womanhood, [24](#) continence was also to be the hallmark of the Christianized *india*. This became increasingly important around 1530, as the friars recognized the obduracy of indigenous resistance to Spanish marital norms. As polygamy became an overriding concern of indoctrination, its eradication became the focus of the decade that followed. [25](#)

Women were to play an important role in the eradication of polygamy, as is suggested by the *ejemplos* [26](#) or "teaching plays" produced by the Franciscan missionaries. The first was staged in Tlatelolco as early as 1531. Its only human character is a woman called Lucía, whose falling "400 times" into sins of the flesh is presented as an unforgivable crime. [27](#) Another *Last Judgment* from around 1535 was staged with Zumárraga and the new viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, as special guests. [28](#) Again, polygamy was the theme. Yet, though friars tended to identify indigenous men as most resistant to monogamy, the play highlighted *women's* responsibility, as women who had sunk into carnal vices were dispatched to Hell. [29](#) The use of female characters for pedagogical purposes shows that native women converted to either chastity or monogamy were to be foot soldiers in the battle against indigenous tradition. Though the Franciscans placed by far the strongest emphasis on women's role, the Dominicans too recognized the importance of women in conversion. The first bishop of Tlaxcala wrote to Pope Paul III, telling him of various naturales converted to the faith. The only woman he mentioned was a baptized Christian who, upon finding that her new husband was unbaptized, denied him the conjugal debt until he relented and accepted baptism. [30](#) Thus missionaries of both orders recognized that women's sexual power could be harnessed for the good of the faith.

This recognition was highlighted in the education of native girls. Of course, girls, like boys, were first and foremost to be catechized. Writing in 1531 to the Franciscan General Chapter meeting held in Toulouse, Zumárraga

described the curriculum taught to girls and boys as essentially the same: "matters of Christian faith, and how one must behave in holy matrimony." ³¹ Preparation for Christian marriage was thus highlighted as an important aim of the instructive program for both sexes. Girls, however, faced an additional emphasis on sexual purity. Indeed, beleaguered chastity is the theme of Mendieta's stories about the girls educated at the colegios de niñas indias. ³²

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But this important schooling faced problems from its inception. Since the institution of schools attached to churches, girls had been taught about Christian conduct, including the need for continence. Such teaching, however, had two major problems. The first was enclosure. Even though native women were chosen to accompany the girls to and from their lessons, the conditions of their learning could not satisfy parents' protective zeal. On the other hand, many parents were not zealous in this regard enough to please Zumárraga, at least when the despoilers of their daughters were principales. The bishop complained that parents gave their daughters in tribute "like other things." ³³ Indeed, Zumárraga repeatedly decried the abuse of girls by caciques, who often operated with parental complicity. Thus he sought to intern girls between the ages of six or seven and twelve, ³⁴ when they would be married to boy graduates of the Franciscan education system and thus would become the mothers of a new Christian generation. Enclosure would protect girls from caciques and satisfy their parents' concerns until the girls could be safely married.

The establishment of enclosed institutions would also solve the second problem of church schools: that friars, boy catechists, and even Christianized Indian girls could not offer *example*, the Franciscan obsession. ³⁵ The Franciscans, of course, were concerned that their missionaries be the most exemplary possible; modeling was at least as important as preaching in their mode of conversion. ³⁶ As Zumárraga explained in 1537,

for pillars of a new church like this one it is necessary to seek the most honest and virtuous clerics who will be found [in Spain]; because in accordance with the circumstances that exist here, and the example that it is necessary to give to these new plants in the faith, other apostles had to be very far from greed and adorned with honesty. ³⁷

For the same reason, Mendieta would later urge Philip II to order that clerics be "exemplary and apostolic men." For the edification of the *naturales*, these exemplary men should be "more revered and respected than in Spain." ³⁸ (*más acatados y repetados [sic] que en España*) Example being thus a critical concern of the Franciscan evangelical effort, women teachers were needed, not because of their particular skill or

training, but to provide girls with an exemplum of Christian womanhood in this most decisive decade for its establishment. [39](#)

The power of Spanish women as exempla had two aspects, both of which were embraced not only by missionaries but also by the royal government. The negative aspect was expressed in rules such as the ordinance that prohibited the immigration of any "single woman who might appear to us to give a bad example." [40](#) (*muger soltera que nos parezca que traera mal enxemplo*) The positive aspect, as we shall see, saw exemplary women brought to New Spain. Secular persons also advocated the use of Spanish women as examples for girls. As early as 1525, the royal accountant Rodrigo de Albornoz suggested to the Crown that there should be a "monastery of women" in which the daughters of the native nobility would be raised "as do the beguines in Flanders." [41](#) From the late 1520s to the early 1540s, several such schools, staffed by exemplary women imported from the peninsula, attempted to convert the daughters of the indigenous elite to Christian living — and Spanish gender norms. Education of girls in church patios and other informal schools continued, of course, but the colegio de niñas, or residential girls' school, became the focus of Franciscan hopes.

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Unlike the rearing of boys in monasteries, the colegio de niñas indias was an autochthonic development. It had, to be sure, Mexica precedents. The first of these lay in childrearing practices. Friars repeatedly commented on Mexica parents' zeal in enclosing their daughters. Moreover, there was a pre-Columbian form of female monasticism, to which Mendieta and others made admiring reference. [42](#) Even some 150 years later, this Aztec antecedent exercised a certain pull on the Creole imagination of Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora; he would begin his *Parayso Occidental* not with the creation of Spanish convents in the New World but with these indigenous "nuns." [43](#) The Mexica inheritance, then, suggested parallels with Spanish views regarding the enclosure of women. The colegio de niñas was thus the perfect bridge between the two worlds, particularly because it would ostensibly be able to enlist the support (or at least tolerance) of the *república de indios*. This was critical not only because parents had to give up their daughters to the colegios, but because the institutions were to be financially supported by the Indian community. [44](#)

The colegio de niñas indias would remove girls from the ambit of native sexual norms that allowed parents to give girls in tribute to high-status individuals. At the same time, the colegio would satisfy Mexica parents' concern for their daughters' protection from partners not of their choosing. In the enclosed atmosphere of a quasi-monastic institution, indigenous girls would serve an apprenticeship in Christian womanhood that would ensure their development into the guarantors of familial Christianity. This ambitious plan to bring quasi-monastic living to native girls needed special personnel.

The Maestras and their Colegios [45](#)

The women chosen to staff the colegios, providing example and enclosure, were beatas rather than professed nuns. There are several probable reasons for the choice of beatas. First, the Franciscan province that *Los Doce* came from contained no Franciscan convents for women from which uncloistered Clares could possibly have been drawn. ⁴⁶ Moreover, nuns in Spain were generally property-owning, cloistered, and contemplative, hardly the female counterpart of the friars who, in addition to being active in the world, were obsessed with the importance of poverty in their mission to the Indians. In the 1520s, beatas were an appropriate choice as personnel for schools. Being a beata was an approved and admired mode of life, connoting not only sanctity but also service; some even felt that beatas were more worthy than nuns. ⁴⁷ To be sure, by the end of the fifteenth century there were already signs of a growing distrust of beatas, as some linked them to the "undeserving poor." ⁴⁸ This distrust would grow through the sixteenth century, particularly after the Council of Trent. But for now, the beata stood out as the most logical counterpart of the male missionary.

Beatas had become a fixture of European society in the Middle Ages, when women all over Europe became attracted to the religious life without necessarily having the opportunity or desire to enter regular orders. In many cases, particularly in the Low Countries, such women gathered together in a community and lived under a rule. Often, they made simple vows and elected one of their number superior. ⁴⁹ These women were known in Northern Europe as beguines. When Rodrigo de Albornoz spoke of creating a convent comparable to those of "the beguines in Flanders," he was thinking of such a model.

Though particularly strong in the Low Countries and in Italy, beguineism, or "semi-religion," was widespread. ⁵⁰ In Spain, the phenomenon varied greatly. Women who called themselves beatas generally wore habits, observed some kind of rule, and lived chastely. ⁵¹ Yet the formality of the beata's religious life varied. Some women were members of Third Orders and took formal, if simple, vows; others simply designated themselves beatas, usually by donning a habit. Any vows made by the latter were usually private. Beatas' living conditions varied as widely as their vows. A beata could live in retirement within her own home; she might live with others in a community, but without *clausura*; or she might live a virtually monastic life in a cloistered community. ⁵² Houses in which beatas lived in *clausura* were often referred to as *emparedimientos*, which appear to have been uncommon in New Spain. ⁵³ Uncloistered communities were known as *beaterios*. ⁵⁴ Such tidy nomenclature, however, should not obscure the ambiguous and fluid nature of the beata's life. The beata's freedom from such constraints as *clausura* made her an appropriate choice to teach Indian girls in a colonial setting. At the same time, however, her liberty would inevitably cause problems. ⁵⁵

Beatas were also a logical choice because they were associated with service as well as contemplation. Many women became beatas because they had no possibility of entering a convent, being of modest wealth and social status. Though such women often received alms and bequests, they generally had to labor in one or another way. Thus, from medieval times on, beatas and beguines were known for their work nursing and teaching girls, through which they were often expected to earn their living. ⁵⁶ Because of the emphasis on service inherent in semi-religious life and beatas' freedom from the impediment of *clausura*, the first *maestras* for indigenous girls were drawn from this group.

The first known *maestra* was Catalina de Bustamante, a third-order Franciscan beata and the best known of the sixteenth-century teachers. Her residential school for girls was established in Texcoco in 1527 or 1528. ⁵⁷ In 1529 Zumárraga wrote to the King that this "*encerramiento*" was under the guidance of "a matron, an honorable woman, of our nation and of good example." ⁵⁸ Bustamante had some 300 girls and women under her care "in a very principal house" partly funded by Hernán Cortés. ⁵⁹ The institution functioned, according to the Mexican bishop, as a general retreat for widows, maidens, "daughters of lords and principal persons," and any other girls or women who wanted to live in enclosure and learn more about Christian doctrine. Although "they are not professed, being, as they are, Indians," ⁶⁰ the women who lived under Bustamante's supervision observed cloister and lived a quasi-monastic life. Clearly, such institutions functioned as general *recogimientos*, accepting Indian women who sought enclosure for whatever reason in addition to girls in need of instruction.

The success of Bustamante's "*encerramiento*" confirmed the hopes of Zumárraga and other Franciscans. In 1529, another *colegio* was established in Huejotzingo, while plans were made for a new foundation in Mexico City. The Franciscans requested that the Crown grant them a site for the planned *colegio* in Mexico. At the same time, Zumárraga and Catalina de Bustamante complained of the First Audiencia's treatment of the Texcoco *colegio*. The Crown's response was to assume royal patronage of the mission to the *niñas indias*. ⁶⁰ The royal personage who took an interest in the effort to evangelize girls was the Empress Isabel, who governed from June 1529 to April 1533 in the absence of her husband Emperor Charles V. Her enthusiasm for the cause was notable, extending to frequent *cédulas* supporting the beatas in their relations with local authorities. ⁶¹ In addition, she was a supporter of other semi-religious women; in 1531, for example, she repeatedly gave alms to two Madrid beatas. ⁶²

In the first year of her regency, Isabel approved and funded the provision of teachers for New Spain. Fray Antonio de la Cruz gathered five beatas and one married woman in Salamanca and transported them to Seville. ⁶³

There, Fray Antonio was forced to scramble when three of his charges changed their minds in the face of the ocean crossing. ⁶⁴ Three Franciscan tertiaries were hastily gathered to replace them. ⁶⁵ Hernán Cortés, then in the process of again departing for New Spain, was ordered to take the expedition with him to New Spain "in such a way that they travel with the honesty and enclosure that is required in accordance with the quality of their persons." ⁶⁶ Though Cortés was delayed and could not accompany the beatas, the reconstituted expedition left San Lúcar in late 1530, arriving in Mexico City early in 1531. ⁶⁷

In January 1531, the *oidores* of the Second Audiencia arrived in the city, bearing instructions that ordered them to select for the beatas a house "as close as possible to the main church of Mexico." ⁶⁸ According to a *cédula* given the previous year, the new audiencia was to construct a "house and monastery" for the women, using 200 pesos from the royal treasury. ⁶⁹ The *oidores*, however, had not found time to rent or purchase a house for the beatas before the latter arrived in early 1531. ⁷⁰ Thus the beatas were installed in the home of Doña Marina Gutiérrez, widow of the late royal treasurer Alonso de Estrada. "Being women of weak condition" they remained with her for some time "gaining strength" for their assignment. ⁷¹ The audiencia judges purchased two houses in the heart of the city, just east of the main plaza, ⁷² which were transformed into an appropriate residence for the beatas.

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Suitably rested, several of the beatas were deployed to other regions. One was sent to Texcoco to work with Catalina Bustamante, while two others were sent to Huejotzingo. The beata sent to Texcoco did not last for more than four years; by 1535, Catalina de Bustamante was complaining that "she alone cannot endure the work." ⁷³ The Huejotzingo beatas returned to Mexico even sooner, due to ill health. It is unclear whether they returned to their posts. ⁷⁴ Notably, however, the Huejotzingo casa de niñas was still under construction in 1532, when *oidor* Licenciado Juan de Salmerón ordered the Franciscans to undertake a *visita* of the institution, provide for the completion of the work, and gather "the daughters of the lords and principals of the said province." ⁷⁵ Salmerón also ordered that a woman now in Puebla "in the nuns' house of the city," ⁷⁶ (*en la casa de las religiosas desta cibdad*) be transferred "to the said house of Huejotzingo because she requests it." ⁷⁷ The woman, "a principal woman of Tlaxcala," was an adult abandoned by a Spanish husband. Thus it is clear that the Huejotzingo casa de niñas, like that of Texcoco, also functioned as a *recogimiento* for indigenous women - at least those of the elite - in addition to its work as a residential school for girls. The colegio de niñas indias, then, was a general quasi-monastic institution for native (noble) women.

Though progress was somewhat slow, all was apparently well. In 1533, the Audiencia reported to the King that

The women that Your Majesty ordered to come to this land have produced and are producing much fruit, and have a house in this city and another in Texcoco and another in Huejotzingo and another in Cholula and order is being given to build another in Tlaxcala and another in Chalco, where there are many daughters of noblemen. We see this as very important for the universal conversion of these people. [78](#)

In response to such optimistic news, the Crown offered continued support for evangelization of girls by women. The Council of the Indies suggested in 1533 that Indian boys and girls be raised in convents of men and women respectively. [79](#) Zumárraga, who was in Spain for much of the period 1532-4, managed to sustain monarchical favor. [80](#) Royal interest was also maintained by the beatas themselves, who deputized Juana Velázquez to return to Spain in 1532. She evidently had audiences with the empress, who approved the beatas' request for permission to beg alms for building construction and ordered that their medical and apothecary bills be paid from royal coffers. [81](#)

In addition to supporting the beatas already in New Spain, the Spanish Crown financed two more expeditions of women to staff the colegios de niñas. In 1534, Zumárraga, returning from Spain, brought with him eight "secular teachers" to staff new schools for girls. Some of these women would assist in colegios de niñas, while at least one was permitted to start her own school. [82](#) Six were apparently beatas of some kind, but the group also included two married women, who brought their families. [83](#) The audiencia was ordered to support these women for a period of two years. [84](#) In 1535, Catalina de Bustamante gathered another group of three Sevillian beatas and was granted permission as well as costs to take them to New Spain, "where she says she has worked and endured much in administering and being in charge of many maidens." [85](#) The three beatas selected by Bustamante were Isabel Pérez, Catalina de Muela, and Francisca de Velasco. [86](#) Their order or avocation was not clearly specified. They were referred to in the cédula as "honest women," *mujeres honestas* "female religious," *religiosas* and "beatas." [87](#) It seems likely that they too were Franciscan.

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Some clue to the motivation of missionary beatas can be found in a letter written in Seville in January 1534 by Catalina Rodríguez de Carvajal, "religious of the order of Saint Francis of the city." Rodríguez petitioned the Council of the Indies for permission to participate in the conversion of

the Indians. The council noted that

She, with the desire to serve God Our Lord and [the Crown], has the will to pass to New Spain to teach and indoctrinate the Indians native to [the land]... and for this she has license from her prelate, and she begged me that since her end is good, and she is poor, that we order her provided with passage and with the supplies appropriate for her, and for a servant who might serve her, until arrival in the said land, and [also] with books and other necessary things as has been done with other women religious who have gone [there]. [88](#) 

Clearly, the mission to the native people of New Spain was on the minds of at least some of Seville's religious and semi-religious women. The girls' schools offered the opportunity to possibly improve the circumstances of a "poor" *religiosa* while undertaking most important labor. Evidently, however, the apostolic poverty that the Franciscan missionaries emphasized was not equally embraced by their female counterparts. Rodríguez's petition notes the presence of a "*criada*," and the first expedition of beatas was accompanied by at least one servant. [89](#)

Rodríguez seems never to have received permission to go to the New World, but both Zumárraga's mission of 1534 and Bustamante's of 1535 supplemented the teaching personnel of Mexico City and other Indian towns. By 1538, Zumárraga could claim that he had "five or six great houses in this city and others," containing "more than a thousand" daughters of caciques. [90](#) As late as 1541, beatas were still applying to the Council of the Indies for posts in the mission. In that year, the provincial of the Franciscan province of La Concepción was ordered to "ascertain the quality" of Francisca Velázquez, a Franciscan beata who wanted to travel to New Spain to serve God "in the instruction of the natives of [the land]." [91](#) 

Francisca Velázquez, however, must have been misinformed. Zumárraga's enthusiasm for his women teachers had waned early. Less than a year after the arrival of the 1534 secular teachers in Mexico City, the bishop was already complaining of his inability to rescue native girls "from the cursed lust of the caciques" (*del aldilubio maldito de los caciques*) using existing personnel:

nothing can be done without proper teachers to keep and teach them, *giving the example that is right, because they imitate and learn much of what they see, good and bad; and that [the teachers] be nuns or beatas who have professed, because from the secular women we do not see the doctrine and fruit that the friars*

have planted... and before it has been seen that [secular women] want to acquire for themselves and for the children they brought, and scheme to return to Castile; and at least professed women religious will not say that they never promised obedience, nor will they wander around outside like these; nor is there anyone to make them stay in the house, or to go to and return from the cathedral with the girls rather than delegating Indian substitutes; and I say no more in this matter even though there is no lack of things to write. [92](#) 

Clearly, then, Zumárraga was frustrated with the women he had imported as well as with the beatas. These women could not offer sufficient examples of orderly Spanish behavior. Yet he had not given up on beatas altogether. Indeed, Zumárraga was clearly a supporter of semi-religious women throughout his life. He donated money for a beaterio in the Biscay, and at his death left sums to various beatas in his homeland. [93](#) Rather than disparaging all beatas, he criticized only those he considered disorderly. In another letter, for example, he referred to the need for "female religious, nuns or beatas," *religiosas monjas o beatas* rather than "seculars." [94](#) Here the looseness of early sixteenth-century terminology prevents a clear statement of what the bishop meant; but it suggests that Zumárraga wanted women who had taken vows, whether those were formal vows, as in the case of nuns, or simpler ones, as in the case of third-order beatas. Zumárraga elaborated upon particular problems with the existing personnel:

those who have come up until now, for the most part, do not apply or humble themselves to teach and handle [the girls] as they should according to their condition and manner, considering their brain and capacity; nor do they have the enclosure and honesty that women religious should have, which is more necessary here in the eyes of [the girls'] parents, that they (who are more suspicious than Spaniards) not balk so much at giving their daughters; and they tell me that [the teachers] go around outside, and that their noblewomen cannot go out ... and some of [the teachers] have left the houses on me, even though I ordered on pain of excommunication that they not leave, saying that they are not slaves who have to work for nothing. [95](#) 

Evidently, the major defect of all the women who had arrived to instruct girls was their refusal to acknowledge Zumárraga as their director. Only a vow of obedience would satisfy the bishop and solve the administrative problems the colegios faced. This is made clear by Zumárraga's referring, in the same letter, to "nuns or beatas who are professed" as preferable to the current personnel.

The need for change to preserve the colegios was recognized not just by

Zumárraga but by other bishops as well. In 1537, three of New Spain's bishops met in Mexico as a result of the consecration there of the bishop of Guatemala, Don Francisco Marroquín. ⁹⁶ The preference for professed women was highlighted in a letter written by the bishops in regard to the perpetuation of the church in Mexico. First, such women would be obedient. Second, and most importantly, professed nuns and beatas would be cloistered. While the bishops insisted that the beaterio beside the cathedral in Mexico City had been successful,

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we see the greater [success] that would follow if the teachers who taught the girls would be professed, because the women who have come from [Spain], as they were not obligated to cloister or obedience, come and go outside and dispose of themselves according to their will, without the possibility of being compelled to remain in the said houses and not to leave, as most of them have left. ⁹⁷

The women who had staffed the colegios thus far were given to wandering, and were now accused by Zumárraga of finding themselves new posts in private homes in Mexico City. ⁹⁸ They might well have done so. Zumárraga admitted in a 1537 letter to the king that he had lost some of the colegio's staff "because I did not have anything with which to give them food, clothing, and shoes, and to pay for physicians and medicines." ⁹⁹ The ambiguous status of the teachers was at least partly responsible for this problem. On one hand, they were missionaries funded by the Crown. On the other, they were laywomen. Thus the teachers - even the third-order beatas - were expected to defray their personal costs through their own labor. Ramírez de Fuenleal wrote to the king that, although any royal alms would be welcome, "the women who teach the Indian girls can earn their living through handiwork that they do and that they make the girls perform." ¹⁰⁰

This attitude toward the beatas led to a certain confusion in their activities. Maestras were liable to teach settlers' daughters in addition to or even instead of their indigenous charges, perhaps because they could earn something from teaching Spanish girls. Even the unimpeachable Catalina de Bustamante described her students as "daughters of the settlers of the land and of the natives." ¹⁰¹ By 1535, criollas and/or mestizas as well as native girls were obviously being taught in Bustamante's school. While Spanish girls had "infiltrated" the schools, the Mexican bishops claimed that some beatas had left Mexico's colegio "because they do better with positions in the houses of seculars." ¹⁰² The pull exerted on all of the maestras by the *república de españoles* was exacerbated by the worldly ties of some. Some of the women were widows and either brought or later were joined by their children. Zumárraga complained that they were more concerned with family matters than with the native girls in their care.

The teachers' independence also played a large role in the failure of the enterprise. Obedience and jurisdiction became issues almost as soon as the first beatas arrived. In Spain, beatas were generally under the supervision of the ordinary. ¹⁰³ The orders given to the Second Audiencia were that this situation would also obtain in Mexico, "because since at present they need not be professed or enclosed, they need not be subject to any of the religions." ¹⁰⁴  Clear enough, perhaps; yet an incident that highlighted the beatas' potential for disorder occurred almost immediately. The women had been accompanied by a young proto-Jesuit, ¹⁰⁵ Calisto de Sá, a devotee and spiritual friend of the beata Catalina Hernández. The empress initially approved Calisto's travel so that he could assist the beatas en route; she even ordered that his costs be paid by the royal treasury. However, he was first to be examined by one of the newly appointed oidores of the Second Audiencia. The judge found Calisto a virtuous man, but was disturbed by his youth and appearance. As an attractive man of twenty-four, the oidor soberly reported, Calisto should not be traveling with the women, particularly at public expense. ¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, Calisto was able to embark with the beatas through the intervention of Fray Antonio de la Cruz.

Once settled in Mexico, Calisto devoted himself to the beatas, and especially to Catalina Hernández. Fearing scandal, Fray Antonio ordered an end to Calisto's visits to the beatas. When the young cleric disobeyed, Fray Antonio referred the matter to Zumárraga, who received no greater obedience and was forced to complain to the audiencia. Seeking a compromise, the oidores asked Calisto to leave the city and enlist in the missionary effort in some other locale. Instead, he chose to return to Spain, causing an uproar among the beatas. Catalina Hernández was particularly outraged, denouncing the audiencia and threatening that she and her companions would return to Spain. She was imprisoned for a short time on suspicion of illuminism, but was released and returned to her work in response to the pleas of the other beatas. ¹⁰⁷ The incident, however, was notorious, and highlights the beatas' independence of ecclesiastical supervision.

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During Zumárraga's absence in Spain, issues of obedience arose again. Given that Zumárraga was absent for years and that the cathedral chapter was not yet functional, it would have seemed reasonable for the Franciscans to take over supervision of the beaterio. The beatas' mission was conducted under the auspices of the Franciscan order and the Franciscan bishop, Zumárraga, and many of the women were Franciscan tertiaries. But when Juana Velázquez travelled to Spain to consult the empress, the beata told the monarch that since they were not religious nor subject to visitation,  they should be left alone by the Franciscan friars. In response, the empress ordered the Franciscans to abstain from visiting the beatas, approving their claim that they were not under Franciscan jurisdiction and that any investigations should be carried out by the audiencia. ¹⁰⁸

The beatas of the 1530 expedition had felt it necessary to send one of their number to court even when Zumárraga, their bishop and supervisor, was already there. Clearly, then, the beatas believed that the bishop did not adequately represent their interests. Given this perception of their independence from the bishop, one is not surprised to learn that upon Zumárraga's return the beatas were apparently unwilling to accept his jurisdiction. Virtually every reference Zumárraga made to the women after 1535 referred to their unwillingness to accept his direction, "saying that they are not nuns, nor did they promise obedience." ¹⁰⁹ Thus they became, in his eyes, disorderly women who wandered like "streetwalkers from house to house." ¹¹⁰ (*callejeras de casa en casa*)

By 1537, when Zumárraga and the bishops wrote to the Crown, the colegios were clearly in trouble. Some of the maestras, whether "secular" or "professed," were the source of scandal; they exhibited a tendency to be pulled into the orbit of secular Spanish society, and they had come into repeated and open conflict with the bishop and other religious officials. Some of them had apparently left the school, while others taught both native and Spanish girls. Thus they had come to seem a symbol of womanly disorder rather than an emblem of feminine purity. While the personnel of the colegios were apparently inadequate, indigenous parents also exhibited a continuing reluctance to intern their daughters in the colegios. ¹¹¹ But while Zumárraga was often quick to blame his women teachers for the failure of his dream, there seem to have been other reasons for the debacle. Native parents' reticence and "womanly disorder" were exacerbated by a lack of support from other sectors of society.

The Colegios and Local Government

The efforts of local government on behalf of the beatas and their colegios were somewhat lethargic. Indeed, the First Audiencia showed utter contempt for the effort to enclose native girls. One of the judges, Diego Delgadillo, actually violated the Texcoco cloister to kidnap two "pretty Indian girls" whom his brother found appealing. ¹¹²

Such depravity, characteristic of the First Audiencia, may not be representative of a general lack of respect for the girls' schools. Nonetheless, there is little evidence of widespread support for the colegios. In January 1531, Fray Antonio de la Cruz asked the cabildo to provide a lot on which to build a convent for the newly arrived beatas. A vote was held and the request was refused, because it would be "prejudicial to the city." ¹¹³ Most of the members of the cabildo were actually in favor of the donation, but the councilor Gonzalo Ruiz argued tenaciously that the donation was prejudicial and that the site already purchased and designated for the school was perfectly sufficient for the use of the "nuns." ¹¹⁴

The ostensible difficulty with the site chosen for the convent was that plans

called for its expansion into the street, and the loss of a portion of the street would be a detriment to urban traffic. ¹¹⁵ Other councilors felt that the street should be given over "because it is for such a holy work." ¹¹⁶ (*por ser para tan santa obra*) A few days later, however, a petition was presented by various citizens, alleging that the expansion into the street was against their right to use the street for traffic purposes. After this, all councilors opposed the donation. Nevertheless, work began. The resulting controversy was taken to the audiencia and ended in something of a stalemate; the street was ordered returned, but nonetheless remained at least partly closed by the beaterio. ¹¹⁷ One should not, perhaps, place too much responsibility on the cabildo. The urban government did, after all, grant the beaterio and colegio the right to unclaimed livestock as a financial support. ¹¹⁸ If this incident is rather meager evidence of a lack of support for the beatas' work, it is nonetheless indicative of resentment among the *vecinos*. The closing of streets for convents of women was certainly not unknown; indeed, Mexico City would lose many of its streets to convent expansion through the colonial period. Urban reticence in this case indicates tepid enthusiasm for the work of the colegio. ¹¹⁹

The audiencia, for its part, did purchase property to begin the construction of the school, as ordered by the empress, but the building was never completed. In 1532 Juana Velázquez asked the empress to allow the beatas to beg alms to help defray the costs of the stalled construction. Though Velázquez claimed that "many people have the will to help them to build the house," ¹²⁰ the buildings remained inadequate even after the gathering of alms. In 1535, Ramírez de Fuenleal wrote to the king saying that the Mexican casa de niñas was in dire need of some kind of building. ¹²¹ About two years later Zumárraga claimed that construction had been stalled for five years: "the building of a house for [the girls] commenced, and nothing at all has been done more than what I did before leaving here to come to court." ¹²² Zumárraga now asked the king to order the construction of a larger colegio comparable to the one built in Texcoco, complaining that only about 200 girls were able to fit into the Mexican building, which should serve at least 1000. Notably, the Texcoco school was built by the native people themselves rather than through the efforts of Spanish local governments using Indian labor. ¹²³ In Mexico, in contrast, construction was both delayed and controversial. In 1544, Zumárraga claimed that he, not the audiencia, had built "most of what has been built." ¹²⁴ Throughout the 1530s, then, those charged with the construction and upkeep of the casa de niñas appear to have dragged their heels. One should not, perhaps, make so much of this; as we shall see in Chapter Eight, the city's institutions for women were saddled with shoddy and incomplete buildings throughout the century. Because sources are so meager, there is little evidence to support an assertion that the colegios were not fully supported by urban society. Yet one fact remains ineluctable: institutions that are valued and supported by all sectors of society do not fade so quickly from the scene. Local governments would soon form cooperative efforts to create and support other institutions that were considered essential to a developing colonial society. The colegio de niñas indias, we must assume, was inessential.

A lack of enthusiasm on the part of secular authorities may be seen as a response both to the education of indigenous girls and to the women who had been chosen to teach them. Indeed, as we have seen, the latter were dogged by ambivalence for the decade-long duration of their educative mission. Pious laywomen always tended to be the focus of both skepticism and admiration, thus existing in a "border zone, tacking between boundaries of gender and status." ¹²⁵ In the Spanish and Spanish American contexts, much of this was due to confusion and ambiguity concerning what constituted a beata. Even the empress seemed unclear on the status of her first missionaries; her *cédula* referred to two "women religious, enclosed beatas" (*religiosas beatas emparedadas*) and two "nieces of theirs." ¹²⁶ (*sobrinas suyas*) And the women who staffed the three missions were described variously as "honorable women," (*mujeres honradas*) "women religious," (*religiosas*) and even "nuns"; (*monjas*); no one seemed exactly sure of their status. Thus they were an ambiguous and occasionally disquieting group.

On the other hand, there is no evidence that the beatas and maestras were shunned by individual citizens. Despite Zumárraga's deprecation of the beatas, among them were at least two energetic and committed women. Catalina de Bustamante labored in the effort for many years, as did Luisa de San Francisco, who assisted Zumárraga in removing girls from their parents' homes. The beatas enjoyed the respect of at least some citizens. The women apparently received pious bequests, as in 1536, when Miguel García left four pesos for "the nuns of the Mother of God." ¹²⁷ The beatas, then, were sufficiently respected to be considered nuns who should be supported through testamentary provision. In addition, as Zumárraga complained, the beatas and secular teachers were able to find positions in the homes of private citizens, who obviously had confidence in the sanctity and ability of these women. If Zumárraga is to be believed, Mexico's ladies were particularly interested in the beatas, "tempting them with quantities of gold to accompany them." ¹²⁸ One cannot, therefore, infer that members of Spanish society were dissatisfied with the beatas themselves, whose spiritual services as individuals were evidently sought out avidly.

We are left, then, with an institution that faltered in the face of a fairly obvious need. Yet if there are no extant tirades against the colegios de niñas, neither are there any extant defenses of the colegios from settler society. There are reasons why society might not have supported the schools. Indeed, it seems that native girls were not considered an essential part of a colonial society defining itself against the indigenous population. This reactive mode of self-identification relates to the nature of the colonial endeavor in the Valley of Mexico, which sought to replace an indigenous urbanism with a Spanish one.

When the Spanish took the Mexica empire, as is well known, they conquered

an urban culture centered on the city of Tenochtitlan. Hernán Cortés decided, apparently against the will of his men, to found the new Spanish capital atop the Aztec city. [129](#) Mexico-Tenochtitlan, as it was called until at least the middle of the sixteenth century, was the only Spanish city established in the Valley of Mexico. It was also the only Indian community of the valley to house a cabildo and to have its center taken over for Spanish use. [130](#)

In addition to its geographic characteristics, the site dictated an "exceptional intimacy" between Spaniards and natives. [131](#) The Spaniards attempted to muffle this closeness almost immediately. In the early 1520s, the planner Alonso García Bravo surveyed the city, laying out the Spanish *traza*. [132](#) The *traza* was an area encompassing thirteen blocks from each corner of the main plaza, or *zócalo*, where the buildings of highest authority were constructed. This Spanish core was populated by some 2200 Spaniards in 1524: [133](#) a virtual garrison, surrounded by the Indian town of San Juan Tenochtitlan, which comprised four L-shaped barrios roughly corresponding to the pre-conquest divisions of the city. These barrios were in turn subdivided into smaller units. All were governed by indigenous officials. [134](#)

This combination of intimacy and separation produced anxiety. The strength and value of the kingdom, as many recognized, lay in its now-subjected native peoples; "*without the Indians,*" wrote the royal *visitador* Tello de Sandoval, "all the good of [the kingdom] would be lacking." [135](#) But the *naturales* were also the principal threat to the Spanish conquerors. The nature of the population of the city, with its huge native population surrounding the comparatively small Spanish *traza*, led to many concerns about the city's defensibility. Might it not be a "prison for Spaniards"? [136](#) A witness testifying in 1534 for the urban government on the state of the city said that "it is clear what disadvantage this city of Mexico receives because of the multitude of Indians there are, and every day they multiply." [137](#) In 1537, Indians were ordered to live "a crossbow's shot" (*a un tiro de ballesta*) outside the *traza*. [138](#)

Fear of the size and (erroneously) alleged growth of the indigenous population continued to dominate the post-conquest period, particularly after the outbreak of the Mixtón rebellion in 1540. In 1544, the *fiscal* of Mexico's *audiencia* argued vigorously for the enclosure of the city, "because every day the [number of] people grows." [139](#) (*porque cada día crece la gente*) In the middle of the sixteenth century, Indians still outnumbered Spaniards by approximately ten to one in the city (compare this to the situation in the late eighteenth century, when "whites" outnumbered Indians by more than two to one). [140](#) Much of the perception of Indian danger referred to the perceived growth and size of the indigenous population.

Anxiety in regard to the conquered was manifested in defensive measures. In 1527, the cabildo forbade the construction of adobe outer walls, which were weak in case of attack. ¹⁴¹ In 1534, the audiencia ordered a series of measures to ensure the city's defensibility. Spanish citizens of the city were to hold horses and arms in readiness and were not to leave the city without license. Women's vulnerability was also highlighted; the audiencia ordered "that a place be provided where the Spanish people can come if there is threat of war among the Indians, and where women and children can be enclosed." ¹⁴² And yet, even with these preparations, the city's fortifications were considered inadequate. In 1537 the alcalde of the fortress of Mexico complained to the King that

there is no city or town so sold to or in the hands of the enemy as this one is, because of our being enclosed in all parts by innumerable ditches and ponds of water ... all our good and strength is in being lords of the field and of horses. ¹⁴³

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The widespread secular perception of native people throughout the 1530s, then, was of a growing menace to a Spanish center construed as in immediate peril and enervated by the loss of every Spaniard who left the city for other parts. In a society that viewed natives as primarily dangerous, the protection of native girls could not be a compelling argument. The cabildo of Mexico City apparently never appealed to the king to protect and perpetuate the colegio de niñas indias; yet, as we shall see, the urban government interested itself in other institutions. Thus, while Mexico City would see the founding of various types of institutions for women in the sixteenth century, not one of them would dedicate itself to the protection of indigenous women, a group arguably more imperiled than any other by the nature of conquest and colonial society. The colegio de niñas indias remained a part of the evangelical effort, subject to its fortunes and whims. Society at large would interest itself in very different institutions. The first indication of the form these institutions would take came in the foundation of La Concepción, an institution totally different from those envisioned by missionaries and bishops.

The Establishment of La Concepción

The story of the foundation of La Concepción, the first convent of professed nuns in Spanish America, usually begins with the efforts of Zumárraga to educate native girls and to establish a convent of nuns. Yet even in the sixteenth century the convent's origins were somewhat mysterious. Archbishop Moya de Contreras was unable in 1586 to find any record of the foundation. ¹⁴⁴ In 1592, one of the witnesses called by the audiencia to testify about the state of the convent thought that it had been founded at least sixty years earlier. ¹⁴⁵ In 1570, the description of the archbishopric produced on royal orders was more accurate; it described the convent as having been founded by Zumárraga thirty years earlier, with the first professions occurring in 1542. ¹⁴⁶ During the sixteenth century, Zumárraga was often described as the founder of the institution. If Zumárraga was the

convent's founder, however, we must recognize that the founder's vision was not realized except in a form diluted or even hijacked by the agenda of colonial society.

To be sure, the end of the 1530s saw several of the bishops of New Spain seeking to establish a convent in Mexico. The response of the religious authorities to the crisis of the *colegios de niñas* was not to abandon the project but to begin it anew in a slightly different form. Thus, in 1537, the bishops of Mexico, Oaxaca, and Guatemala requested that a true convent of professed nuns be established, not on the site of the original *beaterio*, which was judged too public, but in some other convenient locale. ¹⁴⁷ The importance of the institution was still paramount in the minds of the religious; the bishops described it as "that which is most suitable for the conversion and Christianity of these [Indians]." ¹⁴⁸ The new institution would enroll both *mestizas* and *indias*, who would be separated into high and low choirs respectively. ¹⁴⁹ Graduates of the institution would become semi-religious teachers who could train girls in all the regions of the colony. Zumárraga began to plan seriously for the new convent, describing it at the end of 1537 as "the thing with which my thoughts are most preoccupied and to which my will most inclines itself." ¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the bishop even offered to bring the necessary Spanish nuns and *beatas* at his own cost, and to give them the village of Ocuituco, which he held in *encomienda*, for their support. ¹⁵¹ He suggested his cousin, a professed Clare, as well as another Castilian Clare as members of the founding party. Fray Bernardino de Arévalo, a Spanish Franciscan provincial, could be in charge of gathering another two nuns in Spain. ¹⁵²

Zumárraga's proposed nunnery, then, was still aimed squarely at what he perceived to be the needs of native girls. For at the same time that Zumárraga often decried what he considered an endemic abuse of girls in indigenous society, he argued that the nature of that society demanded the use of closed convents; *principales*, accustomed to strict enclosure of their wives and daughters, would not cede their female children to the friars without guarantees of their enclosure. ¹⁵³ By the end of the 1530s, faced with the continuing reluctance of parents to cede their daughters to institutions and women teachers they regarded as too lax and worldly, the bishop felt that change was needed. In general, aside from their lamentable tendency to give their daughters "like fruit" to *caciques*, parents were strict. Mexica customs and beliefs, in fact, were a reproach to the failure of Spaniards to properly enclose their women. Thus, Zumárraga found, what native girls needed coincided neatly with what their Spanish women teachers needed: "closed houses with good walls." ¹⁵⁴ (*casas cerradas con buenas paredes*)

These enclosed and well-walled houses, however, would not be placed among the Spanish population, as the *beaterio* had been. To prevent their

contamination by the concerns of private individuals, they would be placed "in a site that is among the same Indians, not among Spaniards." [155](#)

Like the location, the staff would change. Zumárraga now sought "professed nuns who keep cloister and do not go out, with some beatas, such persons as have promised vows of religion and may be under the obedience of the prelate." [156](#) The concern here was with clausura and obedience, the lack of which was, as we have seen, the major defect in Zumárraga's eyes of the "exemplary" women imported between 1530 and 1535.

The bishop's 1537 instructions to his agents for the Council of Trent [157](#) elaborated upon his plan. He still sought to bring Franciscan nuns to Mexico, and thought it appropriate that they should be Clares of the First Rule (that is, committed to poverty). Because there were no such nuns in Castile, where all Franciscan nuns followed the Second Rule, Zumárraga suggested that the pope could allow the founding nuns to live under the First Rule even though they had professed the Second. To preserve clausura, not yet definitively imposed on First Order Clares, Zumárraga suggested a codicil. Mexico City's nuns would not be allowed to leave their convent "except for things necessary for the instruction of the Indian girls." [158](#)

Though Zumárraga did not go so far as to suggest monasteries of Clares be established elsewhere, the same instruction stressed the importance of creating "as many houses of girls with their mother teachers as monasteries of friars; and if it be possible one in each pueblo." [159](#) For these houses, the bishop was willing to accept either "beatas or nuns who know something of religion." [160](#) (*beatas o monjas que sepan de religion*) Whatever the case, however, Zumárraga felt that the mission was important enough that even if the pope refused to allow the Second Rule Clares to dispense with clausura, they should come anyway. [161](#) The bishop had not given up on his dream of a total conversion of indigenous girls; indeed, he now hoped to expand it. The audacity of the notion of placing religious or even semi-religious women in all the native villages of New Spain is breathtaking even now. The ambition of the bishops' request for a convent in Mexico City to unite Spanish, mestiza, and native nuns was similarly bold.

Zumárraga's hopes, however, were soon to be dashed by the king's terse reply of August 1538:

You say that it appears to you a beneficial thing, and very necessary for the instruction of the children of the natives, that there be in that city of Mexico a monastery of professed nuns, in the manner of those that are in these kingdoms. It has appeared to me that for now there should not be in the Indies monasteries of nuns, and just today I have ordered that none be built. [162](#)

On the same day, the king ordered the viceroy to repair the casa de niñas in such a manner "that it be perpetual." [163](#) The juxtaposition of these two decrees suggests some understanding that the establishment of a convent of nuns and the education of indigenous girls might not be complementary objectives: a prescient intuition, as we shall see.

At the same time that Zumárraga was seeking to establish a convent to take over the work of native education, the city was seeking convents for its own reasons. In 1538, the cabildo solicited the approval of the Crown for the foundation of convents, only to be rebuffed as firmly as was the bishop:

... in that which you beg, that we be served to order built in that city two monasteries of nuns, one of the order of Saint Francis, and the other of the order of Saint Dominic, for wives of Spaniards, and daughters of Spaniards, though your intention is very good and favorable to the service of God Our Lord and the good of that land, talking about it here, it has appeared that at the present it is more suitable that they marry so that the land becomes populated; and thus I charge you strongly to always have as your principal care and intention that they marry so that the population [of Spaniards] will grow, [and] that when it is time to create monasteries of nuns, we will have notice of it so that we may order it done. [164](#) 

The Crown thus situated its objection to convents in terms of the need to populate the new kingdom. The Mexican cabildo was not unsympathetic to arguments for populating the city. As we have seen, the "imbalance" between the Spanish and Indian populations was of grave concern to the urban government. If the "growth" of the indigenous population was worrisome to the colonists, so too was the perceived lack of growth of the Spanish population. In 1533, the members of the cabildo complained to the Crown of Vasco de Quiroga's new town, Santa Fé, which they claimed was removing Spanish as well as Indian inhabitants from Mexico City. "It would be better that this city remains populated with many people, and that [the population], especially of Spaniards, increases and does not diminish," the councilors wrote, "*because this [city] alone is the one that has to pacify and sustain the whole land.*" [165](#)  In 1534, the cabildo argued equally vigorously against using citizens of Mexico to repopulate Granada in Michoacán, arguing that Mexico had an insufficient number of Spanish citizens in the face of an allegedly growing Indian population. The Spanish population of the metropolis, they claimed, was actually decreasing because of outflow to Peru and other areas. [166](#)

Yet the cabildo, unlike the Crown, did not for this reason oppose the foundation of convents for women. Even after receiving the king's firm reply to its petitions, the city council continued to press for the establishment of

at least one and preferably two convents. In a 1542 memorial the city asked,

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... because in this said city and New Spain there are already many maidens, daughters of Spaniards, legitimate and natural, daughters of honored and principal persons, and all of them unable to marry, both because of lack of dowry and for other just impediments, His Majesty be begged that he be served to endow in this city two convents, one of the order of Lord Saint Francis and the other of the order of Lord Saint Dominic, in which such maidens can be placed and might be nuns. And as the Catholic Monarchs, progenitors of His Majesty, founded and endowed [convents] in the city of Granada, which was won as this kingdom has been won, with more just cause His Majesty should do it in these parts, as from it results service to God Our Lord and to His Majesty, and great favor, profit, and utility to the Spaniards in [these kingdoms] through the security of the estate of such maidens. [167](#) 

The city thus contested the Crown's view of proper practice in recently conquered lands. As in Granada, conquest should be quickly crowned with the establishment of female monasticism. The Crown's response — "that for now there be no possibility" (*que por agora no ha lugar*) — reveals again royal reluctance to allow the establishment of convents in a new land.

Despite the royal admonitions to urban government and to the bishop, the convent of La Concepción de la Madre de Dios was established in Mexico City in 1540-1. La Concepción, then, was apparently founded through the *combined* efforts of Bishop Zumárraga, the audiencia, and the cabildo. Just as the Spanish crown's support for the colegios de niñas indias could not sustain them in the face of local indifference, so the crown's disapproval could not prevent convent foundation in the face of local enthusiasm. Just as Zumárraga had shown his willingness to proceed without the approval of the pope, [168](#) the cabildo of Mexico City was willing to participate in the foundation of an urban convent without royal permission to do so. [169](#) In the absence of royal and papal permission, the participation of Bishop Zumárraga as founder was critical.

But this new convent was nothing like the one Zumárraga had planned so feverishly in the late 1530s, for which he had successfully enlisted the support of other bishops. First, La Concepción was not an establishment of First Order Clares, as Zumárraga had desired. The choice of the Conceptionist order seems an odd one, given that both the church and the city had solicited the foundation of Franciscan and Dominican convents. As with so much about the foundation of La Concepción, the reasons for the order's election are hidden. Traditionally, it has been thought that four Toledan Conceptionists founded the convent; however, no documentary evidence has been found to support this belief. Indeed, it appears that

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only one Spanish woman, possibly one of the royally sponsored beatas, entered the convent. 171 In this sense, female monasticism in New Spain appears much more a creature of settler society than any kind of direct transmission of Spanish norms. And yet the choice of the Conceptionist order is significant, for it became the colony's most important order for women. 172

One might seek the reason for this dominance in the aristocratic character of the order, which had been founded in the late fifteenth century by a lady of the Spanish court, Beatriz de Silva, who professed on her deathbed to become the first Conceptionist nun. 173 Thus, in 1540 the order was young; it had received its own rule only in 1511, when Conceptionist nuns transferred from the rule of Saint Clare to their own. The moderation of the Conceptionist rule is also significant. As would be seen in the attempt to found a convent of discalced Carmelites in 1616, colonial society was hostile to strict observance of poverty for women. 174 The subordination of the Conceptionist order to the secular church, proclaimed in 1511 when the order received its own rule, might also be another reason for its election. Whatever the case, the Conceptionist order differed greatly from the First Order of Saint Clare that Bishop Zumárraga had sought to install in the New World.

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La Concepción also strayed from Zumárraga's original objective in that it did not participate in native education as had been planned. Indeed, the strongest link between the missionary objective and the new foundation would come through two nuns, Doña Isabel and Doña Catalina Moctezuma. Doña Isabel and Doña Catalina were daughters of the conquistador Juan Cano and Doña Isabel Moctezuma, daughter of the late Mexica emperor. They professed in 1553, renouncing their right to the rich Tacuba encomienda. 175 Muriel suggests that Doña Isabel and Doña Catalina represented "nascent Mexico," in that they were of mixed race. While this might be true on the level of symbolism, the sisters were certainly not representative of mestizas, nor were they described as such in contemporary documentation, which emphasized their noble descent. Their presence in the convent, a source of considerable pride, was a result of their nobility and membership in the conqueror elite. The non-noble mestizas and indias for whom the bishops had intended the convent would be largely absent, except as servants.

The Spanish and elite character of the foundation was confirmed by its first entrants. The first two novices received by La Concepción de México were Sor Ana de Buenaventura, daughter of Alonso de Ávila and Juana López, and Sor Isabel de los Ángeles, daughter of Juan de Tapia and Doña María de Echánes. A second Ávila daughter, Úrsula de Espíritu Santo, professed in 1543, followed by the daughters of Leonel de Cervantes. 176 All of the founding novices were thus members of the conqueror elite; none were

Indians or mestizas.

The involvement of the elite in the foundation is further shown by the fact that La Concepción was established in a house near the city center. This location flew in the face of the bishops' desire to found the new convent in the middle of an Indian barrio. La Concepción purchased or was given houses belonging to Andrés de Tapia, several blocks northwest of the zócalo. Shortly thereafter, the fledgling institution purchased two adjoining *solares* from Luis de Castilla. ¹⁷⁷ The Castilla house purchased for the convent already had a water supply, but the cabildo showed its support by immediately granting additional water to the fledgling nunnery. ¹⁷⁸

The only link between the bishops' plan and La Concepción was in its importance to the city. The bishop had requested the establishment of "a sumptuous monastery of professed nuns in the manner of Castile,"  and the new institution would certainly be that. But every other aspect of the foundation was different from the original plan submitted by Zumárraga and the other bishops: so different, in fact, as to create a sense of rupture. Was La Concepción truly the convent planned for by Zumárraga, or did the bishop simply approve a totally different foundation planned from within settler society? The sparse documentation allows little more than conjecture. The difference between plan and supposed execution, however, is striking. Perhaps it is true that La Concepción "exceeded the most sublime hopes of the bishop of Mexico." ¹⁷⁹ But the fact that Zumárraga never mentioned it after its foundation may be proof less of his character than of a certain lack of contentment. Given that Zumárraga had described the foundation of a convent of nuns as the most important issue weighing on his mind in the late 1530s, his inattention to La Concepción appears notable. When the bishop died in 1548, he left little to the convent he had supposedly founded. The bulk of his wealth went to the new Hospital del Amor de Dios. La Concepción received a *retablo*, household linens, and fifty bushels of wheat: not a trifling bequest, but certainly not a grand one. ¹⁸⁰ Whatever Zumárraga's feelings about the new foundation, it represented the aspirations of settler society rather than the bishop's aspirations for the Christianization of the city's Indians.

The transition from the church's promotion of monasticism for women as a tool in the evangelical effort to colonial society's promotion of convents for other reasons was replicated in other colonial cities. As early as 1529, the Franciscan provincial in Guatemala requested the establishment of a convent to enclose poor women. ¹⁸¹ The local cabildo was receptive to this argument, and its members wrote to the king asking for support. ¹⁸² Marroquín, Guatemala's first bishop, was also supportive, soliciting royal support immediately upon his consecration in 1537. ¹⁸³ Here again, however, as in the case of Mexico, there was a difference between the goals of the cabildo and those of the church. Bishop Marroquín's efforts were largely directed at Indians and mestizas; and he, like Zumárraga, sought to

establish a convent so that girls could be taught Christian doctrine.

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In 1545, having received no royal assistance, Bishop Marroquín warned that "the maidens are very needy ... and if Your Majesty does not remedy it quickly, ... they will be running much risk and danger." [184](#) Four years later he received a cédula allowing the establishment of such an institution and reported to the king that "there is a nun here who will know how to do it." [185](#) Indeed, like Zumárraga, Marroquín had anticipated approval; in 1546 a beaterio had been established to gather and educate indigenous girls. [186](#) But if the bishop was pleased with this turn of events, the municipal government of Santiago de Guatemala was unsatisfied. In 1556, Guatemala's cabildo was pleading for what the cabildo members called "the most excellent pious work which could be bestowed upon the Indies":

an enclosure and monastery with the greatest income possible in which poor orphan girls can be collected, coming [as teachers] some nuns of good life and doctrine ... there is nothing that is more suitable at present for the service of God. [187](#)

This request was repeated in 1561 with pointed reference to the conquistadores who had lost their life in His Majesty's service, leaving behind "many daughters without any remedy." [188](#) (*muchas hijas sin ningun remedio*) Royal permission was apparently never received, but in 1578 the cabildo informed the king that the foundation was a fait accompli, achieved through the cooperation of the cabildo, the testamentary provisions of Guatemala's late bishop, and the audiencia. [189](#) The project, in the eyes of the cabildo members, was explicitly an urban concern, created not just for the service of God but so that "this city be more illustrious." [190](#) (*sea ... esta ciudad mas yllustrada*) Indeed, though Bishop Marroquín's will was decisive in the establishment of the convent, the cabildo viewed the convent as its own creature, writing to the king in 1585 that the foundation had been approved by the audiencia "at the supplication of this city." [191](#) (*de suplicacion desta ciudad*)

Thus in Guatemala, as in Mexico, the urban government and representatives of secular society united with the church to support the foundation of a convent for Spanish women, while the institution created for Indian women faded into obscurity. In Mexico too the torch had passed from the missionary church to the Spanish city. Zumárraga's colegios for indigenous girls were a failure, and his plans for a missionary convent had come to naught. The establishment of convents and other religious and enclosing institutions for women and girls now became a urban concern focused on the república de españoles.

That republic was well satisfied with its new institution. In 1552, the cathedral chapter wrote to the king of the rapid growth of La Concepción, "because certainly it is well founded, and with such example and religion, and so praised by everyone, that the most select monasteries of Spain have no advantage over it." ¹⁹² The nuns themselves had an even loftier estimation of the importance of their convent. They claimed that, as a result of the foundation, "among everyone in this land a new spirit has been born, such that no good Christian boasts of having daughters without having offered one or more to Jesus Christ." ¹⁹³ But they also referred to the example they offered, "that the natives of these kingdoms be edified in their new conversion." This vestige of the connection between native people and Spanish nuns would soon be all but elided.

At the same time that La Concepción had been established to such general satisfaction despite the Crown's denial of permission, the casa de niñas indias was languishing. The Crown had ordered that it should be rebuilt in such a fashion as to remain in perpetuity. By the time of the first professions at La Concepción, however, the continued existence of the casa de niñas was in serious question.

The Legacy of the Colegios de Niñas Indias

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By 1544, Mexico's colegio de niñas indias was foundering and its beatas had largely dispersed. ¹⁹⁴ Zumárraga said that, "the rearing and doctrine having for the most part ceased, almost all the girls went home to their parents' houses, and now in the house there are not more than four or five Indian women." Of the beatas, only one remained, soon to depart for Spain. ¹⁹⁵ Zumárraga now planned to use the beaterio as the site of his new project, the Hospital Real de las Bupas. ¹⁹⁶ By 1547, according to Zumárraga, there were no girls left in the beaterio, "which was left totally vacant by the pestilence of last year." ¹⁹⁷ That same year Prince Philip approved the transfer of the building to the Hospital de las Bupas. ¹⁹⁸ Thus, although La Concepción had not fulfilled the bishop's plans, there would be no attempt to resurrect the colegio in its original site. Nor was the colegio apparently re-established elsewhere. The colegios in other cities fared as badly. Tlaxcala, for example, had housed a colegio in the 1530s. Yet by 1544 there was no mention of any such institution in a *relación* of that town created by a councilor of Mexico's cabildo. ¹⁹⁹

The colony may have largely abandoned the official effort to evangelize indigenous girls in residential schools, but the Crown persisted in encouraging such efforts. Royal cédulas of 1545, 1550, 1554, and 1579, as well as viceregal instructions, urged the perpetuation and protection of the colegios, an institution that apparently no longer existed. ²⁰⁰ While reluctant to allow the foundation of convents, then, the Crown was highly

supportive of efforts to evangelize native girls. Thus values were inverted on either side of the Atlantic.

The impact of the *colegios de niñas indias* is difficult to gauge. The experiment lasted only ten years, and there were never more than ten schools, each apparently enrolling some 300 to 400 pupils. ²⁰¹ Josefina Muriel claims that the alumni of the *colegios de niñas indias* formed "the base of Catholic Mexico." ²⁰² To be sure, some girls graduated to assist the friars in their tasks, becoming *beatas*; many more became mothers in Christian families. But many died in the plague of 1545-7, which put paid to an institution already more than moribund. ²⁰³ The demise of the *colegios* after such a short time limited their impact. Thus one avoids with difficulty the sense — as when reading about the students of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco — of an opportunity lost: in this case, the opportunity to bring native women into Christian religious life as full participants in those areas of devotion open to members of their sex. ²⁰⁴ Instead it was decided that indigenous women, as Mendieta had it, "were not [made] for nuns." ²⁰⁵ (*no eran para monjas*)

The short duration of the experiment may, of course, have been inherent in its nature. ²⁰⁶ So it seemed to Motolinía, who wrote that "this good work and doctrine lasted only ten years and no more, because these girls were not taught more than to be married." ²⁰⁷ Even Mendieta believed that the extinction of the *colegios* was inevitable,

more because they, according to their nature, were not for nuns, and there they did not have to learn more than to be Christians, and to serve honestly in the law of matrimony; this manner of cloister could [therefore] not last long, and thus it lasted a little more than ten years. ²⁰⁸

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One might argue, then, that the *colegios de niñas indias* carried the germ of their own destruction in their mandate to prepare girls for marriage only. Zumárraga made it clear that the role of such institutions was to prepare girls, "and not before being married with the benedictions of the Church, to transfer them to their husbands to begin married life." ²⁰⁹ Once the first generation of girls had been educated, the work was done; as mothers, they could now take over the project of Christian education.

But it seems that the exclusion of indigenous women from all forms of monasticism, like that of men from the priesthood, was not a foregone conclusion. Indeed, the curriculum of the *colegios* suggests that serious religious training was envisioned for at least some of the internees.

Certainly, the colegios' principal goal was the education of girls who could instill Christianity as mothers in families. Ricard refers to the colegios as little more than elementary schools where "the teaching of manners took precedence over [other] instruction." [210](#) The curriculum at the schools included comportment, to be sure, in addition to "womanly offices that are customary among Spaniards, such as sewing and embroidery and other similar things." [211](#)  Girls were, however, to be instructed in more than Christian doctrine, chastity, and the housewifely arts. This is amply proved by the fact that the beatas of 1530 were given 300 "manuscripts of Christian doctrine" to assist in their labors. [212](#) The hopeful Catalina Rodríguez de Carvajal, as we have seen, expected that the Crown would not only pay her way, but would supply her with the "books and other necessary things" from which to teach. In 1537, Zumárraga had seen enough of the native girls' abilities to report with excitement that without having anyone to teach them to read, the girls had learned to sing the hours of the Virgin. The girls lacked nothing in ability: "*there is no other lack but that of houses and teachers.*" [213](#) (*no hay otra falta sino de casas y maestras*) Much later, Sahagún claimed that many of the girls reared by the beatas had known how to read and write. [214](#) Originally, according to Sahagún, indigenous women were trained to be beatas who would teach girls, but soon showed themselves to be more interested in marriage than in continence:

in the beginning we had the opinion that [the boys] would be suited for priests and [the girls] for nuns and female religious; but we were fooled; through experience we came to understand that for the time being they were not capable of such perfection. [215](#)



During the three years between his pleas for quasi-monastic women's institutions in every village and the foundation of La Concepción, Zumárraga too may have been persuaded by this view.

Yet there is little evidence for the inability or unwillingness of native women to accede to the perfection of spiritual life. Sources for the history of the evangelization of native women are sadly lacking, at least in Spanish. [216](#) Moreover, such a study is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, a few remarks may be hazarded. First, the Franciscans seem to have had a great interest in native girls and women as subjects of evangelization. While friars occasionally deplored the character of indigenous women, they also recognized and celebrated their capacity for sanctity, sometimes even making comparisons unfavorable to Spanish women. [217](#) Mendieta went so far as to note the particular strength and religious fervor of indigenous women, which made them more active than men in such spiritual work as directing *cofradías*. The friar attributed this to the nature of the climate in the New World, "because in this climate the woman in her way is better off than the manly sex." [218](#)  The principal planet in the region, he

explained, favored women, "*and grace above all.*" [219](#) This astrological influence and divine favor gave Christianized women the virile power to defend their chastity. In one chapter, he describes how two girls from the school defended themselves "in a manly fashion" from the violent advances of men. [220](#) Thus Mendieta used the topos of the manly woman, or "*mujer varonil*," to praise the chastity and spirituality of such women, incorporating them into a long tradition of feminine hagiography. [221](#)

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Indeed, according to the admiring Fray Jerónimo, many of the alumni of the colegios de niñas became "*good women who remained with the name of beatas.*" These women apparently assisted the friars "*in things relating to doctrine and Christian comportment.*" [222](#) In addition, they served the sick, instructed the ignorant, gathered "single women who were found wandering wasted in offence of Our Lord,"  and received frequent communion. [223](#) Unfortunately, Mendieta names only one such beata, Ana de la Cruz of Tlatelolco. [224](#) Nonetheless, the anecdotally reported existence of numbers of native beatas in the sixteenth century suggests that lack of Spanish support, not indigenous reticence, was behind the failure of monastic and quasi-monastic life for native women and girls.

Education of indigenous girls did not completely end, of course; it continued under the auspices of the general Franciscan educational system. [225](#)

Spanish beatas, however, were no longer involved. In early 1572, Martín Enríquez reported to the king that, though upwards of 900 girls were being educated in the chapel of Saint Joseph, their education was in the hands of male teachers overseen by three Franciscans. [226](#) He also noted that girls were similarly taught in Tlatelolco. Mendieta wrote that all the monasteries of New Spain carried out such instruction, and that he himself, as guardian "in one pueblo," had supervised more than 300 maidens who gathered in the patio of the church "some of them teaching the others with the greatest sincerity and honesty that can be imagined." [227](#)  Girls continued to study the catechism, including the Credo, Salve Regina, Pater Noster, Ave María, and Ten Commandments. Indeed, Mendieta claimed, the girls continually sought to go beyond this knowledge, begging for more doctrine. Indigenous women still had some part in this education, accompanying the girls to their lessons and taking them home afterward. Such women, Mendieta suggested, worked

in the manner of beatas, not because they had taken any vows (at least publicly), but more because voluntarily they offered themselves to the Lord, not separating themselves from his temple and service, occupied in prayers, fasts, and vigils, with Saint Anne the widow as their example ... and at the same time exercising themselves in works of charity and virtue, in imitation of the holy women who in the primitive church followed and served

the apostles and disciples of Christ. [228](#)

Many of the women who received training from the friars, according to Fray Jerónimo, preferred to live in continence rather than marry. Even though they were often forced to go about their business in the city, "which is a Babylon," they were "as strong in the guarding of their virginity as the most enclosed daughters of Spanish ladies behind twenty walls." [229](#) 

Such indigenous beatas still existed in the time of Mendieta's writing, but, according to the friar, their ranks were thinning. Writing with his accustomed "nostalgic bitterness," [230](#) Mendieta paints a picture of a form of life eradicated not by the limitations of the naturales or the original mandate of the evangelical effort, but by the depredations of colonial administration:

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Today there are in very few parts these matrons or beatas who exercise themselves in such spiritual works, because the population that there used to be is much diminished, and because they say they have more than enough to do finding what is necessary for their sustenance, and for paying their tribute and the other impositions that continue to be added to them. [231](#) 

Mendieta's views, however, were not widely shared. Early colonial society, which considered the protection of women so important, extended little shelter to female members of the república de indios.

Indeed, by mid-century even the secular church had a rather cynical view of native women. Archbishop Montúfar wrote in 1556 that, "these people are very inclined to vices ... to the weakness of the flesh, with the spur of nudity and small or rare resistance of the women." [232](#)  Such views of native people of both sexes had long been current in secular society as well, often supported by influential citizens such as Jerónimo López, an important member of the city government and an opponent of native clergy, the establishment of the Colegio de Santiago Tlatelolco, and the teaching of Latin to Indians. [233](#)

Indigenous women were increasingly perceived as not only given to vice but as not deserving of the protections normally granted to their sex. This view was expressed by Francisco Gómez Triguillos de Silva in a 1567 letter to Philip II. Gómez argued for an extension of tribute to single Indian women, suggesting that such women could actually contribute more than married men. In a sense, Gómez's words echo those of Mendieta, in that Gómez too found a certain "manliness" in indigenous women. "They are the ones," he wrote, "who sustain most of the profits and transactions in the markets; and

they deal and make contracts with more strength and in a more manly fashion." [234](#) The consequences of native women's manliness, however, were not the same for Gómez as for Mendieta. In the eyes of Gómez, the "manliness" of indigenous women was a perversity, a strength that removed them from the sphere of women needing protection. More manly indeed than their men, such women could without compunction be taxed. Gómez's attack did not end there. He linked the issue of tribute for Indian women to their spiritual life in a striking manner:

I remember when I was a boy, without my parents' knowing it, my sisters stole whatever they could to give it to me; and thus are these [Indian] women of this land. All that they can earn or take, all of it is for the friars, and they give it to them on the pretext that they are beatas; and thus they can be seen by the hundreds, with their white capes, which are only sheets. [235](#)

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This is confirmation of Mendieta's assertion that many indigenous beatas existed. More importantly, however, it is evidence of a highly contemptuous attitude toward such women - and friars - on the part of some settlers. Even the habits such women wore were only "sheets."

Disapproval would continue to follow native beatas. During the Valderrama visita of the late 1560s, Indian women were prohibited from starting beaterios. [236](#) Thus the religious options of such women were gradually foreclosed not by their own limitations or desires but by the acts of colonial administrators. The spiritual aspirations of indigenous women were now to be expressed only in subservient positions within Spanish women's monastic institutions. In 1570, the secretary of Fray Alonso Ponce noted that many spiritually inclined native widows and maidens entered convents to serve nuns. [237](#) Such service often entailed the taking of simple vows as a *donada*. Donadas performed routine and menial chores in the convent while observing religious life insofar as their duties allowed. Petronila de la Concepción, a native of Xochimilco, is one of the few donadas whose story has survived. In the early seventeenth century she entered the convent of Jesús María to serve the nun María de la Concepción. [238](#) Life as a convent servant or donada, or less commonly, life as an independent beata, were now the only options for an indigenous woman who sought to enter religious life. Such options were, however, apparently sufficiently appealing to attract native women in number. Donadas would become numerous enough to be the target of an attempt to make them pay tribute. In 1620, the Dominican Fray Gaspar de Ledesma complained against the plan because the donadas were "*very great servants of God, and superior in virtue.*" [239](#) (*muy grandes siervas de dios, y aventajadas en virtud*) So the religious life of native women assumed the form it would take until the eighteenth century, when the first convent for Indian women was established. [240](#)

While Gómez belittled indigenous beatas and Valderrama forbade them to open beaterios, La Concepción de México was building. In 1563, the convent began its new church, aided by the efforts of the cabildo, which sent two *procuradores* to court in 1562 partly to request royal support for the nuns' building program. At the same time, the city requested a new Dominican convent, citing more than 2000 Spanish women who could not expect to marry. [241](#) After 1550, the support of local governments would be directed not to the protection of niñas indias but to the support of the women of the Spanish city.

In 1597 Viceroy Conde de Monterrey attempted to respond to his instructions to protect and perpetuate Mexico's colegios de niñas indias. This was problematic, however, because the new viceroy was unable to find any traces of the institutions. He wrote that

of the houses for enclosing and indoctrinating Indian maidens ... that Your Majesty supposes have been founded in this city and other parts, I have not found any evidence that they might exist, nor have persons from this audiencia and outside of it of whom I have inquired. [242](#) 

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Colonial memories were indeed short. [243](#) Only sixty years before, the colegios de niñas indias had been the focus of missionary hopes. From their successes had come episcopal plans for a new multi-ethnic female monasticism; from their failures originated the insistence that profession, enclosure, and obedience be the hallmarks of Mexican women's institutions. And yet by 1597, the colegio de niñas indias was erased not only from the urban landscape but apparently even from popular memory. The colegio's rightful place in urban history as the first monastic institution for women was usurped by La Concepción, now indubitably "*the most important monastery of this city.*" [244](#) (*el mas grave monesterio desta ciudad*) Doctor Villanueva Zapata, an audiencia lawyer testifying about the convent's state in 1592, asserted that

there is no monastery in Christendom that is superior, and thus it is held in great veneration and estimation, and thus in all the monasteries that have afterward been founded here, foundresses have come from this convent, and with their religion they have planted it in all the others with public satisfaction of the kingdom. [245](#) 

The satisfaction of the kingdom was such that no one apparently envisaged or attempted the re-foundation of protective institutions for vulnerable

indias. Yet in 1597, the aged Philip II ordered his viceroy to ascertain whether it might be possible and convenient to reestablish such schools. With this anachronistic order ends the history of the colegios de niñas indias. Perhaps it is appropriate that Sor María de Ágreda, who appeared to the Indians of the northern frontier, was a Spanish nun. On Sor María's side of the Atlantic, the "mission to the Indians" was still sufficiently vital to capture the attention of an enclosed nun. In New Spain, for many years after the foundation of La Concepción, only the rarefied example of Spanish nuns would reach the naturales. The foundational zeal of the hispanizing city was far from exhausted; but the focus of new foundations would be the women of the república de españoles.

Apendices

[Appendix 1. AGI, México 2555. A SM de los obispos de México y Oaxaca. Undated \(c. 1535\)](#)

[Appendix 2. AGI, México 280. A SM de la abadesa y conbento de mexico. 15 February 1552.](#)

[Appendix 3. AGI, México 339. A SM del cabildo de la yglesia de Mexico. 12 January 1552.](#)

Notes:

Note 1: Her story was accepted by the Franciscans, though criticized by certain Jesuits and viewed with suspicion by the Inquisition. For the Jesuit critique see INAH Colección Antigua 163 (antes 98b), f. 453. *Carta en que se da noticia de las predicaciones que la madre ágreda hacia en espíritu a los infieles de nuevo mexico; y fragmentos de las criticas que un jesuita hizo de esta narración.* For her 1531 brush with the Inquisition, see Joaquín Pérez Villanueva, "Sor María de Ágreda y Felipe IV: un epistolario en su tiempo," in Antonio Mestre Sanchis, ed., *La Iglesia en la España de los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1979), 359-417; 384; also Clark Colahan, "María de Jesús de Ágreda: The Sweetheart of the Holy Office," in Mary Giles, ed., *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 155-170. Sor María's activities in what is now the US Southwest retain their power to inspire Catholics; see <http://www.thepillar.net/page3.html> for both the story and an image of the nun. [Back.](#)

Note 2: That is, because none of them was a professed nun. Their status varied, as discussed below. [Back.](#)

Note 3: The origin of the founding nuns of La Concepción is difficult to discern, but Josefina Muriel believes that Paula de Santa Ana originally came to New Spain with the missionary beatas. See Muriel, *Conventos*, 36. [Back.](#)

Note 4: *Ibid.*, 26. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Ibid., 31-2; also see Asunción Lavrin, "Women in Convents: Their Economic and Social Role in Colonial Mexico," in Berenice Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1976), 250-77;. 255. [Back.](#)

Note 6: Arenal and Schlau, op. cit., 293. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Lino Gómez Canedo, *La educación de los marginados durante la época colonial: Escuelas y colegios para indios y mestizos en la Nueva España* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1982), 5. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Ibid., 6. [Back.](#)

Note 9: For the development of missionary methodology in the Antilles, see Lino Gómez Canedo, "Desarrollo de la metodología misional franciscana en América," in *Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre los franciscanos en el Nuevo Mundo: La Rábida 16-21 septiembre 1985* (Madrid: Ed. Deimos, 1986), 209-50; 212-17. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Christian Duverger, *La conversión de los indios de Nueva España* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 31. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Hermenegildo Zamora, O.F.M., "Educación franciscana del indígena americano," in *Actas*, op. cit., 251-92; 261. [Back.](#)

Note 12: Ibid., xviii. This was in direct response to one of the first requests made by the Franciscans. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: AMS Press, 1966 [1930]), 144. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 65. [Back.](#)

Note 15: Ibid., 38. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Ricard, op. cit., 98, 209. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Braden, op. cit., 145, 148. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Ibid., 102. [Back.](#)

Note 20: "Las mujeres y niños son los que hay para ser enseñados y doctrinados." Fray Francisco Mayorga al Obispo de Santo Domingo, 12 August 1533. Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, III, No. 142, 120-2; 122. This letter is also reproduced in Mariano Cuevas, S.J., ed., *Documentos inéditos del siglo XVI para la historia de México* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1975 [1914]), 47-8. [Back.](#)

Note 21: "No fuera plena o perfecta conversión si todo el cuidado de los ministros se pusiera en sola instrucción y doctrina de los varones, dejando olvidadas las mujeres." Fray Jerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*

II, Libro iii, Cap. lii (Madrid: Atlas, 1973), I, Libro iii, Cap. lii , 190. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iv, Cap xvi, 43; Ricard, op. cit., 99. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Josefina Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas.I. Fundaciones del siglo XVI* (Mexico: UNAM, 1995), 94. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14. José Sánchez Lora argues that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a woman's sexual honor was seen as her most essential and important characteristic. See José L. Sánchez Lora, *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca* (Madrid: F.U.E., 1988), 55 passim. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Othón Arróniz, *Teatro de evangelización en la Nueva España* (Mexico: UNAM, 1979), 28; Ricard, op. cit., 111. [Back.](#)

Note 26: See Juan Collantes de Terán, "La huella franciscana en el primer teatro secularizado del siglo XVI en México," in *Actas*, op. cit., 997-1005. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Arróniz, op. cit., 24. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Ricard, op. cit., 195. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Arróniz, op. cit., 37, 40. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Traducción de la Carta que el Illmo. y Rmo Sr. D. Fr. Julián Garces, de la Orden de Predicadores, Primer Obispo de Tlaxcala, escribió a la Santidad de Paulo III. 1537. In *El clero de México durante la dominación Española según el Archivo Inédito Archiepiscopal Metropolitano. Documentos inéditos o muy raros para la historia de México, publicados por Genaro García* (Mexico: Librería de la viuda de Ch. Bouret, 1907), No. cxii, 237-58; 252. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Carta del obispo de México al capítulo general celebrado en Tolosa de Francia. 12 June 1531. In Mendieta, op. cit., Libro v, cap. xxx, 171-2. [Back.](#)

Note 32: *Ibid.*, I, Libro iii, Cap. lii, 191. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Instrucción de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga a sus procurados ante el Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 63-71; 67. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Zumárraga wrote in late 1537 that the girls should be "*tomadas á sus padres desde seys o siete años abaxo, para que sean criadas, doctrinadas é yndustriadas en el dicho monasterio çerrado.*" Carta del obispo de México, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, a Juan de Samano, secretario de S.M. México, 20 December 1537. *Cartas de Indias* (Madrid: Atlas, Bibliotecas de Autores Españoles, 1974) Vol. I, No. xxxv, 165-75; 169. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Duverger, op. cit., 120. [Back.](#)

Note 36: For a discussion of the importance of example in the Franciscan mode of conversion, see Inga Clendinnen, "Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Sixteenth-Century Yucatán." *Past and*

Present 94 (February 1982): 27-48; 28 passim. Clendinnen, of course, emphasizes the role of corporal punishment in the Franciscan mode of conversion. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Instrucción de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga a sus procurados ante el Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 63-71; 67. [Back.](#)

Note 38: Carta de Fray Jerónimo de Mendieta al Rey Don Felipe II, 20 January 1570. *Cartas de Religiosos de Nueva España (1539-94)* (Mexico: Chávez Hayhoe, 1941), No. ii, 31-45; 35. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Muriel, *Colegios*, 32. [Back.](#)

Note 40: AGI, Indiferente 1092, N. 230. Real Cédula, 26 September 1537, f. 1v. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 97. [Back.](#)

Note 42: "When they were infidels, these Indians also had a type of nun... these women were very enclosed and well guarded." [*Tenían también estos indios en su infidelidad una manera de monjas... Estaban estas mujeres encerradas y muy guardadas.*] In common with Christian women religious, such women were, according to Mendieta, required to guard their chastity and remain enclosed. They often kept silence and engaged in handiwork for the benefit of the temples they served. Mendieta, op. cit., I, Libro ii, cap. xviii, 65. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Kathleen Ross, *The Baroque Narrative of Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora: A New World Paradise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 82-3. [Back.](#)

Note 44: In 1535, Ramírez de Fuenleal noted that the girls in the Mexico colegio were supported by the Indians, "sharing the costs of their maintenance and the clothing they give them, and the fathers of others (being nobles) providing for them." [*repartiendo entre si el mantenimiento y vestidos que les dan, y a otras probeyendolas sus padres por ser principales.*] AGI, México 2555, Relacion del obispo de santo domingo, s.f. (c. 1535). [Back.](#)

Note 45: This chapter cannot provide an exhaustive history of the development and fortunes of the colegios de niñas indias. Muriel's admirable recent study does just that. See Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas*, op. cit., 23-99. [Back.](#)

Note 46: Marcel Bataillon, "L'Iñiguiste et la Beata: Premier voyage de Calisto a México," *Revista de Historia de América* 31 (June 1951), 59-75; 64. [Back.](#)

Note 47: Francisco Avellá Cháfer, "Beatas y beaterios en la ciudad y arzobispado de Sevilla," *Archivo Hispalense* 198 (1982), 99-132; 100. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Joann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 454. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Avellá Cháfer, op. cit., 101. [Back.](#)

Note 50: Gill, op. cit., 15-47; 19. See also McNamara, op. cit., 391-3. [Back.](#)

Note 51: Christian, op. cit., 16. [Back.](#)

Note 52: Avellá Cháfer, op. cit., 101. [Back.](#)

Note 53: Muriel, *Colegios*, 59. [Back.](#)

Note 54: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 128. [Back.](#)

Note 55: José García Oro, "Reformas y Observancias: crisis y renovación de la vida religiosa española durante el Renacimiento," *Revista de Espiritualidad* 40 (1981), 191-213; 196-7. [Back.](#)

Note 56: McDonnell, op. cit., 477. See also Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Creating and Recreating Communities of Women: The Case of Corpus Domini, Ferrara, 1406-1452," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (Winter 1989), 293-320; 298-9. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Muriel, *Colegios*, 54. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Carta á Su Majestad, del Electo Obispo de México, D. Fr. Juan de Zumárraga. 27 August 1529. In Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, primer Obispo y Arzobispo de México. Estudio biográfico y bibliográfico, con un apéndice de documentos inéditos ó raros* (Mexico: Antigua Librería de Andrade y Morales, 1881), No. 1, 1-42; 18. [Back.](#)

Note 59: Muriel, *Colegios*, 54-5. [Back.](#)

Note 60: Ibid., 55-7; also see Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Many of these are reproduced in García, *El Clero*. [Back.](#)

Note 62: AGI, Indiferente 422, Libro 15, f. 42v, Im. 93. See also Im. 196, Im. 241. [Back.](#)

Note 63: Thus Fray Antonio made his only appearance in the annals of the missionary effort. Nonetheless, in 1532, the empress provided him with a reference for the general chapter meeting in Toulouse, describing him as a person who had "served much in [the Indies] in the conversion of the natives" [*servido mucho en aquellas partes en la conversion de los naturales,*] and asking that he be favored in everything he asked. His sole activity, however, seems to have been related to the beatas. Ibid., f. 136r, Im. 283. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Muriel, *Colegios*, 59. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Ibid., 60. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Orden de la reina al marqués del Valle, que pasaba a Nueva España, para que llevase en su compañía y la de su esposa, ciertas beatas religiosas... 1530. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* II, No. 82, 8-9. [Back.](#)

Note 67: Muriel, *Colegios*, 63. [Back.](#)

Note 68: Guillermo Porras Muñoz, *Personas y lugares de la ciudad de México: siglo XVI* (Mexico: UNAM, 1988), 94. García Icazbalceta quotes the instructions in his "Colegio de niñas de México," in *Obras* (Mexico: Biblioteca de Autores Mexicanos, Imprenta de V. Agüeros, 1896), 427-34; 428-9. [Back.](#)

Note 69: A la Real Audiencia que mande construir casa y monasterio para unas religiosas que vienen a establecerse en México. 4 February 1530. García, *El Clero*, No. iii, 13-14. [Back.](#)

Note 70: *Ibid.*, 92. [Back.](#)

Note 71: Carta de la Audiencia a la Reina. 14 August 1531, quoted in Gómez Canedo, *op. cit.*, 105. [Back.](#)

Note 72: The site is behind and to the north of the Palacio Nacional, where Correo Mayor and Moneda meet. [Back.](#)

Note 73: AGI, Indiferente 1961, L. 3, F. 284-5, Im. 577. Licencia de pase a Catalina de Bustamante. 16 June 1535. Also see Carta del Real Consejo de Indias, incluyendo una Real Cédula de la Emperatriz... 18 June 1535, in Ángel Ortega, "Las primeras maestras y sus colegios-escuelas de niñas en Méjico," *Archivo Ibero-Americano* (Revista de Estudios Históricos) 16: 92 (March-April 1929), 259-76; 272-3. [Back.](#)

Note 74: Muriel, *Colegios*, 67. [Back.](#)

Note 75: AGI, México 1684. Visita a la ciudad de los angeles. 11 December 1532. f. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 76: Presumably an early beaterio or recogimiento, given that Puebla's first convent was established in 1569. [Back.](#)

Note 77: AGI, México 1684. Visita a la ciudad de los angeles. 11 December 1532. f. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 78: Carta al Rey, de la Audiencia de México. 5 August 1533. Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* III, No. 140, 107-20; 112. [Back.](#)

Note 79: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 19. [Back.](#)

Note 80: In 1531, Zumárraga was ordered to return to court to answer to charges brought against him by the erstwhile *oidor* Diego Delgadillo. The bishop was quickly exonerated but remained in Spain to attend to his consecration (April 1533) and to other negotiations relating to the Mexican church. He left Spain in June 1534, arriving in Mexico in October of the same year. See García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, 73-88. [Back.](#)

Note 81: La Reina a la Real Audiencia. 27 November 1532. In García, *El Clero*, Nos. vii/viii, 18-20. [Back.](#)

Note 82: Muriel, *Colegios*, 71. [Back.](#)

Note 83: See the cédulas reproduced in Ortega, op. cit., 274-5; Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 20, 113. Muriel (*Colegios*, 69) suggests that Charles V would not allow Zumárraga to gather "professed" beatas. Nonetheless, given the wide range of beatas in Spain, it seems implausible that Zumárraga would have to choose between beatas who had taken third orders and complete laywomen. Given that they were entrusted with Christian education, such women were more likely beatas who had taken no vows but lived semi-religious lives. [Back.](#)

Note 84: El Rey a la Real Audiencia: Que provea de pan a siete mujeres que trae el Obispo Zumárraga para instruir a las niñas indias. 21 May 1534. In García, *El Clero*, No. xiii, 29-30. [Back.](#)

Note 85: AGI, Indiferente 1961, L. 3, ff 284-5. Licencia de pase a Catalina de Bustamante. 16 June 1535. [Back.](#)

Note 86: Gómez Canedo, op. cit., 115. [Back.](#)

Note 87: See Ortega, op. cit., 272-3. [Back.](#)

Note 88: AGI, Indiferente 1961, L. 3, ff. 106r-v. 6 January 1534. [Back.](#)

Note 89: Muriel, *Colegios*, 60. [Back.](#)

Note 90: Quoted in Gómez Canedo, op. cit., 122. [Back.](#)

Note 91: AGI, Indiferente 423, Libro 20, ff. 555r-v. 1541. [Back.](#)

Note 92: AGI, Patronato 184, R. 28, Bloque 3. Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Consejo de Indias. 24 November 1536. This letter is also reproduced in Cuevas, op. cit., 55-7; 57. [Back.](#)

Note 93: Porras Muñoz, op. cit., 26-7. [Back.](#)

Note 94: Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Emperador. 25 November 1536. In Cuevas, op. cit., 58-62; 61. [Back.](#)

Note 95: Ibid. 61-2. [Back.](#)

Note 96: García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, 117. [Back.](#)

Note 97: Carta de los Illmos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oajaca y Guatemala, sobre la ida al Concilio General, y piden sobre distintos puntos, así de Diezmos, como otros para la buena planta y permanencia de la fe en este Nuevo Mundo. 30 November 1537. In García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 21, 87-103; 94. [Back.](#)

Note 98: Gómez Canedo, op. cit., 114, n. 42. [Back.](#)

Note 99: AGI, México 2555. Fray Juan de Zumarraga a SM. s.f. (c. 1537). [Back.](#)

Note 100: AGI, México 2555. Relacion del obispo de santo domingo. s.f. (c. 1535). [Back.](#)

Note 101: AGI, Indiferente 1961, L. 3, ff 284-5. Licencia de pase a Catalina de Bustamante. 16 June 1535. [Back.](#)

Note 102: Carta de los Illmos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oajaca y Guatemala, sobre la ida al Concilio General, y piden sobre distintos puntos, así de Diezmos, como otros para la buena planta y permanencia de la fe en este Nuevo Mundo. 30 November 1537. In García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 21, 87-103; 94. [Back.](#)

Note 103: Christian, op. cit., 16. [Back.](#)

Note 104: Quoted in Porras Muñoz, 94, and García Icazbalceta, "Colegio de niñas," 428-9. [Back.](#)

Note 105: Calisto was an *Iñiguista*, one of the companions of Ignatius of Loyola in his early (1525-8) and unsuccessful attempts to create a company. [Back.](#)

Note 106: Bataillon, op. cit., 68. [Back.](#)

Note 107: Ibid., 70. [Back.](#)

Note 108: La Reina a la Real Audiencia: Que provea que los franciscanos no visiten ya a unas beatas de México. 1534. In García, *El Clero*, No. xvi, 33-4. [Back.](#)

Note 109: Instrucción dada por don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, Obispo de México, a Fray Juan de Osseguera y Fray Cristóbal de Almazán, como procuradores del Concilio Universal. In Cuevas, op. cit., 487-97; 488. [Back.](#)

Note 110: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 111: Al presidente e oidores de la Nueva España y Obispo de México: que, por la mejor manera y mas sin escándalo que les pareciere, provean lo que conviniere cerca del tomar a los indios los niños y niñas para los poner en si doctrinados. 26 February 1539. In García, *El Clero*, No. xxxv, 69-70. [Back.](#)

Note 112: Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, 28-9; Ricard, op. cit., 255. [Back.](#)

Note 113: "Fray Antonio de la Cruz, a nombre de las beatas, pidió un solar para hacer un monasterio para dichas beatas. Aparecen los votos en el acta. Se les negó a causa de ser en perjuicio de la Ciudad." Acta del 10 julio de 1531 (427), in O'Gorman, Edmundo, and Salvador Novo. *Guía de las Actas de Cabildo de la Ciudad de México: siglo XVI* (Mexico: Fonda de Cultura Económica, 1970), p. 77. [Back.](#)

Note 114: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 106, n. 26. [Back.](#)

Note 115: Muriel, *Colegios*, 65. [Back.](#)

Note 116: Porras Muñoz, op. cit., 99. [Back.](#)

Note 117: Marroqui, op. cit., I, 322-4. [Back.](#)

Note 118: Muriel, *Colegios*, 82-3. [Back.](#)

Note 119: Later, when Zumárraga sought to transfer the colegio de niñas to the Hospital del Amor de Dios, the ayuntamiento opposed him, claiming that the city needed the building for a granary and a school for Spanish orphans. Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, 230. [Back.](#)

Note 120: La Reina a la Real Audiencia. 27 November 1532. In García, *El Clero*, No. vii, 18-19. [Back.](#)

Note 121: AGI, México 2555. Relacion del obispo de santo domingo s.f. (c. 1535). [Back.](#)

Note 122: AGI, México 2555. Los obispos de mexico y oaxaca a SM. s.f. (c. 1537). [Back.](#)

Note 123: Instrucción dada por don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, obispo de México, a Fray Juan de Osseguera y Fray Cristóbal de Almazán, procuradores del Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 487-97; 488. [Back.](#)

Note 124: Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Príncipe Don Felipe. 2 May 1544. In Cuevas, op. cit., 123. [Back.](#)

Note 125: Gill, op. cit., 19-20. [Back.](#)

Note 126: A la Real Audiencia: que mande construir casa y monasterio para unas religiosas que vienen a establecerse en México. In García, *El Clero*, No. iii, 12-14. [Back.](#)

Note 127: Porras Muñoz, op. cit., 95. [Back.](#)

Note 128: Instrucción dada por don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, obispo de México, a Fray Juan de Osseguera y Fray Cristóbal de Almazán, procuradores del Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 487-97; 496. [Back.](#)

Note 129: Gibson, op. cit., 368. [Back.](#)

Note 130: Ibid., 37, 368. [Back.](#)

Note 131: Ibid., 368. [Back.](#)

Note 132: J.M. Houston, "Foundation of Colonial Towns in Hispanic America," in *Urbanization and Its Problems* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 352-90; 357. [Back.](#)

Note 133: Marroquí, op. cit., I, 110. [Back.](#)

Note 134: Separation between Indian and Spanish urbanisms was a constant in Spanish America, as was the need for Indians to live close to their Spanish masters. Such separation would be decreed in the 1573 Laws of the Indies:

...the settlers should try, inasmuch as this is possible, to avoid communication and traffic with the Indians, or going to their towns, or

amusing themselves or spilling themselves on the ground; nor allow the Indians to enter within the confines of the town until it is built and its defenses ready and the houses built so that when the Indians see them they will be struck with admiration and will understand that the Spaniards are there to settle permanently and not temporarily.

Dora P. Crouch, Daniel J. Garr, and Axel I. Mundigo, *Spanish City Planning in North America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), Ordinance 137, 18. [Back.](#)

Note 135: Carta al príncipe don Felipe, del licenciado Tello de Sandoval, visitador de la Nueva España, dando su parecer sobre las cosas que deberían proveerse para el buen gobierno de la misma. 9 September 1545. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* IV, No. 246, 209-26; 218. [Back.](#)

Note 136: Carta al rey, del conquistador Ruy González, diciendo que la ciudad de México, que el había ayudado a ganar, no debía trasladarse del lugar en que estaba... 24 April 1553. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* VII, No. 369, 31. [Back.](#)

Note 137: Información hecha por el ayuntamiento de la ciudad de México para probar que estaba despoblada la ciudad de Granada en Mechoacán, y que no convenía sacar españoles de México para repoblarla. 3 September 1534. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* III, No. 155, 155-72; 162. [Back.](#)

Note 138: Marroquí, op. cit., I, 26. [Back.](#)

Note 139: Carta al rey del licenciado Cristóbal de Benavente... 1 June 1544. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* IV, No. 226, 94-102; 101. [Back.](#)

Note 140: Gibson, op. cit., 380. [Back.](#)

Note 141: Marroquí, op. cit., I, 142. [Back.](#)

Note 142: AGI, México 1684. Testimonio de la cibdad de Mexico sobre lo que pidieron para la guarda de la cibdad. 13 July 1534. [Back.](#)

Note 143: Carta al Rey de Lope de Samaniego, alcaide de la fortaleza de México... 10 December 1537. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* III, No. 181, 227-230. [Back.](#)

Note 144: AGN, Bienes Nacionales 176, Exp. 5. Carta anónima... refiriéndose las fundaciones de conventos de religiosas conceptionistas en México. 1635, f. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 145: AGI, México 289. Ynfformacion rrecibida en la rreal Audiencia de mexco sobre la necesidad de la casa e yglesia del monasterio de la concepcion de la dicha ciudad. 1592. Testimony of Juan Velázquez de Salazar, f. 2. This might well be because the interrogatory produced by the convent itself referred to the convent as being more than sixty years old. See *Ibid.*, f. 6v. [Back.](#)

Note 146: *Descripción del Arzobispado de México hecha en 1570 y otros documentos*. Colección de Joaquín García Icazbalceta (Mexico: Terrazas e Hijos, 1897), 290. [Back.](#)

Note 147: Quoted in Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 119. [Back.](#)

Note 148: Carta de los Illmos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oajaca y Guatemala, sobre la ida al Concilio General, y piden sobre distintos puntos, así de Diezmos, como otros para la buena planta y permanencia de la fe en este Nuevo Mundo. 30 November 1537. In García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 21, 87-103; 94. [Back.](#)

Note 149: *Ibid.*, 99. [Back.](#)

Note 150: Carta del obispo de México, Fray Juan de Zumárraga á Juan de Samano, secretario de S.M.... 20 December 1537. *Cartas de Indias* I, No. xxxv, 165-75; 169. This letter is also published in Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 22, 103-11. [Back.](#)

Note 151: Carta de los Illmos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oajaca y Guatemala, sobre la ida al Concilio General, y piden sobre distintos puntos, así de Diezmos, como otros para la buena planta y permanencia de la fe en este Nuevo Mundo. 30 November 1537. In García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 21, 87-103; 100. [Back.](#)

Note 152: Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Emperador. 25 November 1536. In Cuevas, *op. cit.*, 58-62; 61. [Back.](#)

Note 153: Carta del obispo de México, Fray Juan de Zumárraga á Juan de Samano, secretario de S.M.... 20 December 1537. *Cartas de Indias* I, No. xxxv, 165-75: "it is the condition and custom of the Indians that all the nobles keep their wives and daughters in strict enclosure." [... *es asy la condicion y costunbres de los indios, que tienen comunmente todos los principales á sus mugeres é hijas en estrecho ençerramiento.*] This was probably more rationale than reason for their refusal, but it preoccupied Zumárraga. [Back.](#)

Note 154: *Ibid.*, 170. [Back.](#)

Note 155: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 156: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 157: The bishops of New Spain received the call to the council in 1537. [Back.](#)

Note 158: Instrucción dada por don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, obispo de México, a Fray Juan de Osseguera y Fray Cristóbal de Almazán, procuradores del Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, *op. cit.*, 487-97; 488. [Back.](#)

Note 159: *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

Note 160: *Ibid.*, 495-6. [Back.](#)

Note 161: *Ibid.*, 497: "even if His Holiness does not dispense with *clausura*, they should not hesitate to come." [aunque no dispense Su Santidad en la *clausura* no dejarán de venir.] [Back.](#)

Note 162: El Rey contesta a los obispos de México, Guatemala, y Antequera. Valladolid, 23 August 1538. García, *El Clero*, No. xxiii, 45-54; 49-50. [Back.](#)

Note 163: Al Virrey de la Nueva España: que vea el colegio de niños... y que se repare la casa de las niñas. 23 August 1538. García, *El Clero*, No. xxx, 61-3. [Back.](#)

Note 164: AHA 439a. Cedula de la ciudad. 1522-1682, f. 61v. 3 October 1539. [Back.](#)

Note 165: Carta al Rey del Ayuntamiento de México. 6 May 1533. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario III*, No. 135, 80-7; 84. [Back.](#)

Note 166: Información hecha por el ayuntamiento de la ciudad de México para probar que estaba despoblada la ciudad de Granada en Mechoacán, y que no convenía sacar españoles de México para repoblarla. 3 September 1534. In Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario III*, No. 155, 155-72; 159. [Back.](#)

Note 167: Capítulos que por instrucción y delegación de la Ciudad de México fueron expuestos ante s.m. por los procuradores Loaiza y Cherinos. 28 November 1542. In Cuevas, op. cit., 109-18; 112-13. [Back.](#)

Note 168: Zumárraga, of course, may have been entitled to found convents through an interpretation of his episcopal privilege. However, papal approval was important to the foundation; only in 1586 did the convent receive such approval and thereby the right to solemn vows. Until this date, professions were made under simple vows, almost like semi-religious ones. [Back.](#)

Note 169: It is possible that Viceroy Mendoza approved the foundation of La Concepción. A cédula of March 1541 provided for such approval: "*que provea que no se haga ningun monasterio sin su licencia, y donde viere que conviene hacerse dé orden para que se haga.*" Inventario de los Papeles, Autos, Escrituras... que se hallan existentes en la Secretaría de Cabildo de M.I.V. S. Dean y Capitulares de esta Santa Iglesia de México... 1646. In García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, No. 50, 229-239; 238. [Back.](#)

Note 170: For a discussion of this controversy, see Muriel, *Conventos*, 36-7. [Back.](#)

Note 171: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 172: Of the twenty-three convents for women established in Mexico City during the colonial period, eight were Conceptionist, and Conceptionist convents tended to be extremely populous. [Back.](#)

Note 173: Muriel, *Conventos*, 20; McNamara, op. cit., 414; Marroquí, op. cit., II, 133. Muriel gives 1498 as the date of the foundation, McNamara and Marroquí 1489. [Back.](#)

Note 174: Manuel Ramos Medina, *Imágen de santidad en un mundo profano: Historia de una fundación* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Historia, 1990), 58-9 passim. [Back.](#)

Note 175: Muriel, *Conventos*, 36. The sisters were later taken out of the convent to serve as "foundresses" of Santa Clara, but eventually returned to their convent. In 1594, Gaspar de Esquinas complained to the king that though other heirs of Moctezuma had received royal favor, Doña Catalina and Doña Isabel, who were still alive, had received nothing. The royal response was terse: "there is no possibility of that which they ask." [*no a lugar lo que piden*] Perhaps Doña Isabel and Doña Catalina were emblematic of nascent Mexico. AGI, México 289. El abadesa y convento del monasterio de la conception de mexico y doña ysavel y doña catalina de moteçuma monjas professas en el dicho moasterio, supplan atento lo que refieren se les hagan mrd de quatro mill pos de renta de a quatrocientos y cinquenta mrs. cada uno en la caja de mexico. 1593-4. [Back.](#)

Note 176: Muriel, *Conventos*, 36. [Back.](#)

Note 177: Porras Muñoz, op. cit., 104-5. [Back.](#)

Note 178: Ibid., 138. [Back.](#)

Note 179: Ibid., 105. [Back.](#)

Note 180: Memoria Testamentaria del Sr. Zumárraga (c. 1548) and Testamento del Sr. Zumárraga. 2 June 1548. García Icazbalceta, *Zumárraga*, Nos. 42 and 43, 172-81. [Back.](#)

Note 181: AGI, México 280. Relación de três cartas del provincial de los franciscanos de la provincia de Guatemala. 1529. [Back.](#)

Note 182: AGI, Guatemala 41, N. 35. El cabildo a SM. s.f. Unfortunately this document is virtually illegible because of staining and tears. [Back.](#)

Note 183: Carmelo Saenz de Santa María, S.J., *El licenciado don Francisco Marroquín, Primer obispo de Guatemala (1499-1563): Su vida — sus escritos* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1964), 121, 125. Also see *Cartas de Indias* II, No. lxxiii, 413. Marroquín, of course, was one of the bishops who joined with Zumárraga in soliciting a convent for Mexico City. [Back.](#)

Note 184: Ibid., 205. [Back.](#)

Note 185: Ibid., 244, 246. [Back.](#)

Note 186: María Isabel Viforcós Marinas, "Los recogimientos, de centros de integración social a cárceles privadas." *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* I, No. 2 (1993), 59-92; 61. [Back.](#)

Note 187: AGI, Guatemala 41, N. 24. El cabildo de Guatemala a SM. 1 May 1556. Im. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 188: AGI, Guatemala 41, N. 28. El cabildo de Guatemala a SM. 17 May 1561. Im. 2. [Back.](#)

Note 189: AGI, Guatemala 41, N. 57. El cabildo de Guatemala a SM. 19 March 1578. Im. 2. [Back.](#)

Note 190: AGI, Guatemala 170. Testimonio de la ynstituycion del monesterio de monjas de nra señora de la concecion de la ciudad de guatemala fecha por don franco marroquin primer obispo de la dicha ciudad e ynformacion fecha de pedimiento del cavildo y rregimiento della... 1578, f. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 191: AGI, Guatemala 41, N. 64. El cabildo de Guatemala a SM. 31 March 1585. Im. 1. [Back.](#)

Note 192: AGI, México 339. El cabildo de la iglesia de mexico a SM. 12 January 1552. [Back.](#)

Note 193: AGI, México 280. La abadesa y convento de mexico a SM. 15 February 1552. [Back.](#)

Note 194: Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Príncipe Don Felipe. 2 June 1544. In Cuevas, op. cit., 120-3. [Back.](#)

Note 195: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 196: Bataillon, op. cit., 70. [Back.](#)

Note 197: Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga al Príncipe Don Felipe. 4 December 1547. In Cuevas, op. cit., 135-53; 136. [Back.](#)

Note 198: Al President e oidores de la Audiencia Real de la Nueva España: que provean que unas casas que hay en México en que se solían doctrinar las hijas de los caciques, se de al hospital de las bubas. 11 March 1546. García, *El Clero*, No. I, 103. [Back.](#)

Note 199: Relación de Bartolomé de Zárate... 1544. Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario* IV, No. 233, 133-49. [Back.](#)

Note 200: Muriel, *Colegios*, 31-3. [Back.](#)

Note 201: Muriel, *Conventos*, 30. [Back.](#)

Note 202: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 203: Gómez Canedo, *Marginados*, 123. [Back.](#)

Note 204: Certainly this is a controversial assertion; the history of evangelization is a history of compulsion. Yet forced Christianization without the possibility of full participation seems to compound the crime of compulsory conversion. [Back.](#)

Note 205: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iii, Cap. lii , 190; Fray Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1969 [1615]), III, Cap. xl, 108. Torquemada, of course, is a virtually verbatim copy of Mendieta. [Back.](#)

Note 206: Ricard, op. cit., 211. [Back.](#)

Note 207: Fray Toribio de Benavente o Motolinía, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico: Porrúa, 1969), Trat. iii, Cap.

15, 182. [Back.](#)

Note 208: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iii, Cap. lii, 190; Torquemada, op. cit., iii, Cap. xl, 108. [Back.](#)

Note 209: Instrucción de Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga a sus procuradores ante el Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 63-71; 67. [Back.](#)

Note 210: Ricard, op. cit., 210. [Back.](#)

Note 211: Mendieta, op. cit., I, Libro iii, Cap. lii, 190. Mendieta hastened to add that the girls were not taught weaving, at which they far excelled Spanish women. Torquemada III, Libro v, Cap. xl, 108. [Back.](#)

Note 212: Real Cédula a los Oficiales de la Casa de la Contratación de las Indias ordenándoles que a quatro religiosas que pasan a Méjico les paguen los vestidos y otras cosas, conforme a un memorial que acompaña. Memorial a que se refiere la anterior. In Ortega, op. cit., 259-76. [Back.](#)

Note 213: Instrucción dada por don Fray Juan de Zumárraga, obispo de México, a Fray Juan de Osseguera y Fray Cristóbal de Almazán, procuradores del Concilio Universal. February 1537. In Cuevas, op. cit., 487-97; 488. [Back.](#)

Note 214: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 215: Quoted in León Lopetegui and Félix Zubillaga, *Historia de la Iglesia en la América Española: Desde el Descubrimiento hasta comienzos del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1965), 427. Also see Muriel, *Colegios*, 87; Ricard, op. cit., 231. [Back.](#)

Note 216: I have not investigated Nahuatl sources, which may hold promise for research of this type. [Back.](#)

Note 217: For example, Mendieta equated the poor example afforded by Spanish women's hairstyles (!) with the perils of wine, which led "married and marriageable" [*casadas y por casar,*] Indian women to sell themselves to the Spaniards who used alcohol as their "pimp." [*alcahuete*] Thus the obsession with example continued. Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iv, Cap. xxxiii, 91-2. [Back.](#)

Note 218: Ibid., II, Libro iv, Cap. xviii, 44. [Back.](#)

Note 219: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 220: Ibid., I, Libro iii, Cap. lii, 191. [Back.](#)

Note 221: The figure of the "*mujer varonil*" or "manly woman" was, in early modern Spain, the logical outgrowth of a society that figured virtue as masculine. Describing a woman as "*varonil*" was generally a positive evaluation. See Melveena McKendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the Mujer Varonil* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Perry, op. cit., 81; Bilinkoff, op. cit., 3 passim. Likewise, a long Christian tradition considered virgin women to be positively masculinized and strengthened by their bodily condition, and therefore able to

access Aristotelian male virtues such as eloquence and command. See John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (International Archives of the History of Ideas XVII. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 52; Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 68; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 158. [Back.](#)

Note 222: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iv, Cap. xxix, 80. [Back.](#)

Note 223: Ibid., II, Libro iv, Cap. xvi, 44. [Back.](#)

Note 224: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 225: For a history of non-residential schools for indigenous girls, see Muriel, *Colegios*, 92-9. [Back.](#)

Note 226: AGI, México 19, N. 75. Martin Enriquez a SM. 6 February 1572. [Back.](#)

Note 227: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iv, Cap. xvi, 43. [Back.](#)

Note 228: Ibid., 44. [Back.](#)

Note 229: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 230: The phrase is David Brading's: see *The First America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 115. [Back.](#)

Note 231: Mendieta, op. cit., II, Libro iv, Cap. xvi, 44. [Back.](#)

Note 232: AGI, México 336A, Doc.3, f. 29. Of the native boy catechists in particular, Montúfar wrote that they had taken advantage of their position to seduce girls and "even boys." [Back.](#)

Note 233: Ricard, op. cit., 254. López's angry criticisms of the alumni of the colegio who spouted Latin "like Ciceros" are well known. [Back.](#)

Note 234: AGI, México 168. Francisco Gomez Triguillos de Silva a SM. 15 March 1567. [Back.](#)

Note 235: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 236: Muriel, *Colegios*, 87. [Back.](#)

Note 237: Ricard, op. cit., 233. [Back.](#)

Note 238: Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso occidental, plantado y cultivado por la liberal benefica mano de los muy catholicos, y poderosos reyes de españa, nuestros señores, en su magnífico Real Convento de Jesús María de México de cuya fundación y progressos, y de las prodigiosas maravillas, y virtudes, con que exalando olor suave de perfección, florecieron en su clausura la V.M. Marina de la Cruz, y otras exemplarissimas religiosas.* (Mexico: J. de Ribera, 1684), ff.

172-172v. [Back.](#)

Note 239: INAH, Colección Antigua, T. 2, N. 336. Manuscritos varios. Apuntamientos del Rev. Fray Gaspar de Ledesma, acerca del tributo que se pretendió cobrar a las indias de los conventos de monjas. 1620. [Back.](#)

Note 240: Corpus Christi de México, a discalced Franciscan convent, was inaugurated in 1724. There is little doubt, however, that indigenous beatas continued to exist throughout the colonial period; Nahuatl sources may be a fruitful avenue for an investigation of these women. [Back.](#)

Note 241: Porras Muñoz, op. cit., 105. [Back.](#)

Note 242: AGI, México 23, N. 80. El virrey conde de monterrey a SM. 4. August 1597, f. 10. [Back.](#)

Note 243: But see INAH, Colección Antigua, T. 2, N. 336. Manuscritos varios. Apuntamientos del Rev. Fray Gaspar de Ledesma, acerca del tributo que se pretendió cobrar a las indias de los conventos de monjas. 1620. Ledesma had a clear if somewhat unproblematized view of the history of indigenous women's monasticism:

The Emperor Charles V our lord ordered that in these kingdoms there be convents of Indian nuns at his royal expense; and thus there were, as many people testify, in this city, in La Trinidad, and the Colegio de Niñas was built for this; and in Coyoacán, Tlaxcala, Tlalmanalco, Techamachalco, and Michoacán. And as experience taught that they were not capable of governing themselves in such a perfect state, the said foundations did not survive. 🌐

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Note 244: AGI, México 289. Ynfformacion rrecibida en la rreal Audiencia de mexco sobre la necesidad de la casa e yglesia del monasterio de la concepcion de la dicha ciudad. 1592. Testimony of Cristóbal Osorio, f. 3v. [Back.](#)

Note 245: Ibid., f. 1v. [Back.](#)

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