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2. The Politics of Catholic Worship in Nineteenth-Century Mexico

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Abstract

Worship at the Mexico City cathedral from the 1840s to the 1890s was intentionally local, national, and universal. Canons actively promoted holy figures to convey messages of defiance to a reforming state, global Catholic solidarity, constancy under persecution, loyalty to the papacy, and solace to parishioners. The Roman Curia, too, demonstrated special consideration for afflicted Mexican parishioners by authorizing an unusually large number of devotional privileges. When radical liberals prevailed after fifty years of internecine wars, prelates proposed to win the peace by constructing an expiatory temple dedicated to San Felipe de Jesús, where the country might atone for sins committed in the violence of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Mexico City, Catholic Church, saints, Pius IX, *Reforma*

Introduction

“In our times, a new war has been declared against public religious devotion,” wrote *El Ilustrador Católico Mexicano* in 1847. The Mexico City newspaper longed for “the pomp with which feasts are celebrated, the abundance of lights, the song of the psalms, the sound of the bells, and the spectacle of the processions.” Modernizing reformers alleged that the Catholic Church exercised unnatural influence in Mexican society and vowed to free the Mexican populace mired in such medieval superstition (Hale: 110-40; Fowler: 189-94). By the 1860s, reformers had hacked up statues of saints, melted down adornments, and forbidden outdoor religious processions. The defense and attacks on ecclesiastical adoration were so important exactly because both sides believed that the issues at stakes were nothing less than the loyalty of Mexico’s people, the country’s future, and perhaps the eternal fate of souls.

By characterizing the struggle over worship as part of a larger war, the writer did not exaggerate. Little consensus existed about the form or power of the state. From independence to mid-century, the national executive office changed hands nearly fifty times. In seemingly continuous violent conflicts, politicians, caudillos, and their allies clashed over modernization, federalism, the military, taxation, and, perhaps most contentiously, how the state should treat the Catholic Church. Liberal politicians, especially after 1848, advocated that the government should nationalize ecclesiastical property and restrict the clergy’s role in public life (Smith: 141). Clerics and their supporters mobilized factions to defend the Catholic Church. Liberals temporarily won the struggle in the War of the Reform (1857-61) and definitively against the French-supported monarchy of Maximilian I (1862-67).

As this analysis of the cult of saints at the Mexico City cathedral suggests, prebendaries responded in part to the challenges of the 1840s to the 1890s through worship. Recent scholarship has debunked the characterization of the Mexican church as a backward-looking, static institution (Mijangos y González). As Terry Rugeley’s study of the Yucatán attests, the cult of saints constituted one major area of innovation. Yet his study focused on parishioners, which leaves the impression that the clergy had ceded their ecclesiastical leadership. The actual extent of clerical guidance of worship in the cult of saints in nineteenth-century Mexico is relatively unknown. Of the thousands of holy figures, only the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Sacred Heart of Jesus have received scholarly attention. Studies have argued that Guadalupe expressed religious nationalism to her devotees while the papacy promoted avocations to Christ to rally Catholic resistance to hostile governments and encroaching secularism of society (Brading; Díaz Patiño: 77-90; Moreno Chávez: 226-36). The greatest part of worship, then, has eluded academic consideration. This omission is surprising given historiography’s interest in rhetoric, symbols, and ceremonies, but accurately reflects the field’s preference for the formation of Mexico’s modern nation-state in the nineteenth century rather than the Catholic Church (Mallon: 69-106; Warren: 112; Archer: 81).

This study finds that prebendaries of the Mexico City cathedral carefully considered the political dimensions of worship from the 1840s to the 1890s. Prelates actively promoted holy figures to convey messages of defiance to a reforming state, global Catholic solidarity, constancy under persecution, loyalty to the papacy, and solace to parishioners. To examine such trends, the cult of San Felipe de Jesús (born in Mexico City, martyred in Japan in 1597,

and beatified in 1627) provides a useful focus within the wider devotional culture. As shaped by the Mexico City cathedral, worship was intentionally local, national, and universal. The Roman Curia, too, demonstrated special consideration for afflicted Mexican parishioners by authorizing an unusually large number of devotional privileges. This period of close coordination between the papacy and Mexican prelates culminated in the French invasion to restore Catholicism in the country. Pius IX (1846-78), encouraged by exiled Mexican prelates, turned the 1862 canonization of San Felipe de Jesús into a showcase moment for Catholic solidarity and energy to resist the reforms of secularizing national governments.

Mexico's liberal governments also paid attention to the symbolism of saint days. Liberals choose to promulgate their anticlerical 1857 constitution on San Felipe's feast. As a result, February 5 was either a secular holiday or religious celebration depending on the political party in power. Saints such as San Felipe de Jesús were caught in the middle of a struggle to determine if Mexicans were principally citizens or parishioners. When the clergy lost the war to defend their church, they proposed to win the peace by building the *Templo Expiatorio de San Felipe de Jesús*, a church where Mexicans might pray for the restitution of sins and venerate the country's first saint. All told, worship in nineteenth-century Mexico City was a politicized space where the pope, the Mexican Catholic Church, and the secular government all vied for the loyalty of citizens.

Promotion of Saints and Liberal Attacks, 1840s-1860s

By the late 1840s, the Mexican Catholic Church had become familiar with the realities of life in independent Mexico. Friendly governments such as that of Antonio López de Santa Anna in 1834-35 asked for money; unfriendly ones like that of Valentín Gómez Farías in 1833-34 asked for money and cut rights (Fowler: 189-94; Mecham: 350-52; Pérez Memen: 282, 298). The federal government's constant penury exacerbated political instability. During this time, only Guadalupe Victoria in 1828 served a complete presidential term in office. The ever-present threat of rebellions and coups put influential clergy under special scrutiny. As the cathedral chapter's minutes show, prebendaries carefully weighed the political consequences of their decisions about worship and saints.

While political instability created an atmosphere of heightened suspicions around worship, the cathedral's precarious financial position first forced the prebendaries to modify liturgical services. Tithe income, which had provided more than a half million pesos yearly dropped 80% or more by 1835 (Costeloe: 18).¹ Working capital of chaplaincies and pious works had similarly eroded. Without regular payments on endowments, the chapter scrambled to uphold their sacred obligations to carry out liturgical feasts. For instance, the prebendary in charge of San Felipe feast used his personal funds to satisfy expenses for years (ACCM, Actas, vol. 75: 286v).² In 1842, he flatly refused to move forward with the celebration if the funds did not materialize (ACCM, Actas 76: 87). In other years, the

¹ Costeloe believed that tithes ended entirely, but some ecclesiastical sources from the 1850s suggest that the Catholic Church continued to receive about 20% of the 1820 total (Pablo Mijangos y González, personal correspondence).

² From the mid-1830s, the feast of San Felipe cost 120 to 130 pesos while about 40 pesos were collected in alms each year.

orchestra performed for free or the chapter economized by simplifying the service (ACCM, Actas 77: 133; 78: 97v; 79: 10).

Once again in February 1847, the chapter had to decide what to do for the feasts of San Felipe and the Purification of Our Lady; only this time, the country was enduring a foreign invasion. The United States had already taken New Mexico and California and General Winfield Scott's forces were planning the siege of Veracruz (Vázquez: 319-48). A desperate federal government passed a law authorizing the use of ecclesiastical property as collateral for an 11-million-peso loan on January 11, 1847 (Dublán and Lozano: 5: 246-48). Prelates objected to the move and shut down some churches in protest. The Mexico City cathedral treasurer outlined the unpalatable decision that faced the chapter given the tricky political situation and the fact that there were no funds for the normal public feast of San Felipe or for the Purification of Our Lady. The best option, he stated, would be a small private ceremony. However, cancelling the public events meant that "it will be said that [the cathedral] is infringing some law and [therefore] is inciting the people to rebellion" (ACCM, Actas 80: 51v-54). On the other hand, retaining the public ceremony meant that the cathedral would have to formally receive the same government officials who passed the January 11 law. Doing so, he believed, would communicate a scandalous weakness to the public. After putting the matter to vote, the chapter decided to hold a private blessing of candles for the Purification of Our Lady and to cancel the function for San Felipe. Such public pressure on the federal government was only part of the Church's response to the January 11 law. Privately, church officials encouraged secular opponents who launched the rebellion of the Polkos on February 26, 1847. Prelates also negotiated directly with the government. After receiving a payment from the Catholic Church, President Santa Anna rescinded the planned loan (Costeloe: 13; Mecham: 357). However, neither the loan nor the reopening of churches aided Mexico's defense. By September 1847, Mexico had surrendered to Scott's forces. American soldiers wandered through the capital until May of 1848, some of them noting the magnificent cathedral and its celebrations (Peskin: 194-95). All told, Mexico lost about half its territory to the United States.

The devastating loss sharpened the political ideas of the ruling class about how to solve the country's ills. Liberals became convinced that only radical changes to Mexican society could ensure stability. In opposition to this view, a true conservative party emerged. Its guiding light, Lucas Alamán, argued that the peace and stability of the colonial era might return if the country would abide by its rightful character of Hispanic values, Catholicism, centralism, and a strong military.

The Mexican Catholic Church, too, began to modernize, revamp its administration, and project a unified Catholic voice (Ivereigh; Connaughton Hanley). One welcome trend for Mexican clerics was warming diplomatic relations with Rome. Jubilant crowds greeted the arrival of the first papal nuncio in Mexico, Msgr. Luis Clementi, in 1851 (Gilbert: 40).³ The rapprochement brought the Mexican Catholic Church closer than ever to the papacy at a time when Pius IX began to take a more confrontational approach to nationalizing liberal

³ Radical liberals prevented his official reception for over a year. While most bishops welcomed Clementi, the archbishop clashed with him (Mijangos y González: 202-5).

governments. Some Mexican clerics adopted this newly defiant attitude. Clerics of the Guadalajara cathedral assisted the military in a revolt that overthrew President Mariano Arista in 1852 (Fowler: 225-27). The conservative administration that took power began restoring ecclesiastical privileges such as allowing the Company of Jesus to reenter Mexico and reestablishing protection for the permanence of monastic vows (Mecham: 358-59).

During this time, religious devotion underwent a renaissance. For instance, in early February 1853, newspapers announced a Forty Hours' Devotion in the parish of San José on one day and on the next an indulgence of the rosary in Santo Domingo and another of the scapular in the Merced Convent and in the Colegio of Belem (*El Siglo XIX* 1853: 4).⁴ The Virgin of Remedios, the Christ of Good Works (Señor de Buen Despacho), St. Primitivus, Martyr, and the Holy Christ (Santo Cristo) of St. Teresa all experienced renewed activity in their cults (ACCM, Actas 84: 46, 194v-98v).⁵

For the first time since independence, Mexican clergy and laity began to petition Rome for greater privileges on behalf of favorite saints. From this point until the 1860s, changes to worship closely tracked Mexico's relationship to the papacy. The holy figures promoted by the Mexico City cathedral projected a very specific message to Catholics of loyalty to the pope and constancy under persecution, but surprisingly ignored a ready-made opportunity to boost religious nationalism via the cult of San Felipe.

In February 1852, Discalced Franciscan José Agustín García tried to revive the long-stalled campaign to canonize San Felipe de Jesús. In search of financial and moral support, Garcia sent long letters to civil and religious authorities appealing to their sense of religious patriotism (ACCM, Actas 84: 18-19).⁶ Mexicans, he wrote, should promote and "venerate their own countrymen and so be more protected by the hand of God through them, as all nations of the world have always done with their religions heroes" (Garcia: 304v). The idea appealed to the city council, but the cathedral chapter had little interest in pursuing the canonization (ACHM, Asistencias 386, exp. 18: 45-45v).⁷ Its San Felipe fund showed a negative balance of 833 pesos despite having collected donations since the seventeenth century.⁸ Moreover, prebendaries waited two years to authorize Garcia to start gathering

⁴ Those participating in it pray before the blessed sacrament for forty hours (Jungmann: 223-38).

⁵ The Virgin of Remedios was a conquest image and patron of Mexico City (Curcio-Nagy: 367-91). The Señor del Buen Despacho was an image from Charles V with a chapel in the cathedral. Primitivus was an early Christian martyr whose relics were rediscovered in the cathedral catacombs. The Santo Cristo, also called the Cristo Renovado, was in the San José convent of the Discalced Carmelites (Taylor: 945-74).

⁶ These were President Mariano Arista, Archbishop José Lázaro de la Garza y Ballesteros, the Mexico City Ayuntamiento, and the cathedral chapter.

⁷ The Ayuntamiento expanded the saint's feast procession by inviting new participants: the Seminario Conciliar Nacional, the Colegio Nacional de San Juan de Letrán, the Colegio Nacional de San Gregorio, the Colegio Militar, and the Seminario de Minera. They joined the Discalced Franciscans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Oratorians. Additionally, longtime supporters of San Felipe, the silversmith guild, published a compendium of the martyr's life in 1852 (*Compendio de la vida*).

⁸ From 1851 to 1856, the cathedral collected about 158 pesos for San Felipe's canonization of which 128 pesos came from one large donation from the Canon Pedro Verdugo of the Mexico City cathedral chapter in 1852

alms (ACCM, Actas 84: 203-203v). They even speculated if the government might donate three or four thousand pesos – perhaps from the proceeds of the sale of the Mesilla valley to the United States (ACCM, Actas 85: 15, 21). The massive amount of federal debt made this idea fantasy (Tenenbaum).

Unbeknownst to Garcia and others in Mexico City, global events began to favor San Felipe and the other Nagasaki martyrs. Just as the secularizing governments in Europe removed church privileges and nationalized ecclesiastical property, secret Christian sects in Japan came to light. In 1853, United States Commodore Matthew Perry forced feudal Japan to open political and commercial relations with the rest of the world (Perry). Against all odds, the world learned that some Japanese still maintained fidelity to Christianity after two centuries of isolation and persecution. The faith's unexpected survival provided welcome respite to the Catholic Church wearied by bad news.

Despite Mexico City's connection to this inspiring story of Christianity in Japan through San Felipe, the cathedral chapter preferred other saints. To historians, the Virgin of Guadalupe, which communicated God's special blessing on the Mexican people, was first and foremost. Indeed, many Mexicans felt that Pius IX's declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 reflected positively on her cult. The Mexico City cathedral, like other churches throughout Mexico, grandly celebrated the doctrine and inveighed against modern impieties such as liberalism and secularism in late April 1855 (Reta: 154-92). Yet the cathedral also set its sights on other devotions that communicated equally pressing religious messages as the religious nationalism of Guadalupe.

Prebendaries choose holy figures to console parishioners, to communicate solidarity to the papacy, and to favorably resolve conflicts with secular authorities. In late November 1854, the cathedral asked Rome for new privileges for devotions such as the Guardian Angel and the Passion of Jesus Christ. They also requested a special prayer to Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice. This eighteenth-century Franciscan who preached religious revival in the Italian peninsula was "very appropriate for these times," as the prebendaries said, "because it can be said that he is the last Apostle and that he specialized in changing hearts" (ACCM, Actas 85: 93).⁹ He was perfect for convincing liberals to mend their ways. The chapter might also have intended to curry favor with the pope given that Pius IX canonized the holy figure in 1867. The cathedral chapter, too, asked to adopt the feast of the Virgin of Help of Christians (*Auxilium Cristianorum*) (ACCM, Actas 85: 233-36). An earlier pope, Pius VII, instituted this celebration to memorialize his 1814 release from five years of captivity under Napoleon. The Mexico prebendaries understood that popes commemorated the triumph of the Church over its secular enemies during this feast.¹⁰

(ACCM, Clavería 45: 61; 46: 39; 47: 34; 48: 35; 50: 42; 51: 41; 52: 42). The great bulk of the canonization fund – 37,789.73 pesos – had been handed over to the Spanish king in 1817 (ACCM 84: 40v-41v).

⁹ This holy figure was beatified in 1796 and canonized on June 29, 1867 (Bihl).

¹⁰ In 1856, Pius IX extended the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to all churches, but the cathedral did not mention this devotion specifically until 1864 (Díaz Patiño: 77-79; ACCM, Actas 87: 129).

In Mexico, national politics took a turn for the worse in the 1850s. Exiled liberals saw opportunity for political change principally because President Santa Anna's conservative administration proved deeply unpopular. He based his legitimacy on the defense of the Catholic Church, but exasperated the country through frivolous rule and particularly the sale of the Mesilla Valley to the U.S. in 1853. Caudillos such as Juan Álvarez in Guerrero rebelled against the regime and took over the presidency in the fall of 1855 (Fowler: 32). Once back in power, liberals were determined to punish clerics for ecclesiastical support of their political enemies and to end the Catholic Church's influence in politics. Most importantly, the government severely restricted ecclesiastical *fueros* (courts) and forced the sale of most church-owned properties.¹¹ However, such radical measures offended even moderate liberals. Armed rebellions broke out in Puebla, Querétaro, Michoacán, and Veracruz (Hamnett: 96). Prelates excommunicated those who bought ecclesiastical property.¹² Those who swore allegiance had to retract the oath publicly or were refused care at Catholic hospitals or burial in consecrated ground. Radical liberals decried the hard-hearted clergy and exiled some – including Antonio Pelagio Labastida y Dávalos, bishop of Puebla in May 1856 (Gilbert: 228; Smith: 145). He made his way to Rome where he conferred with Pius IX.

As the conflict over religion intensified, it expanded into the realm of public ceremony and Catholic worship. Liberal editorialist Juan Bautista Morales in *El Republicano* warmly described the “solemn function of the blessing of the flag” in February 1856. Such occasions brought Mexicans together in civic harmony to “teach the public truth, and not falsities with the varnish of religion” like Catholic ritual did. The conservative newspaper *La Cruz* defended worship and the holy figures within it by emphasizing the Catholic Church's integral role in the history of Mexico. In February 1856, for instance, it argued that churchmen like the beatified Antonio Margil were “pure in habits, distinguished in virtue, and full of knowledge” (491). Other columns helped readers to interpret and appreciate the legacy of ecclesiastical buildings used for worship such as the Capuchin convent (*La Cruz* 1858b: 637).

The struggle to reform the Mexican Catholic Church reached a high point as liberals wrote a new constitution. In it, they hoped to codify their vision of a secular government, individualistic society, and a diminished Catholic Church. The Constitutional Congress officially opened on February 18, 1856 and delegates began deliberations. By law, they had exactly one year to finish (Zarco: 1: 27).

The Mexican Catholic Church and the papacy closely monitored the constitution's progress. The cathedral prebendaries often voiced concerns as they did in July 1856 when the Congreso Constitucional was considering religious toleration (ACCM, Actas 85: 275-76). Pius IX also remained focused on the proceedings – thanks to the entreaties of exiled prelate Pelagio Antonio de Labastida y Dávalos (Gilbert: 190). The Roman Curia began to draft a

¹¹ These were the Ley Juárez of November 23, 1855 and the Ley Lerdo of June 25, 1856 (Hamnett: 96-99; Meham: 360).

¹² The Church could avoid some of the effects of this law by transferring the properties to allies or having someone lend their name to a sale contract (Knowlton: 36-37). However, the pace of nationalization increased markedly in 1859 (Chowning: 268-71).

formal response to the new constitution, but importantly, too, Pius IX sent an unusual number of special devotional privileges to Mexico. He added, for instance, a papal absolution for San Felipe's feast as well as indulgences for two miraculous statues in the cathedral: the Señor del Buen Despacho and the Santo Niño Cautivo (ACCM, Actas 85: 353; 88: 365).¹³

The worst fears of the clergy came true in late January 1857. At that time, the Constitutional Congress approved measures asserting the federal government's power to regulate Catholic Church property and, in article 123, even issues of worship (*El Estandarte Nacional* 1857b, 1857c). With these provisions established, José María Mata, a radical delegate from Veracruz, pushed the group hard to finish their deliberations even searching the theater for deputies late one evening to keep a quorum (*El Estandarte Nacional* 1857d). Delegates approved the final version on February 3 and arranged for its formal signing two days later – on San Felipe's feast day (*El Estandarte Nacional* 1857a). No one specifically stated the intention was to replace a religious feast with a secular milestone, but it cannot be a coincidence that this document that severely undermined the Catholic Church came into being on that date particularly since the congress had another two weeks on its one-year remit. The constitution's promulgation, like the law itself, muscled aside religious concerns to realize their secular vision of Mexico.

Pius IX and clergy prepared the Mexican Catholic Church for the expected persecution from the government. Even before the promulgation of the constitution, the pope sent his formal condemnation and issued detailed instructions to the clergy (Mijangos y González: 165-66; Gilbert: 195). The directions prepared the Mexican clergy for the worst – even how to proceed when faced with desecrated churches and absent prelates (ACCM, Actas 85: 389). At the same time, Pius sent more changes to worship to hearten Mexican Catholics. Devotions of San Felipe, Precious Blood of Christ, Guardian Angel, and Our Lady of Help of Christians (Auxilium Christianorum) all received new privileges. For their part, the archbishop and chapter refused to ring church bells to celebrate the constitution, which they feared “might be interpreted as an approval of the contentious articles” (ACCM, Actas 85: 366-67). Furthermore, the archbishop forbade any Mexican clergy or any good Catholic layman from swearing allegiance to it (AGN, Justicia Eclesiástica 174: 415v).¹⁴ The prohibition created an anguishing dilemma because all public functionaries – working in any capacity – had to vow loyalty to the constitution or lose their job.

As ecclesiastics predicted, the government indeed clashed with the Catholic Church. Over the course of 1857, troops arrested and exiled clerics sometimes to dramatic effect. In July 1857 on Maundy Thursday, the federal government sent soldiers and police into the cathedral as the canons were in the midst of the Divine Office (*La Cruz*, 1858a: 614). Religious buildings were confiscated including the main friary of the Franciscans in Mexico City (Hamnett: 101). *Hacheros* or hatchet men destroyed altars and sacred images (Gilbert: 236). The government secularized public space by restricting religious processions and

¹³ The image earned its name because pirates captured it in 1622 before ransoming it back to cathedral.

¹⁴ Those that did were to present themselves to the ecclesiastical tribunal of penitence or their confessors and then publicly retract their vow

ecclesiastical clothing to indoors (ACCM, Actas 87: 135). In response, the Mexican Catholic Church declared an interdict of all sacraments. In December 1857, an alliance of conservatives, who rebelled under the leadership of General Félix Zuloaga, issued the Plan of Tacubaya. Benito Juárez assumed the presidency and fled first into the north before establishing a temporary capital in Veracruz (Hamnett: 102-3). From here, he oversaw the continuing military campaign and issued an avalanche of anticlerical laws such as a reduction in ecclesiastical feasts (Díaz Patiño: 134-35).

When the conservatives reestablished control over Mexico City, Catholic worship immediately resumed. In February 1858, the authorities in power made a special effort to celebrate San Felipe's feast – as if to erase the memory of the constitution. According to the official gazette, the function had “a sumptuousness that had not been seen in many years” (*Diario Oficial del Supremo Gobierno*). As “new proof of the frank reconciliation between the Church and State,” the archbishop presided over the ceremony in the cathedral with President Zuloaga, other high ministers, and municipal authorities all in attendance. This alternative nationalism proposed no divide between Mexico and Catholicism. The conservative government also adopted new patron saints. In response to a petition from residents of Mexico City and ten religious communities, Miguel Miramón, the conservative president, in May 1859 declared the Renovation of the Santo Cristo de Santa Teresa a national feast for May 19 (AGN, Justicia Eclesiástica 19: 350; vol. 146: 269-70).¹⁵ The federal government, too, reacted favorably to a request to make the feast of the Virgin of Remedios a day of obligatory mass (AGN, Justicia Eclesiástica 146: 431, 437-39, 483-87; 146: 316).¹⁶

Ultimately, the outcome of the bloody War of the Reform doomed such celebrations. Over the course of 1860, liberal forces gained the upper hand and in January 1861 reentered Mexico City. Anticlerical measures passed by President Benito Juárez from Veracruz became the law of the land and he began issuing new decrees targeting the Mexican Church (Hamnett: 112). Among those was a law-making February 5, a national holiday commemorating the 1857 constitution (Juárez: 32). Editors of *La Reforma* rejoiced saying that February 5 “for the lovers of the constitution. [We shall have] no *Te Deums*, cannon shots, no farces” (3).¹⁷ The Juárez administration added to the church's misery by issuing another decree on San Felipe's feast that renewed the confiscation and sale of ecclesiastical properties including the main Franciscan friary in Mexico City (Dublán and Lozano 1876: 9: 54-62). Beloved sacred images were destroyed in the process (Díaz Patiño 2016: 123).

Although liberals had retaken the seat of federal power, they had not obtained peace nor stability. Juárez deprived the opposition of its leaders by expelling the papal nuncio and

¹⁵ This statue had gained public attention in recent years. In 1854, the cathedral sponsored a novena to the Cristo of Santa Teresa for flooding and illness (AHCM, Festividades: Religiosas 1066, exp. 57; ACCM, Actas 85: 43-44).

¹⁶ The Virgin of Remedios had also experienced a surge. In 1854, 1855, 1856, 1858, and 1859 authorities in Mexico City brought the image for celestial assistance from flooding, illness, and war (AHCM, Festividades: Religiosas 1066, exps. 57, 61, 74, and 75; ACCM, Actas 85: 43-44; AHCM, Actas 180-A: 611).

¹⁷ The moderate liberal newspaper, *El Siglo XIX* (1862, 1863), stopped even mentioning February 5 as San Felipe's saint day.

exiled many prelates of the Mexican Catholic Church (Cuevas: 2: 476; Marroquí: 2: 412-13). Many made their way to Rome where they added their voices to the clamor already advocating for a forceful response to the anticlerical measures in Mexico. Pius IX understood only too well the high stakes. By 1860, he had lost all the Papal States except Rome to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. Only the support of Napoleon III saved the Eternal City.

The Catholic Church had its opportunity to strike back at liberals in the spring of 1861. At that time, Juárez declared a moratorium on external debt payments to stave off bankruptcy. The move gave papal ally Napoleon III an excuse to invade Mexico. Because the French emperor promised to install a pro-church, European monarch as puppet, Pius IX blessed the move. French troops arrived in Veracruz in December 1861 and marched inland. Churches offered masses of thanks along the way and exhorted parishioners to support the intervention (Beezley and Meyer: 292). Liberal forces offered stiff resistance in Puebla on May 5, 1862, but fled the capital for northern Mexico by June 1863.

As the fighting in Mexico continued, Pius IX paused to make arrangements for an unusual spectacle – a great meeting of Catholic prelates from across the globe to celebrate the canonization of San Felipe de Jesús and the other Nagasaki martyrs.¹⁸ The distinction accomplished a number of political goals for the papacy, but primarily, Pius IX envisioned a grand assembly of Catholic leaders in an event that projected the Catholic Church's strength and resilience.¹⁹ The Congregation of Rites scheduled the canonization for the symbolically important date of Pentecost and sent invitations to every bishop in the Catholic world (AMAS, leg. 1170, no. 36).

The canonization rallied Catholic prelates with a message of faithfulness to the mission of the Catholic Church and angry defiance of hostile governments. By early June 1862, twenty-one cardinals, five patriarchs, fifty-one archbishops, and one hundred eighty-one bishops gathered ("Manifestación" 1862: 34-40). They came from Europe, the Near East, Africa, Asia, and the Americas including Mexico. Speakers like Monsignor Félix Dupanloup, the bishop of Orleans, France, rallied the assembled dignitaries. He lamented that the troubled times were enough to cause the faithful to cry, "Oh! How God tests his Church!" (48-49). However, especially at this time of Pentecost, he emphasized, the Catholic Church could not abandon its mission. He stressed, too, the importance of solidarity behind the leadership of Pius IX calling the papacy the "sun of the world of souls" (47).²⁰

The canonization itself put Roman spectacle on display for the world. On June 8, 1862, the day of Pentecost, a procession of the gathered prelates and the religious communities of

¹⁸ Pius IX also responded to political pressure from the general of the Franciscans, Fr. Bernardino de Montefranco, and Spanish Queen Isabel. Both were on hand in September 17, 1861, at the Franciscans church of Santa Maria of Araceli to see Pius IX authorize the canonization of the Nagasaki martyrs (Banegas: 102).

¹⁹ According to the Spanish ambassador in Rome in a letter dated December 24, 1861, Pius IX considered it "a way to celebrate a type of Council motivated by the calamities afflicting the Church" (AMAS, leg. 1169, no. 262).

²⁰ The complete sentence reads, "every star has its laws, its movements, its harmonies, and yet, not one is independent or isolated, but rather each forms part of a system and revolves around a brilliant sun."

Rome filed out from the Sistine Chapel through the Plaza of St. Peter. They passed by paintings of the miracles of the Nagasaki martyrs and banners lauding the saints as examples of “virtue and faith, whose triumphs we applaud” (*Descripción de la fiesta*: 11). In a solemn ceremony, Pius IX canonized the Nagasaki martyrs and gave a homily on their lives and legacy (Banegas: 119). The moment held special significance to the exiled Mexican prelates who witnessed San Felipe de Jesús’s elevation to the first canonized saint born in Mexico.²¹

The following day, Pius IX wrapped up public events with a sermon angrily denouncing the war on Catholicism. He especially targeted the intervention of secular governments: “With detestable and truly satanic skill, [the enemies of the Catholic Church] stain and pervert all knowledge” causing the perdition of souls (1862a: 16). In a written response, the visiting dignitaries praised the pope’s leadership. In these difficult times, “you are for us the teacher of the sane doctrine, the center of unity” (“Manifestación”: 26). Enemies of the Catholic Church, they felt, would break against the citadel of the Holy See. Thus, energized with a message of resistance and fidelity, prelates returned to their dioceses – except those from Mexico.

Even though French forces were advancing, clerics in Mexico City had to endure a hostile liberal government. The news of the joyous occasion in Rome momentarily replaced the concerns that dominated Catholic affairs in the Mexican press such as ecclesiastical property, religious courts, and relations with the federal government. Catholic newspapers like *El Cronista* dedicated five days of front-page coverage to the canonization starting on August 26, 1862. Readers had a full transcript of Pius IX’s homily and a detailed description of the ceremony in Rome: many high prelates in attendance, St. Peter’s hung with lights, and a great concourse of spectators in the plaza; “everything was majestic” (Pius IX 1862b: 1; Rojas: 1). It might have seemed a sort of Catholic paradise to readers accustomed to religious conflict.

After San Felipe’s canonization, February 5 assumed even more symbolic importance for liberals and conservatives. Liberals, who still controlled Mexico City, though, made sure that the holiday to the constitution in February 1863 obscured the first feast of San Felipe as a full saint. They required that all public employees show up to cheer the constitution and timed the event to prevent people from attending both ceremonies (AHCM, Festividades 1058, exp. 3: 10). Rome, too, was attuned to the significance of February 5. That very day Pius IX named Pelagio Antonio Labastida y Dávalos as the new archbishop of Mexico (ACCM, Actas 87: 131).

The long-awaited entry of the French into Mexico City came in June 1863. The Mexico City cathedral chapter rejoiced at the change in government. Prebendaries made sure that

²¹ Banegas wrote that “by providence bishops who were banished from the Republic by Juárez’s decree were in Rome, so they attended and took part in the glorification of San Felipe” (105-6). He listed Clemente de Jesús Munguía of Michoacán, Francisco de Paula Vereá of Linares, Pedro Espinosa of Guadalajara, Pedro Barajas of San Luís Potosí, Pelagio Antonio de Labastida y Dávalos, of Puebla; and José María Covarrubias of Antequera [Oaxaca] (111).

worship shone their pleasure upon the French.²² When Emperor Maximilian arrived in June 1864, the cathedral quickly integrated him and his wife, Carlota, into the liturgy with *Te Deums*, processions, and masses.²³ For an institution defensive of its traditions, the chapter was notably accommodating to the new imperial regime.

Starting in 1864, the Catholic Church revived San Felipe's saint day to blot out the secular festival to the constitution. The official gazette lamented that in years past, the country did not celebrate the feast with the "appropriate honor" (*Periódico Oficial del Imperio Mexicano*). This newly declared national holiday, however, fulfilled the wishes of prelates who wanted a return to earlier times when religion and politics comingled (ACCM, Actas 87: 181-82). The newspaper proudly announced the grandees in attendance and the magnificence of the celebration. The articles singled out General Bazaine who carried in public for the first time the emblems of the Great Imperial Cross and the distinguished Order of Guadalupe awarded for his work in pacifying the country and consolidating the regency. The recently arrived ambassador of Napoleon III, the Marquis of Montolhon, also attended as well as other military officers and regency administrators. "Nothing was lacking," proclaimed the gazette, "for the perfect solemnity of this national feast" (*Periódico Oficial del Imperio Mexicano*).

Over time, the clergy grew disenchanted with their new emperor. While they had hoped for a complete restoration of Catholicism in Mexico, they found Maximilian more inclined to govern with a predilection toward enlightened monarchy. Most importantly in late December 1864, he refused to return all the Catholic Church's confiscated property and later even declared the toleration of other religions (Pani: 343).

Despite their disappointment in Maximilian, the Mexico City cathedral took advantage of the freedom of worship to strengthen the public cult of saints and highlight the miraculous power inherent in Catholicism. In that effort, they found a steadfast ally in Pius IX and a holy figure – also named Pius. In late December 1864, the pope sent the cathedral precious relics of St. Pius, a pope martyred in 157 (ACCM, Actas 87: 401). The prebendaries immediately began additional liturgical functions in thanks. They formally received the relics with a mass and resolved to say a triduum (three days of prayers) (ACCM, Actas 87: 399-400). To spread the devotion further, they named a commission in charge of the St. Pius's cult and asked the pope for a new proper office and mass for the saint for the entire archdiocese (ACCM, Actas 87: 406). Within months, Pius IX approved the request and added a plenary indulgence in favor of the Souls of Purgatory (ACCM, Actas 88: 182-84).

²² The prebendaries received the French army into Mexico City with a sung *Te Deum* (ACCM, Actas 87: 128-29). They invited the regime's top generals to participate in the Corpus procession and even considered adding the French flag to the regalia of the event (ACCM, Actas 87: 129-30).

²³ For instance, the cathedral celebrated the June 1864 birthday of the empress with a mass (ACCM, Actas 87: 249). For the official entrance of the emperor, the cathedral hosted three masses and an indoor procession. Maximilian's people asked for a prayed rosary, but the chapter objected saying that "this class of prayer is not customary in the cathedral" and suggested a sung litany of the saints instead (ACCM, Actas 87: 253). On July 6, 1864, the cathedral hosted the birthday mass of the emperor with a mass sung by the archbishop (ACCM, Actas 87: 262-63). In early July 1864, the cathedral added the emperor's name to mass and the collect (ACCM, Actas 87: 266-69).

Every year on February 25, the cathedral would sing the mass to St. Pius and display his relics for public veneration (ACCM, Actas 87: 410).²⁴

While this devotion unified the Mexican Catholic Church with the pope, Mexico was terminating its ties to Maximilian. Like the Mexican clergy, Pius IX only tepidly supported the regime and Napoleon III began to evacuate French troops from late 1866 to early 1867. By May 1867, liberals once more controlled the country. February 5 was restored as a civic holiday to the constitution with military processions and patriotic speeches celebrating liberal accomplishments.²⁵ Surprisingly considering recent events, Juárez moderated his stance on the Catholic Church somewhat and worked toward a reconciliation with clergy. Rather than religious polemics, the administration of Juárez and of Porfirio Díaz after him concentrated on establishing order and revitalizing the economy. While the Catholic Church did not entirely regain its property, legal rights, or political influence, it quietly concentrated on rebuilding.

Atoning for the Sins of *La Reforma*, 1880s-1890s

In the mid-1880s, Mexican prelates were confident enough in the political climate to push for a grand gesture that reinforced the central role of Catholicism in national life. Pius IX and Leo XIII (1878-1903) sent unsolicited privileges that boosted the cults of San José, the Rosary, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Díaz Patiño: 68-85). However, new devotional initiatives promoted within the Mexican clergy exceeded these papal measures. Most prominently, a group of prelates crowned the Virgin of Guadalupe on October 12, 1895. Mexican and foreign dignitaries visited the basilica for a month-long celebration of Guadalupe's legacy, of the importance of Catholicism to Mexico, and of the necessity of healing the violence of Mexico's wars (Brading: 298-304; Moreno Chávez: 199-210). Lesser known, although perhaps more closely tied to the symbolic restoration of Catholicism in Mexico, was the Expiatory Temple of San Felipe de Jesús, a church where priests prayed to atone for the sins of Mexico's *Reforma*.

Both the coronation of Guadalupe and the Templo Expiatorio began around the same time, involved many of the same clergymen, and were inspired by the same person: José Antonio Plancarte y Labastida, the nephew of Pelagio Antonio de Labastida y Dávalos, archbishop of Mexico. José Antonio had accompanied his uncle to Europe in exile. He was in Rome in 1862 to witness the canonization of San Felipe de Jesús. He traveled through France in 1877 seeing the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre, Paris a year after

²⁴ Given that the pieces were small, the cathedral tried to fit them together and considered setting them in wax or stucco, but decided instead to place them in a dignified silver urn.

²⁵ In 1869, artillery rounds were shot off at sunrise (AHCM, Festividades 1058, exp. 3: 16). Military bands played in the zocalo and later through the streets. Grandees like Guillermo Prieto, Ignacio Altamirano, and President Juárez made speeches. At 4:00 p.m., schoolchildren met in the Alameda for the first annual Children's Feast. In 1871, signatories of the 1857 constitution were special guests who enacted, "the code that guaranteed individual rights and public liberty, consecrated in Mexican blood" (AHCM, Festividades 1058, exp. 3: 21). By 1878, the ceremony featured the bodily remains of Benito Juárez from their sepulcher in the cemetery of San Fernando (AHCM, Festividades 1058, exp. 3: 83). In 1888, the Sociedad de Obreros or Gran Congreso Obrero had a "demostración patriótica" at the grave of Juárez (AHCM, Festividades 1058, exp. 3: 91).

construction began. The basilica was intended as an expiatory temple to atone for French sins that might have led to their country's defeats in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the Paris Commune uprising in 1871.²⁶ He also visited the famous shrine of the Virgin of Lourdes one year after her coronation (Brading: 292).

By 1885, Plancarte y Labastida was raising money for a church dedicated to San Felipe where priests might "expiate or repair the harm committed everywhere to the illustrious Holy Host" during Mexico's wars ("Relativa"). He proposed that it be built on the site of the former Main Friary of the Franciscans in Mexico City, which liberal governments had confiscated and partially leveled. As Plancarte y Labastida presented it, such a church would also return Mexico as a nation to good standing with God through prayer and penance.²⁷

Construction for the Templo Expiatorio got underway on August 2, 1886, with a blessing of the first stone. With ceremonial tools made of nickel and coral, the archbishop, the first lady, and the secretary of state heaped mortar on a cornerstone (*Templo expiatorio*: 3-4). The moment meant the most to the Franciscans. Later that morning they held the first mass there since the building was nationalized. "Venerable site," they lamented, "how many memories come to mind! Now without any other ceiling than the heavens, leveled by a thousand profanations" (*Templo expiatorio*: 5). Blessed be "this temple to our aggrieved God, where we will come day and night to expiate and erase with tears our madness" (*Templo expiatorio*: 5). To finish this vision and put the past to rest, the prelates called for the public to donate or pray.²⁸ "All of us," José Antonio Plancarte y Labastida concluded, "have to lament and ask for forgiveness for the past, we all need illumination and help for the future" (*Templo expiatorio*: 7).

In November 1896, the Templo Expiatorio of San Felipe was nearing completion. Archbishop of Mexico City, Próspero María Alarcón y Sánchez, planned the building's dedication to coincide with the tricentennial of San Felipe's martyrdom on February 5, 1897. On this date, the prelate envisioned a global day of atonement for the sins of the Mexican Reforma. He invited Catholic churches around the world and even Pope Leo XIII to say a mass in honor of San Felipe and to pray for the Mexican Republic. "The wars and revolutions that have wracked our homeland have ended;" now it is time, he urged, for a spirit of expiation, penitence, faith, and charity (Alarcón y Sánchez).

The archbishop instructed his Mexican clerics to hold a mass on February 5 and that all pray for the remission of the country's sins. The archbishop also asked that the prayer be read in religious schools asking that all be of contrite heart and supplicate the forgiveness of

²⁶ In 1896, Próspero María Alarcón y Sánchez de la Barquera, archbishop of Mexico City, stated explicitly that the Montmartre basilica inspired the San Felipe temple (Alarcón y Sánchez).

²⁷ This was not the only project aimed at atoning for the transgressions of the War of Reform. In 1885, María Concepción Méndez Pérez Gil received permission from archbishop Labastida y Dávalos to start a new order of nuns called the "Instituto de la Adoratrices Perpétuas Guadalupanas" dedicated to praying for the restitution of sins (Wright-Rios: 126).

²⁸ Interested donors that paid for a column could have their remains buried there. Those paying for an altar or a stained-glass window would have their names attached to the pieces.

sins in honor of San Felipe and for the good of the patria.²⁹ He provided a blank worksheet for each priest to identify every religious act on that day (see Appendix 1). So, that the priests of the Templo Expiatorio might know what sins had been committed, he asked clerics to send a report of the destruction of churches or of sacrileges against the Holy Host.³⁰ Finally, he asked that all request their religious superiors that San Felipe be named patron of the Mexican Republic with a rite of the first class and octave. The bishops of Cuernavaca and Yucatán sent out similar instructions to their diocesan priests (Vera; Carrillo y Ancona).³¹

The dedication of the Templo Expiatorio and the National Day of Atonement on February 5, 1897, provided an opportunity for reflection about history, Mexico, and Catholicism. Letters from parish priests and parishioners from places like Tepexpam and Tasquillo spoke excitedly about San Felipe and the call for public atonement.³² Clerics who spoke at the event or wrote about San Felipe, however, were subdued and thoughtful rather than defiant and triumphalist. At the dedication ceremony, the bishop of San Luis Potosí, Ignacio Montes de Oca, placed San Felipe and Mexico within the great push to evangelize the Americas and Asia. He had recently walked in the footsteps of San Felipe and other early missionaries in a pilgrimage to Japan. He related the saint's story including the glory of his martyrdom, but also lamented the great cost in lives of evangelization there (Montes de Oca: 35). Even more circumspect and sadly pessimistic was the 1896 *Vida* of San Felipe written by Francisco Banegas, seminary professor in Michoacán. During Mexico's *Reforma*, he wrote, the Church saw its "temples, monuments to the faith of our fathers, converted into streets; its churches looted, its priests mocked, and its dogmas profaned" (122). Normal morality gave way to a life or death struggle (120). Exactly at this moment of brutality and destruction, Pius IX canonized the martyrs of Japan. "Is there not something providential in this act?", Banegas asked his readers (124). Yet rather than heeding God's will by rededicating itself to the Catholic faith, he gloomily reflected, Mexico was adrift in "a glacial indifference that seems to extinguish religious belief in our patria" (126). The tone and message painted a stark contrast to the hopeful confidence in God's special purpose for Mexico that had buoyed national spirit in the early nineteenth century.

²⁹ The archbishop conceded 280 days of indulgence to those who took part in the day of expiation.

³⁰ He planned to collate all this information into a book that would go into the altar. Unfortunately, I have not located these reports.

³¹ The bishop of Cuernavaca, Fortino Hipólito Vera (2-4), also requested that all pilgrims traveling to the basilica of Guadalupe first pass through the temple. The bishop of Yucatán, Cresencio Carrillo y Ancona (24-25), asked his clerics to include the insurrection of indigenous peoples when compiling outrages against the Church. These clerics were also prominent defenders of the historicity of the apparition of Guadalupe and the wisdom of her coronation (Brading: 262-75).

³² Parishioners of Tepexpam included six pages of signatures (Dios Hurtado). The Sagrario also wrote (Estrada). The parish priest of Tasquillo and his parishioners also added their names to the request (Peña y Fon).

Conclusion

Until the late nineteenth century, prebendaries of the Mexico City cathedral communicated messages of constancy, religious revival, the miraculous power of Catholicism, and faithfulness to the papacy to its parishioners through the cult of saints. Certainly, parishioners also encouraged devotional change, but Mexican prelates were far from ceding control over holy figures to the laity. In this effort, the Mexican prelates had an ally in Pius IX. Until the 1840s, the Mexican Catholic Church was somewhat isolated from Rome. The unprecedented persecution that buffeted both the Holy See and bishoprics in Mexico drew the two together. In this sense, Catholics were more global in outlook and better connected internationally than liberals.

Liberals, too, took aim at worship by most notably prohibiting public processions and promulgating an anticlerical constitution on February 5, San Felipe's feast. The Holy See had a response for this as well. In 1862, Pius IX canonized San Felipe and other Nagasaki martyrs as examples of the strength and resilience of the Catholic Church. Almost simultaneously, the pope conspired with exiled Mexican prelates to encourage Napoleon III to conquer Mexico and install a European prince as Catholic monarch.

The disastrous results of this French Intervention and the death of Pius IX in 1878 loosened the close coordination between the papacy and the Mexican Church. The Catholic Church abandoned any audacious plan of overthrowing of the government. Clerics returned to earlier policies of guiding parishioners through worship. However, devotional changes authorized by Rome slowed substantially. As a result, the Mexican Catholic Church encouraged by pious entrepreneurs such as José Antonio Plancarte y Labastida focused more inwardly to resolve national concerns like overcoming the rancor of recent wars through the Templo Expiatorio.

Prelates did not relinquish the idea that Mexico was a Catholic nation nor that Catholicism could solve the country's woes. The Templo Expiatorio of San Felipe placed the Mexican Catholic Church at the center of the reconciliation process from the Wars of the Reforma. However, the message of San Felipe shifted. Rather than a symbol of religious nationalism and local pride, his feast was an opportunity to reflect on recent losses. The political orientation of the Mexican Catholic Church did change. Prelates preferred ecclesiastical freedom from the government rather than integrating the government formally into worship (Connaughton Hanley: 101). The reorientation from the upper reaches of power to parishioners set the stage in Mexico for the expansion of social Catholicism (Ceballos Ramírez). Worship and the cult of saints freed from close coordination with Rome were positioned to contribute to that effort.

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Appendix 1. Worksheet sent to priests for National Day of Expiation, February 5, 1897

Curato deObispado de
Cura.....
Misas dichas.....
Misas oidas.....
Comuniones.....
Primeras comuniones.....
Visitas al santísimo sacramento.....
Viacrucis.....
Rosarios.....
Actos de penitencia corporal.....
Ayunos y privaciones.....
Limosnas para la adoración perpetua.....
Limosnas para el Templo Expiatorio.....
Limosnas para los pobres.....
Obras de misericordia.....
Horas de enseñanza del catecismo.....

From Archbishop Próspero María Alarcón y Sánchez. "Edicto." Mexico City, November 27, 1896.

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AGN

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AHCM

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