

Chapter 4

REFORM AND RENEWAL IN THE DOMINICAN NUNNERIES OF SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

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REFORM AND RENEWAL have been continuous and cyclical throughout church history. Some argue it was an idealistic and maybe utopian aspiration—*ecclesia semper reformanda*—with a vague and unspecific meaning of these words and their synonyms.¹ Each reform movement was distinct and contingent on the time and place and deserves detailed individual analysis.

Compared with the Franciscans the lack of study into reforms of the female branch of the Dominican Order is particularly striking, especially for Spain and its colonial dominions in the Americas. Past research has superficially offered a vision of false homogeneity. However, the agents involved and the features and consequences across monastic life—art, architecture, liturgy, etc.—varied from one nunnery to another and from one place to other, and presents a complex picture. Moreover, the importance of Observance and reform movements within the religious orders and in relation to art and architecture has not been taken into consideration until recently, not only with Dominican nuns, and not only in the Spanish territories.² The present article intends to offer an introduction to these questions, namely the Observant reform and subsequent reformists

* Much of this essay was written with the support of a Clarín-Cofund grant under the Seventh Work Programme of the European Union, Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions, grant agreement no. 600196.

1 Gerhard Ladner's account of the rhetoric of reform in the early Church Fathers has been revised by scholars who have noted the lack of a clear definition of reform and other related vocabulary. On these issues, see Vargas, *Taming a Brood of Vipers*, 16–22 and also his "Administrative Change."

2 The Franciscan Observance in Italy and its repercussions for art was an exception, and the bibliography is vast. Recently, Denise Zaru has analyzed the contribution of Dominican Observance in Venice to changes in the religious image: Zaru, *Art and Observance in Renaissance Venice*. For Spain see Lucía Gómez-Chacón, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*. For Portugal see Cardoso, "Art, Reform and Female Agency in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries."

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movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, including those in the wake of the Council of Trent, for Dominican nunneries in Castile and Latin America, placing them in a broader context.

The Reform of Dominican Nunneries in Castile: Origins, Agents, and Impacts

The reform of Dominican nunneries in Castile started earlier than hitherto thought.³ The Western Schism (1378–1418) has been blamed for the apparent delay in the introduction of the Observant reform in Castile as Castile fell under the obedience of the Avignonese papacy.⁴ However, for the Dominicans we must bear in mind that Portugal, under the obedience of the pope of Rome, not Avignon, also belonged to the “Province of Spain” of the Order of Preachers before 1418 and introduced Observant reforms. Friar Vicente de Lisboa, Provincial of Spain, founded the first observant nunnery and male convent in Portugal: São Salvador of Lisbon (1392) and São Domingo of Bemfica (1399) respectively. The Portuguese observant convents joined together under a reform-minded vicar and continued so till 1418, when the new Province of Portugal was officially created.⁵ We should not forget the relationship between the queen of Portugal, Felipa (Philippa) de Lancaster (1387–1415), and Catalina (Catherine) de Lancaster (1373–1418), queen of Castile, her stepsister. As Diana Lucía has pointed out, their relationship may have favoured an earlier introduction of Observant reform in Castile, even before the Council of Constance in 1414–1418.⁶

Certainly, by the fifteenth century some women, including prioresses and patronesses, fostered reform in their nunneries. Kinship and family ties were key to this process, since it impacted on the legitimization of lineages. According to the *Libro Becerro* of Sancti Spiritus de Toro, Leonor Sánchez de Castilla, illegitimate daughter of the *infante* Sancho de Castilla, and prioress of Santi Spiritus de Toro (from ca. 1411 to 1444) reformed the spiritual life of this nunnery.⁷ No extant medieval documents prove her role as reformer, but an interesting miscellany volume copied in 1421 and dedicated to her could be understood in the context of Observant reform.⁸ Moreover, according

3 Pérez Vidal, “La Reforma de los monasterios de dominicas”; Lucía Gómez-Chacón, “Religiosidad femenina y reforma dominicana.”

4 Recent studies have shown that several attempts were made to reorganize the Order from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, contradicting the alleged decline of the Dominicans during this century: Vargas, *Taming a Brood of Vipers*, and his “Administrative Change”; Mixson and Roest, eds., *A Companion to Observant Reform*.

5 Luis Sousa, *Segunda Parte da Historia de S. Domingos*, book 1, chapter 2, fols. 10–11; book 2, chapter 1, fols. 83–86 and book 3, chapter 1, fol. 199; Hernández Martín, “La reforma dominicana.”

6 Lucía Gómez-Chacón, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, 57–58.

7 Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereinafter AHN), Clero, Libros, 18314: *Libro de Becerro*. Leonor entered first Sancti Spiritus in Benavente where she made her profession in 1393, and she subsequently moved to Toro.

8 Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 21626. It includes translations of Guillaume Perault and Suso’s *Horologium Sapientiae* by the bishop of Burgos, Pablo de Santa María: Conde, “De nuevo

to Diana Lucía, Leonor Sánchez de Castilla would have been probably one of the ideologues behind the iconographic program of Beatriz of Portugal's tomb, together with the former queen herself. The sepulchre's decoration includes one of the first depictions in Castile of St. Catherine of Siena, and this could have implied an earlier devotion to St. Catherine here than previously thought, probably through the circulation of hagiographical texts about St. Catherine produced by Tommaso da Siena.⁹

Books played a major role in the introduction or implementation of Observant reform and their exchange between different communities was crucial for processes of reform. Queen Leonor de Albuquerque, stepsister of her namesake prioress of Toro, donated in 1418 to Santa María in Medina del Campo her houses adjoining this nunnery.¹⁰ But, more or less at this very moment she wrote a letter to her cousin, María de Castilla, prioress of Santo Domingo in Toledo, with a request to borrow an Ordinary of the Mass in the vernacular to make a copy. This copy was most likely intended as a gift for the Santa María in Medina del Campo.¹¹ The Ordinary was a fundamental text, as any modification had to be approved by a General Chapter, like the Constitutions, so as to ensure liturgical uniformity across the Order.¹² Moreover, copying manuscripts to facilitate their transfer among nunneries implied a "liturgical migration," a phenomenon that has been mainly analyzed in relation to the enforcement of reform.¹³ In this case, and probably in others in Castile, this liturgical migration was probably determined by royal patronage and ties of kinship between these noblewomen and particular nunneries.¹⁴

We must mention here the outstanding example of Constanza de Castilla and her relative, Catalina de Castilla, prioresses of Madrid and Toledo respectively. Both, but especially Constanza, played a major role in the legitimation of her lineage, following the Iberian tradition of the *infantas*, which was continued by the *señoras* during the Late Middle Ages [Fig. 4.1]. In addition to the rebuilding or enlargement of several parts of the nunnery, such as the church in 1442, the refectory, the dormitory, and perhaps the main cloister, Constanza transformed the church's apse into a funerary chapel for her

sobre una traducción desconocida." I am grateful to Silvia Bara Bancel for bringing this to my attention. See also Pérez Vidal "Female Aristocratic Networks", 122–24.

9 Diana Lucía, "Religiosidad femenina y reforma," 629–30 and 634–36. Tommaso da Siena claimed to have sent copies to territories belonging to the Avignonese obedience, including Castile. Nevertheless, due to lack of manuscripts known from Castile, Catalonia, and the British Isles, Hamburger and Signori judged the success of Tommaso da Siena to be limited, and these texts only arrived with the printing press: *Catherine of Siena*, 7 and 11.

10 She kept for herself some dependencies where she lived for five years, until she took her vows as a nun: López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 28r.

11 Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 230; Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 104–5.

12 Creytens, "L'ordinaire des Frères prêcheurs."

13 Muschiol, "Migrating Nuns-Migrating Liturgy?"

14 Pérez Vidal, "The Art, Visual Culture and Liturgy," 230; Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 113–15.



Figure 4.1: Tomb of Constanza de Castilla. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 50242
[Reproduced courtesy of Fernando Velasco Mora, MAN, under licence CC-BY-SA-4.0]

grandfather, King Pedro I, and other members of the Castilla family.¹⁵ In the same way, and at the same time, her relative Catalina de Castilla, prioress of Santo Domingo de Toledo, ordered considerable repairs in the choir.¹⁶ Among these repairs were the renovation of the tombstones of some outstanding prioresses, like Juana de la Espina and Teresa de Ayala, but also those of her father and uncle, Diego and Sancho, both illegitimate sons of Pedro I, whose remains had been transferred to the nunnery by herself and queen Catalina de Lancaster.¹⁷

The powerful Constanza was certainly a charismatic prioress but something of a contradiction: despite her evident devotion and observance, she also obtained special licences from prelates of the Order to conduct a life more like the *infantas* or *señoras* than an observant nun.¹⁸ For instance, like other queens and noblewomen, she was permitted to live separately from the community, in her own lodgings around a secondary cloister, and she was allowed to leave the nunnery, when necessary, to visit her relatives

¹⁵ Eguren, *Memoria histórico-descriptiva del Monasterio de Santo Domingo*, 21.

¹⁶ Martínez Caviro, *Conventos de Toledo*, 106.

¹⁷ Hernando del Castillo, *Segunda parte de la Historial General de Sancto Domingo*, chapter 7, fol. 159.

¹⁸ A survey of Hispanic customs concerning the *Infantado* is available in Cayrol Bernardo, “*De infantas, domnae y Deo Votae*.” The *señoras* can be understood as continuing this custom. They had great power and authority over the abbess or prioress, oversaw the administration of their nunnery, acted as intermediaries between the patrons and the nunnery, and played a prominent role in preserving the memory of their lineage.

or to address personal issues at the royal court.¹⁹ Conversely, between 1449 and 1451 she was entrusted by Pope Nicholas V with the foundation of a new nunnery *sub regulari observantia* called Mater Dei.²⁰ It seems that there was no contradiction in that historical moment between observance and aristocratic women living in their own lodgings in a convent. We can cite more examples: Queen Beatriz of Portugal, who retired to Sancti Spiritus de Toro in her widowhood, or Beatriz de Manrique, wife of Pedro Fernández de Velasco, Count of Haro. Beatriz and Pedro supported and fostered the Franciscan observance in Castile. When widowed, Beatriz retired to the Poor Clares nunnery of Medina del Pomar. There, she built a house in the orchard to lodge some laywomen who came with her, as well as other pious women who could live at the nunnery without taking vows.²¹ This custom continued in Spain even after the Council of Trent, as several studies have proved. Cloistered nuns were indeed closely involved in the secular world, and their influence transcended the cloister walls.²²

The Provincial of Spain, Luis de Valladolid (1419–1423), who granted Constanza de Castilla so many privileges, also encouraged reform. Indeed, on February 5, 1418 Martin V authorized him to found six monasteries and four nunneries, although it seems only Scala Coeli by Álvaro de Córdoba was ever completed. All these attempts of reform were a consequence of the Council of Constance, at which Martin V was elected and Álvaro de Córdoba, Luis de Valladolid, and Juan de Torquemada all participated. Torquemada pursued the reform of the Dominicans in Castile in the 1460s, albeit with a clearly different accent, one where Thomism had significant weight.²³ Torquemada reformed Santa María Sopra Minerva in Rome as well as San Pablo de Valladolid, commissioning a now lost cycle of frescoes, based on Torquemada's *Meditationes*, in the former as well as the rebuilding of the convent and church of the second.²⁴ The Congregation of the Observance was established in 1467 with the approval of a Master General and its first chapter was held at San Pablo de Valladolid in 1477.²⁵

The Catholic Monarchs and Cisneros whipped up reform with the appointment of reformers at the end of the fifteenth century. But they had to often face strong opposition from particular religious communities, as we know of conflicts from some documents, even if chronicles kept this quiet.²⁶ They are documented for Dominican nunner-

¹⁹ All these privileges were collected in a book: *Libro de las licencias y gracias*, unfol., in Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 7296.

²⁰ The pope issued two bulls, the first on July 5, 1449 and the second on May 18, 1451: Rome, Archivio General dell'Ordine dei Predicatori, Serie xiv, Fondo Libri, *Liber KKK*, fol. 574r; Archive of Santo Domingo de Toledo, doc. 1713; Madrid, AHN, Clero, Pergaminos, 1365/15.

²¹ Pereda, "Liturgy as Women's Language," 2:974–88. She also encouraged the foundation of three communities of Franciscan women religious: Rucquoi, "Los franciscanos en el reino de Castilla," 79.

²² Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun*; Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*.

²³ Binder, "El cardenal Juan de Torquemada."

²⁴ Bourgeois, *Reconstructing the Lost Frescoes*; Beltrán de Heredia, "Colección de documentos inéditos," 213.

²⁵ Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la Reforma de la Provincia de España*, 160.

²⁶ In Castile these conflicts are well documented in some monasteries, like San Esteban de

ies in Castile at Caleruega, Quejana, and San Cebrián de Mazote and perhaps elsewhere. In 1486 the reformer Alfonso de San Cebrián required the support of the civil authorities to stem disorders and impose reform on San Cebrián de Mazote and others.²⁷ Trouble occurred too at Caleruega, where some unreformed nuns, who had previously abandoned the nunnery, wanted to return and expel the reformed nuns, as we can read in a letter of August 1, 1479 from Queen Isabel.²⁸ Finally, a memorandum sent to the Consejo Real refers to both the reformers' abuses in Quejana and the nuns' resistance with the support of their patron Pedro López de Ayala.²⁹ Queen Isabel also took part in the reform of this nunnery, on the request of María de Ayala, Countess of Valencia de Don Juan. The reform process was probably not completed until the sixteenth century.³⁰

As we have seen, friars were not the only people in charge of introducing observance, but some women—both nuns and patronesses—also fostered it. We might also note that some nunneries were reformed even before the monasteries in the same cities, as happened in Zamora in 1478 and Salamanca in 1482.³¹ So women's role as agents in these processes needs to be revised.³²

Even if the Catholic Monarchs and Cardinal Cisneros were far from being the only reforming agents, their power could prevail over Dominican friars. For instance, they supported the Beata di Piedrahita, a famous Dominican reformer whose spirituality was strongly influenced by Savonarolan piety, against the opposition of his Order.³³ Moreover, the influence of the Cisnerian Reforms reached America, by means of some friars, like fray Juan de Zumárraga and the Dominican fray Bernardo de Alburquerque. In the New World, conflicts between reformers and unreformed friars continued during the sixteenth century.³⁴

Salamanca: Nieva Ocampo "La creación de la Observancia regular."

27 Archivo General de Simancas, Registro General del Sello, IV, fol. 122, cited in Nieva Ocampo, "La creación de la Observancia regular," 96.

28 Archivo General de Simancas, 1757 (Registro General del Sello, III, 248, fol. 81), cited in González González, *Real Monasterio de Santo Domingo de Caleruega*, 152.

29 Portilla Vitoria, *Vertientes cantábricas del Noroeste Alavés*, 767.

30 María de Ayala appointed Queen Isabel her executor (in her will of July 4, 1496), commissioning her with the reform of Quejana: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Pergaminos, 3524/2; Archivo del monasterio de San Juan Bautista de Quejana, Apart. B, leg.1, no. 5.

31 Beltrán de Heredia, *Historia de la Reforma de la Provincia de España*, 16. Liber KKK, fol. 574r; Salamanca, Archive of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación, *Noticia de la fundación del Convento de Santa María de la Ciudad de Salamanca* (1698), fol. 2r.

32 The complexity of these processes has been recently clarified in the case of Observant Dominican nunneries in North and Central Italy: Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre*. See also Diana Lucía, "Religiosidad femenina y reforma."

33 Sastre Varas, "Proceso de la beata de Piedrahita," *Archivo Dominicano* 11 (1990): 359–402 and second part with the same title in *Archivo Dominicano* 12 (1991): 337–86; Sanmartín Bastida, *La representación de las místicas*.

34 Ulloa, *Los Predicadores divididos*, 85–141.

Cisneros, Bishops, and Patronesses in the First Nunneries in the New World

The Franciscan fray Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico, a man formed by the Cisnerian reform, introduced remarkable developments in the New World.³⁵ Among other initiatives, he urged the foundation of the first nunnery in New Spain, facing opposition from the crown. During the 1530s and 1540s the Spanish Monarchs did not consider the foundation of nunneries necessary in mission territories but favoured instead the creation of schools for girls for the training of aristocratic native women (the daughters of *caciques*, or indigineous chiefs).³⁶ Between 1531 and 1536, ten such houses were founded in the Mexico valley. The first were Texcoco and Huejotzingo, established by Pedro de Gante in 1528, and a third was created in Mexico in 1531. Interestingly, whereas the conversion of *beaterios* (houses of pious but unordained women) into nunneries or houses of regular tertiaries was encouraged in Spain, this was not seen as a necessity in America.³⁷

Both the episcopacy and the secular elite, people like viceroy Mendoza and friar Juan de Zumárraga, fostered the establishment of convents of cloistered, regular nuns. Juan de Zumárraga arrived in New Spain on December 6, 1528, and, as other bishops, he viewed *beatas* with suspicion, and had strong confrontations, even threatening them with excommunication if they did not observe enclosure. In 1537 he proposed “un monasterio encerrado de buenas paredes altas y convenientes aposentos” (a monastery enclosed with good high walls and suitable rooms), that is to say, of enclosed nuns, as being more appropriate for the natives: “nos parece que sería mejor monjas encerradas, por la condición y costumbres de estos naturales.”³⁸ He required “indian” women and *mestizas* (mixed American and European) to be separated inside the cloister, and encouraged nuns from Spain to join this foundation. However, Spanish nuns did not come, only *beatas* during the sixteenth century.³⁹ In 1529 and 1530 the Empress Isabel issued royal decrees ordering the provincial of the Franciscan Order to recruit five *beatas* from Salamanca and Seville to be sent to New Spain.⁴⁰ Agustín Vetancourt reported the arrival of three religious women from Santa Isabel de Salamanca to Mexico.⁴¹

35 Regarding Zumárraga, see García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga*; Carreño, *Don fray Juan de Zumárraga*; Greenleaf, *Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition*, 26–41.

36 Maybe inspired by the girls’ schools founded by Cisneros in the early sixteenth century in Alcalá de Henares and Toledo for educating young women: Graña Cid, “Mujeres y educación en la pre-reforma castellana,” 121–22.

37 Muriel, *La sociedad Novohispana*.

38 *Carta de los Ilustrísimos. Sres. Obispos de México, Oaxaca 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 de este Nuevo Mundo* (November 30, 1537) in García Icazbalceta, *Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga* (1881), 93–94.

39 See Doris Bieñko’s article in this volume.

40 Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*, 28–32.

41 Vetancourt, *Teatro Mexicano*, part 2, 343.

The new foundation, at that time dedicated to the Madre de Dios, is mentioned for the first time in the will of Zumárraga in 1547. However, recent research has shown that it was rather in transition between an original *beaterio-recogimiento* and a Conceptionist nunnery that was only officially established in 1578. The change was a more complex and longer process than had been considered before.⁴² As often happened, the institution's history was subsequently rewritten and in the mid-eighteenth century its origin as house for "indian" noblewomen was denied.⁴³

I consider the dedication of the nunnery—Madre de Dios—significant and perhaps linked with the influence of Cisneros' reform on Zumárraga. Cisneros had a great devotion for the Immaculate Conception. He was a great supporter of the Order of the Immaculate Conception (Conceptionists) from the beginning of the sixteenth century and he founded several convents, such as the Madre de Dios de Illescas (Toledo). He also created a chapel with the same dedication—the Immaculate Conception or the Madre de Dios—in the archbishop's palace in Toledo, and he established a confraternity "de la Purísima Concepción."⁴⁴ While such a dedication was not exclusive to Cisneros nor to the Franciscans, it does seem to have been a very popular dedication for observant or reformed nunneries in the Iberian Peninsula between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ Queen Eleanor of Viseu, founded in 1509 the nunnery of Madre de Deus in Lisbon, a community of Colettine Poor Clares.⁴⁶ We find also many Dominican nunneries with this dedication, despite the *maculist* stance of the Order (i.e., opposed to the doctrine of the immaculate conception), which at that point was not universally adopted by Dominican friars. As we have mentioned before, Constanza de Castilla undertook the foundation of a nunnery called Mater Dei between 1449 and 1451, and a previous *beaterio* in Toledo, dedicated to Santa Catalina and also supported by Cardinal Cisneros, became the nunnery of Madre de Dios in 1486.⁴⁷ In 1495, the Catholic Monarchs and Cisneros entrusted the foundress of this Toledan house, María Gómez de Silva, with the reform of Santo Domingo de Toledo, and Santo Domingo de Madrid.⁴⁸

42 The bull of confirmation, issued by Pius V, arrived only in 1586: Barreto Ávila, "Beatas medievales educando princesas nahuas," 37–39.

43 Previously, the chroniclers of the Franciscan Order, like Agustín Vetancourt, had simplified the process of foundation, anticipating it to 1530, when four *beatas* who had been living until then in the house of the conquistador Andrés de Tapia made his profession before Zumárraga, noting also that they were then under the trust of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady: Agustín Vetancourt, *Teatro Mexicano*, part 2, 26–28.

44 García Oro, *La iglesia de Toledo*, 99–100.

45 Many had previously been *beaterios* dedicated to Santa Catalina, and changed dedication when they were transformed into nunneries.

46 Curvelo, ed., *Casa Perfeitíssima*.

47 In this year, the *beatas* were authorized by Pope Innocent VIII to profess as nuns "veladas y encerradas": López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 281r.

48 Serrano Rodríguez, "Piedad, nobleza y reforma," 224.

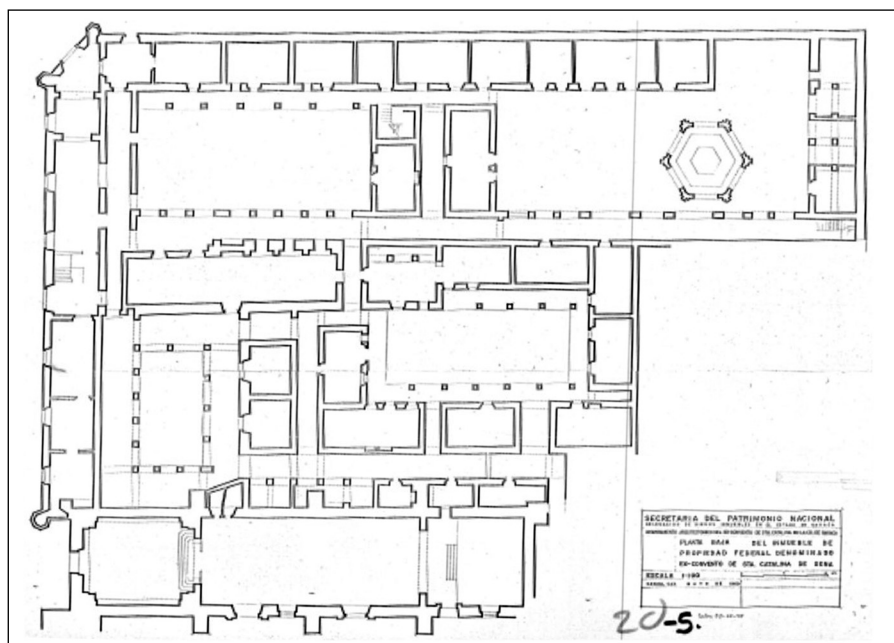


Figure 4.2: Plan of Santa Catalina de Siena, Oaxaca. By Vicente Medel y Ortiz Lajous, from the Dirección de sitios y monumentos, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Mexico. Reproduced courtesy of CONACULTA.

The second nunnery founded in New Spain had the dedication “Santa Catalina de la Madre de Dios in Oaxaca.” Its founder was the bishop of Antequera (now Oaxaca), the Dominican Bernardo de Alburquerque (1558–1579), who had been friar of San Esteban in Salamanca [Fig. 4.2].⁴⁹

In a pattern seen elsewhere, it started in 1571 as a family foundation for two nieces of the prelate, plus other religious women, who were lodged in some houses allocated for this purpose by the bishop Alburquerque (“que para ello tenía deputadas”).⁵⁰ It is striking that some Franciscan nuns from Mexico were sent to Oaxaca, although the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina de Siena and Santa Ana in Puebla had been already founded in 1568.⁵¹ Indeed, it was not uncommon for nuns belonging to a different order to be appointed to instruct or reform newly founded nunneries, both in Peru and New Spain. This had occurred previously in Spain but it was certainly more frequent in the New World. However, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards,

⁴⁹ Martínez Sola, *El obispo fray Bernardo de Alburquerque*.

⁵⁰ Oaxaca, Biblioteca Burgoa, 24727: *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio de monjas intitulado de Sancta Catharina de Sena*. This is a copy of the original book, preserved at the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Históricas in Querétaro.

⁵¹ Amerlinck de Corsi and Ramos Medina, *Conventos de monjas*, 153–56.

religious women would be sent from Europe.⁵² Returning to Oaxaca, once the nunnery got over its teething problems, and the necessary papal approval was obtained in 1577,⁵³ the bishop granted it specific constitutions, which, were substantially those of the Dominicans, under whose jurisdiction they were.⁵⁴ In the same way, the Dominican nunnery of Santa María de Gracia de Guadalajara was founded in 1588 by the Dominican bishop Domingo de Alzola, with Dominican nuns from Puebla, and it was under episcopal jurisdiction.⁵⁵

In the viceroyalty of Peru, nunneries had a similar origin, many of them originating from earlier *beaterios* founded by widows or women who could not afford a dowry.⁵⁶ The first nunnery in Lima, la Encarnación, was originally a female orphanage founded by Leonor de Portocarrero and her daughter Mencía de Sosa. It was subsequently transformed into a *beaterio*—Nuestra Señora de los Remedios— and later into a nunnery (1561) of Augustinian canonesses, under the jurisdiction of the bishop (Jerónimo de Loaysa).⁵⁷ Dominican nuns in Cuzco were also under episcopal jurisdiction and quite independent from their order. After her son's death, Lucía de Padilla founded Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Arequipa, the second Dominican nunnery in Arequipa, on August 1, 1599. It subsequently moved to Cuzco with the approval and support of the bishop Don Antonio de la Raya. An anonymous Dominican nun reported that the nuns of Arequipa did not seem to have asked the friars' permission for their relocation, nor were they received by them upon their arrival in Cuzco [Fig. 4.3].⁵⁸

As we will now see, chapter 9 of the decree *De regularibus et monialibus* of the Council of Trent established that nunneries established under episcopal jurisdiction were to be governed by bishops and were ultimately dependent on the Apostolic See. However, it did recognize the existence of other nunneries under the jurisdiction of the male

52 This happened for instance with the Capuchin nuns. The first house of these nuns in Mexico received nuns from Toledo in 1665, and five Capuchin nuns from Madrid were sent in 1712 to Lima. The latter journey is one of few travel narratives written by women and for other women, and one of the first accounts of women religious travelling to the New World: María Rosa, *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*, ed. Owens. Regarding this and the cultural influence of Spanish nuns in America see the article of Doris Bieńko in this volume.

53 Papal letter of Gregory XIII authorizing the foundation of the nunnery (March 1, 1577): Oaxaca, Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova, Fondo incorporado.

54 *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio*. Davila Padilla referred the foundation in his chronicle as well as Martínez Sola in her study on the prelate. Nevertheless, both relied exclusively on the *Libro de fundación del convento y monasterio*. Dávila Padilla, *Historia de la fundación y discurso de la Provincia de Santiago*, 300–303; Martínez Sola, *El obispo fray Bernardo de Albuquerque*, 388–404.

55 Two other Dominican nunneries were founded in Mexico in the sixteenth century: Santa Catalina de Siena in Mexico in 1593 and Santa Catalina de Valladolid in 1595.

56 Martín, *Daughters of the Conquistadores*; Burns, *Colonial Habits*; Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly*.

57 Leiva Viacava, "En torno al primer monasterio limeño"; Vinatea Recoba. "Ficción y realidad."

58 Burns, *Colonial Habits*, 83; Pérez Vidal, "Arte y patrimonio de las dominicas."



Figure 4.3: Cycle of paintings with scenes from the life of St. Catherine of Siena.
Santa Catalina de Siena, Cuzco. Ca. 1650. Photo: Mercedes Pérez Vidal.

branch of their order.⁵⁹ In the case of Arequipa, the independence of these Dominican nuns from the Order of Preachers is clear.

The Council of Trent and its Impact in America

The Council of Trent legislated on regular religious in its twenty-fifth and final session. The Decree *De regularibus et monialibus* consisted of twenty-one chapters. Six of them made specific reference to nuns (chaps. 5, 7, 9, 10, 17, and 18), on top of the general prescriptions for regulars that we find in the rest of the chapters.⁶⁰

However, as is well known, the implementation and enforcement of the Tridentine decrees varied from place to place, depending on different factors. The support provided by the respective princes and rulers was one of them. For instance, Cosimo de' Medici was somewhat in disagreement with the Tridentine interpretation of enclosure, as he had previously issued, in 1545, a decree, *Reformatio monasteriorum*, more concerned with financial and patrimonial control over nunneries.⁶¹ By contrast, in Spain, these disciplin-

⁵⁹ López de Ayala, trans., *El sacrosanto y ecuménico concilio de Trento*, 370.

⁶⁰ López de Ayala, trans., *El sacrosanto y ecuménico concilio de Trento*, 360–453.

⁶¹ Evangelisti, “We Do not Have It.”

ary measures posed little novelty, as they continued the line of reforms that began a century earlier and the prevailing policy of Philip II. By a royal decree issued on July 12, 1564, he urged compliance with the Tridentine decrees in all territories under his sovereignty.⁶²

Previous historians have argued that the New World was ignored by the Council of Trent and the Spanish crown did little to implement the Tridentine decrees in America. On the contrary, some bishops, like Alonso de Montúfar and Pedro Moya de Contreras in New Spain or Jerónimo de Loaysa, Toribio de Mogrovejo in Peru, were credited with the introduction of these reforms through the provincial councils they convened.⁶³ Recent studies have shown the different agents involved in these processes and how complicated change could be. Not only metropolitan bishops but the regular clergy, viceroys, and the Spanish Crown all played an active role.⁶⁴ The interest of the crown—and in particular Philip II—in the ecclesiastical reforms in America is exemplified in *De la Gobernación* (ca. 1568), a book written by Juan de Ovando (1514–1575) who was responsible for the visitation and reform of the *Consejo de Indias*. It was a paraphrase of the Council of Trent, intending to provide, after assessing the state of the church in America, a basis for provincial councils to be held in the New World.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru showed major differences, due to their differing circumstances. The relationship between the secular and regular clergy, the bishops, and the viceroys and the Spanish crown differed significantly. In New Spain, the secular and regular clergy were clearly in opposition to each other, on the one hand, likewise the bishops and viceroys due to the support the viceroys offered to the mendicants. In the Viceroyalty of Peru, things were quite different, due in large part to its great size. The regular clergy never gained the same importance and influence as in New Spain, and the opposition between viceroys and bishops was less marked.⁶⁶ We need further research to offer more nuanced interpretations than previous scholarship and clarify some understudied issues, like the impact of these reforms on nunneries.⁶⁷

In both New Spain and Peru, the first two provincial councils echoed the Tridentine decrees, but only the third was effective and successful, resulting in a legislative corpus that was in force until almost the nineteenth century. The first provincial council of New Spain was celebrated in 1555, when the Council of Trent was still happening, and the second was held in 1565, both being convened by Alonso de Montúfar.⁶⁸ In Peru, the

62 Rodríguez de Ceballos, "Liturgia y configuración del espacio," 45.

63 Lundberg, "Unification and Conflict"; Poole, *Pedro Moya de Contreras*; Viforcós Marinas, "Las reformas disciplinares de Trento," 525.

64 Martínez López-Cano and Cervantes Bello, eds., *Reformas y resistencias en la Iglesia Novohispana*.

65 Pérez Puente, "La Reforma regia para el gobierno eclesiástico de las Indias."

66 A comparative analysis taking a specific dispute about *diezmos* is in Mazín, "Catedrales versus órdenes religiosas."

67 Some exceptions already exist: Viforcós Marinas, "Las reformas disciplinares de Trento"; Salazar de Garza, "Repercusiones arquitectónicas"; Loreto López, "Los conventos de mujeres en Puebla."

68 The acts of the first three provincial councils of Mexico were finally published together in 2004, as well as a collection of studies devoted to them: Martínez López-Cano, ed., *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*; Martínez López-Cano and Cervantes Bello, *Los Concilios provinciales en Nueva España*.

first provincial council was celebrated in 1551–1552, and although it had neither pontifical nor royal approval it laid the groundwork for subsequent councils. The second provincial council was convened by Jerónimo de Loaysa and held in 1567 and 1568. Despite its achievements, its provisions quickly fell into abeyance and had nothing to say specifically about nuns. This lack of interest in female monasticism by the two first provincial councils in both Peru and Mexico is easily understandable when we remember there was then only one female foundation in the Viceroyalty of Peru—La Encarnación in Lima—, plus the Madre de Dios, in Mexico City.

The third iterations in both Peru and New Spain did then establish rules for nuns. The third provincial council of Peru was organized by Toribio de Mogrovejo in 1582, and that for Mexico three years later and convened by Pedro Moya de Contreras.⁶⁹ The rules adopted by both constituted the basic regulatory body that governed religious life until the nineteenth century. Researchers have focused on the impact of both these councils on mission in the New World, and on the reform of the clergy, but, with a few exceptions, they have ignored female monasticism. However, the third council of Mexico devoted chapter (*título*) 13 of the third book, including twenty-one points to nuns,⁷⁰ and the council of Lima devoted four entire chapters to nuns (23 to 26).⁷¹

Disputes between the Regular and Secular Clergy

Jurisdiction over nunneries was, in addition to doctrine and tithes (*diezmos*), a major source of friction between the regular and secular clergy, leading in some cases to heated conflicts.⁷²

As mentioned above, Trent encouraged the foundation of nunneries under episcopal jurisdiction, but allowing some to be under their respective orders' control. The provincial councils in New Spain and Peru were quite vague in regulating the relationships between episcopal authority and the nunneries. Thus, the heterogeneity of the Middle Ages persisted after Trent. Custom played an important role and led to a flexible interpretation of the life and rights within convents until the second half of the eighteenth century. Whereas some nunneries were founded by bishops—who frequently provided them with specific constitutions⁷³—, in other cases episcopal protection was sought by the nuns themselves to escape the friars' control. Conversely, some nunneries sought

69 Vargas Ugarte, *Concilios limenses*; Martínez López-Cano, *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*.

70 "De los regulares y las monjas, in Concilio III Provincial Mexicano celebrado en México el año 1585. Aprobación del concilio confirmación del sínodo provincial de México Sixto V, para futura memoria": Martínez López-Cano, *Concilios provinciales mexicanos*, 178–89.

71 Viforcós Marinas, "Las reformas disciplinares de Trento."

72 As happened for instance in the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina in Quito where jurisdiction over the nunnery was claimed by the friars on the one hand, supported by the Lope Antonio de Munive, president of the *audiencia* in Quito, and by the bishop on the other hand: Viforcós Marinas, "Las reformas disciplinares de Trento," 530.

73 For instance, Bishop Bernardo de Alburquerque in Oaxaca, or Fray Agustín de Coruña in San Agustín de Popayán in 1578: Viforcós Marinas, "Las reformas disciplinares," 532.

to avoid the bishops' jurisdiction in favour of Dominican friars.⁷⁴ This only changed through individual intervention by some energetic bishops, like the reformist Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, Bishop of Puebla (1639–1656).⁷⁵ He placed all the nuns in Puebla, with the exception of the Poor Clares, under his jurisdiction; he ordered the revision and a new publication of rules and constitutions for all the convents in the Calzadas district.⁷⁶ Moreover, he also founded the Dominican nunnery of Santa Inés de Montepulciano, and he wrote specific ordinations and constitutions for it, as well as for the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina di Siena.⁷⁷ So even here, Dominican nuns did not follow the constitutions of their own order, but those given by their episcopal prelate.

Embracing or Imposing Enclosure

The observance of enclosure was an issue inextricably linked to all reform movements during the late medieval centuries, although the results achieved in this regard had not been satisfactory. The Council of Trent legislated on enclosure in an ambiguous and hasty way, leading to considerable controversy in subsequent years regarding the interpretation of those provisions. Clarification of the issue and the adoption of clear and strong measures was the work of Pius V in the constitutions *Circa pastoralis* (May 29, 1566) and *Decori et honestati* (January 24, 1570). In some cases, this meant building physical barriers, as happened in Santo Domingo de Toledo. In this nunnery, probably in the wake of the *Circa pastoralis*, prioress Ana de Duque started in 1566 the rebuilding of the church with a solid wall between it and the nuns' choir [Fig. 4.4]. A similar wall was built in the Dominican nunnery of Medina del Campo. On both walls we can see the coat of arms of Philip II.⁷⁸

However, the implementation of these measures varied from place to place, depending on several factors, and we can distinguish, as Creytens pointed out, "open nunneries" and "closed nunneries," not only before Trent but even after it.⁷⁹ In many cases, nuns sought to overcome the increasing constraints of enclosure by negotiating a more flexible interpretation of the rules and maintain their earlier religious practices. Before and after Trent nuns would leave their convents, and outsiders of both sexes were allowed inside the enclosure.⁸⁰ Not only priests entered to celebrate masses and processions

74 Regarding jurisdictional heterogeneity in Dominican nunneries in medieval Castile see Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 62–67.

75 Álvarez de Toledo, *Politics and Reform in Spain and Viceregal Mexico*.

76 Loreto López, "Conventos de mujeres en Puebla," 415.

77 Palafox y Mendoza, *Ordenanzas y Constituciones*. Salazar de Garza, "Repercusiones arquitectónicas," 131–32.

78 Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*, 243–45.

79 Creytens, "La riforma dei monasteri femminili dopo i Decreti Tridentini," 1:46–49.

80 Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*. As this author has shown, there was a tension between religious reform and the traditional independence and power of Spanish nuns. See also Pérez Vidal, "De linnage munit' alt."



Figure 4.4: Santo Domingo el Real, Toledo. Wall between the church and nuns' choir, with the arms of Philip II of Spain. Reproduced courtesy of José María Moreno Santiago.



Figure 4.5: Chapter House. Cycle of paintings with penitent saints, Chapter House. Santa Catalina de Siena, Cusco. End of the eighteenth century. Photo: Mercedes Pérez Vidal.

but also some seculars, for certain occasions.⁸¹ Although the reinforcement of enclosure seems to have been closely related to the growth of rituals, paraliturgies, and plays by nuns inside the cloister, reformers and ecclesiastical authorities tried to control this development, especially the performance of profane plays and the presence of lay audiences. Santo Domingo de Toledo had a remarkable chapel of musical nuns but, at certain feastdays—Easter, Christmas, the Assumption of Our Lady, or Corpus Christi—, some lay singers and dancers were hired by the nunnery.⁸² In Santo Domingo de Madrid we have documentary evidence of the lay audience participating in plays performed in the nunnery's church at least in 1562 and before.⁸³

81 Patrons and patronesses and lay people at some feastdays, as happened for instance in Santa María de Medina del Campo, where this was justified as it was a pre-Tridentine “uso antiguo”: López, *Tercera parte de la Historia de Sancto Domingo*, fol. 29r.

82 Galán Vera, Martínez Gil, and Peñas Serrano, “La música en los conventos dominicos,” 266.

83 As we can read in the ordinations for the chapel given by Diego de Castilla, dean of Toledo, on June 2, 1562: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 7297: *Cuaderno de los títulos y ordenaciones de la Capilla del señor Rey Don Pedro*, unfol.

In many cases, apostolic visits provides us with interesting information regarding such performances. For instance, in Mexico, Bishop Payo Enriquez de Rivera forbade the representation of comedies at Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in the wake of his visit there in 1673.⁸⁴ In the same way, Melchor de Liñán y Cisneros, who was successively bishop of Popayán (1667–1671), archbishop of La Plata (Charcas) (1675–1676), and Lima (1678–1708), also tried to stop theatrical and profane music performances in female cloisters.⁸⁵ Antonio de León, Bishop of Arequipa (1677–1711), banned in 1684 all kinds of performances in both monasteries and nunneries.⁸⁶ Finally, the dean and canonry of Valladolid (Morelia, Michoacán) addressed a letter to the prioress of the Dominican nunnery of Santa Catalina on October 30, 1737, urging the observance of enclosure. In particular, he banned performances and receptions anywhere other than in parlours, and he regulated the entry of men into the nunnery.⁸⁷ Such details are important for the study of liturgical, paraliturgical, and theatrical performance, but also for art historians, as they help us understand the functionality and meaning of monastic spaces.

Another important question concerning enclosure was the so-called *vida particular*. Since the Middle Ages, some nuns lived in their own cells, even sharing them with girls, corrodians, or some relatives. Subsequent reform movements tried to end this practice and encouraged return to “common life,” but they rarely succeeded. As we will see in the following section, this had consequences for the layout of nunneries. In New Spain only the reforms fostered by Fabián y Fuero and Lorenzana in the last third of the eighteenth century tried firmly, even violently, to end this practice, by building spaces for the common life inside the nunneries.⁸⁸

Art and Reform: The Role of Women

Whereas the impact of reforms imposed by friars or bishops on monastic architecture is well known, the role of women in this, as well as the likely impact of monastic reform on visual arts have not been properly studied in these territories.⁸⁹ At the end of the eighteenth century, the chapter house of Santa Catalina de Siena in Cuzco was decorated, probably by Tadeo Escalante, with a cycle of painting in which penitent saints occupied a prominent place. Although the meaning of such a program and its relation to the functionality of the chapter house must still be deciphered, its relationship with the late eighteenth century Bourbon reforms and a return to the austerity of the early order seems clear [Fig. 4.5].⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Pérez Puente, Oropeza Tena, and Saldaña Solís, *Autos de las visitas del arzobispo fray Payo Enriquez*, 38–39.

⁸⁵ Vargas Ugarte, “Un archivo de música en la ciudad de Cuzco.”

⁸⁶ *Constituciones sinodales*, chap. 20.

⁸⁷ Sigaut, “Azucenas entre espinas,” 202. In this case, it is worth noting the support and control exerted by the cathedral canons over this nunnery, which was clearly depicted in a painting commemorating the nuns’ move to their new convent on May 3, 1738.

⁸⁸ Salazar de Garza, “Repercusiones arquitectónicas”; Zahino Peñafort, *El cardenal Lorenzana*.

⁸⁹ Regarding Spain see Diana Lucía, “Religiosidad femenina y reforma.”

⁹⁰ Pérez Vidal, “Arte y patrimonio de las dominicas.”

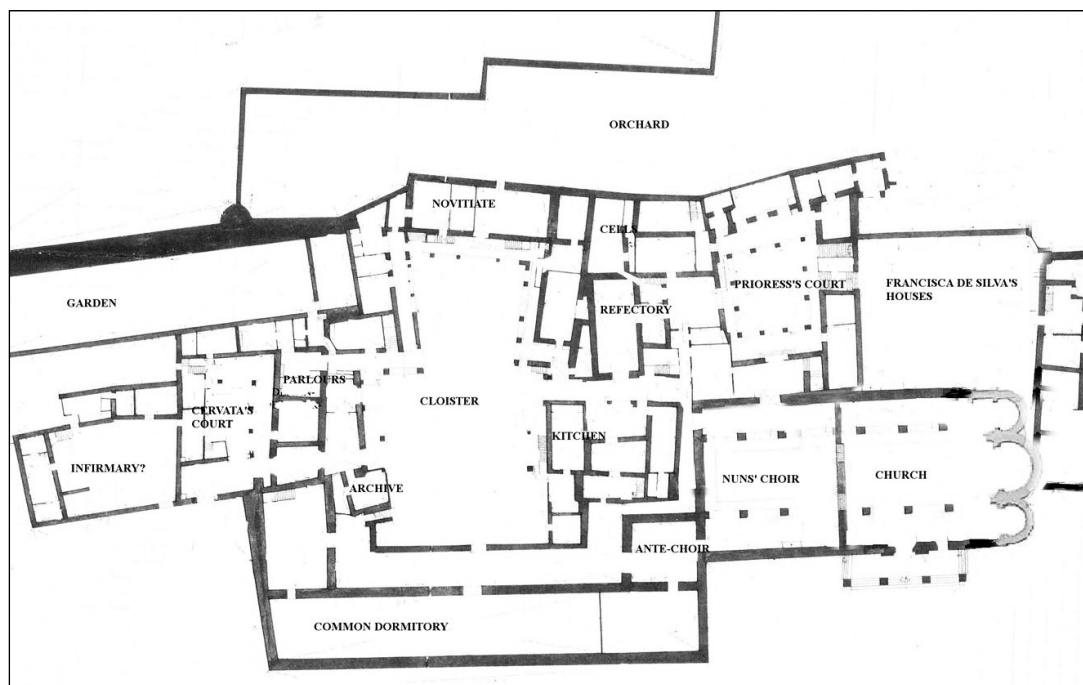


Figure 4.6: Plan of Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Author's reconstruction based on the ground plan of the Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, 1881.

As we have just seen, Observant reform advocated a return to common dormitories. A large dormitory and refectory were built in Santo Domingo de Toledo at the beginning of the sixteenth century,⁹¹ but it was apparently only in use for a few years, since by the end of this century some cells were being repaired, and others of large dimensions were being built.⁹² In New Spain, this practice flourished between 1640 and 1760, when many individual cells—paid by individual nuns and their relatives—were built inside nunneries, and reformist bishops even encouraged it. This was the case with the Archbishop of Mexico, fray Payo Enríquez de Rivera, who in 1672 ordered new administrative measures to better manage increasingly crowded convents. They encouraged and approved something that had become common practice: the multiplication of family spaces, where the presence of girls and laywomen was frequent.⁹³ This led to chaotic,

⁹¹ The common dormitory was built between 1507 and 1508, and in 1522 the nuns had already been transferred to it, as a letter to the Master General of the Order shows, in which they pleaded not to be forced to accept young girls, as they had no more individual cells: Toledo, Archive of Santo Domingo, doc. 571: *Exposición y súplica de la comunidad de Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo*.

⁹² Subsequent repairs are recorded in the books of the nunnery, through till the eighteenth century: Madrid, AHN, Clero, Libros, 15144: *Gasto General de maravedís*.

⁹³ Lavrín, "Ecclesiastical Reform of Nunneries in New Spain"; Gonzalbo, *Las mujeres en la Nueva España*.

unplanned growth of monastic enclosures, as happened for instance in San Jerónimo in Mexico, whose area for private cells grew exorbitantly in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁹⁴ Although it has been not properly considered by Latin American scholars, this had been commonplace in medieval Spanish nunneries, a good example being Toledo [Fig. 4.6].⁹⁵ These practices were resumed or continued through till the nineteenth century. We must just remember, for instance, the cell built by Manuel Tolsá ca. 1803 for the Marques de Selva Nevada in the nunnery of Regina Coeli, in Mexico.⁹⁶ We have seen some nuns were quite rebellious and ignore prelates and councils repeatedly banning these and other practices.

Commissioning works of art was another way nuns expressed power and independence. Although the third Mexican council established that nuns and abbesses could not rent property or build their own without the consent of their superior, we know of nuns disobeying, like Sor María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio (1695–1756). As Cristina Ratto has recently pointed out, she probably took part in designing the decorative program of the nun's choir in her convent.⁹⁷ As the previous example of Constanza de Castilla shows, a powerful prioress could play a prominent role in shaping the devotional and liturgical practices in her nunnery. Known as “the other Mexican muse” she was one of the most important unsung women writers of Mexico's colonial past. She wrote prolifically and stands alongside Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the celebrated seventeenth-century Mexican poet, playwright, and nun, as a colonial woman writer who was published during her own lifetime. Her writings include constitutions for her convent, spiritual guidebooks for nuns, and four mystical theological treatises. Moreover, Sor María Anna managed to get her nunnery a direct dependence of the Holy See, with privileges “that were usually only granted to a consecrated abbess.” For instance, her biographer narrated with astonishment how she was authorized to wear a cope in the Divine Office on solemn festivities.⁹⁸

Conclusions

The complexity and variety of the different reform movements and their impact in female nunneries, and specifically in Dominican nunneries, in Spain and the Americas, deserve more studies. However, this article has shown that many assumptions of traditional historiography need revising. First, we must pay closer attention to regional and local circumstances, since these determined the success or otherwise of the attempted reforms. Second, we must acknowledge the different agents involved—bishops and secular clergy, Dominican friars and nuns, secular patronesses and patrons, the Spanish Monarchs, and so on—, and the different weight they had in each territory and each nunnery. Only then can we provide a broader, comparative picture.

94 Ratto, “El convento de San Jerónimo.”

95 Pérez Vidal, *Arte y liturgia en los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla*.

96 Muriel and Grobet, *Fundaciones neoclásicas*.

97 Ratto, “La glorificación de María como Madre de Dios.”

98 Bellido, *Vida de la V.M.R.M María Anna Águeda*, 95–96.

The reform of Dominican nunneries in Spain started earlier than previously thought, with the first attempts at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and different agents and forces were involved. Accordingly, we must reassess the role of women, both nuns and patronesses, not only in Spain but also, later, in the New World. A gendered approach—absent so far in both Spain and Latin America—is needed to study these processes of reform, as well as in the consequences of reforms in art and architecture.

The *uniformitas* that the Dominicans aspired to was not achieved through their late medieval reforms, nor in the wake of the Council of Trent, but a great diversity persisted during the Early Modern period, particularly in the distant territories of the Spanish Empire.

Bishops influenced by Cisneros's reforms founded the first nunneries in New Spain. Episcopal jurisdiction over nunneries was reinforced by Trent and by the provincial councils in America, especially the third provincial councils in Mexico and Peru. However, the interpretation of the Tridentine decrees varied widely from place to place, and custom remained important. Many nunneries were placed under episcopal jurisdiction, something that was not unusual during the Middle Ages, but seems to have been far more frequent in early modern America. Nevertheless, some nunneries rejected bishops' control, and even managed to become direct dependences of the Holy See. In many cases, nuns and prioresses played a key role in finding a particular solution, often facing strong opposition.

Lastly, although this was not a central issue either for late medieval reformers or the Council of Trent, their reforms had consequences for architecture—building walls, barriers, new spaces, and new uses of older spaces—as well as in the visual arts. Nuns developed rituals and performances, and they commissioned artworks and paintings, often breaking official prohibitions. In these ways, they expressed their own personality and creativity but both art and liturgy were used as a vehicle of power.

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