A Contradictory Subject: Reform, Resistance, and Holy Women in Early Modern Spain

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Abstract

In 1517, Martin Luther, a German priest, nailed a document to the door of All Saints Church. This document, entitled Ninety-Five Theses, laid out corruption within the Catholic Church, and caused an immediate uproar across Europe. Luther and his fellow reformers suggested massive changes in the structure and practice of the clergy, leading to a schism from the Catholic Church known as the Protestant Reformation. In response, the Church instituted a variety of reforms of its own, referred to as the Counter-Reformation. The impacts of the Counter-Reformation were broad and far-reaching; this thesis deals primarily with their effects on holy women in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain. In this era, holy women were subject to increasingly harsh regulations: their already limited ability to move throughout Spain was further restricted, and their ability to preach publicly curtailed. Prior to the Counter-Reformation, mystics and beatas, or laywomen who shared their holy visions, were tolerated, but in the late 1500s and early 1600s, these women were persecuted more intensely, and enclosure within a convent became the only respectable option for holy women. Even when safely enclosed, holy women were subject to surveillance by their confessors and fellow nuns. In addition to this external surveillance, they were encouraged to closely monitor their own internal thoughts for signs of sin. If a holy woman gained enough power to influence to threaten the male authority of the Catholic Church, she was reprimanded, and in serious cases, sent to the Inquisition. Holy women not only faced restrictions, but combated them. Their resistance becomes clear in multiple arenas: namely the convent, recogimiento (convent for penitent women), galera (women’s prison), and vida (a nun’s autobiography). In these arenas, holy women both conformed to patriarchal expectations and subverted them. I argue that while holy women participated in and at times initiated the discipline of women who broke gender norms, they also repeatedly demonstrated their impulse to care for other women. This thesis tracks these contradictory impulses to punish and protect through Inquisition records, artwork, and the correspondence and autobiographies of nuns themselves.
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Introduction

In 1608, Sister Magdalena de San Jerónimo wrote to King Phillip III of Spain (1578-1621) that she believed “a large part (if not the largest) of the harm and havoc customary in this kingdom of Spain is born from the liberties, dissolution, and destructiveness of many women.”¹ To rectify this problem, San Jerónimo proposed the foundation of “a house, in each city and place where there is a necessity, with the name of Galera, where justice is executed and vagrant women, thieves, witches, sorceresses, and other bad women are punished according to their crimes.”² What led San Jerónimo, a nun who had spent the majority of her life exclusively in the company of women, to blame “harm and havoc” on women specifically? San Jerónimo’s actions are explained by the changing spiritual and social landscape of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the construction of the “fallen woman” in the early modern era, and the strict religious and patriarchal systems which defined life for holy women.

While San Jerónimo’s proposal for a women’s prison was novel, her condemnation of women, and her involvement as a holy woman, were not. Following the Reformation in the early 1500s, the Catholic Church instituted a series of counter-reforms, most of which emerged after the Council of Trent convened between 1545 and 1563.³ The Counter-Reformation resulted in a multi-pronged crackdown: first, on popular piety, particularly in the form of unenclosed holy women or beatas; and second, on women generally in favor of increasingly patriarchal and stratified religious and social systems. Popular holy women walked an uneasy line between lending the Church additional influence and acclaim and acting as threats when they became too visible, powerful, or uncontrolled by male authority. This precarity made them vulnerable to

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¹ Magdalena de San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera y casa real, que el rey nuestro señor manda hazer en estos Reynos para castigo de las mujeres vagantes, ladronas, alcahuetas, y otras semejantes,” Valladolid, Francisco Fernandez de Cordova, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, 4.
Counter-Reformation restrictions. This vulnerability is evidenced by the high number of nuns and beatas who were accused and convicted of alumbradismo, or false visions, and harshly punished by the Inquisition.⁴

While religious and legal systems became increasingly repressive, holy women did not lose the ability to control their own lives and representations. Many holy women faced strict enclosure; however, such enclosure was frequently more permeable than it initially appeared, and even from behind convent walls, nuns served as “pious intercessors and models of chaste behavior,” who “contributed to the social and spiritual wellbeing of their communities.”⁵ Many nuns established themselves as spiritual authorities despite the constrictive gender norms applied to them. One of the options open to nuns seeking to gain influence was a vida, or autobiography written under the supervision of a confessor. Historians have generally understood vidas to be created at the command of the confessor, and therefore as coerced and highly mediated narratives. Alison Weber adds nuance to this view: while she acknowledges the power imbalance between nun and confessor, she also points to the possibility of “some degree of cooperation and mutual purpose.”⁶ Thus, a vida was a point where many goals and purposes, some aligning and some conflicting, converged.

Experiencing conflicting pressures and purposes was common in early modern Spain. It is easy to assume that the power of the Church and the crown in the post-Tridentine period meant that their objectives were both clear and faithfully carried out. In reality, however, not only did individual motives interfere with the implementation of Counter-Reformation reforms, but the reforms themselves called for different and at times contradictory responses. As Margaret Boyle

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argues, “these tensions and contradictions – between charity, healing, and education, and control, punishment, and exclusion – produced what George Mariscal calls the ‘contradictory subjects’ of early modern Spain.” As subjects at the nexus of increasing spirituality and patriarchy, holy women experienced these tensions to an even greater degree. However, holy women were not only subject to the contradictory pressures of post-Tridentine Spain, but also enacted them. Many recogimientos, convents for “fallen women” — a term which most frequently referred to women who engaged in extramarital sex, although it was also applied to itinerant workers, petty criminals, and otherwise marginalized women — were run by nuns, who treated those under their authority with a mixture of care and discipline.

Many authors have characterized confinement in galeras, or women’s prisons, and recogimientos as an extension of the Counter-Reformation impulse to enclose and discipline women. Stacey Schlau claims that “Both the recogimiento and the galera thus oriented rehabilitation (and in the case of the latter, punishment) toward a lifetime of confinement.” Georgina Dopico Black echoes the concept of recogimientos and galeras as tools of control, but centers the fear of sexually transmitted diseases rather than moral failings: “the disease that the prostitute transmits is both symbolically and discursively linked with her open body or, more precisely, with the openness of her body.” In order to maintain public safety, Black argues that recogimientos separated and enclosed the “open” body of the prostitute. Margaret Boyle also identifies recogimientos as sites of containment and discipline, claiming that “recogimiento can also be understood as a gendered practice of modesty and controlled behavior, most frequently

8 Boyle, “Confined Conversion,” 45.
applied to women’s bodies and sexuality." However, Boyle also recognizes the centrality of protection and rehabilitation, demonstrating that in the case of Magdalena de San Jerónimo, “ultimately, although the extremity and harshness of punishment for women was unique to the galera system, it also reflected Madre Magdalena’s passionate investment in the protection of women.” Boyle acknowledges the dual, at times contradictory, purposes of recogimientos: while they did confine and discipline “bad” women in order to force them to adhere to rigid gender expectations, they also provided women with care and resources.

Without understanding the political, social, and religious environments in which holy women in post-Tridentine Spain lived and moved, their actions may seem inexplicable to us. However, within the context of the contradictory pressures faced by early modern Spanish subjects for discipline and care, these actions become legible as the struggles of women attempting to claim a domain of female authority while working within an oppressive patriarchal system. These contradictory pressures created contradictory responses: vidas which functioned both as surveillance and as a method by which a nun could gain popular acclaim; convents which encouraged piety, reflection, and care as well as penitence and self-discipline; and recogimientos and galeras which balanced punishment and protection for their inhabitants. Holy women were not passive in the face of post-Tridentine gender norms, but navigated their way through them by developing an arsenal of gendered actions to gain influence and agency. Finding themselves forced off the streets, holy women instead channeled their fervor into writing, reforms, education, and punishment within enclosure. This fervor is exemplified through the sites of vida, convent, recogimiento, and galera.

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To comprehend why this transformation was necessary, one must first understand the changing religious and social landscape of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first section of this paper analyzes records of the Inquisition, and examines the Church’s position towards holy women, as well as what kinds of punishment were common and what goals they fulfilled. The management of holy women was accomplished not only through the disciplinary institution of the Inquisition, but also in their daily lives and homes. The second section interrogates the purposes of enclosure and convent architecture, including how artwork reminded nuns and penitent women of their roles and responsibilities. The third section illustrates a punitive turn, represented by the creation of the galera. Even within this turn, however, holy women’s impulse to protect and care for other women persisted. This section also analyzes the role of women writers, a concept that is further explored in the final section, which focuses on how the vida of nuns served as contradictory documents, both uplifting the women who wrote them and reinforcing the values of humility and subservience expected of holy women at the time. While these sites of analysis may appear disparate, all four demonstrate the limitations imposed on holy women, and their efforts to transcend those limitations. In carefully appropriating the language and actions of patriarchal authority, holy women resisted that authority, and maintained their desire to protect and reform other women even as they participated in their discipline and punishment.
Section One: Nuns, Beatas, and Alumbradas: the Persecution of Holy Women by the
Inquisition in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Spain

In 1546, Magdalena de la Cruz, once a well-respected Franciscan nun, was found guilty of *alumbradismo*, or false visions.¹³ Not only had she lied about receiving messages from God, the Inquisitors claimed, but she had consorted with the Devil, endangering both her soul and the sanctity of all those around her. The Inquisition punished de la Cruz for these grievous sins by stripping her of her convent privileges, imposing complete enclosure, and requiring her to remain unveiled, both for the duration of the trial and the rest of her life.¹⁴ These punishments illustrated the main goals of Inquisition trials concerning errant holy women: removing de la Cruz’s convent privileges forced her to constantly reflect upon her sin; confining her to the convent and prohibiting her to speak with anyone but her confessor and fellow nuns prevented the dangerous contagion of her *alumbradismo* from spreading; and requiring that she go unveiled revealed her sinful nature to all who saw her, ensuring that she was legible as an *alumbrada* to the public. This discipline was meant to punish her personally and to use her as an example to deter other holy women from reporting false visions.

Such punishment, while extreme, reflected the changes in the Catholic Church and Spanish society during the Counter-Reformation. “Counter-Reformation,” is a broad term; I am using it to mean the mid-1500s to the mid-1600s, and to reference the religious impetus behind reform in this era. In the early sixteenth century, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other reformers denounced the corruption of the Catholic Church, including “the fiscal policies of the church, the ways in which priests and higher officials were chosen, and the worldliness and morals of priests,

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¹⁴ Ibid, 175.
monks, nuns, bishops, and the pope.”15 Reformers targeted the practice of issuing indulgences (remission of a sin for a fee) and sexual corruption and hypocrisy among the clergy.16 These critiques were summed up in Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, a series of grievances he pinned to the door of a Catholic church in 1517.17 His theses resonated widely, and the Church faced backlash from across Europe. Protestants proposed alternate methods of worship and clergy structure, which included a greater emphasis on personal relationships between laypeople and God, and which claimed full chastity was nearly impossible and thus allowed for clergy members to have sexual relations within the confines of marriage.18 These proposals were seen as radical and destructive by the Catholic Church, which quickly responded by entering a defensive mode. This defense included disputing many of Luther’s accusations and implementing sweeping reforms aimed at remedying the issues he highlighted. This reactionary mindset characterized the Church throughout the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth; thus, any action taken by the Church in this period should be interpreted with the understanding that it occurred in the shadow of the Reformation.

The response to Reformation criticisms reached a peak in the Council of Trent, where high-ranking Catholic authorities met dozens of times to lay out a comprehensive response to Luther and his followers.19 Reforms emerging from the Council of Trent both attacked Protestants directly and implicitly worked to undermine their message by reinforcing existing Catholic institutions. Popes Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV all issued condemnations of “heresies” committed by the Protestants.20 Such condemnations were intended to paint

16 Wiesner, Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World, 74.
17 Ibid, 75.
18 Ibid, 77.
19 Ibid, 130.
20 Ibid.
Protestants as radical and reinforce the doctrinal authority of the Church. Additionally, the Council instituted a series of reforms meant to sacralize society and to strengthen the position of male clergy as both spiritual and social authorities. Part of this reform process entailed a reexamination of the role of women, particularly holy women, in public life. Catholic authorities meant for holy women to act as models of virtue, and to impart their values of penance and holiness on the communities in which they resided. To ensure that this goal was met, the Council reaffirmed the enclosure of nuns, and emphasized the importance of modesty and submission to male authority.\(^{21}\)

Many nuns in the prior centuries had been enclosed within convents; however, such enclosure was loose, and many traveled regularly for familial, business, or health reasons.\(^{22}\) The Council of Trent condemned such travel, and required nuns to remain within their convents at all times bar absolute emergency. While complete enclosure was rare and convents remained permeable to some extent, the proscription on breaking enclosure nevertheless had a strong effect, both in the actual movement of holy women and in how they were viewed by male religious authority.\(^{23}\) For example, *beatas*, literally meaning “blessed women,” but used to refer to unenclosed holy women, often gained popular acclaim, as their lack of enclosure allowed them to reach a wide audience.\(^{24}\) However, as full enclosure became more important, *beatas* were increasingly viewed with suspicion by the Church and subject to harsh penalties for preaching without official approval from male authority.\(^{25}\) The push towards enclosure was partially motivated by Catholic religious ideas concerning solitude and separation from the outside world as crucial to true devotion. In addition to its religious purposes, enclosure was also both

\(^{23}\) Lehfeldt, *The Permeable Cloister*, 182.
implicitly and explicitly about controlling the sexual lives of women. In the eyes of the Church, the moral “purity” of holy women had to be maintained by preventing them from having any relationships with men outside of the penitent-confessor relationship.26

In addition to strengthening enclosure, the Council emphasized the importance of confession in monitoring and regulating the thoughts and behavior of holy women. While all Spanish subjects faced surveillance, holy women experienced greater scrutiny, in an attempt to limit their potential to gain popularity and power as well to safeguard their chastity.27 As Michel Foucault explains, for Catholics in the Post-Tridentine era there was an “obligation of regularity, continuity, and exhaustiveness” in their practice of confession, and “with this considerable extension of penance and confession there [was] a corresponding proportional increase in the priest's power.”28 Overall, “the power and knowledge of priest and church were caught up in a mechanism that formed around confession as the central element of penance.”29 Close surveillance of penitents became a central function of religious authority, key to maintaining the gendered hierarchical structures which kept the Church in power. The confessional gaze did not only come from male religious authority, but also emerged from within. Catholics, and particularly enclosed monastics, were encouraged to continually monitor their own minds for sinful thoughts.30 Thus the culture of surveillance in post-Tridentine Spain became internal and embodied for holy women: present not only in the gaze of their confessors and fellows, but also in their interior selves.

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29 Foucault, Abnormal, 176.
30 Wiesner, Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World, 139.
While holy women were not fully repressed by such surveillance and enclosure, the stakes of breaking gender norms in a patriarchal society were high. All Spaniards were subject to increased monitoring in the form of mandated confession, and holy women in particular faced surveillance from their fellow nuns and male religious superiors. Nuns and beatas who gained power or prestige were particularly suspect, and if found to have acted without the permission of male religious authority, or if their holy visions proved to be false, they were subject to discipline. This discipline came either from their immediate superiors or from the specter which loomed over all potential sinners in early modern Spain: the Inquisition.\(^{31}\)

**Sub-Section A: Increased Surveillance and Discipline in the Form of the Inquisition**

The Spanish Inquisition spanned multiple centuries, beginning in 1478 and continuing until the nineteenth century.\(^ {32}\) While it drew from a history of inquisitions dating back to the Roman Empire, the creation of the Inquisition in the late fifteenth century represented a specific religious phenomenon emerging in response to the Jewish and Muslim populations of Spain.\(^ {33}\) The first Inquisitors were appointed by Ferdinand and Isabella after reports that converted Jewish people, or *conversos*, were judaizing throughout Spain, unchecked by the clergy.\(^ {34}\) *Conversos* continued to be viewed as a significant threat, and throughout the Inquisition were subject to strict scrutiny and harsh punishments. Such persecution culminated in multiple expulsions: the first in 1492, after Ferdinand and Isabella feared accused *conversos* were contaminating other

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\(^{31}\) The Inquisition was not only a Spanish phenomenon. The Holy See presided over Inquisition trials, referred to as the Roman Inquisition, and Portugal operated similar trials. Additionally, Spain and Portugal ran Inquisitions in some of their colonies. While it is outside the scope of this thesis to do a comprehensive comparison between the Spanish Inquisition and that of other countries, it should be noted that while other Inquisitions occurred in the same Counter-Reformation context and therefore dealt with similar issues (heresy, witchcraft, sexual transgressions, etc.), they also operated within local contexts that shaped their specific concerns and approaches. For example, Portugal, like Spain, had a large population of Muslims, and thus their trials are more concerned with *moriscos* than those of Italy or the colonies, where the Muslim population was relatively small. For reading on other Inquisitions, see Jonathan Seitz’s *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice*, Mary E. Giles’ *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, and François Soyer’s *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal*.

\(^{32}\) Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition*, ix.

\(^{33}\) Ibid, xvi.

\(^{34}\) Ibid, xvi.
Spaniards.\textsuperscript{35} All Jewish people in Spain were given a choice: convert, leave, or face punishment at the hands of the newly reinforced Inquisition.

Muslim Spaniards, called moriscos, faced similar constraints. While in the late fifteenth century Ferdinand and Isabella reassured Muslims in the newly conquered kingdom of Granada that they would not have to convert, by 1526, all Muslims in Spain had been ordered to emigrate or become Christians.\textsuperscript{36} Initially, trials against moriscos were rare, however, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, moriscos became subject to greater violence. In the revolt of Alpujarras, from 1568 to 1570, Muslim residents of Granada refused to abandon their religious traditions. King Philip II retaliated, and after their surrender, Granada’s moriscos were forcibly redistributed to other parts of Spain.\textsuperscript{37} King Philip II received multiple requests to expel moriscos from Spain; he refused repeatedly, but his son, King Philip III, capitulated in 1609 and moriscos were expelled in stages over the next few years.\textsuperscript{38} While initiated in response to conversos and moriscos, the Inquisition tried, convicted, and punished a variety of other crimes, including blasphemy, fornication, and heresy.\textsuperscript{39} The scope and power of the Inquisition increased under Philip II in the sixteenth century, and again under Philip III in the early 1600s.\textsuperscript{40} Additionally, the Council of Trent reinforced the Inquisition’s ability to repel the Protestant threat unleashed by the Reformation. Trent and the expansions under Philip II and Philip III thus empowered the Inquisition to monitor and regulate the daily lives of all Spaniards, both secular and holy.

The Spanish Inquisition is frequently understood as emblematic of the surveillance and punishment which became prevalent during the Counter-Reformation. However, the Counter-Reformation did not solely result in increased discipline. Responses to the Reformation

\textsuperscript{35} Homza, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition} xviii.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, xxxiv.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, xxxv.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, xxi.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, xxxiii.
were complex; with the impulse to care for and protect subjects emerging alongside the urge to monitor and punish them. While the protective impulse of religious authorities will be examined more closely in later sections, the urge to reform and redeem is revealed even in Inquisitorial trials, the institution most representative of a renewed focus on punishment. For example, in the 1526 “Deliberations on the Reality and Heresy of Witchcraft,” several high-ranking Inquisitors debated how to identify and punish witches following a well-publicized incident in which dozens of witches were convicted and executed in Navarre.\textsuperscript{41} The Inquisitors recommended harsh punishments for witches who committed multiple offenses and convinced others to make pacts with the Devil; however, for those whose crimes were less egregious, they suggested that “preachers excellent in both life and teaching be placed there to instruct the witches so that they will not be so obscenely tricked by the Demon.”\textsuperscript{42} Additionally, they called for these preachers to “preach that the female witches shall live and speak with Catholics.”\textsuperscript{43} The Inquisitors were clearly threatened by the idea that witches would corrupt those around them. However, they also appeared to believe the opposite: if fallen souls were surrounded by faithful Catholics and properly educated, they could be redeemed and welcomed back into society. This balance between discipline and reform characterized many of the interactions between the Spanish Church, the Crown, and its subjects during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{41} Homza, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition}, 154. The impetus for this meeting was the public execution of a large number of people accused of witchcraft at the order of a secular magistrate. This incident raised a number of questions for the Inquisitors: did the prosecution of witchcraft fall under secular or spiritual jurisdiction? What counted as witchcraft, and how should it be punished? Witchcraft was contentious in sixteenth century Spain, and while an in-depth exploration is outside the scope of this paper, more information can be found in Jonathan Seitz’s book, \textit{Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice}, in which he discusses competing paradigms in interpreting witchcraft: scientific and medical as well as religious or secular. Seitz also illustrates the difficulties in establishing jurisdiction over witchcraft, and whether it constituted heresy or a secular crime, echoing the concerns raised by the Spanish Inquisitors in 1526. These questions were clearly critical in the eyes of the Spanish Inquisition as well as the Venetian.

\textsuperscript{42} Homza, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition}, 160.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. It should be noted that in Early Modern Spain, witches could be either male or female, although more women were accused than men. For more scholarship on witchcraft and gender specifically, see Gustav Henningten’s \textit{The Witches’ Advocate} and Mary Elizabeth Perry’s \textit{The Magician, the Witch, and the Law}.
Some Inquisition trials resulted in the education and protection of individuals, but more often, they chose to protect the community by expelling individual offenders. One of the greatest concerns of the Inquisition was putting a stop to practices that could spread beyond the original perpetrator and undermine Spanish society as a whole. The early modern theory of contagion “did not focus on biological contagion alone: morals, people, and ideas were all potentially contagious; that is, capable of spreading from person to person.”

Thus, a man who blasphemed or a nun who shared false visions were not merely sinners, but sources of infection that threatened religious and social structures. Additionally, contagious sins could occur in thought as well as action; the demonstrated intent to commit a sin was frequently punished similarly to the sin itself. Overall, the Inquisition sought to control the spread of immoral ideas and action, and devoted effort to prevent the emergence of sin and contain its proliferation. This regulation of thought was accomplished by encouraging members of the Church to monitor themselves and confess regularly and in detail.

Other methods of stopping this contagion included sentencing sinners to dramatic and often highly public penances and discipline. These public punishments had two main intended effects. The first was to deter through example. This purpose is exemplified in the debates concerning witchcraft when Dr. Coronel, one of the Inquisitors, asserted that “the penalty should be a punishment for the offenders and an example to others,” and declared that “some witches be punished so that others shall be warned.”

Punishment here was not only individual, but served as a tactic to educate and control the community. The second reason for these public punishments was to shame offenders, and to strip them of their influence. In expelling these dangerous individuals from the community, Inquisitors restored its sanctity. This expulsion could take

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several forms. For minor offenses, penitents were merely required to wear a *sanbenito*, or specialized garment which indicated the wearer had been convicted by the Inquisition. Those wearing *sanbenitos* were allowed to go about their normal business, however, the presence of the *sanbenito* destroyed their credibility and warned others of their sins. For more serious offenses, the convicted were enclosed within a convent or monastery, prohibited from interacting with the outside world. In the most extreme cases, sinners were executed, and thus forever prevented from corrupting others.

**Sub-Section B: Gender and Discipline; Punishment for Those on the Margins**

While the Inquisition punished anyone who committed religious offenses, those on the margins of society were particularly vulnerable to seizure and discipline. In 1588, Catalina Muñoz, a Black formerly enslaved woman, was tried for false sanctity. Muñoz had reported prophetic visions of “the child Jesus… St. Francis, St. Martin, St. Sebastian, the Magdalene…the souls of certain important people, who treated her as devoted to the Mother of God.” Visions of Jesus were a clear indication of particular holiness; in addition, the saints she claimed to see were all associated not only with sanctity but also with humility and penance. These visions thus framed her as the ideal holy woman of the time: someone who had a personal relationship and connection with Jesus but maintained their identity as a humble penitent. However, several witnesses testified that they had also heard her describe evil visions, including “a snake who was half man, with long horns, a long tail, and hair like a cat.” This grotesque apparition was used as evidence that her visions were sent not by God, but by the Devil himself. Further evidence

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used against Muñoz included her own confession, in which she admitted to feigning miracles and making “an explicit pact with the Demon and promising him her soul.” A pact with the Devil was one of the most serious offenses a holy woman could commit, and Muñoz was severely punished following her confession.

Even prior to the revelation that Muñoz had faked her visions, her treatment was harsh. While held by the Inquisition, Muñoz was tortured extensively. Torture in order to obtain a confession was not unusual for those held by the Inquisition on more serious charges. However, the intensity of the torture endured by Muñoz was likely due in part to her vulnerable status. High-status prisoners of the Inquisition had family and connections to speak on their behalf; Muñoz did not even have a confessor, and the Archbishop Juan de Ribera, of Valencia where she lived, had refused to endorse her. Muñoz was quickly convicted, and punished severely with “one hundred lashes, reclusion [in a monastery], perpetual prison and confiscation of goods.” This punishment is harsher than others faced by women convicted of false sanctity: like Magdalena de la Cruz, Muñoz was forced into strict enclosure, but unlike de la Cruz’s penance, in which she had to wear a gag and go unveiled, Muñoz was forced to undergo a grievous physical punishment. Muñoz’s status as a former slave, female, and unattached, to either family of note or a religious order, contributed to both her initial attraction of Inquisition suspicion and her harsh treatment.

A lack of connections added to Muñoz’s vulnerability; her gender was also key to her marginalization in the eyes of the Inquisition and Spanish society. Women were both more suspect for many offenses, and, once brought to Inquisition trials, more likely to have their

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54 Ibid, 253.
55 Ibid, 252.
56 Ibid, 255.
testimony questioned and their actions, particularly those of a sexual nature, subject to scrutiny. For example, statements against Maria de Cazalla, a married woman tried in the 1530s for *alumbradismo*, described her as abstaining from sex in a way deemed “inappropriate.”57 This language reveals several interesting aspects of religious involvement in women’s sexuality. For one, her confessors’ knowledge of her sexual habits demonstrates the level of intimacy present in a confessor-penitent relationship, and establishes sexuality as an appropriate topic of discussion with religious advisors. Second, the “inappropriateness” of Cazalla’s abstinence reveals the proscribed nature of sexuality in general and of women’s sexuality in particular. Women were expected to engage in sex in an extremely narrow range of “appropriate” behavior: obviously, prostitution and extramarital sex were prohibited, but so was refusing sex in the context of marriage.

Prior to the Reformation, the Church was largely ambivalent towards marital sexuality, allowing chaste marriages despite the Catholic imperative to engage in procreative sex.58 However, following the Reformation and sharp Protestant critiques of Catholic sexuality, the Church instituted changes in how marriage was viewed. The Council of Trent maintained that a proper marriage was “sacred, indissoluble, and consensual;” if it met these criteria, marriage could act as “a protection against sin (remedium) and as having positive spiritual value (sacramentum).”59 To fulfill this remedium, the body of the wife acted as a barrier to fornication by the husband, stopping him from spreading the moral and physical corruption of sexual relations outside the sacrament of marriage. This conception of marriage helps explain why Cazalla’s chastity was treated as sinful by the Inquisitors. While her lack of engagement in sex

59 Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 32.
may have seemed to add to her sexual purity, in the eyes of the Church she risked forcing her husband to sin by abstaining from sexual relations.

Holy women as well as secular women had their sexual behavior scrutinized: some of the most damning accusations against Magdalena de la Cruz concerned her carnal relations. Testimony against her described how “one night the demon abused her because she refused to consent to a certain lascivious act.” Even the suggestion of sexual transgression was highly incriminating, and the “lascivious act” de la Cruz refused played a large part in condemning her. In addition to her suspect sexual actions, de la Cruz held controversial opinions on sexuality among the clergy. A witness stated that while “speaking with certain people, she said many times that all the abbots and monks had lovers and this was not a sin nor was God offended by it.” In a time in which the sanctity and sexual purity of enclosed holy men and women was a priority for the Church, these comments were transgressive. This was especially true in light of Martin Luther’s claims that the Catholic clergy was sexually corrupt and debauched: de la Cruz’s frank comments confirmed the accusations of clerical depravity the Church was vehemently attempting to deny. De la Cruz’s permissive attitude towards sexual affairs among members of the Church and her own suspicious behavior thus played a significant role in her condemnation and punishment by the Inquisitors.

Holy women faced Inquisitorial trials not only for sexual actions and comments, but also when they accumulated popularity and influence that threatened male religious authority. While de la Cruz’s sexual indiscretions and interactions with the Devil condemned her, she was initially brought to trial for her reputation as a mystic: a woman who heard and interpreted the voice of God. Religious authorities in Cordoba, where de la Cruz’s convent was located, grew suspicious

60 Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 173.
after she was proclaimed a living saint by many of the inhabitants of the city. De la Cruz became suspect to the Inquisition partially because of reports of her relations with the Devil, but in larger part because of her increasing power and influence. In a patriarchal society where religious women were expected to submit to their male superiors and remain silent, a nun who was treated as a living saint was an unacceptable threat. De la Cruz’s subversive actions and popular appeal meant the Church needed to control and contain her. Mystical visions, preaching, and teaching by holy women were only acceptable once legitimized by direct supervision by male authority.

De la Cruz was far from the only holy woman to face scrutiny and censure from the Inquisition in response to her popularity as a mystic. Francisca de los Apóstoles, a beata active in the late sixteenth century in Toledo, was brought to an Inquisition trial after she and her sister, Isabel Bautista, made several public attempts to found a convent of their own. Francisca and Isabel were accused of alumbradismo, and forced to endure a grueling two-year trial in which they were repeatedly questioned about their religious experiences. While Francisca claimed that her visions were true, and that “all the above-mentioned [her visions] was clearly a thing from God and not the devil,” she was convicted of consorting with the Devil and falsely portraying herself as a holy woman. The Inquisitors were tempted to “punish her most gravely,” but in light of her “good confession and the signs of repentance she has given,” decided to “merely” sentence her to a public penance, one hundred lashes, and exile from Toledo, her home. These punishments removed her from her sphere of influence after her reputation, and body, were seriously injured.

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64 Francisca, The Inquisition of Francisca, 116.
65 Ibid, 157-158.
During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Inquisition imposed strict religious regulations on thought and behavior, largely in response to Protestant critiques that the Church was corrupt and the clergy sexually depraved. Sins were defined as actions and intentions, even if no physical sin resulted from those intentions; this definition of sin helps explain the renewed importance of regular confession, as confessors were thought to locate and uncover the secrets of the mind. Particular concern was shown to sinners who tried to pass their ideas on to others. The early modern conception of contagion included ideas and morality, and thus one sinful person had the potential to corrupt a far larger pool. All Spaniards were subject to increased surveillance and discipline, but those on the margins were particularly susceptible to accusations, trial, and punishment. This principle applied especially to holy women, who were vulnerable because of their status as independent women in a patriarchal society. If a holy woman gained enough influence to threaten male religious authority, her power was often curtailed through an Inquisition trial and subsequent public punishment that stripped her of her dignity and authority. To fight against such repressive systems and establish their own voice and agency, holy women had to be both clever and careful. Gaining power and prestige as a holy woman required navigating the patriarchal system of the Church, and crafting personal narratives in ways which benefited, or at least appeared to benefit, patriarchy and Catholicism as well as the holy woman herself.

The threat of the Inquisition, particularly to unenclosed holy women, meant that women seeking a sacred life increasingly chose to take vows within a convent. However, as demonstrated by the case of Magdalena de la Cruz, status as an enclosed nun did not guarantee protection. Even within the relative safety of the convent, holy women had to be aware of the

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67 Foucault, *Abnormal*. 
punishment they could face should they break patriarchal expectations. Any time a nun attempted to assert her own voice, she risked disaster: exile, humiliation, physical punishment, death. In analyzing the words and action of holy women, it is crucial to understand the repressive and threatening environments in which they lived. This repression was accomplished in multiple ways: while perhaps the most visible deterrent, the Inquisition was not the only means of checking immoral and transgressive behavior. The space and decoration of the convent itself reminded nuns of their duty to remain faithful, humble, and subservient to male authority.
Section Two: Enclosure and Adornment: the Physicality of Convents as a Tool for Educating and Controlling Women

When a visitor entered the chapel area of the Recogidas de Madrid, a famous recogimiento (penitential convent) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the first thing to draw their eye would have been the beautifully rendered portraits of saints which adorned the walls. Among them were paintings of Saint John the Baptist, Saint Geronimo, Saint Joseph and Saint Francis. Most striking, however, would have been the two large paintings of Saint Mary Magdalene, hung in places of prominence by the altar and over the side door. Manuel Recio, an archivist who wrote a brief history of the Recogidas in 1777, spent much of his description of the chapel discussing these two paintings and noted that “great mention” had been made of them, and that the other portraits were “not of such merit.” Clearly, the Magdalene portraits had special significance to the Recogidas. As a figure representing both sinfulness and redemption, Mary Magdalene played a crucial role as a model for the women of the recogimiento. The Recogidas was not alone in using paintings this way. The decoration and physical environment of the convent was conceived to encourage penitential and redemptive practices. The physical spaces of convents thus reflected the contradictory pressures experienced by the women within them: holy paintings emphasized the possibility of redemption and/or religious fulfillment as well as tacitly reminding them of the dangers of losing faith or falling into sinfulness. In addition to their decorations, the physical enclosure of the convent also served the dual purpose of monitoring and protecting holy women.

Sub-Section A: The Founding of Convents and Recogimientos

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68 Manuel Recio, “A Historical Compendium and Instructive Manifesto on the Origin and Foundation of the Royal House of St Mary Magdalene of the Penitence, Commonly Known as the Recogidas of Madrid,” 1777, in Unruly Women, Performance, Penitence, and Punishment in Early Modern Spain (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 120.
69 Recio, “A Historical Compendium,” 121.
70 Ibid.
Convents and monasteries had existed for centuries prior to the Counter-Reformation as spaces within which holy men and women could practice their faith separately from the distraction and pollution of the secular world. While convents became increasingly important in early modern Spain, they had long held a place of religious and societal prominence, and as such, attracted many potential devotees. Who were the women who chose to enter convents? Many convents required dowries as entry fees, limiting admittance to elite families who could pay the often high price. Thus, convents in Spain were often aristocratic institutions with familial ties to noble families. Once in the convent, nuns were educated. The literacy and knowledge of both religious and political affairs that resulted from this education, along with their high-status, gave nuns access to a limited amount of power and authority. Abbesses in particular had considerable power over the daily operations of their convents, as well as the ability to correspond with and influence high-ranking religious authorities. Even from within the convent, many nuns exercised agency through correspondences and relationships that enabled them to influence religion and politics beyond the convent and make their own names known to a broader public.

Not all convents were reserved only for holy women: some acted specifically as penitentiaries for “fallen women,” and housed these women in addition to the nuns who operated the convent. The term “fallen woman” was used for prostitutes and women who engaged in extramarital sex as well as other vulnerable and marginalized women: itinerant workers, petty criminals, or even women fleeing domestic violence. In a patriarchal society where women were expected to be virtuous, pious, and, most crucially, under male supervision, fallen women

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73 Lehfeldt, Religious Women in Golden Age Spain, 182.
74 Ibid, 182.
75 Margaret E. Boyle, Unruly Women: Performance, Penitence, and Punishment in Early Modern Spain, (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
76 Boyle, Unruly Women, 22.
were not only objects of pity but seen as threats to the social order. As discussed in the first section, the spread of moral and sexual corruption was a concern for early modern Spaniards. This concern with the symbolic and literal spread of corruption from women who had sex outside of marriage spurred efforts to confine and enclose fallen women in order to protect “respectable” society.

While Spanish society targeted fallen women, changes in the seventeenth century also increased the number of these marginalized women. The Counter-Reformation focus on controlling women’s sexuality led to the closure of brothels in 1623, and prior to that, regulations and restrictions on them were greatly tightened. This meant that sexual relations for money increasingly took place informally, and for many women served to supplement their income rather than as a profession in itself. Additionally, urbanization meant that larger numbers of single women entered cities impoverished and in search of employment. Their desperation and lack of connections left them vulnerable to entry into prostitution or other criminal activities. This was particularly true in large cities like Madrid, which experienced rapid population growth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries after the royal court was moved there in the mid-1500s.

When women who were engaged in extramarital sex or otherwise considered fallen were persecuted, one of the options available to them was enclosure in a *recogimiento*, a special

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79 For a more complete examination of the lives of sex workers and women’s history generally in Early Modern Spain, see Margaret Mikesell’s *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, Sherrin Marshall’s *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe*, Mary Elizabeth Perry’s *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, Mary Giles’ *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World* and Lisa Wollendorf’s *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*.
convent which housed and reformed repentant fallen women. While *recogimientos* were used to encourage penance, they were meant as curative rather than punitive institutions, and served to protect vulnerable women by providing them with safe housing, meeting their basic needs, and giving them access to a level of religious and occupational education not available to many low-status women. After spending time in *recogimientos*, many repentant women either married a man approved by the nuns of the *recogimiento* or took vows to become nuns themselves; while a few returned to working life, the goal of *recogimientos* was to prevent the recurrence of extramarital sex through male and/or religious supervision.

**Sub-Section B: Permeability and Enclosure as a Tool**

One of the main tools used to control the sexuality of clergy members and encourage deeper commitment to faith and penitence was strict enclosure. This applied especially to female clergy following the Council of Trent. Enclosure was thought to manage the sexuality and agency of holy women by removing them from the temptations of earthly pleasures and from the negative influence of other sinners. Thus, enclosure functioned as a patriarchal tool to strip women of their freedom of movement and restrict them to spaces in which a limited set of activities could occur. Enclosure was not intended only to function punitively, however: convent walls were also meant to “protect women from the world” and allow them to practice faith without interruption or distraction. Protective enclosure was not limited to nuns: when the King of Spain was away for military or political purposes, his Queen and daughters would retreat to a convent as a way of both ensuring their own protection and engaging in practices of faith during

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84 Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, 175.
85 Ibid, 186.
national turmoil.\textsuperscript{86} Additionally, several female relatives of Kings Philip III and IV, including Philip III’s aunt Margarita de la Cruz and Catalina D’Este, a cousin of Philip IV, voluntarily took vows as enclosed nuns.\textsuperscript{87}

In addition to its positive functions, the enclosure of recogimientos was stricter in theory than practice. As demonstrated by the life of Teresa de Avila, enclosure was not enforced in all convents, and nuns were permitted to leave for family, financial, or personal health reasons. Teresa herself left many times as a young woman, both to seek medical and spiritual care for her persistent illnesses and to care for her ailing father and manage the family finances in the wake of his death.\textsuperscript{88} It is telling that while Teresa later argued for stricter enclosure for holy women, she still characterized these leaves as emerging from “great necessity.”\textsuperscript{89} Even as she advocated for harsher measures to confine women, Teresa excused her own lapses and those of her fellow Cistercians.

Even in strict convents, correspondence was both permitted and frequent, enabling holy women to engage with the outside world. Writing bridged a gap between enclosed nuns and the exterior worlds they were forbidden to move through. For example, there is no evidence that Maria Vela y Cueto, a nun at the convent of Santa Ana in Avila, ever left her convent once she swore her vows as a young woman.\textsuperscript{90} However, she kept up correspondences with her two older brothers for her entire life, and maintained close relationships with them.\textsuperscript{91} For example, when Vela faced scrutiny from her fellow nuns and religious superiors, she told her brother Lorenzo

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{87} Sánchez, “Where Palace and Convent Met,” 59.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Book of Her Life}, translated by Kieran Kavanaigh and Otilio Rodriguez, (Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis, 2008), 228.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Book of Her Life}, 228.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Maria Vela, \textit{Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun}, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. The Toronto Series 51 (Toronto, Ontario: Iter Press, 2016), 53.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Vela, \textit{Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun}, 54.
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Cueto, a priest, that she “wrote to my [other] brother, because I wanted him to tease out the bishop’s response to the…turn of events, and also because in Your Grace’s absence I did not know who else might do this for me.” While Vela used the formal address “Your Grace,” used to refer to a male religious superior, the casual way in which she requests aid from both Lorenzo and her other brother Diego demonstrates the strength of their relationships. Writing could provoke suspicion and inquiry, but when used to pull upon powerful familial ties, it could also be mobilized in a nun’s defense.

Nuns not only corresponded with family members, but also with confessors, spiritual advisors, and patrons. Patrons were typically wealthy members of the Spanish nobility of either gender, who funded convents and had some say in their operation. These patron-convent relationships were a mark of the increasing sacralization of Spanish society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: even those not personally involved in monastic life were encouraged to support it both financially and spiritually. Nuns could, and did, develop professional and personal relationships with nobility up to and including the king himself: Magdalena de San Jerónimo, head of a well-known recogimiento in Valladolid, frequently corresponded with the Infanta (Princess) Isabella, and even addressed a proposal for a women’s prison to King Phillip III himself. These close ties between royalty and nuns continued well into the seventeenth century: Phillip IV maintained a correspondence of 14 years with another cloistered nun, and served as a patron of her convent.

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95 Sanchez, “Court Women in the Spain of Velázquez,” 101.
These correspondences made up an important part of the connections between royalty and religion, which were common and crucial in early modern Spain. The king and queen of Spain were viewed as possessing a special relationship to God; this idea was reinforced by the physical space of the royal chapel, where the monarchs were separated from the rest of the congregation by a *cortina*, or curtain.\(^96\) Additionally, Kings Philip II, III, and IV were credited with increasing the prominence of religion in the daily lives of their subjects. All three presided over frequent and often enormous religious processions, including the “high-point of the liturgical year,” Easter Week.\(^97\) Furthermore, all three kings expanded the reach of the Inquisition, and would personally attend *autos de fe*.\(^98\)

In order to maintain the idea that they had a special connection with God and were responsible for sacralizing society, Spanish royalty had to cultivate relationships and correspondences with holy men and women, thus contributing to both the permeability of the convent and its prestige, as convents became centers of spiritual inspiration.

**Sub-Section C: Portraiture and Adornment — The Physical Space of the Convent**

Deep thought, recollection, and penance were encouraged not only by the enclosure of convents, but also by their decoration. Convents were often adorned with artwork, which symbolized the power and status of the convents (much of the art was painted by well-known and prestigious artists) and invoked specific reactions in the nuns who viewed them on a daily basis. Following the Council of Trent, the moral dimensions of artwork became controversial, and while “the Church in its official capacity continued to maintain its tradition of …defending the legitimacy and usefulness of images even in sacred places,” artwork concerning “relationship

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\(^97\) Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, 60.

\(^98\) Ibid.
of body and soul, flesh and spirit,” was viewed as suspect. To conform with post-Tridentine expectations, convent paintings were almost always of religious figures, depicted to reinforce feminine piety. Jesus and Mary were ever-present, as were a cast of saints, some popular, some specifically relevant to individual convents. In convents, portraiture of religious figures reminded nuns of their main purpose: to devote themselves to God by following the models of saints. Many of the figures in convent art served as models to emulate. For example, Mary acted as an exemplar for deep connection with divinity as well as chastity; Saint Catherine of Siena, as a model for how to practice asceticism and undertake penitence as an enclosed nun; and Saint Gerónimo (also commonly called Jerome) as an example of an early instructor in how holy women should behave. Educated nuns would have been intimately familiar with the lives of the saints portrayed in convent paintings. The images thus served as continuous reminders to practice a life of virtue through humility, asceticism, and faith.

This use of paintings is demonstrated by the artwork within the Real Monasterio de la Encarnación (Royal Monastery of the Incarnation), a convent founded by Queen Margaret of Austria, wife to Philip III, in 1616. The Monasterio had close ties with the royal family, exemplified by the existence of a passage between the convent and the royal palace itself. Within one of the main halls of the convent are two series of paintings: one depicting the life of Mary, the other, the life of Jesus. Holy women played crucial roles in these series. Although Mary had a central role, other holy women, including Saint Anne (Mary's mother) and Mary

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100 Michelle A. Erhardt and Amy M. Morris, Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque, (Leiden :: Brill, 2012), 17.
101 Erhardt and Morris, Mary Magdalene, 22.
102 Adamson, The Princely Courts of Europe, 54.
103 Note: for these paragraphs, I am drawing from my own experience within the Real Monasterio de la Encarnación and the information given to me by a tour guide there. I have not been able to verify all of this information independently, but have no reason to doubt the veracity of the guide’s account.
Magdalene also appeared. In the Monasterio, Saint Anne is depicted teaching Mary how to read; Saint Anne as teacher of the Virgin was a common theme in paintings of her in the early modern era.\textsuperscript{104} In the painting by Bartolome Esteban Murillo shown further down this page, Saint Anne has abandoned her sewing to instruct her daughter. This portrait exemplifies several ideas relevant for nuns within the convent: the combination of the sacred saints with the everyday acts of sewing and reading, the instruction of a younger woman by her elder, and the religious education of women. Saint Anne’s move in this painting from the traditionally feminine art of sewing to the contested skill of reading demonstrates the still-rebellious nature of literacy and writing among women. Despite this contentious action, Saint Anne is depicted modestly, in a full-coverage gown and veil. Murillo’s painting thus demonstrates the constraints on female literacy. Reading was allowed for holy women, but women were also expected to maintain their demureness and use their literacy for religious purposes only: to more deeply understand the Bible, or write to spread doctrine. Nuns were literate; however, their education was encouraged only within the confines of deepening their faith.

Mary Magdalene was present in the Monasterio in her role as witness to the resurrection of Christ; paintings portraying this scene are frequently called \textit{Noli Me Tangere} (“touch me not,” or “do not hold on to me”).\textsuperscript{105} The Magdalene’s representations in early modern art were complex, as will be discussed below. The presence of a \textit{Noli Me Tangere}
Tangere painting in the Monasterio likely served to depict a crucial event in the life of Christ and demonstrated the complex role of women, particularly redeemed women, in Christian theology. Mary Magdalene was the first human to see the resurrected Christ, and yet was prohibited from touching him. In Noli Me Tangere paintings, the Magdalene is typically shown kneeling beneath Christ, reaching out towards him as he holds a hand out to stop her. In both Corregio’s Noli Me Tangere and that of Jerónimo Cosida, shown on page 34, Mary Magdalene is depicted on the ground below Jesus, leaning towards him even as he reaches out a hand to stop her. While both these paintings are similar in terms of their composition, Cosida depicts the Magdalene modestly, with a veil and high-necked dress, whereas Corregio shows her with hair unbound and a looser, lower neckline. These two portrayals emphasize the contrasting views of Mary Magdalene in sixteenth-century Spain, emphasizing her dual nature as sinner and saint. In both Noli Me Tangeres, the Magdalene’s spiritual witnessing is elevated, but her desire to physically touch Christ is denied, and the viewer is reminded of her carnal past. Thus, this portrayal encouraged the nuns of the Monasterio to focus on their spiritual selves while denying the desires of the flesh. The Monasterio never served as a recogimiento, however, it emphasized the virtues of deep faith, chastity, and penitence through the art it displayed.

The Monasterio was not alone in displaying such paintings; recogimientos, as sites specifically for fallen women, frequently contained portraits of Mary Magdalene. As both a former prostitute and a saint, Mary Magdalene served a dual purpose in instructing the women of recogimientos. Her presence reminded them of their sinfulness and shame, but also promised redemption. Although they may have committed grave offenses, with abiding faith and penitence

106 Erhardt and Morris, Mary Magdalene, 193.
108 Erhardt and Morris, Mary Magdalene, 120. For more discussion of Mary Magdalene’s role in early modern Spanish art history, see Ingrid Maisch’s Mary Magdalene: the Image of a Woman through the Centuries and Susan Haskins’ Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor.
they too could be redeemed and reintegrated into society. As tensions around female sexuality grew in the post-Tridentine era, Mary Magdalene rose in popularity as an exemplar of penitence.109 As her use as a model of repentance increased, her image became a “pervasive commodity,” particularly in spaces centered on women.110 The presence of portraits of the Magdalene in recogimientos reflected the multiple purposes of the recogimientos themselves: to punish fallen women, and to educate and rehabilitate them.

This is exemplified by the two portraits of the Magdalene in the Recogidas de Madrid. One of them, Penitent Mary Magdalene by Juan Carreño de Miranda, was painted in 1654, and depicts Mary Magdalene nude from the waist up, posed next to a wooden carving of Jesus on the cross and eyes raised towards the sky where cherubs watch from above. The Magdalene’s nudity

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109 Erhardt and Morris, Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies, 107.
110 Ibid, 113.
again reminds viewers of her sensuality and former carnal sins. Such a sensuous depiction would have been tolerated but viewed with suspicion.\(^{111}\) In this context, however, the Magdalene’s nudity was not intended to titillate viewers, but to remind them of the dangers of mortal sin. Her posture and gaze towards the heavens in Miranda’s piece demonstrate that she has left her sinful ways behind her, and emphasize her new role as a redeemed woman, ready to reenter society and contribute where she once harmed. According to Recio, this image was displayed prominently above the altar. Not only the content, but also the location of this portrait in a place highly visible to the residents of the convent and any visitors would have emphasized both the “fallen” status of the women enclosed within the convent and their potential for redemption.

Both the religious artwork which adorned convent walls and the enclosure which characterized convent life in the early modern period served multiple purposes in managing the lives of nuns and other women confined in convents. Enclosure was meant to act as both protection and surveillance. Its power as a tool for controlling the movement and sexuality of women was strong, and calls to increase its strictness were frequent in the post-Tridentine era, even from nuns themselves. However, many convents remained permeable, either through the physical movements of nuns or through the relationships they maintained. This permeability reflected the competing pressures placed on nuns.

\(^{111}\) O’Malley, “Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics’ Senses of the Sensuous,” 44.
to serve their families, and to spread religious doctrine, even as they were encouraged to sever ties to all earthly connections and remain silent), as well as the high status of many holy women. In addition to enclosure, the art which decorated convent interiors reminded nuns of their sacred duties and provided them with models to emulate. This function of artwork was taken a step further in recogimientos, in which portraits of Mary Magdalene both threatened punishment for carnal sin and promised redemption for those who were truly penitent. Considering the impacts of enclosure and decoration are crucial to the experience of early modern Spanish women: it was not only the explicit instruction given to enclosed women by their superiors and the threat of punishment that regulated their actions, but also the space of the convent itself.

Managing and disciplining women through their physical environment remained a powerful tool at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and was taken to new heights with the creation of the galera, or women’s prison. Recogimientos served as institutions in which vulnerable women could be educated and monitored, but when they failed to reform women, there were few options available save for the drastic punishments exemplified by the Inquisition. To address this gap, and to separate delinquent women from truly penitent ones, secular and religious authorities collaborated to implement the galera. As in recogimientos and convents, the physicality of the galera helped achieve its aims, and as in recogimientos and convents, the impulse to protect marginalized women remained, even as the galera represented a more punitive shift.
Section Three: Punishing and Protecting “Thieves, Witches, Sorceresses and Other Bad Women:” Understanding the Role of Holy Women in the Galera

In this section, we return to Sister Magdalena de San Jerónimo, who in 1608 wrote to King Phillip III of Spain to propose a solution to what she viewed as Spain’s most pressing problem: “the rotten and evil women who assault the honesty and virtue of good women with their dissolution and evil.”

The “rotten and evil women” San Jerónimo referred to were criminals and women who engaged in extramarital sex; such women were established targets of control, punishment, and reform in early modern Spain. The solution that San Jerónimo presented, however, differed from the existing systems in place to address “fallen” women. Rather than send these women to a recogimiento, San Jerónimo proposed a galera as a last resort to separate “bad women” from society and reform them. The proposal, addressed to the king but meant to be published more broadly, contains sections on the importance of the galera, its physical structure, governance, and benefits, and a final section again emphasizing its necessity.

Like recogimientos, galeras were meant to confine and rehabilitate women; unlike them, they were intended to punish women, and imposed physical discipline and penitence. San Jerónimo’s proposal thus represents a punitive turn in a society which already emphasized the discipline and control of women. However, even within a document focused on punishment, San Jerónimo’s impulse to protect and care for vulnerable women emerges. In an environment in which women were expected to be walled-off, subservient, and in many cases silent, the power and agency of holy women was dependent on conforming to gender norms and expectations, specifically in the realm of managing other women. Nonetheless, in managing other women, nuns acquired power: Mother Superior of a convent, Prelada (prelate) of a recogimiento, or, like

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Magdalena de San Jerónimo, correspondent to the king. While these roles frequently involved the discipline of other women, they also led to many instances of mutual care, and holy women played a large part in educating and protecting the women they enclosed. The introduction of the *galera* represented a shift towards more punitive interactions between holy women and the women held in *galeras*. Fallen women imprisoned in *galeras* were considered more recalcitrant than those in *recogimientos*, and that attitude is reflected in the frequent and harsh punishments they faced. Additionally, the creation of *galeras* marked a move towards formalizing and increasing the number of carceral institutions. However, these shifts did not constitute an erasure of the protective impulse. The holy women who conceived of and managed *galeras* continued practices of care towards their charges, and believed they could still be educated and reformed. These beliefs persisted even as attitudes towards sinful women became increasingly harsh in early seventeenth century Spain.

**Sub-Section A: Subject-Making and Imprisonment in Early Modern Spain**

*Galeras* shared features with *recogimientos*: both targeted female penitents, both aimed to rehabilitate and reintegrate women into society, and both involved some measure of public penitence and punishment despite their enclosed nature. However, the women within *galeras* were thought to have fallen further; San Jerónimo described the worst inmates as “rebeldes incorregibles” (incorrigible rebels), demonstrating their status as threats to Counter-Reformation society (their “rebellion” in a time which insisted on conformity) and the long-standing or “incorrigible” nature of their sinfulness.¹¹³ In addition to their greater reliance on punitive measures, the physical space of *galeras* differed from that of *recogimientos*. *Galeras* enclosed women to a greater degree, and there were fewer spaces for reflection or artwork. Like *recogimientos*, *galeras* were located in cities, but while *recogimientos* sometimes allowed

¹¹³ San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 32.
visitors, at least into the outer sanctum or chapel area, *galeras* were closed except to those who worked or lived within them. The one exception to this rule were confessors, who were allowed in to aid sinful women in “purifying their souls.”114 In addition to stricter rules around visitation, *galeras* did not allow women to leave for any reason besides their release to the care of a *recogimiento*. Women in *recogimientos* could leave to publicly do penance and participate in religious holidays and festivals; the women of the *galera* made no such departures.115

In her article on “Old Regime Penology,” Isabel Ramos Vázquez rejects the theory that punishment did not shift from public spectacle to private imprisonment until the eighteenth century. Vázquez insists that there were several earlier, intermediate stages which served as stepping stones from a doctrine of “maximum severity” to one of utilitarian and humanitarian reform.116 In Spain, Vázquez suggests that shifts away from corporal and capital punishment and towards imprisonment began in the 1500s, with the implementation of galleys as a form of confinement and punitive labor.117 *Galera*, while used by San Jerónimo to mean “women’s prison,” literally means galley in Spanish, creating a connection between the imprisonment of women within *casas de galera* and the imprisonment of men as rowers in galleys. *Galeras* can thus be understood as part of the shift towards incarceration for criminal offenses, as well as a continuation of the confinement of women for religious and/or moral offenses.

However, this did not mean that *galeras* abandoned public discipline, nor did they aim to condemn their inmates to perpetual imprisonment. While women confined in the *galera* could

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115 Manuel Recio, “A Historical Compendium and Instructive Manifesto on the Origin and Foundation of the Royal House of St Mary Magdalene of the Penitence, Commonly Known as the Recogidas of Madrid,” 1777, in *Unruly Women, Performance, Penitence, and Punishment in Early Modern Spain*, (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 120. The women of the *galera* were not the only ones to experience a punitive turn in the early 1600s: the moriscos of Spain were expelled in 1609. When viewed together, these events mark a general shift towards punishment and removal from society for those viewed as a threat.
not leave for any reason, exceptions could be made for punishments before a public audience.

For example, San Jerónimo recommended that if a woman who had previously been sent to a galera reoffended for a fourth time, she would be hanged above the entrance to the galera with a sign proclaiming her crimes for all to see. It is unclear if or how often this punishment was carried out, but its inclusion in a published treatise suggests continued reliance on public punishment as a deterrent for criminal or delinquent actions. In addition, while certainly more punitive than recogimientos, the galeras aimed to rehabilitate and move women out of imprisonment, though not necessarily out of enclosure. It was not uncommon for the prelada (female leader) of a recogimiento to visit women sent to the galera to “help them correct themselves.” Additionally, the prelada would “welcome them back to their Magdalen house when they demonstrated true penitence.” This ongoing support, as well as the possibility of return to a less punitive space, demonstrates the continued care of holy women towards their charges. While holy women frequently confined, controlled, and punished other women as part of their positions of power, that did not mean that relationships between holy women and the women they oversaw in recogimientos and galeras was wholly antagonistic: care and rehabilitation emerged as clear objectives of the galera along with control and discipline. San Jerónimo herself identified “removing [vulnerable women] from the danger of being lost” as one of the main goals of the galera.

These contradictions between care and discipline can only be understood within the context of a patriarchal society which placed competing pressures on holy women.

Sub-Section B: The Conception of Galeras in Magdalena de San Jerónimo’s Treatise

118 San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 35.
120 Perry, “With Brave Vigilance and a Hundred Eyes,” 14.
121 San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 25.
Magdalena de San Jerónimo’s proposal demonstrates the competing discourses faced by holy women, and reveals her management and discipline of other women to gain agency without challenging the gender norms which bound her. In addition to its punitive and protective purposes, the proposal was meant to bolster San Jerónimo’s own credibility. This document followed a previous discussion between San Jerónimo, the king, and his advisors, in which Philip approved the idea of the galera and allowed for their construction in Valladolid and Madrid.  

122 This proposal was thus meant to clarify San Jerónimo’s intent and rally support for additional galeras. Furthermore, released “under the shadow and protection of Your Majesty,” this document enhanced San Jerónimo’s credibility and aimed to silence the galera’s detractors.  

123 San Jerónimo not only navigated conflicting opinions on galeras, but also a treacherous landscape for women in power. Her intentional use of the king’s name to shield herself reveals the complex ways in which women writers established their ability to speak publicly.  

Writing and publishing was a fraught pursuit as a woman in seventeenth-century Spain. Print culture expanded rapidly in early modern Europe, and some scholars argue that it played a pivotal role in the religious, economic, and social changes sweeping Europe at the time.  

124 The written word became particularly important to the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was used to “cement community, propose correct devotions, and inculcate the teachings of the Church.”  

125 However, printed materials could also be used to spread heresy, and written works were closely monitored for any dangerous content. If writing were found to be heretical, it could be censored or banned entirely: in 1559, an index published by

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Inquisitor-General Valdés prohibited a wide variety of books in response to the discovery of Protestant cells in Seville and Valladolid.\textsuperscript{126} While the writings of Martin Luther and known Protestants had been banned for decades, this ban covered many well-known Catholic spiritual authors, and warned any would-be Spanish writer of the dangers of publishing controversial material.\textsuperscript{127} Holy women were expected to model humility and subservience, thus, their public writings were already considered suspect, and female authors had to prove their good intent more so than male authors. San Jerónimo was well aware of these expectations, and her invocation of the king’s name and repeated emphasis on the necessity of her proposal justified her decision to publish.

San Jerónimo first established her claim that the \textit{galera} was necessary by arguing that Spain faced a major threat: uncontrolled women, and particularly, uncontrolled female sexuality. San Jerónimo opened her proposal by describing how “women, around twenty years old, with their liberties and disillusion, or shamelessness, who have lost their fear of God and justice” have “wreaked havoc and laughed in the faces of men.”\textsuperscript{128} This flouting of gender norms was socially and religiously unacceptable. While San Jerónimo did not explicitly mention extramarital sex in describing these women, her reference to pimps and madams immediately following this section demonstrates the linkage between behavior which broke gender norms and prostitution.\textsuperscript{129} After establishing the damage wrought by such sexually transgressive women, San Jerónimo claimed that “in addition to doing many unsavoury tasks in their homes,” bad women and their pimps “enter other homes, and more important yet, bring about great havoc and fault, not only to the maids, but also to the daughters and still to the ladies, a great affront to God, dishonour of a

\textsuperscript{126} Homza, \textit{The Spanish Inquisition}, 212.  
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{128} San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 15.  
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 18.
family, and the scandal of all the people.” While San Jerónimo expressed concern at the “unsavoury tasks” carried out by pimps and immoral women within their own homes, her larger concern was the spread of such activities when they “entered other homes,” particularly when that spread took place across class lines and began to affect “the ladies,” who in turn affected “all the people.”

This concern with containing vice is repeated multiple times throughout the proposal. San Jerónimo felt that even the reference to some women as “bad” threatened the honor of all women, clarifying early in her proposal that “I take as fact that here we do not touch nor stain the good and honourable women…they are the honour of women, a mirror of honesty, and an example of all virtue. Instead we address the rotten and evil women who assault the honesty and virtue of good women with their dissolution and evil.” San Jerónimo highlighted this section in the printed proposal by including a “nota” (note) in the margins besides this statement. Her words, combined with the marginal note, expressed concern that the honor of “good women” was sullied by the presence of fallen women, and situated the separation of good women from bad, and thus the defense of that honor, as one of the major projects of the galera. While enclosure within a convent was meant to protect holy women from the dangers of the exterior world, the spatial segregation of the galera functioned to keep dangerous women confined where they could be monitored and reformed.

To combat the actions of these “bad women” and prevent them from contaminating good women and all of Spanish society, San Jerónimo recommended that the galera be built as a “strong and well-closed house, built in a way so as not to have windows or views, and not connected to any other house.” San Jerónimo’s focus on the enclosure of the galera

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130 San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 18.
131 Ibid, 20.
132 Ibid, 32.
emphasizes her concern with preventing contact between the corrupted women within and the “honorable” people of the outside world. The recommendation to build *galeras* cut off from their surroundings contrasted with the relative openness of convents generally and *recogimientos* specifically. While repentant women in *recogimientos* were not allowed visitors or regular trips away from the convent, they occasionally participated in processionals through the city, and were certainly not denied windows or views.¹³³ The women of *recogimientos* were fallen or otherwise marginalized, but not so dangerous that they could not have limited contact with the public under the watchful eye of nuns or male clergy. This contrasts with the women of the *galera*, who were viewed as so corrupt that even the presence of windows could lead to harmful contact between them and the innocent. In proposing an intensification of enclosure for fallen women, San Jerónimo demonstrated a turn towards a more disciplinarian approach towards regulating women and female sexuality.

However, San Jerónimo’s concern was not only for punishing “bad women” and shielding “honorable women,” from the threat of contamination, but also for the protection of the “bad women” who posed the threat. In the first section of her proposal, San Jerónimo asserted that “there should be homes or schools, where all orphaned girls are to be collected, so that there they will be taught virtue, Christianity, and policy, removing them from the danger of being lost…so that, in time, they may serve in recogidas and honest homes, where they may be remedied and put in place after a few years.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, when discussing where to enclose “bad” women, San Jerónimo first suggested *seminarios*, or religious institutions, before *galeras*.¹³⁵ The *galera* was not San Jerónimo’s first choice for vulnerable women, but a last resort. In her ideal vision, abandoned girls were protected and educated, and the sinfulness of

¹³³ Recio, “Historical Compendium and Instructive Manifesto.”
¹³⁴ San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,” 25.
¹³⁵ Ibid.
women was halted not by punishment but by spiritual education and care in the context of a safe, enclosed space. Additionally, San Jerónimo blamed the dishonesty of vulnerable women on their upbringing rather than their inherent moral character. While they may have been “bad women” at the moment, once the “dishonest dancing and other such unsavoury inclinations and customs” were replaced by “virtue and Christian doctrine,” they could be reformed and saved. Even for women whose transgression merited imprisonment in a *galera*, San Jerónimo saw the possibility of their redemption. The urge to educate and aid women is present in San Jerónimo’s conception of the *galera* as well: one of the staff members she proposes, a *maestra*, was dedicated specifically to educating the *galera*’s inhabitants.\(^{136}\)

San Jerónimo’s vision for the administration of the *galera* balanced her desire to assign authoritative roles to holy women with the need to conform to patriarchal structures of power. While San Jerónimo served as the head of a *recogimiento*, and Magdalene houses and *recogimientos* often had staff largely composed of nuns, her vision for the staff of the *galera* was both more secular and more centered on men than that of the convent or the *recogimiento*. As she explained:

> In order for good administration and government of the *galera*, there should be five staff members. The first should be a married man, with the name and office of Warden, as they do it in prisons. He should have a wife who is a woman of honor and good upbringing…he should live at the first gate and entrance, so that he can work with those that govern within, who should be three honorable women.\(^{137}\)

The three honorable women San Jerónimo suggests were a Rectora, “who governs all the people,” a Portera, who “has as her charge the second door and the pantry,” and a Maestra, who “always assists with the women, who teaches the prayers and the Christian doctrine.”\(^{138}\) While San Jerónimo does not specify whether these were secular women or nuns, the expectation that

\(^{136}\) San Jerónimo, “La razón y forma de la galera,”39.

\(^{137}\) Ibid.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.
the Maestra would teach doctrine suggests that she, at least, would have training as a holy woman, and would thus be educated and literate. In establishing positions of authority for themselves, holy women were beholden to gendered hierarchies, and were frequently asked to answer to a male authority even in spaces designed for the enclosure, discipline, and rehabilitation of women. However, it should not be assumed that the Warden held all, or even the majority of the power in San Jerónimo’s proposal. This proposed staffing structure reflects in miniature what holy women struggled to implement on a larger scale: while nominally led by a man, in charge of formal discipline and with a wife to aid and serve him, the male authority was on the outside, at the first gate, while the power to govern the interior belonged to holy women.

Sub-Section C: Later Implementation of Galeras

Following her proposal, San Jerónimo disappears from the historical record. Whether she died, returned to her work as head of a recogimiento, or participated in the realization of the galeras she introduced remains unknown. However, while San Jerónimo herself vanished, her ideas lived on, and by the late 1600s, galeras had been implemented more broadly throughout Spain and its empire. In 1676 Leonardo Galdiano y Croy, a Royal Accountant, recorded 59 “lost women” contained in the Casa de Galera y Recogimiento de Mujeres Perdidas, along with dozens of other women enclosed in Madrid’s Casa de Mujeres Recogidas de Santa Maria Magdalena and the Beaterio de San Ioseph de la Penitencia. While Galdiano y Croy’s records do not reveal the physical structure or location of Madrid’s galeras and recogimientos, they do list staff. The records show that while San Jerónimo’s plan was followed to some extent, her vision of three women as the leaders of the galera’s interior was not adhered to, and almost all

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140 Leonardo Galdiano y Croy, “Breve Tratado de los Hospitales y Casas del Recogimiento,” 1676, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid. The Casa de Mujeres Recogidas was a recogimiento, and the Beaterio was a house in which beatas could live in community and under male supervision without taking vows at an actual convent.
roles of authority were given to men. The Casa de Mujeres Recogidas described by Galdiano y Croy lists an administrator, rector, altar boy, doctor, surgeon, and andaderas among its male staff, along with a “ministra,” the feminine form of administrator, which could have indicated either a religious or secular female leader. Interestingly, the ministra is listed not with the rest of the staff, but with the women enclosed in the recogimiento: Galdiano y Croy’s exact wording is “53 mujeres, inclusa la ministra (53 women, including the female administrator).” The placement of the sole woman in a role of authority with the penitent women of the recogimiento indicates the subordinated position of women in early modern Spain’s power hierarchies. Although the ministra was not one of the penitent women, and almost certainly held power in the daily operations of the recogimiento, it was her gender and not her status as a staff member that dictated her place in Galdiano y Croy’s accounting of the recogimiento’s inhabitants: with the other women, listed after even the altar boy. Galdiano y Croy’s records thus mark a clear break from the woman-centric proposal put forth by San Jerónimo. While recogimientos may have been spaces for women, and spaces in which women could rise to positions of authority over time, they still recreated the gendered hierarchies common to Counter-Reformation Spain.

Patriarchal hierarchies were even more apparent in the staff of the galera that Galdiano y Croy listed: the only administrators present in his list were a warden and a porter, followed by “59 mujeres perdidas (lost women).” In his accounting of the staff of the beaterio, Galdiano y Croy also listed a female rector with the women of the beaterio; the absence of any female administrator listed with the lost women suggests that the staff was entirely male. This marked a significant departure from San Jerónimo’s vision of a female-dominated if not female-exclusive staff, and emphasizes the difficulties holy women faced in attempting to secure power and

141 Galdiano y Croy, “Breve Tratado de los Hospitales y Casas del Recogimiento,” 35.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid, 37.
positions of authority, even when they conformed to gender expectations. As the seventeenth century continued, care and punishment shifted from the shared purview of both male and female authority to a male dominated one. Thus, San Jerónimo’s conception of holy women in positions of power was never fully realized.

San Jerónimo’s proposal demonstrates key ways in which women responded to a patriarchal culture that enforced enclosure and penitence for women. Her careful use of her own authority reveals the delicate navigation of gendered expectations women performed in order to assert power and speak publicly. Her implementation of punitive measures to control, enclose, and rehabilitate fallen women demonstrates the role high-status women played in the confinement and discipline of low-status women; while the intensive restrictions on women’s sexuality and movement derived from patriarchal gender norms, it was not only men who enforced them. Despite the punitive nature of San Jerónimo’s proposal and the extension of imprisonment from men to women it resulted in, her commitment to remediation and rehabilitation reveals the protective impulse that accompanied the discipline of the *galera*. San Jerónimo’s main goal in creating *galeras* was to protect women. She aimed to protect honest women by removing potential agents of corruption in their midst, the fallen women of the *galera* by providing them with resources and education otherwise unavailable to them, and women generally by further sacralizing society.

Additionally, San Jerónimo’s choice to write and publish reveals the complexities of entering the male-dominated field of writing as a literate woman. Despite the dangers of writing as a woman, the ability to reach a wider audience and share a message or idea was a powerful draw, and San Jerónimo was not alone in choosing to express her vision in writing. Other nuns who wished to gain power and acclaim could do so through writing, particularly in the form of a

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144 Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 204.
vida, or autobiography. Nuns who wrote vidas had to reckon with a hostile print culture, and male authorities who were suspicious of women writers. Like San Jerónimo, vida-writers employed seemingly contradictory strategies in order to navigate this patriarchal culture.
Section Four: Control and Care in the Vidas of Early Modern Nuns

In 1598, Maria Vela y Cueto, a Cistercian nun at the convent of Santa Ana in Avila “endeavored to obtain permission from the Lady Abbess…to undertake public mortifications. She granted my wish, imposing them on me as a penance.”¹⁴⁵ This statement, which Vela wrote in her vida, or autobiography, may initially seem nonsensical. Vela requested these mortifications willingly, and yet she describes them as “imposed” on her. Additionally, why would a nun be interested not only in punishing herself, but in doing so publicly? Why would an abbess, guardian of both a convent’s reputation and of its nuns’ wellbeing, allow these actions? While such behavior may seem perplexing, within the context of early modern Spanish convent life, it was understandable, if unusual. As we have seen, holy women were contradictory subjects, and exposed to a variety of competing pressures: to display faith publicly, to partake in penance and to punish others, and to care for other holy women.

These pressures were particularly strong for enclosed nuns, who served as exemplars for their communities. The tensions between discipline and care, and humility and public display of sanctity, are present not only in the physical structure of the convent and nuns’ management of low-status women, but also in their writing. In creating and sharing vidas, nuns opened a space for other literary women. In portraying themselves as pious, modest, and subordinate to their male superiors, these nuns reinforced gender norms even as they broke them. This tension is obvious in the convent relationships depicted in vidas as well: while the authors of vidas cared for others and were cared for themselves while ill or injured, they also frequently came into conflict with other nuns. Both the act of writing vidas and the content they contained demonstrate the contradictory forces and goals holy women faced in post-Tridentine Spain.

Vida literally means “life” in Spanish, but in this case refers to a specific form of autobiography undertaken by enclosed nuns. Vidas served multiple purposes in early modern Spain: they could be used as evidence in the beatification of a nun, they allowed confessors to monitor the claims to holiness of the women under their watch, and they gave nuns a chance to author their lives in their own voices. Once published, in addition to aiding in beatification proceedings, they also served as exemplars for other holy women. The women who wrote them intended for their work to be read; hopefully, their vida would gain a wide audience, as did that of Teresa de Avila, but if not, a nun could expect that at least her confessor and fellow sisters would read it. Vidas were often addressed to a nun’s confessor, indicating both the significant role confessors played in vida construction and demonstrating that vidas were never meant to be fully private. This meant that although vidas were partially intended as a record of personal visions and conversations with divinity, there was always an awareness that they would be shared, and clear morals and messages emerge from their pages. Vidas should thus be analyzed both as texts which attempted to portray their authors in a positive light, and as tools which strove to mold other holy women into their “ideal” forms.

Beyond these explicit and implicit purposes, vidas provide detailed accounts of the everyday lives of nuns. While their content focused on the holy experiences of the women who wrote them — visions, strange phenomena, or the voice of God himself — they also described the schedule of a typical nun, conversations with abbesses and fellow holy women, and other seemingly trivial details. These minutiae are given less importance than the sacred in vidas, but they still reveal patterns in interactions between holy women, as well as between nuns and their male superiors. Two key themes emerge from these interactions: mutual care and protection,

147 Vela, Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun, 55.
particularly between close female friends and from female superiors towards those under their authority; and punishment or the fear of punishment, from other holy women as well as the omnipresent threat of the Inquisition and censure by male authority. In both their role as educational texts and as records of interactions between holy women, *vidas* demonstrate the interplay of control and care, and the contradictory pressures which shaped the lives of all holy women in post-Tridentine Spain.

**Sub-Section A: The *Vida* as Genre and Tool**

*Vidas* were not straightforward accounts of a nun’s life, but constructed texts designed to portray the nun in a way most likely to secure her canonization, and as such can be considered autohagiographies rather than autobiographies. In addition to their role as hagiographies, *vidas*, as mandated texts, also served to both regulate and liberate nuns. In addition to their role as autohagiographies, *vidas*, as mandated texts, also served to both regulate and liberate nuns. *Vidas* were not freely undertaken, but instead ordered by a nun’s confessor. One function of this mandate to write was control and surveillance. Similar to the process of confession itself, writing the minute details of their lives accustomed nuns to regularly giving an exhaustive account of themselves and their experiences with God. Nuns were subject to the confessional gaze throughout their daily lives, and expected to recreate it within themselves; thus, *vidas* reflected the presence of self-surveillance as well the oversight of confessors. As holy people, and specifically as holy women subject to strict enclosure in the post-Tridentine era, nuns were more

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regulated than the general populace. Accordingly, *vidas* acted as an extension of the tighter control by the Church of holy women.

However, the mandated nature of *vidas* did not only function as surveillance, but also allowed nuns to write about themselves without fear of being accused of vanity or a lack of humility. In claiming that they were following the orders of their confessors, nuns deflected accusations that they were overstepping their roles as holy women. In the case of Maria Vela y Cueto, her *vida* was ordered by her last confessor, Father Miguel Gonzalez Vaquero, and was completed in several sections over the course of a decade. Vaquero, like most confessors who mandated *vidas*, played a large role in the construction and distribution of Vela’s *vida*: not only did he order its creation, he shaped its contents. Vaquero edited the *vida* (or asked Vela to edit it) at certain points, and he compiled the entire *vida* following her death. This level of involvement approached co-authorship, particularly given that many sections of Vela’s *vida* were written directly following conversations between the two. Vaquero’s influence on Vela’s *vida* fulfilled several functions. As canonization of a nun reflected well upon her confessor, taking an active role in the creation of Vela’s *vida* offered Vaquero an opportunity for acclaim of his own. Additionally, Vaquero’s partial control of the content of the *vida* reinforced patriarchal oversight of holy women. Conversely, he also gave Vela freedom to express herself by providing her with an excuse to write under the seal of approval from a male authority. As co-creators of *vidas*, confessors thus introduced a variety of competing pressures to the nuns writing *vidas* under their jurisdiction: they surveilled and edited even as they provided the opportunity for nuns to assert voice and gain acclaim.

152 Ibid, 122.
Sub-Section B: Dissemination and Education

The impacts of *vidas* were as varied as the pressures which shaped them, and went beyond presenting a nun in a positive light for beatification and canonization. As texts that were meant to be read by other members of a nun’s convent, and hopefully by a broader audience, *vidas* sought to instruct and direct other holy women.\(^{154}\) While some authors of *vidas* explicitly called on other holy women to reform themselves, others educated implicitly, by setting themselves up as ideal models to emulate. Religious men and women in early modern Spain frequently modeled their actions on other holy figures, with holy women in particular taking their cues from female saints and female contemporaries. In the wake of the Counter-Reformation, the idea of shaping oneself after a saintly model took on even more significance, and many holy men and women justified the founding of new religious orders and other reforms by pointing to an esteemed model who had undertaken similar actions. This practice of turning to an exemplar for guidance meant that nuns in positions of power or seeking fame and influence were aware that their actions would guide current and future holy women. The *vida*, meant to be read by the author’s fellow convent members and potentially a wider audience, should thus be understood as an instruction manual and a prescriptive text: providing a model for what a good nun should do, as well as correcting those who did not fall in line.

In her *vida*, Maria Vela both referred to other holy women as models and asserted herself as an exemplar for other women. In particular, Vela used the example of Catherine of Siena to justify her often controversial penances, and Teresa of Avila as an inspiration for her close relationship with God as well as her creation of a *vida*. Catherine of Siena, an Italian holy woman who was canonized in 1461, was an “important exemplar of female Eucharistic piety,

\(^{154}\) For a more in depth discussion on the publication and distribution of *vidas*, see Elizabeth Lehfeldt’s *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* and Marta V. Vicente and Luis R. Corteguera’s *Women, Texts and Authority in the Early Modern Spanish World*. 
asceticism, and visionary religiosity,” and likely appealed to Vela not only because of her 
popularity among the clergy of early modern Spain but also due to her frequent and severe acts 
of penitence, which Vela strove to emulate.\textsuperscript{155} Vela was not alone in her admiration: many holy 
women who sought canonization, including Vela, followed Catherine’s example and drew 
connections between their lives and hers.

In an early chapter of her \emph{vida}, Vela described how “like [Catherine], I was devoted to 
silence, to prayer, and to keeping vigil. Like her, I would not go to bed until midnight; I 
performed three disciplines a day and wore a hair shirt; I slept on a mat of cork and ate only 
greens.”\textsuperscript{156} Here, Vela drew a connection between not only their mutual virtues, but also their 
penitential practices. Penance was encouraged in post-Tridentine Spain as a way to show faith, 
but penance which drew particular attention to an individual, and which was done without the 
express approval of male authority, risked being interpreted as transgressive. Linking her 
penances, which were controversial, with those of an established and revered female saint would 
have lent Vela credibility and framed her public and extreme penances as a sign of faith rather 
than disrespect for common Cistercian practices on penance. Vela explicitly expressed her desire 
to model herself after Catherine when she described how she had “implored the Lord to give me 
a new heart, as he had given [Catherine], because I had a great desire to imitate her in the 
virtues.”\textsuperscript{157} In comparing her own desires to those of Catherine’s, Vela situated herself within a 
lineage of penitent holy women, emphasizing her holiness and establishing her right to serve as 
an exemplar to future nuns.

\textsuperscript{155} F. Thomas Luongo, “Introduction,” in \textit{The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena} (Cornell University Press, 2006), 13. For further reading on Catherine of Siena specifically, see Monica Furlong’s \textit{Visions & Longings: Medieval Women Mystics} and Jane Tylus’s \textit{Reclaiming Catherine of Siena: Literacy, Literature, and the Signs of Others}.

\textsuperscript{156} Vela, \textit{Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun}, 62.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
As discussed in Section Three, literate holy women could and did write about controversial issues, but such writing was subject to scrutiny and could be used as evidence against a nun in an Inquisitorial trial if it were judged heretical. Nuns were hesitant to publish their work, and if they did, were sure to portray themselves as humble and obedient to male authority. For example, Isabel de Jesús, a Carmelite nun like Vela and Teresa, depicted her writing as forced to deflect accusations of pride or *alumbradismo*. In her book concerning Isabel, Sherry M. Velasco demonstrates how she portrayed herself as opposed to writing and her writings as forced by her confessor, painting him as adversarial and the writing process as physically nauseating.\(^{158}\) However, Isabel also laid out arguments in favor of her writing, describing God as encouraging her to lengthen her *vida* and the process of writing it as akin to acting as a divine mouthpiece. Velasco asserted that Isabel’s dual claims that her writing was both mandated by her confessor and encouraged by God allowed her to “show her own holiness and then lengthen the narrative without seeming vain.”\(^{159}\) In portraying herself as merely an obedient vehicle for God’s will, forced to write by her confessor, and out of piety rather than any selfish motivation, Isabel enabled herself to tell her own story without facing accusations of *alumbradismo* and possible denunciation to the Inquisition.

Like Isabel, Vela was cognizant of the suspicion around women writers, and frequently referred to Teresa of Avila, a respected nun canonized in 1622, to justify her own holy writings. Vela had access to a copy of Teresa’s *vida* and demonstrates a clear familiarity with it. This would not have been unusual for a holy woman, as Teresa was popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and her writings were widely distributed.\(^{160}\) Additionally, Vela and


\(^{159}\) Velasco, *Demons*, 69.

Teresa lived in Avila at the same time, creating an additional link between them. Vela experienced a connection with Teresa and her vida several times: she “reads [the writings of] Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus,” and then feels “within myself a renewed spirit and a strong will.” The example of another nun’s successful writing invigorated Vela and “renewed” her “strong will” to continue documenting and sharing her own spiritual experiences. On a different occasion, “when thinking about what the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus says - that spiritual people must not forget to meditate on the sacred humanity of Christ Our Lord,” Vela received a message from Christ himself. Again, to Vela, Teresa represented a connection with holiness and an exemplar of the potential for popularity and respectability as a female author. Vela’s familiarity with and adherence to Teresa’s vida demonstrates both vidas’ potential for widespread recognition and their function as a didactic tool for holy women.

Maria Vela not only referred to other holy women as models, but also asserted herself as an exemplar for how other nuns should act. While Vela had to establish her exceptionality in order to qualify for sainthood, she also intended for others to follow her example: thus, while she portrays some aspects of her experience as inimitable (her visions of God, her conversations with Jesus), her penitential practices and deep faith were meant to be emulated. When her penances provoked suspicion and “some persons became scandalized,” Vela retorted that all should resign themselves to God’s will as she had done and that “our Lord gave me to understand that when the soul is resigned to divine will, the devil can do nothing.” Instead of fighting the charges of scandal, Vela wrote that she “was to exercise faith, trust, resignation, and humility. In doing so, not only would I benefit, but so, too, would those who dealt with me.”

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162 Ibid, 129.
163 Ibid, 71.
164 Ibid, 73.
herself as a paragon of Christian virtue: in responding to accusations with “resignation and humility,” she emulated Jesus himself, a connection she made multiple times in her vida. At one point during a crisis of faith, Vela claimed that God would restore her health if she drank boiled hyssop.165 In depictions of Christ’s crucifixion, Roman soldiers extended Jesus a water-soaked sponge on a branch of hyssop; Vela’s reference to it as a physical and spiritual cure for herself thus drew a direct connection between her and Jesus.166 She made several other similar allusions, and frequently referred to herself as a bride of Christ. In modeling herself as faithful and humble, as Christ himself was, Vela believed her own religious connection with God would deepen, and that her fellow nuns would follow her example

Vela was not the only nun to frame herself as an exemplar in her vida; Teresa herself also asserted her own right to serve as a model of feminine virtue, and to some extent, to preach. In her vida, Teresa called for an increase in surveillance and enclosure for holy women, claiming that the new rule of Carmelite convents (which allowed for worldly possessions and travel for reasons of illness or family) was lax. Teresa describes how in her first convent “the nuns out of great necessity often went out,” and “the rule was not kept in its prime order but was observed…according to the bull of mitigation.”167 While Teresa allowed that the reasons many nuns broke enclosure were due to “great necessity,” she encouraged a more extreme adherence to enclosure and vows of poverty, going so far as to say that it was “the devil” who “partly kept [her] from home.”168 To practice the values she espoused in her writing, Teresa opened several

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Note: the “bull of mitigation” was the new rule of the Carmelite orders, which allowed for holy women to keep their worldly possessions, enabling a convent life which closely mirrored that of aristocratic women outside of the convent.
168 Teresa of Avila, The Book of Her Life, 228.
convents/monasteries for “Discalced” (barefoot) Carmelites, in which all members were required to renounce all possessions and linkages to the external world, including relationships with family members and one’s own family name.\textsuperscript{169}

In preaching greater enclosure, Teresa entered a complex debate on whether holy women should be allowed some limited freedom in order to gain knowledge and further spread their sanctity, or if they should be completely enclosed to limit their worldliness and protect their modesty and chastity. While the Council of Trent had come down firmly on the side of total enclosure, individual convents continued to reckon with these issues. Teresa’s actions towards a more total removal from the world aligned her with the Council of Trent and other proponents of full enclosure. Her embrace of enclosure was not meant for her alone: Teresa intended that other nuns would follow her example and leave behind the world and their “sinful” excesses. At one point, Teresa went so far as to write that “the Lord should sometime ordain and be pleased that if a nun read this she might learn a lesson from me.”\textsuperscript{170} Clearly, Teresa felt comfortable in both serving as a model and in using her writing to directly chastise and guide other holy women.\textsuperscript{171}

\textbf{Sub-Section C: Care and Discipline Within Convent Walls}

\textit{Vidas} not only served as tools of education and beatification, but also provided descriptions of the daily lives of enclosed holy women. The contradictory pressures exerted on and by holy women emerged in both Teresa and Vela’s depictions of their interactions with fellow members of their convents. Both suffered severe illness and relied on the care of their


Note: Teresa renounced her own family name in favor of the simpler title “Teresa de Jesus;” this is why she is traditionally referred to using only her first name.

\textsuperscript{170} Teresa of Avila, \textit{The Book of Her Life}, 33.

\textsuperscript{171} For more analysis on Teresa specifically and her impact on holy women in the Early Modern Era, see Julia Rombough’s “Teresa of Avila and Her Many Confessors: Lowly and Exalted Men in The Book of Her Life,” in the \textit{Strata University of Ottawa Graduate Student History Review and Teresa and the Politics of Sanctity}; and \textit{Enkindling Love: The Legacy of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross}, both by Gillian Ahlgren.
fellow nuns to sustain them for long periods of time, and both found themselves in frequent
conflict with other holy women, which at times resulted in Inquisitorial interviews. In terms of
her illness, Vela was more focused on her own physical symptoms and not particularly
descriptive of the environment of the infirmary; however, at times it is clear that she was closely
watched over and attended to by fellow nuns. During a bout of severe illness in which Vela was
“in bed and extremely weak,” she was told by a divine voice that she must arise, after which she
“made the nuns dress me, since I could not do it myself.”172 While Vela framed this as an unequal
interaction in which she “made” the other other nuns attend to her, their presence and willingness
to aid her suggests the level of care provided to ailing members of the convent. Similarly, Teresa
suffered from various illnesses almost as soon as she entered the convent, and at one point left
enclosure to seek help from a renowned healer, but ultimately returned to the Incarnation and
was cared for her fellow nuns as she convalesced over the next several years.173 Even when
Teresa sought help outside the convent, she was accompanied by other holy women: “when the
time came for the cure to begin…I was brought there with much solicitude for my comfort by
my father and sister, and my friend, the nun, who had come with me, for she loved me very
dearly.”174 This statement demonstrates the deep friendships that often formed between convent
members, as well as the physical and emotional labor that nuns undertook for each other.

Teresa’s relationships with her fellow nuns were not based solely around care, however.
Many of the other members of her convent felt threatened by or suspicious of her displays of
holiness, as well by her insistence on greater enclosure and stricter vows of poverty. Teresa’s
feelings about the danger of unenclosed nuns were quite strong: she claimed that “a monastery of

172 Vela, Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun, 78.
173 Jodi Bilinkoff, “Introduction,” in The Book of Her Life by Teresa of Avila, translated by Kieran Kavanaigh and
women that allows freedom is a tremendous danger,” because “youthfulness, sensuality, and the
devil incite [young nuns] and make them follow after things that are of the very world.” Many
nuns at Teresa’s convent and other “aristocratic” convents which allowed for possessions and
greater freedom of movement enjoyed their privileges, Teresa’s scathing condemnation of a lack
of enclosure incited equally strong feelings. When she first proposed the founding of a convent
of Discalced nuns, people within her convent and outside of it objected strongly, creating what
she called “the great persecution that cannot be briefly described came upon us: gossip, derision,
saying that it was foolishness.” While Teresa enjoyed close friendships and support from many
of her fellow nuns, when she deviated from established convent traditions, she also incited
hostility and condemnation.

Vela too was frequently at odds with her fellow nuns even as they expressed care towards
her. In particular, Vela’s relationships with her Abbesses demonstrated a combination of concern,
care, and at times censure. Vela frequently undertook partial or complete fasts as part of her
penitence or as expressions of faith, including cutting out meat, subsisting on bread and water, or
refusing to take all nourishment except Communion for weeks on end. These fasts were a source
of controversy between Vela and her Abbess. The Abbess’s reluctance to allow Vela to fast
seems to have originated from several sources: first, this kind of intense physical penitence was
not common among Cistercian nuns, and Vela’s continued fasting drew unwanted attention and
rebuke from her fellow nuns and their male superiors. Father Alarcón, a representative of the
Inquisition who was called on to investigate Vela, went so far as to state that Vela’s fasts, among
other “extraordinary acts of penance in public,” were “not in conformity with the Rule, or

176 Ibid, 229.
177 Vela frequently refers to the leader of Santa Ana only as the “Lady Abbess.” While there were many women who
served in this role during Vela’s lifetime, she does not often distinguish between them.
according to the usage or custom of this house, or done with the approval of the male superiors of the Order.”

Clearly, Vela had broken multiple social, religious, and gender norms. Not only had she undertaken a penance that violated Cistercian custom, she had performed it publicly and without the approval of male superiors, threatening her reputation as well as the convent’s and by extension, the Abbess’s. Additionally, Vela suffered a myriad of negative physical symptoms while fasting, from fainting and weakness to seizures and lockjaw. Vela described her fasting as serving as “medicine” for her illnesses; the Abbess appears to have believed otherwise, and would frequently order Vela to eat when her symptoms became severe. The Abbess’ interference in Vela’s penitential practices should thus be understood both as endeavors to keep her in line and as attempts to prevent her physical health from declining further.

The Abbess was not the only nun who disapproved of Vela’s actions; Vela flouted the strict hierarchies of convent culture, and thus created many enemies for herself. While Vela had friends and confidantes within the convent, as was typical for nuns who lived within tightly-knit homosocial communities, many of her peers at Santa Ana viewed her public penances with suspicion, and took offense at her repeated arguments with her abbesses and confessors. When Vela first began fasting, “the nuns in the convent became scandalized, because I only ate at night. They said this was a singularity and not in keeping with the community; they thought that…it would be better if I were to do what everyone else did.”

The way to be a “good” nun and a “good” woman in post-Tridentine Spain was to conform and obey: not challenge the authority of one’s religious superiors and draw unnecessary attention. Thus, Vela’s superiors and peers regularly urged her to give up her exceptional penitential practices, Eventually, this conflict came

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178 de Alarcón, “Father Juan de Alarcón to the Abbess of Santa Ana, 1601.”
to a head when a group of Vela’s fellow nuns wrote to Father Alarcón, a member of the Inquisition, to detail Vela’s “scandalous” behavior and ask him to investigate her. Following this denunciation, Alarcón wrote a sharply worded letter to the Abbess, and then interviewed Vela on behalf of the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{181} While he cleared Vela of any wrongdoing, tensions remained, and she described continued suspicion towards her even as her abbess and fellow nuns provided her with medical and emotional care.

Vela spent the rest of her life in the convent of Santa Ana; following her death in 1614, Vaquero, her confessor, and Lorenzo de Cueto, her brother and fellow member of the Cistercian clergy, argued passionately for her canonization, with Vaquero going as far as to publish his own biography of Vela, \textit{La Mujer Fuerte}, to support her sainthood candidacy.\textsuperscript{182} Their fervor was backed by the religious community of Avila, who witnessed Teresa’s canonization in 1622 and argued that Vela deserved to join her among the ranks of the saints.\textsuperscript{183} While beatification proceedings were started for Vela, for unknown reasons the process stalled, and Vela was never canonized. Her \textit{vida} and correspondence were preserved by the nuns of Santa Ana, but she faded from history until the twentieth century, when her writings were uncovered and translated.\textsuperscript{184} While Vela never achieved her ultimate goal of sainthood, her \textit{vida} still serves as her legacy, revealing her personal struggles and abiding faith as well as the contradictory pressures under which she labored.

Vela was far from the only nun to reckon with the conflicting impulses to discipline and care for other holy women. Maria Rosa, an abbess at a Capuchin nunnery in Granada, traveled to

\textsuperscript{181} Juan de Alarcón, “Father Juan de Alarcón to the Abbess of Santa Ana,1601,” in \textit{Autobiography and Letters of a Spanish Nun}, The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. The Toronto Series (Toronto, Ontario: Iter Press, 2016).
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 33.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 35.
Peru in the early 1700s with a group of other nuns to found a convent. When one of the nuns assigned to the mission sickened due to breast cancer, it is clear that the other nuns not only cared for her physically, but also provided emotional support, and deeply mourned her when she died: when her condition deteriorated, they “stayed by her side,” and once she had passed “our grief…was beyond words.” The post-Tridentine impulse to provide charity and care towards others clearly continued to impact relationships between Spanish nuns even into the eighteenth century. Arcangela Tarabotti, an Italian contemporary of Vela and Teresa describes similar scenes in her convent: while holy women were closely monitored and frequently forced to undergo penances, they also “find paradise” in being “true friends” to each other and to God, and in “showing to other women the true path to eternal salvation.” While Maria Rosa’s travels and Tarabotti’s Venetian convent were far from Vela and Teresa’s convents in Avila, the continued presence of tension between penance and care demonstrates the pervasiveness of contradictory pressures on holy women in the early modern era.

Holy women in sixteenth and seventeenth Spain were subject to differing messages from all sides: they were instructed to be modest and humble, but also to serve as exemplars for other holy women and reveal visions from God. They were encouraged to write as a means for confessors to surveil them, but when their words became too famous and/or threatened established religious hierarchies, they could be chastised or even reported to the Inquisition. They were expected to provide each other with care, both physical and emotional/spiritual, and yet they were also told to watch each other with suspicion for false visions or other “scandalous” behavior. These contradictory pressures resulted in *vidas* which were meant to instruct other

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186 Rosa, *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns*, 64.
women even as they also served a surveillance function for confessors and as potential evidence in beatification for the nuns which wrote them. Additionally, *vidas* reveal the tension between control and care in the everyday interactions between holy women in the convent. Like convents, *recogimientos*, and *galeras*, *vidas* demonstrate the contradictory responses of holy women to the patriarchal system which confined them.
Conclusion: “Time Alters All Things”

Almost a century after Magdalena de San Jerónimo published her proposal justifying the creation of *galeras* and stricter rule in convents for penitent women, Manuel Recio, a royal archivist, described conflict within the Recogidas de Madrid, a famous *recogimiento*. Recio listed several major transformations in the convent since its founding in 1601, including a change in location in which the inhabitants formed a solemn procession on the way to their new home, and “prostrated themselves on the ground” before their King, an act which “inspired much devotion.”188 This devotion was continued for a time in their new *recogimiento*, where according to Recio they lived “in this retreat with great recogimiento, in continuous exercise of prayer, penitence, and mortification, in the hopes that if in a past life they threatened the Republic, they may later help build it with their example.”189 Clearly, Recio felt that for a time the purpose of the Recogidas was fulfilled, and women who had once been threats to the Republic now contributed to its moral strength and stability.

However, Recio then stated that “time alters all things,” and that by the end of the seventeenth century the strict rules of the convent had grown lax, to the point where “the saint [was] wholly without use, as well as the laudable institute of its foundation.”190 While it is unclear which saint Recio referred to, he depicted the Recogidas in the late 1600s as an institution which had lost its purpose due to the laxity shown its inhabitants: women who without male authority fell back into the sinful habits ingrained in their natures. To remedy this disorder, multiple male religious authorities created “new Constitutions” for the Recogidas which mimicked the earlier, stricter rules.191 These constitutions were adopted, but “their precepts were

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190 Ibid, 123.
191 Ibid.
altered with great prejudice towards the institute,” and as a result, the Lord Protectors “saw themselves forced to lay down their decrees, and “providences, ordering their observance and fulfillment.”¹⁹² This set of events mirrors circumstances common a century earlier: male authorities found that holy women were not conforming to patriarchal expectations, attempted to implement stricter measures which were then resisted, and ended by using force to quell the threat.

Recio’s description, and the continuing tensions it revealed, demonstrate continuities from the immediate post-Tridentine area into the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of the systems which shaped subject formation and the lived realities of holy women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries remained in place in the late 1600s and beyond.¹⁹³ Women still lived under a patriarchal system which viewed them as inferior, and as threats to male hierarchy should they gain too much power, influence, or liberty. Responses to holy women continued to be harsh, from enclosure and removal from public influence to corporal punishment and exile. Additionally, female sexual deviance was treated severely, with both public discipline and sequestration from society among the punishments used against fallen women, exemplified by the continued existence of recogimientos and galeras.

However, the future imagined by Magdalena de San Jeronimo, in which vulnerable women were both protected and punished by other women, was not fully realized. Care and discipline both increasingly became the purview of male authority. While enclosed holy women retained some power to manage themselves and any women under their care, the restrictions on their agency were further strengthened. Beatas, already highly surveilled and disciplined, all but

¹⁹³ For further reading about religious authority and gender in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see David Sorkin’s The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna and Maria Tausiet’s ““When Venus stays awake, Minerva sleeps”: a narrative of female sanctity in eighteenth-century Spain,” in the Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, volume 22.
disappeared. Convents maintained their status as important religious institutions, but “fallen women” were placed into male-run prisons and sanitariums as opposed to penitent convents. This shift from contested female authority to male authority was reflected not only in religious institutions but also in other aspects of society: for example, midwives, who acted as crucial figures in the medical landscape of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, were replaced by male doctors in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{194}

In addition to further changes in gender hierarchies and roles, the end of the seventeenth century also marked a greater trend towards imprisonment as opposed to public punishment. \textit{Galeras} marked the beginning of the shift from the “gallows age to the prison age,” characterized by humanitarian reform as well as a utilitarian approach to long-term prisoners as a labor source.\textsuperscript{195} This transformation continued well into the eighteenth century, as \textit{autos de fe} and public executions were abandoned in favor of the expansive prison systems familiar to us today. The existence of \textit{recogimientos} and \textit{galeras} at the beginning of this change demonstrates the intersections between gendered enclosure/imprisonment and the creation and growth of extensive carceral systems.

Understanding the ways in which holy women responded to the patriarchal society of sixteenth and early seventeenth century Spain is crucial in comprehending the intersection of punishment, religion, and gender in modern culture. Holy women, as agents in a delicate position in the increasingly patriarchal and religious society of post-Tridentine Spain, reveal both the strengths and limitations of the Spanish Church and Crown. While the reach of the Inquisition was long, and many holy women faced trial and harsh punishment, others established themselves

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as mystics and even saints. Additionally, holy women such as Magdalena de San Jeronimo appropriated the language of male discipline to establish female-run *recogimientos* and *galeras*. Writers of *vidas* like Maria de Vela y Cueto and Teresa de Ávila carefully navigated a print culture suspicious of female authors to argue for increased enclosure and the control of other women. These arguments allowed them to subvert the agendas of the male authorities they served even as they furthered them, and establish themselves as authorities on the proper ways in which holy women should be managed and controlled. Through writing, they breached the confinement of the convent and reached the broader world.

Like other subjects in early modern Spain, holy women were living contradictions: providing vulnerable women with both punishment and protection; treating other holy women with a mixture of suspicion, censure, and deep and mutual care and intimacy; ultimately subordinated to male authority, and yet able to exercise their own agency by delicately maneuvering through a patriarchal society. The voices of women in this period, whether holy or fallen, are difficult to locate. Many were illiterate, and what little writing was done by women was rarely preserved or widely circulated. Thus, the works of women like Magdalena de San Jeronimo, Maria Vela, and Teresa of Avila are only a narrow window into the lives of women in this era. To find the voices of others, one must look between the lines: the replies to an Inquisitor, the descriptions of convent lives within a *vida*, the adornment placed upon convent walls. While difficult, gaining a better understanding of these women helps inform us how marginalized subjects moved within the confines of an often oppressive system, and gives us a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of broader histories of gender, religion, and imprisonment, all as relevant today as in the past.
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